Northern Ireland Assembly

OFFICIAL REPORT
(Hansard)

and

JOURNAL OF PROCEEDINGS

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Official Report
(Hansard)

Assembly Sittings

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 16 February 2015

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Assembly Business

Mr Hussey: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I apologise unreservedly for not being in my place when called at Question Time. I apologise to you and your staff for any inconvenience that that may have caused.

Mr Speaker: Thank you very much for making that apology to the Chamber. It will be noted.

Public Petition: St Mary's University College

Mr Speaker: Mr Máirtín Ó Muilleoir has sought leave to present a public petition in accordance with Standing Order 22. The Member will have up to three minutes to speak.

Mr Ó Muilleoir: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Tráthnóna maith. Ba mhaith liom misneach mhic léinn Choláiste Naomh Muire a mholadh agus mé ag cur achainí os do chomhair. I present to you, Mr Speaker, a petition from the students and community of west Belfast on, as it was at the time, the planned closure of St Mary's University College. The students asked a representative from South Belfast to present the petition to show solidarity and to send their best wishes to Stranmillis University College. Of course, as we know, both university colleges were threatened with closure at that time.

I am happy to present the petition, and I want to say some words of praise for the students. In this day and age, we often hear people say that our young people are not engaged enough in civic or political life, and, with their leadership of this campaign, I think that they showed exactly the opposite. They rose to the challenge, and we owe them a debt of gratitude.

I am aware that circumstances have changed since the petition was first circulated and won the support of people well beyond the confines of St Mary's University College. I will only say that, as we look to the future, I think that you will find in these students who led the campaign great allies as we start to discuss and continue discussing a shared and pluralist approach to further and higher education. Ba mhaith liom sin a bheith ráite, agus go ndéanaimid uilig comhghairdeas leis na mic léinn.

To finish, I know that the Minister met the students, and I think that he will find that they are progressive and ambitious and have high aspirations for themselves, their community and this society. I believe that, in the time ahead, they will continue to engage with him in this debate about saving the university colleges and ensuring that they prosper. My only word of advice for the Minister is to bring a bouquet to that discussion, rather than a metaphorical blunderbuss.

Mr Ó Muilleoir moved forward and laid the petition on the Table.

Mr Speaker: I will forward the petition to the Minister for Employment and Learning and send a copy to the Committee.

Standing Orders 10(2) to 10(4): Suspension

Mr Weir: I beg to move

That Standing Orders 10(2) to 10(4) be suspended for 16 February 2015.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved (with cross-community support):

> *That Standing Orders 10(2) to 10(4) be suspended for 16 February 2015.*

Executive Committee Business

Jobseeker's Allowance (Maternity Allowance) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014

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

> *That the Jobseeker's Allowance (Maternity Allowance) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014 be approved.*

The amendments to the Jobseeker's Allowance Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1996 ensure that the existing provisions relating to a maternity allowance payable to a woman who regularly participates in her spouse's or civil partner's self-employed business are treated in the same way as a maternity allowance that is paid to a woman who is employed or self-employed in her own right, for the purposes of identifying and determining entitlement to jobseeker's allowance (JSA).

The regulations are technical in nature and are a consequence of the recent introduction of a maternity allowance for a new group of women who habitually participate in their self-employed spouse's or civil partner's business but who are neither employed nor self-employed. The regulations ensure equality of treatment by treating this new group of women in the same way as women who are employed or self-employed when determining entitlement to jobseeker's allowance.

Mr Maskey (The Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. The Committee for Social Development considered the SL1 pertaining to this legislation at its meeting on 11 September 2014 and subsequently officially recorded its support for the regulations at its meeting of 25 September 2014. As the Minister indicated, the rule came into operation on 16 September 2014, and the Assembly is being asked to confirm it. Following consideration and the report by the Examiner of Statutory Rules, the Committee recommends that the rule be confirmed by the Assembly.

As the Minister outlined, the rule made consequential amendments to the jobseeker's allowance regulations following the introduction of a 14-week maternity allowance for pregnant women who participate in their self-employed spouse's or civil partner's business but receive no income from doing so. The Committee acknowledged that the amendments benefit women and, therefore, welcomed the rule. On behalf of the Committee for Social Development, I ask that the Assembly confirms the regulations.

Mr Storey: I thank the Chair of the Committee for the comments he has made in relation to the issue. I am pleased that there has been consensus across the Assembly in relation to the regulations. As I said, the regulations are technical in nature and simply ensure the equality of treatment in determining entitlement to jobseeker's allowance.

By amending the JSA regulations, we will merely be ensuring that the existing provisions of a maternity allowance payable to a woman who regularly participates in her spouse's or civil partner's self-employed business are treated the same way as a maternity allowance that is paid to a woman who is employed or self-employed in her

own right, for the purposes of identifying and determining entitlement to jobseeker's allowance. I would, therefore, like to thank the House for the endorsement of the regulations in the Chamber today.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

> *That the Jobseeker's Allowance (Maternity Allowance) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014 be approved.*

Budget Bill: Second Stage

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

> *That the Second Stage of the Budget Bill [NIA Bill 45/11-16] be agreed.*

Accelerated passage of the Bill through the Assembly is needed in order to ensure Royal Assent as early as possible in March. This is necessary to obtain legal authority for Departments and the other public bodies to spend the cash and use the resources in the Bill in 2014-15 and to ensure a smooth continuation of public services into 2015-16.

Preparation of the detailed Estimates and the related Budget Bill that is under consideration today was a challenging undertaking given the timetable involved. The Bill and Estimates must reflect the latest financial position, which was announced to the Assembly only on 19 January, yet the Bill requires Royal Assent prior to the end of this financial year.

I am therefore grateful that the Committee for Finance and Personnel has confirmed, in line with Standing Order 42, that it is satisfied that there has been appropriate consultation with it on the public expenditure proposals in the Bill and is content that it may proceed by accelerated passage. I again welcome and appreciate the assistance of the Committee in this matter.

I shall now briefly outline the purpose of the legislation that is before us today and draw attention to the main provisions of the Bill. The debate follows the Bill's First Stage last week, which, in turn, followed the debate and approval of the three Supply resolutions that were introduced in this Chamber on 9 February. The purpose of the Bill is to give legislative effect to the 2014-15 spring Supplementary Estimates, the 2015-16 Vote on Account and the 2015-16 Main Estimate for the new judiciary pensions scheme. Copies of the Budget Bill and the explanatory and financial memorandum have been made available to Members today.

I do not intend to repeat the detail that was provided to Members during last week's very lengthy debate. In fact, Standing Order 32 stipulates that the debate should concern itself with the narrow content of the Bill; a point which I hope Members will remember during today's proceedings.

For the benefit of Members and in accordance with Standing Order 32, I wish to summarise briefly the main features of the Bill. The purpose of the Bill is to authorise the issue of £15,646,075,000 from the Northern Ireland Consolidated Fund in 2014-15. This is nearly £172 million more than the amount that was authorised in the June Main Estimate. This cash is drawn down on a daily basis as needed from the Northern Ireland Consolidated Fund, which is managed by my Department on behalf of the Executive.

The Bill also authorises the use of resources totalling £17,051,879,000 by Departments and certain other public bodies. This is some £337·5 million more than was authorised in the June Main Estimate. These amounts are detailed by Department in part 2 of each spring Supplementary Estimate for 2014-15.

In addition, the Bill revises for 2014-15 the limit on the amount of accruing resources that may be directed by my Department to be used for the purposes in column 1 of schedule 2. This limit includes both operating and non-operating accruing resources — in other words, current and capital receipts — and amounts to £2,386,731,000. Under section 8 of the Government Resources and Accounts Act (Northern Ireland) 2001, a direction on the actual use of the accruing resources will be provided by way of a DFP minute, which will be laid before this Assembly in March following Royal Assent of the Bill.

Therefore, not only does the Bill authorise the use of resources but it also authorises accruing resources, bringing the total resources for use by Departments and other public bodies to more than £19 billion.

The sums to be issued from the Consolidated Fund are to be appropriated by each Department or public body for services, as listed in column 1 of schedule 1 to the Bill, while the resources, including the accruing resources, are to be used for the purposes that are specified in column 1 of schedule 2 to the Bill.

The amounts now requested for 2014-15 supersede the Vote on Account in the Budget Act (Northern Ireland) 2014, which was passed this time last year, and the Main Estimate provision in the Budget (No. 2) Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 that was passed by this Assembly in June 2014.

The Bill also authorises a Vote on Account for 2015-16 of cash of £7,075,640,000 and resources of £7,742,283,000 to allow the flow of cash and resources to continue to public services in the early months of 2015-16 until the Main Estimates and the related Budget Bill are approved in June later this year. Again, the cash and resources are to be appropriated and used for the services and purposes that are set out in column 1 of schedules 3 and 4 respectively.

Clause 5 of the Bill authorises the temporary borrowing by the Department of Finance and Personnel at a ceiling of £3,537,820,000 for 2015-16. This is a normal safeguard for any temporary deficiency arising in the fund. I must stress to the House that clause 5 does not provide for any additional cash out of the Consolidated Fund or convey any additional spending power, but it enables my Department to run a very efficient cash management regime.

12.15 pm

Finally, the Bill authorises the Department of Justice to use resources of up to £50,000 in 2015-16 for the new judicial pension scheme.

At this stage, there is little more that I can usefully add on the Budget Bill. I look forward to continuing the debate today and will respond to as many points of principle or detail as Members wish to raise.

Mr McKay (The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I apologise for missing the start of the Minister's contribution. Things are running quite swiftly this afternoon.

As we heard, the Budget Bill provides statutory authority for expenditure as set out in the spring Supplementary Estimates 2014-15. The Bill also includes the Vote on Account, which allows Departments to incur expenditure and use resources in the early part of 2015-16 until the Main Estimates are voted on by the Assembly in June.

Standing Order 42(2) states that accelerated passage may be granted for a Budget Bill provided the Committee for Finance and Personnel is satisfied that it has been appropriately consulted on the public expenditure proposals in the Bill. At its meeting on 4 February, departmental officials briefed the Committee and answered questions on the Bill, including on issues relating to a range of Departments. In addition to that evidence, the Committee has scrutinised each of the monitoring rounds during the current financial year, both for overall outcome across Departments and for the position for the Department of Finance and Personnel. In view of that evidence-gathering exercise throughout the year, the Committee was content to grant accelerated passage to the Bill. I therefore wrote to you, Mr Speaker, to inform you of the Committee's decision.

As I pointed out during last week's Supply resolution debate, the scale of the cumulative changes resulting from the normal reallocations through the monitoring rounds, combined with the in-year technical changes, will, in some cases, have resulted in significant differences between the opening and closing resource and capital allocations of Departments. The Committee welcomes the engagement with the Department on those issues during the quarterly monitoring rounds, and members will continue to prioritise that aspect of their work. In that regard, I encourage the other Statutory Committees to continue to monitor closely the financial forecasting and expenditure of their respective Departments for the remainder of this year and during the next financial year to ensure that underspend is minimised and that Departments maximise the impact from available resources.

I shall not rehearse or rehash the issues that were covered in the recent plenary debates on budgetary matters, including the provisions of the Bill. Instead, I wish to highlight a fundamental weakness in our financial and budgetary process that has become even more apparent in recent weeks and is relevant for the process for this and future Budget Bills. Within the last five weeks, since the Committee's take-note debate on 12 January, we have had no fewer than four plenary debates on budgetary matters, each of which has some relationship to the 2015-16 Budget. Moreover, in the case of each of those debates, given the late stage of the process, statutory limitations and other factors, there is little scope for the Assembly to influence changes.

I believe that that raises a serious question as to whether the current process makes for effective and efficient use of our time in the Chamber. Is it a cost-effective approach to achieving input from the democratically elected institution? Surely there would be more potential for added value from the Assembly and for Members and Committees to inform Ministers and exercise influence if the opportunity for scrutiny and debate was front-ended at a point in the budgetary process when Executive decisions have not yet been taken. We are all acutely aware of the changes proposed to the public sector, so surely the Assembly and the Executive should also be prepared to reform and improve their processes.

As the Finance and Personnel Committee has pointed out, a solution to many of the difficulties and flaws in the budgetary process can be found by the Assembly and the Executive agreeing a memorandum of understanding (MOU) on the Budget process. That would establish

a framework for improved cooperation between the Executive and the Assembly for budgetary matters and would facilitate Members and Committees in fulfilling their scrutiny and advice functions, which in turn will assist in overseeing the effective and efficient delivery of the Executive's strategic priorities.

In addition, the MOU will support the Executive in their role of managing public expenditure and help to maintain good working relationships between Departments and their Committees, as well as between Departments and Members. Indeed, a draft MOU prepared jointly by Committee staff and DFP officials was agreed by the Committee earlier this year and is still under consideration by the Minister before being brought to the Executive for approval.

If implemented, this MOU would help to address the fundamental weakness in our financial and budgetary process that I mentioned. In particular, it would help to front-end the Assembly's input to draft Budgets and afford scope to influence key issues in advance of future Budgets being agreed by the Executive. As the Finance and Personnel Committee stated, if genuine commitment is demonstrated and the MOU is operating effectively, there will be scope for further streamlining the end stages of the Budget process. The Minister, while confirming his support for the principles in the draft memorandum of understanding, considered that it would be appropriate to await the outcome of the 2015-16 Budget process to ensure that any lessons learned can also be reflected in the document.

Given the need for greater oversight and closer scrutiny of public expenditure, coupled with the recurrence of difficulties experienced by Committees — insufficient time and a lack of information prevent meaningful scrutiny — the Committee recommends that the proposed MOU on the Budget process be agreed between the Assembly and the Executive as a matter of urgency. In so doing, the Committee concurs with the Finance Minister that the draft MOU needs to reflect the lessons learned from the 2015-16 process. It would be helpful if the Minister could in his winding-up speech give an undertaking to the House that work will resume to finalise the MOU, thereby enabling us to reform the budgetary process with a view to maximising the value of our time spent in the Chamber and in Committees. On behalf of the Committee, I support the motion.

I will just add a few comments from a party perspective. It is clearly the case that devolution is evolving elsewhere. We look at the Smith commission and how different revenue streams will be added to the Scottish Budget. In Scotland, there is a proposal for more power over income tax and bands, air passenger duty (APD) and the Crown Estate. As the First Minister in Scotland said, they are going in the direction of Scottish home rule. There is a risk of this institution being left behind. Edinburgh and Cardiff are ambitious: they want to move forward; they want more powers; they want to demonstrate that they can do their job, deliver on economic well-being and job creation and better the lives of those they represent. There is a danger that this institution will be left standing still.

I was looking at last June's debate about APD and the air connectivity report that we were waiting for at the time from the Finance and Enterprise Ministers. I do not think that we have moved any further on APD, which remains, for me, a no-brainer. The current APD is damaging to tourism. If we maintain the position of waiting until Westminster addresses it, we could be waiting five or 10 years and missing out on economic opportunities, guaranteeing only that more tourists arrive in Dublin and fewer in Belfast and Derry. We want a level playing field across the island. We want more opportunities for our tourism sector, including bed and breakfasts, and for developing hotels in urban and rural parts of the North. Of course, Scotland is now to get APD. I argue that this institution needs it more, because we are on an island, and the South has now abolished any tax associated with people coming to the island. We need, therefore, to address that disadvantage, and it is a matter of concern that the Executive do not yet have a collective approach.

We in Sinn Féin want to see air passenger duty devolved, and we want to see it abolished. Obviously, we do not want to pay for the cost, but we need to have that option. At the end of the day, if Westminster were to abolish APD tomorrow, that would be happy days, but the fact is that there is no indication that it will be abolished. In the meantime, if we are serious about our tourist industry and economic growth in that sector, we need to push for the transfer of the power in the shorter term.

The Crown Estate portfolio in Scotland will now go to Edinburgh. That is something that my party colleague Oliver McMullan has raised before, and he is bringing the matter to the House again. The Crown Estate here needs to be brought under the control of the Executive. The options are whether the Executive have a direct say over the revenues raised or whether those go to local councils. If it is a no-brainer in Edinburgh, I fail to see why we should not have control over the issue here, particularly for areas such as the glens. Those who live in coastal areas need to see a greater advantage coming from the Crown Estate. The best way in which to ensure that its value is put back into communities is to ensure that local representatives make the decisions about it.

A rates revaluation process was undertaken, which the Committee looked at and scrutinised. The revaluation is in the process of being rolled out. There is a lot of concern amongst different businesses about major adverse impacts in certain areas. My party colleague Phil Flanagan held a meeting on that in Enniskillen recently. He flagged up the example of some petrol station forecourts having seen a 70% increase in their rates overnight. Of course, in an ideal world, you would have revaluations all the time. That is not the case at the moment; the last revaluation was done over 10 years ago. That is why there are now radical differences in the valuations attached to non-domestic properties. Will the Minister, in his winding-up speech, bring us up to speed with the economic impact of the revaluation. What are his thoughts on how we address it?

The system is not perfect by any means. The Committee discussed how we might review non-domestic rates and the rates system to prevent anomalies being introduced, such as where businesses with small profit margins are seeing huge rates hikes that are putting their lights out. We need to do our best to ensure that that does not happen. More could be done to explore a more equitable way forward. If businesses are not viable, they are not viable, but there is a sense from the grass roots, from towns and from parts of our cities that there is an unfairness involved. Some examples, such as that of the petrol station forecourts, have been flagged up. There is

also an issue with indoor go-karting facilities, which we raised a few months ago. There, the profit margin is low, yet the rates valuation does not match that profit margin. The Department needs to find creative solutions to such anomalies. It is not an easy job by any means, but, in the time ahead, the Minister should outline how, particularly for small businesses, medium-sized businesses and those that have small profit margins, we can find a more equitable way forward to protect businesses and jobs.

The Department of Health has received a £200 million uplift as a result of the budgetary discussions. That money needs to go to the front line. The big challenge for the Health Minister is to ensure that he gets to grips with the waste in his Department and puts more money into front-line services. Locally, we have been through the experience of the Save the Dal campaign against the proposed closure of Dalriada Hospital. That is what it was; it was certainly not a temporary closure by any means.

12.30 pm

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

The Dalriada Hospital is a perfect example of what Transforming Your Care is all about. It is about care in the community and keeping patients and their families out of acute services. The Causeway Hospital is not without its problems either, given the number of serious adverse incidents (SAIs) that I have dealt with in recent times, but it is working well and its services are needed in that area. The Health Minister needs to give assurances, now that he has received such a significant uplift from the Executive, that those services along the north coast will be protected. He needs to ensure that any decisions coming from the Health Department are rural proofed.

I look forward to the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development bringing forward her proposals for rural proofing. It has too often been that case that, when Departments face pressures, it is rural services that are looked at first. Rural communities are seen as a soft touch and an easy place to make cuts. What happened in Ballycastle will ensure that the Health Minister will think twice before looking there again, but he has not given an assurance that the Dalriada Hospital is not still in the cross hairs of the Northern Trust or the Department for the 2015-16 financial year. He needs to give that assurance to the community in Ballycastle and on the north coast, and the same applies for the Causeway Hospital.

The Budget is the result of Westminster decisions and Tory policies that have been in place for a number of years now. The politics of austerity has not worked here, across the water or across most of Europe. We need to see a change and, if it is continually going to be the case that we will have austerity thrust upon us by the Tories at Westminster, we need to take those powers and controls for ourselves. We need to be ambitious about adding to our own fiscal toolkit.

None of us want to be spongers here. A lot of MLAs like to celebrate being political spongers and the value of the Union and so forth, and then they complain when the Westminster Government make decisions against them that negatively impact on their constituents. We are the best people to represent the people in North Antrim, Fermanagh and South Tyrone, East Derry and North Belfast. We need to be more ambitious about having control over our Budget and having the information about where our taxes go to and come from. The discussions and debates that we have had in the Finance and Personnel Committee have revealed that a lot of the information is not transparent. The reason for that is that the Treasury wants to have control. It will have control in any future negotiations about budgetary matters and it will always have the upper hand and advantage unless we call for further transparency in these matters.

In other countries across Europe, where there is a more federal set-up, all the information is transparent and everything is accountable. There is absolutely no reason why the people we represent should not be entitled to full fiscal information about where corporation tax receipts go and where income taxes go. That information needs to be more transparent, the systems need to change and, until we do that and form a collective political front to call for that information to be made transparent, the Treasury will continually try to wipe our eye. That is not going to operate to our advantage and it is certainly not going to operate to the advantage of the people we represent.

We need to have a mature political conversation about that, because if we are going to represent the people who elected us, we need to have the information relating to their taxes and their fiscal and economic well-being.

We need to be able to challenge the Treasury better because the experience of recent negotiations, whether on corporation tax or what not, shows that the Treasury is just throwing figures at us to scare us. Until we have full transparency over that information, the Treasury will continually try to wipe our eye, so there is a challenge for the Assembly and Executive to be ambitious on economic powers and fiscal tools and to be more challenging in dealing with the Westminster Government and taking on the Treasury.

Mr Girvan: The Committee had a good opportunity to go through the budgets as presented. In doing so, there are areas I have concerns about. We heard about transparency. There is a lack of transparency in how the figures from Departments are presented in the Budget statement. Block headings seem to hide quite a large spend. Certain Departments seem to be worse at that than others. I do not know whether that is officials or direction from ministerial level but large budget headings seem to hide large amounts of money. Quite a bit is not as transparent as it should or could be.

We are maybe in a better position than a few months ago in that we had all sorts of doomsday scenarios if we could not achieve a Budget. It looked as if the draft Budget was going to give serious problems. A good of amount of work has gone on. There have been costs: we have wasted money in delaying the implementation of welfare reform. Some believe that accommodations were made in that process. There is not a big lot of difference from what was agreed 18 months ago between the Department and the Treasury. We got it over the line through the Stormont House talks and that was something.

The rates re-evaluation process has attempted to address what was some imbalance in town centres. Sometimes, town centres pay the lion's share of the rates. As a consequence, they were not necessarily having the footfall to facilitate that. To help to regenerate some of the worst-hit towns, some movement has been made. There are winners and losers in every process but the revenue

raised through the rates will not necessarily increase dramatically.

That means we have to make sure we are collecting the maximum amount of rates, which are the main taxation opportunity for this House. As a consequence, we need to make sure that we get in the lion's share of those moneys and ensure that it is properly spent and distributed to Departments.

We have attempted to address that through the revaluation of non-domestic premises, which has worked in town centres. There are those who may complain because they seem to be getting a fairly stringent hit but we raise in the region of £1·1 billion per year through rates. As a consequence of the Budget Bill, we are dealing with about £15·6 billion. A fairly large percentage of that is the block grant from Westminster.

The Barnett formula appears still to be the best option in town. Unfortunately, some people say that we could do different things. Genuinely, I believe that we are better off with the formula that is being used. As a consequence, we have more money to spend than we generate in taxation in Northern Ireland.

I will move on to deal with Departments. Some have delivered projects in the past four years as a result of monitoring round programmes. We have a number of monitoring rounds in the year, taking place in June, October and January. As a result of picking out particular things and not receiving moneys from those monitoring rounds, certain functions, which would be deemed to be key, have been put on hold. I think that it is now vital that key functions are included as part of the bid process, as opposed to expecting the monitoring rounds to deal with them. I see monitoring as rounds delivering the icing on the cake. You can still have the cake, but if you want to put additional icing on it, you have to use the monitoring round process to do that.

We have to see that less money came through in the last two major monitoring rounds than had been initially anticipated. That was a consequence of having £4 billion wiped from our Budget over the four years from 2011 to 2015, which is a result of the Conservative Government's approach to Northern Ireland. I appreciate that that hit was quite extensive, but it was managed. Whether people believe it or not, I think that it has been managed to a large degree. We ran into some difficulties towards the end, but that was a consequence of some past expenditure.

The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety deals with around £4·7 billion in the year, which makes up a very large percentage of our spend. The Department of Health and the Department of Education spend the lion's share of our block grant. There is some indication that £200 million has gone to Health, but of a £4·7 billion budget, that is a very small percentage, and I see some difficulties.

I have some concerns about continuing to throw money at Departments that do not necessarily make the best or most effective use of it. There have been some instances in which we have applied additional moneys to Departments, and when you come back and look at them a year later, you see that what was additional last year has become part of their bid for normal functions. I think that there needs to be a realisation that we do not have a bottomless pit. We need to make effective use of the money that we have. I do not necessarily believe that we are getting the efficiencies that can and should be delivered from two of the Departments that are making very large spends.

On the back of what has been said, from a Committee point of view, the review of the financial process and the budgeting process has caused concern. Some people believe there is a necessity to change that process so that there is a more streamlined, open and transparent way forward. That has to be dealt with.

I think that there are Ministers who attempt to go on solo runs and have their own vanity projects, wish lists and personal agendas. As a consequence of those personal agendas, sometimes they attribute a large commitment of public funds to deliver something that is deemed to be of interest to only a very small minority of people and that, at the end of the day, probably does not deliver anything other than a political or personal agenda. On the back of that, I think that it is vital that there is a realisation that we do not have a bottomless pit of money. If we did, you could go down the route of dealing with everyone's personal agendas. However, we do not have that, and we have to deal with that in the round.

12.45 pm

I support the Bill as presented. I welcome the work undertaken by the Finance Minister, his predecessor and the Executive in bringing forward a Budget to the Assembly, which goes a large way to dealing with it. We have the opportunity to borrow money within the next year. Some people have asked, "Why would you borrow?" We will borrow to pay for the exit programme for the public sector and will have an opportunity to reinvest that money in the years to come as we will not make that spend.

We have to grow our private sector. There has to be less reliance on the public sector; and, as an economy, we can only go forward once we have a private sector in place that is capable of delivering for Northern Ireland and creating the wealth to keep our economy going. We have invested moneys in the likes of Invest NI, which has gone out and probably outperformed on all its expectations on inward investment and bringing jobs into Northern Ireland. It is our place to ensure that the jobs that are here are supported and that we encourage employers to invest and keep up the employment within Northern Ireland.

I look at it very much as someone who was involved in the private sector, and it is vital that the private sector avails itself of the opportunities when we have the powers to deal with corporation tax. That will help others. Some people say that a lower rate of corporation tax will mean more going into the back pockets of those who are the owners of large businesses. To a large extent, businesses have to invest to go forward, so they will use that money to invest, whether it is in jobs or new technologies within their businesses. That will be for them to decide, but that opportunity will be there. A lower rate of corporation tax is one of the tools in the box. It might not necessarily be the silver bullet, but it can and should be used. I support the Budget Bill as presented.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh míle maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Tá mé buíoch díot as an deis cainte sa dara céim de Bhille an Bhuiséid 2015-16. Mar is eol dúinn, baineann an dara céim de Bhille ar bith leis na

bunphrionsabail atá taobh thiar de Bhille. Thank you very much, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to speak on the Second Stage of the Budget Bill, which will deal with the year 2015-16.

As we know, the Second Stage of any Bill affords Members the opportunity to examine the underlying principles of the Bill in question. I suppose that, usually, the underlying principles of a Budget Bill would be the agreed Programme for Government, but that is not the case with this Bill as no agreed Programme for Government underpins it, and, therefore, we have to search for the underlying principles.

We have heard calls for improvements to be made to Budget information. That includes the rationale behind decisions to make, or not make, allocations to particular services or departmental functions and the impact that such decisions will have, including what specific safeguards will be put in place to prevent priority front-line services being affected. Without those underling principles, the rationale for those decisions is difficult to conclude.

Last week, I spoke about the situation that the Department of the Environment faces. In particular, I spoke of my concern about the implications of the final Budget for the rates support grant. As I said then:

> *"Reductions to that grant will impact directly on those less well-off councils that have access to those grant payments to help make good the difference between their rates income and the money that they need to maintain parity of service provision with more wealthy councils." — [Official Report, Bound Volume 101, p350, col 2].*

At that time, I said that that would be particularly unfair and unwelcome at a time when councils are seeking to make the major organisational changes associated with local government reform and reorganisation. Councils cannot meet the expected pressure on their budgets that, even with additional allocation, is anticipated to be in the region of £3 million. One has to ask: where is the rationale for such an outcome and what underlying principle supports this?

Mr Attwood, when he spoke last week, mentioned the potential for heritage-led development here, for creating the many thousands of jobs that it has done in Dublin or Scotland. He said that the consequences of the Budget Bill would be to undermine heritage-led development and stifle the potential to create those jobs. So, once again, how can a Budget which stifles the potential to create jobs be said to be based on underlying principles?

The shortcomings of the Budget process are clear for all to see. The Assembly Committees experience difficulties with both the time available and the lack of information coming from Departments, so the current process has fallen far short of international good practice, and it highlights, once again, the need to put in place the memorandum of understanding between the Assembly and the Executive to ensure that the shortcomings are addressed and that future Budget processes meet the needs of both the legislature and the Government.

This Budget is more akin to the equivalent of a financial shotgun wedding than an agreed Budget. A report published by the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants entitled 'Parliamentary financial scrutiny in hard times' compared the level and quality of financial scrutiny across countries and jurisdictions. It noted that:

> *"The outdated 'estimates supply votes' process that exists in Westminster-style systems is a key barrier to effective parliamentary scrutiny of the budget and financial reports."*

The Budget before us and the process that led up to it is one of the worst examples of that.

> *"In countries using the Westminster model of government, parliaments cannot realistically amend spending proposals, and many are barred from substituting a budget of their own. Instead, they are confined to assenting to spending proposals that are put to them ... The focus of financial scrutiny needs to be re-aligned with the budget, spending plans and resource accounts, but this will require significant structural and cultural reform."*

Unfortunately, that is true of our Estimates and Supply votes-style system, despite the in-year monitoring process. As far back as 2008, the Finance Committee conducted an inquiry into the ability of the Assembly to effectively scrutinise the Budget. The Committee recommended then a number of measures that should be considered to make this process more accessible and provide opportunities and sufficient time for Members to contribute to and scrutinise the Budget and the in-year processes. Those measures included the memorandum of understanding, which has been mentioned by several Members, between the Assembly and the Executive in relation, in particular, to timely and adequate provision of information to Committees. That certainly was not the case this year.

One of the other points that the report highlighted was the need to establish:

> *"a regularised budget process, which includes clearly defined pre-draft Budget stages that provide for early Assembly input, irrespective of whether an annual or multi-year budget cycle is followed."*

The third recommendation is that Statutory Committees should be more assertive in their statutory powers to call for persons and papers when such powers may be necessary. This year, Committees did not have much opportunity to do that.

You will remember that, in 2011, the Executive launched their own review of the financial process. The response to the review document highlighted many of the same recommendations raised in the Committee's earlier inquiry. It was stressed that an early strategic Budget phase is one of the most influential stages of the Budget process and, as such, is an essential requirement rather than an aspiration. This year, the budgetary process was further than ever from that .

Year after year, Members underline the need for reform of the budgetary process. It is my hope today that I will not have to come back to the House next year and mention the same need for reform. I acknowledge that the Minister is open to reform, but there is a need for much more urgency and energy in the process to ensure that we have a budgetary system that affords Statutory Committees and the Assembly the opportunity to scrutinise budgetary information fully and to make changes that they feel are necessary.

Mar sin de, a Leas-Cheann Comhairle, don bhabhta seo fágfaidh mé mar sin é. Thank you very much, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr Cree: It is a pleasure to speak on the Second Stage of the Budget Bill. This is always an interesting subject. There are discussions on a wide range of areas, and we have already had examples of that this afternoon. The only thing that I have not yet heard is the weather forecast, but maybe that will come up a little later.

It was encouraging to hear our Chairman talk about the memorandum of understanding. Other Members also touched on the review of the financial process, which we have been preaching here for years. The Minister will be pleased to know that, having heard that that be well covered by other Members, I will just leave it on the record as this: let us have it for next year — end of story. It is ridiculous. It is a pity that the Chairman of the Committee has just gone. The only thing that he does not seem to have learned is the Minister's lecture on economic theory. That seems to have gone over his head, I am afraid. However, I will turn to the task in hand.

The Bill covers the 2014-15 financial year and provides legal authority to spend for the early part of 2015-16. In June, we will consider the Main Estimates for 2015-16. Despite the fact that we are approaching the year end, it remains crucial that Committees continue to monitor the spending of their respective Departments so that underspends are minimised, and the risk of having to return funding to the Treasury will be avoided. There is little time left — about six weeks — in this final year of the four-year Budget. The year marked a turning point, and we face a tighter financial future. As Mr Bradley just said, 2015-16 is not geared to the Programme for Government, and we expect to have a new comprehensive spending round, which will shape the immediate future.

The Stormont House Agreement provided for a package to help the Executive to achieve their priorities. Up to £50 million additional capital DEL will be available for new shared and integrated education projects. The Budget 2015-16 is, at this stage, simply a block of figures — some 45% of last year's Budget — and does not have any detail. However, as we all know, the year starts on 1 April, and plans will have to be in place before then. So, how will this £50 million be spent and where will the benefits be felt?

1.00 pm

The £30 million of resource DEL has been provided for the funding of bodies to deal with the past. What are the plans?

Arguably, one of the greatest challenges facing the Assembly is the voluntary exit scheme. Up to £200 million of reinvestment and reform initiative (RRI) borrowing will be used. What plans have been put in place to deal with the issue? What action will be taken if there are too few volunteers? I ask the Minister to advise on the costs arising from any delay in that scheme, as it appears, in my opinion, to have the potential to fail.

At the recent Budget debate, the Minister referred to the £13 million in the Department for Regional Development's budget that was anticipated to come from the reserves of the harbour commissioner. Apparently, the legal opinion is that that is not possible. Can the Minister confirm the situation? If so, is there sufficient headroom to cover the shortfall?

I return now to the Stormont House Agreement. There is a figure of £350 million of additional borrowing to support capital investment projects, and £100 million from borrowing is provided for 2015-16. I would appreciate some detail on what has been planned for that. As we touched on last week, the £30 million change fund is intended to stimulate innovation, improve outcomes for citizens and generate savings. Will the Minister advise whether that is a brand new approach, or will it turn out to be a continuation of previous or existing schemes?

Finally, I ask the Minister for an update, if he can give it to me and, indeed, the House, on EU funding, particularly INTERREG V, which is likely to assist in the 2015-16 Budget.

Mr Lunn: I am glad to be able to speak on the Budget. Alliance has made clear its concerns. We are not convinced by arguments that it addresses the financial challenges looming on the horizon. We have opposed the Budget at various stages, so far, but we acknowledge that the Bill implements a Budget that already has political support from the Chamber. So, we are accepting our Executive responsibility to ensure that a Budget is passed, and we will not oppose today.

Nonetheless, our concerns are amplified by the recent announcement on corporation tax. The Stormont House Agreement required us to agree on a fair and sustainable Budget so that corporation tax could be devolved. Since then, the UK Government have produced a draft of the Bill that would confer those powers on the Assembly. However, that would be a significant decision and one with a significant financial impact. We have all heard the estimates, which, at the moment, appear to range from £250 million to £300 million per annum. That is a sum that, under EU law, we would have to find from within the Northern Ireland Budget, with costs, presumably, taken from all Departments. In addition, a reduction in corporation tax would need to be accompanied by investment in skills and innovation to ensure that the reduction was the start and not the end of the process to grow the private sector. However, before any Executive could agree to including such a spending commitment in a Budget, they would need a clear and costed plan. So, we are highly concerned that the Budget for 2015-16 makes no significant movement towards making the kind of reforms that could allow for an alteration to the level of corporation tax.

Of course, such a commitment would take place against a background of further reductions in the block grant, regardless of the colour of the UK Government after the next election. That is why this Budget's failure to tackle significant reform or make progress on the cost of division is deeply worrying. In all areas where the most significant reform is required, the DUP and Sinn Féin are essentially offering protection to the relevant public bodies, which has the practical outcome of frustrating efforts at further reform. As mentioned, for example, the implementation of Transforming Your Care (TYC) is not proceeding fully. Any reform programme requires upfront investment, and Transforming Your Care has blatantly not received that. The recent Donaldson report reinforces that. On top of that, the Minister has given health a significant uplift in spending. However, if the health system is not reformed,

it will require an uplift every year, for no other reason than the simple reality of an ageing population with increasingly complex requirements.

That is a problem across the Western World. I hear the figure of a 6% uplift perhaps being required year on year from now until 2025, and that is clearly beyond our means, so we have two options: either try to meet that or implement Transforming Your Care. When £79 million was made available by the UK Treasury to the Northern Ireland Executive, almost all of it arising from an uplift in National Health Service spending in England, I understand that we did not allocate any of it to health.

I notice that a Sinn Féin motion is to be debated next week along the lines of reductions in the block grant and the need to explore additional revenue-generating powers that have not been explored fully as part of the Budget process. I am glad that one of the two major parties is beginning to see the light, because we will inevitably come to that at some stage. We have some sympathy with — I think that it was Edwin Poots's suggestion at the time — the reintroduction of prescription charges possibly to pay for the very necessary cancer drugs that we do not have over here. The fact is that we had £79 million on the table, yet we have not used it for that purpose. As a result, I understand that regionally identifiable public spending on health in England is 22%, yet here it is just below 18%.

Likewise, the education system in Northern Ireland ensures that there is a duplication of services and enough surplus places to draw funding away from front-line services and into administration, yet the Department of Education is being protected, ensuring that such inefficiencies can be protected. Where progress was made, as it had been by the Minister for Employment and Learning on teacher training, the Executive overruled the Minister and decided to spend additional money on reinforcing division.

I am sorry, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, but I am suffering slightly today.

By way of comment on teacher training, I want to make it clear, before anybody jumps up, that I am not talking about St Mary's; rather, I am talking about the overall teacher-supply situation. Last week in the House, the Minister of Education said that he had reduced teacher training places over the past number of years by 30%. Just this morning, he very helpfully answered a question for written answer from me. I will give you the figures for the approved intakes to initial teacher education courses: in 2014-15, 600 places; in 2013-14, 600 places; in 2012-13, 600 places; in 2011-12, 663 places; and in 2010-11, 663 places. I could go right back to 2007-08, when there were 699 places. Members probably get the point that I am making, which is that there has not been a reduction in teacher training places at all.

The other side of the argument is the number of teachers who have obtained a position in Northern Ireland between their graduation and now. The Minister very helpfully sent me an answer to a question on that subject as well today. If you take the year of graduation as being 2010, the number of North of Ireland graduates who have been employed on a permanent or significant temporary basis is 57%. If you take it as being 2013 — more recently — only 23% of graduates have obtained a place, and those are not even full-time places. They are of a significant temporary nature, which is for one term or more, and the percentage includes full-time and part-time teachers. It also presumably includes the 200 who are on the signature project, which is about to come to an end. When we talk about an oversupply of teachers — I am directing this not at one particular institution but the overall situation — there is a colossal expectation that is not being fulfilled. In my opinion, it is also a colossal waste of money, which is why I raise it. It is precluding other university places from being granted because we are supplying too many teachers.

The list of unresolved reforms is quite long, but there are some examples of success. If Stephen Farry had been allowed to proceed, that would have been one of them. Dare I say it, the other Alliance Minister, David Ford, has embarked on a programme of prison reform that has a similar effect. The failure of this Budget to address such reform makes it much less likely that we will be able to present a credible and costed decision on corporation tax in the near future.

As I said, we will accept the Budget on the basis on which it is now offered but with considerable misgivings. We hope for better days next year. I appreciate that this is a one-year Budget, but the problems coming down the track at us cannot be ignored. The Minister knows that, so we will see where we are in a year's time.

Mr Weir: Listening to the Member's cheery analysis of the situation that we are facing in Northern Ireland, I was glad that he does not have a part-time post with the Samaritans.

As we approach what is effectively — the Chair of the Committee referred to this — the fourth Budget debate in a matter of a few weeks, the general point that has been raised by a number of Members is that we should seek some sort of reform of the process. The fact that there is a degree of regurgitation makes that case. While I am in favour of memorandums of understanding and, indeed, general reform in that regard, we should not kid ourselves that there is some form of utopia out there in terms of the Budget process. The reality is that the value of any change will only really be gained through the way that each Department deals with its Committee — if they operate in a full, open and transparent manner as well.

Obviously, when we get into the fourth debate in the space of six or seven weeks, there is a major challenge for any of us, particularly those on the Finance Committee who have probably spoken in each of those debates, to find something novel to say — dare I say it, to find something interesting to say. That is a challenge that I have no intention of meeting. I can reassure the House that I will not be saying anything either novel or interesting today. I will try to stick to that mantra throughout.

Another issue that was raised by the Chair of the Committee — I appreciate that he was speaking in a personal capacity — was about ensuring that policies are rural proofed. While I think that is important, we need to ensure, not just with the wider Budget but with departmental spend, that we have equitable spending across Northern Ireland. To that end, we often hear about the needs of various city communities, understandably enough, and we hear about rural needs. Those of us who come from suburban Northern Ireland and who do not really fit into either of those categories would make a case that we should not be left behind as a result. Rather than

pigeonhole ourselves into particular locations, we need to ensure that, across the board, we have equitable spending.

Given the Budget process that is facing us, including some of the constraints and because this is the last full year of this Assembly, I think there was a great temptation for the Finance Minister to essentially take what has happened with previous Budgets and simply roll it forward, with no cognisance of any need for change. There was a temptation to tread water. I do not believe that we are faced with that today. As I highlighted on previous occasions, many of the initiatives that are being put into effect through the Budget, such as the change fund and other funds that have been located, or the broader reform of public services and the embracing of a voluntary exit scheme, for example, show a commitment to radically looking at things again. There is no doubt — it has been highlighted by a number of Members — that we are very much in an age of austerity in which the block grant, in real terms, has shrunk over the last few years and is likely to shrink again. Again, the temptation for Departments will simply be to see where they can salami-slice what they have at present and not make any radical change. I believe that what is contained in this Budget is the opportunity for the much greater change that has been highlighted.

1.15 pm

It is also a Budget that is consistent with the broad economic sphere. I have some sympathy on the issue of how we fund, in particular, specialist cancer drugs, and I think that that means that there is a need for a look again at prescriptions. Leaving that aside, I think that the temptation has been resisted to simply say, because the Budget is under greater strain, let us look at where we can squeeze whatever additional bit of money out of hard-pressed taxpayers and ratepayers. We have had an Executive and a Finance Minister that have operated on the basis of ensuring that burdens of taxation on members of the public and on businesses are kept to a minimum. That is replicated in the Budget, so that the temptation that could have been there has been resisted. At times, some members of the Alliance Party have suggested massively ramping up regional rates as a device to do so. Obviously, Mr Lunn is a dissenting voice on that.

Mr Lunn: Will the Member give way?

Mr Weir: I will give way, yes.

Mr Lunn: I want to query that we have suggested massively ramping up. That is completely inaccurate. We are trying to be realistic about it, and I think that Sinn Féin at least and perhaps, eventually, your party will come to the same conclusion.

Mr Weir: Speaking of realism, the impact of a 1% rise in regional rates is that that would maybe generate another £5 million or £6 million. If we are to radically change things on that basis, the only logical conclusion from the Alliance's position is to increase that by a massive amount. That is not something that this Executive have done, and I think that they are right. I have some sympathy for the point that we had a non-domestic rates revaluation, and, as Paul Girvan said, it is an attempt to try to rebalance things to a certain extent. Inevitably, it will produce winners and losers, and it may be open to question that that has been entirely fair in each individual case.

I took a little bit of exception earlier on when the Chair of the Committee, possibly speaking in a personal capacity, mentioned the sterling work that one of the members, Mr Flanagan, had supposedly done in Fermanagh, hosting a meeting on rates revaluation. At the same time, his colleagues were putting through an increase in Fermanagh rates of over 5% this year. That was opposed by my party and the Ulster Unionists and some of the SDLP. People have to be absolutely consistent. I think that we have a Budget that is consistent. It seems that, at times, others are not particularly following through in connection with that.

I welcome that the Budget secures a range of much-needed projects. As has been highlighted, this year's Budget does contain £26 million of SIF money. Without rehashing the arguments, that is precisely the full amount that another party, had it been successful, would have cut every penny from, including the projects for which there were legal requirements, so I welcome that.

While it has been somewhat belated, and an earlier agreement being reached could have saved the Executive a considerable amount of money, I welcome the fact that, with agreement on welfare reform, we have a situation where welfare reform is going ahead with, effectively, an identified financial safety net to ensure that the most vulnerable in our society are not disadvantaged. That is a genuine safety net and is unlike the way that some in the House would present it when they say that there is nothing really there to cushion the blow. There is a set amount in the Budget. Nor, indeed, as some others have criticised, is it a blank cheque. A specific amount has been set aside, and I welcome that.

I welcome the amount of money that has been set aside for health. Part of the wider challenge of change is where TYC and other things will be quite important. There is no doubt that there are major issues, not just for Northern Ireland but, essentially, across the Western World with health spend. I believe that we need the twin pillars of reform of health spend, which I think is happening, and to ensure that, as best as possible, front-line services in health are protected. Therefore, I make no apology for the fact that, in tough economic times, the biggest single winner out of the Budget is the health service, with an extra £204 million as part of this Budget going into place.

In terms of transparency of action, some of the criticisms have been from the Department of Education. Nevertheless, one of the changes between the draft Budget and the final Budget that we face today has been an acceptance of the protection of the front-line services that are being provided in schools. The £63 million, I think it was, that the Executive put in place, which was matched with what I think is an extra £17 million for the delegated schools spend coming directly from the Department, should mean that, while there are still pressures in schools, the radical pressures that would have led to wide-scale redundancies and a diminution in the services that are provided to our children in Northern Ireland have been avoided. As per some of the points that were made, I think that the Health Department, the Education Department and other Departments are in need of a shake-up and change. Nevertheless health and education are probably the two key front-line services that most people want to see protected as much as possible. I think that we have a Budget that does that. Finally, I turn —

Mr Lunn: I thank the Member for giving way. I take the point about the extra £63 million and the £17 million that was topped up for the Department of Education, avoiding an imminent crisis. Does the Member have any specific comment on what I said about 600 teachers a year being trained when we do not need anywhere near that number? Expectations are being raised. Even the teachers' pension scheme has been amended, so teachers will have to work much longer, which compounds the problem.

Mr Weir: First of all, the position on pensions is not unique simply to the teaching profession. As we have an ageing profession, unions have inevitably raised concerns, and there has had to be pension reform in a wide range of professions, particularly in the public service. We still have a situation where, to be fair, despite even those changes, the public-sector pension schemes tend to be the most advantageous in society as a whole.

There is a wider challenge to find a long-term structural change in teacher training. We cannot essentially engineer that by the back door, so simply taking action that impacts on a couple of teacher training bodies is not particularly strategic. That is why I think the Executive took the correct approach when taking their position on St Mary's and Stranmillis. We need a much more strategic point of view. A knee-jerk reaction of simply putting cuts in place does not bring that about. I agree that there is a longer-term need for the reform of teacher training, but we have to try to move forward as best possible on a wider scheme with consensus.

I will come back to the remarks that I made at the start on reforms to the structure. A memorandum of understanding, for instance, would be useful, but, unless it is accompanied by a very honest assessment from each Department when they present to Committees, it will have limited value. Not unsurprisingly, mention was made of the extent to which Treasury seeks to contain information so that nobody else has that knowledge. That has been something that Whitehall has faced. It is not a problem unique to Northern Ireland; Whitehall has faced it for many years. I think that we also see that in Departments at times.

Sometimes, Departments put a spin to their Committee, quite understandably, to try to establish why they should receive more money. As well as the Committee for Finance and Personnel, I serve on the Committee for the Environment, and we have seen figures presented there about a wide range of good things, generally speaking, that the Department does that will clearly lack funding. However, the figures do not take account of the fact that a very large percentage of the departmental budget will be spent simply on staffing. While it is acknowledged that some members will be part of a voluntary exit scheme, that is not taken into account when looking at those figures or, indeed, when looking at where some money can be diverted from, such as the carrier bags levy. I do not think that we are getting a particularly honest appraisal from the Department about its financial position. I want to say specifically on that, because we will have to face some decisions fairly quickly in connection to that in the Department of the Environment, that I would like to ensure that priority is given to road safety, albeit perhaps delivered in a different way.

I am concerned that many of the signals that have come from the SDLP, in particular, seem to highlight the rates support grant as being almost the number one priority, when, from a practical point of view, it is the equivalent of 0·5% in the overall local rate that is put in place. We need to see and ensure that that is prioritised when there is a freeing up of resources.

It is clear, as we move forward, that there is an important reform of public sector services of which the voluntary exit scheme is a key component. There are a couple of points to be made on that. First, as has been stated time and again and despite the spin put on it by others — to be fair, probably outside the House — the exit scheme is, by definition, entirely voluntary. Therefore, people will make a choice. Mr Cree, for instance, raised the concern, "What if we do not get enough people?". Those are not the soundings that I am receiving from people at the moment. From my experience of exit schemes in the past and the feedback I get at present, I would be surprised if we did not get the situation in which there were too many people looking out rather than too few. That is the feedback that I get. While I think that the change will make a high level of difference — we can debate and argue over that, and time will tell — in the past, in any voluntary exit scheme, the tendency has been that too many people have been interested, rather than too few. That may be something that we have to deal with.

I believe that what we have overall is a sensible Budget that actually looks to the future. As indicated in previous debates, it may well be that we will look back in a few years' time and see that it signposts directions for the better delivery of services for all people, ones that actually protect the most important aspects of society and its most vulnerable people. I therefore commend the Budget Bill to the House.

Ms Boyle: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the opportunity to speak on the Second Stage of the Budget Bill.

If we are to build a better, more democratic, just, fair and prosperous economy for our children, economic power is not optional; it is essential. The alternative is increased austerity, income inequality and poverty. The general election in Britain will not deliver an alternative for our people. There may be a change of rosette colours, but policies will remain the same. We can make the change. We can take economic power to build an economy of fairness, prosperity and democracy — the three pillars of any decent society.

Westminster governance is not delivering for our people. It means wage cuts for the low-paid and tax cuts for millionaires. Collectively, we should demand economic power from Westminster to build a prosperous North and a prosperous island, a fair society where hard work is rewarded and vulnerable people are protected. I believe that the majority of us want this. The argument that we are too wee and too poor to take economic power from Westminster is an insult to us. It is an insult to the intelligence, creativity and skill of every person living here in the North. Of course, those who make that argument do not really believe it. How can they, when it is just patent nonsense? They know that economic confidence is the key to economic power. Our task here is to build that confidence in our ability to deliver economic prosperity and jobs.

1.30 pm

We can, together, secure the full financial powers to tackle inequality and promote competitiveness to allow businesses here to thrive. We can collectively stop

hiding behind overestimations of the fiscal deficit and can together stop hiding behind the word "subvention", for austerity and raids on the block grant are no gift to the people of the North. We can stop hiding behind the net fiscal balance report under the pretence that it presents us with official statistics when we know that it is not recognised by the Office for National Statistics. We can, together, accept that the methods and data used in that report are not the same as those used in Scotland. We know that no Finance Minister in Scotland would stand over an estimate of VAT based on a survey of 147 households or 24 households per county.

We cannot afford to let Westminster continue to stifle our growth and squander the real opportunities for our people. We have vast potential for renewable energy, a successful food and drink sector and a thriving life sciences industry. We have some of the best universities in the world here and have produced some of the greatest entrepreneurs. We can be confident about our economic prospects, but it is our prospects under Westminster that cause us concern.

I have spoken about the talent and the resources in the North, but, for decades, Westminster Governments squeezed the living standards of our people, crushing talent and opportunity. As a result, we face an ever-widening gap between rich and poor. Two out of every 10 people in the North now live in poverty, and, without sounding full of doom and gloom, that is the reality. We have the biggest cuts imposed on us from Westminster. Britain is the most unequal society in Europe. Nowhere is that felt more keenly than here. We are locked into a system that exploits our people and wastes our resources. We face a future of ever-increasing social inequality.

Economic power means powers to create more and better jobs, better-paid jobs and more jobs for women and the power to attract more world-class companies to invest in Ireland, North and South. Taking power from Westminster is rational, reasonable and, indeed, responsible. It is about the best way forward for our people and the best way to build the fair, prosperous and democratic economy that we here strive for. We know that no one is more passionate about our economic future than the people who live and work here. No one else cares as much, and so it should be our people who take the decisions that will shape the lives of this and future generations. It is simple. We have every reason to secure economic power from Westminster; in fact, we have more than 1·8 million reasons. Let us deliver economic power and prosperity to our people. I support the Bill.

Mr I McCrea: Thank you, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. This is my first opportunity to put on record my congratulations to you on gaining the position of Principal Deputy Speaker.

A lot has been said throughout the last few weeks in respect of the debates on budgets and whatnot. Rehearsing a lot of that today is probably unnecessary, and I will try my best to avoid it. There are some issues that need to be addressed. Michaela Boyle, across the way, tried to give us many a good reason why we should have more fiscal powers in Northern Ireland.

If we look at what we have and what we are due in the not-too-distant future when we will be dealing with corporation tax, we should take one at a time and see how we get on. Some Members believe that corporation tax should not be devolved, but the debate has long since moved on to the rate at which we set it.

We are looking at the wider context of our Budgets and how we set things. The Minister will no doubt look at rates and issues to do with rates. We need to address those as they affect people in our constituencies. In my constituency, I find it very difficult to understand why we talk about devolving more fiscal powers, given those that we have already, including the ability of councils to set rates. In my council area — the new Mid Ulster Council — Sinn Féin, backed by the SDLP, which holds the balance, increased the rates burden by 5·81% in Dungannon, 5·63% in Magherafelt and 2·74% in Cookstown. We are asking for more powers — Sinn Féin certainly has it on record that it wants as many powers devolved as possible — yet we cannot even strike a rate in councils in the best interests of our constituents or ask council officials to try to cut their cloth to ensure as low an increase as possible. No one will tell me, after 12 and a half years' experience, that there was never any cloth to be cut.

It is important, therefore, that we look at the wider context. If we are to devolve additional fiscal powers, we have to get better at exercising the powers that we already have, such as setting the rates. I understand that, in other council areas across Northern Ireland, rates have been cut or frozen. Mid Ulster and Fermanagh and Omagh councils are no different in having that responsibility. In the new Mid Ulster Council, Sinn Féin, backed by the SDLP, is more interested in the Irish language and other things than the delivery of key services. If that is the lesson to be learned from the way in which we exercise our fiscal responsibilities, I am not sure that everyone has grasped how best to do so. In the past few days, I have not heard from one constituent who is happy with the increase, and I, speaking on behalf of my party and the Ulster Unionist Party, which also opposed the increases, think that it is incumbent on those parties who voted through the increase to tell people exactly why they did so.

I contributed to one of the Budget debates, when an Ulster Unionist Party amendment proposed to take £26 million out of the social investment fund. I will not rehearse all the issues, but I still have not heard how the Ulster Unionists proposed to do that. Twenty six million pounds is allocated to the social investment fund. From my constituency's perspective, there is £1·4 million of committed spend. Had the Ulster Unionist Party's amendment been accepted, where was the £1·4 million going to be found? I discussed it with the Finance Minister, who told me that he had allocated £26 million — no other money — to the social investment fund. This is basic mathematics: if you take £26 million away from £26 million, there is nothing left. I still have not found a valid explanation of where we would have found the additional £1·4 million for the projects in my constituency.

All in all, I commend the Finance Minister for the efforts that he put in to bring us to this point. He spent many hours trying to ensure that we had enough money to pay for all the services and ensure that front-line services were kept, certainly in the education sector. I commend him for all the work that he has done, and I wish him well as he continues to do the job.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I call Mr Colum Eastwood.

Mr Eastwood: You caught me by surprise, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. I, too, congratulate you on your elevation. I do not think that I have had the opportunity yet to do so. I wish you luck in your role in the future.

This has been well debated and the arguments well made, so I do not propose to go through all of them again; I will focus on a couple of particulars. I want to pick up on something that Mr McCrea said about Mid Ulster. I have a lot of family in Mid Ulster, but I am no expert in how the rates process was set and what the money is being spent on. However, it is a bit disingenuous to say that the DUP voted against a rates increase that, like a lot of other rates increases, will be, in large part, due to the cut being made to the Environment Department, which has to be passed on somewhere. In large part, it has to be passed on to local government. That is —

Mr Girvan: Will the Member give way?

Mr Eastwood: Yes.

Mr Girvan: In light of what the Member is saying, is he aware that other councils have been able to set a 0% rise and that other areas in the same council area receive under the review of public administration (RPA) a 4·7% reduction in their rates over the year? That comes down to the good management of budgets.

Mr Eastwood: There are many reasons why rates go up and down, but when you send a cut to councils — not all councils will have seen it because of the rates support grant — they have to decide whether to cut services, maintain services or increase rates. Unfortunately, at times, they really have very little choice but to increase rates. It is worse for some places than for others, and, hopefully, there will be some mitigation.

Somebody has done a nice little graph showing where the money has gone and where it has increased. Clearly, the DOE's budget has taken the largest hit. Mr Weir is right: it affects road safety. As we look at the Budget now, there is no money whatsoever for road safety, whereas, last year, I think that £2·2 million was spent on road safety. The Minister has committed to putting some money into road safety, but he will have to be very creative about how he gets the message out because very little money was left in the pot after it was raided. It is clear that local government has been affected. Poorer councils will be affected — in my council, it will be to the tune of hundreds of thousands — because of the different cuts and different grants from central government. We have to be mindful that we can all play politics in our local area, but when a cut comes as a result of a cut from central government, that is where the issue is.

Members should be honest in saying that they are voting for a Budget that creates a cut. Everybody knows that that is what it is doing, so to go to local councils and do something different is a bit disingenuous.

1.45 pm

People will see through that and understand —

Mr I McCrea: Will the Member give way?

Mr Eastwood: Yes, go ahead.

Mr I McCrea: The Member talks about people being disingenuous in how they vote on councils. Will he advise us how the SDLP voted on Omagh and Fermanagh councils, when, in this place, SDLP MLAs voted against the Budget? It was their right to do that, but, in Omagh and Fermanagh, SDLP councillors were split. Had they been united, the rates bills might have been a whole lot less.

Mr Eastwood: I honestly do not know what happened in Omagh and Fermanagh. I will gladly talk to the Member afterwards, and perhaps he can enlighten me on what went on. It would not be unusual for people to argue for their own area, especially at a time when we are merging councils.

I want to touch on something that we need to be aware of. I know that Members have talked about the Tories and about the British Government this and Westminster that, and I agree. The Tories have brought in savage cuts to our Budget and to budgets across Britain, but we have to be mindful of the fact that we are responsible for our budgets in the vast majority of public policy areas, so we have to take responsibility for our actions. My argument, coming as I do from west of the Bann and a city that has the highest unemployment rate — an unemployment rate that does not seem to be getting any better — is this: what did we do when we had the money, before the Tories came into power and made major cuts?

Where did we invest? Did we invest in the A5 or the A6? Did we invest in ensuring that the university at the Magee campus was expanded to 10,000 students doing the right kinds of courses for attracting investment? No, we did not. To stand up and blame the Tories is all very well, but we have to understand that, when there was money in the pot, we did not invest. Parties that are now saying that it is all the Tories' fault did not invest in the skills and infrastructure that we need to develop our economy.

I have big fears around some of the arguments that we are having now. In principle, I agree that the rate of corporation tax should be brought down to the same level as that in the Twenty-six Counties, but the difficulty with corporation tax being brought down to 12·5% without investing in infrastructure and skills is that we end up with no advantage whatsoever. I know, because I live in a place called Derry. We have a border at the edge of our city in three different directions, so we have a 12·5% rate of corporation tax. Businesses could come and set up in Bridgend if corporation tax were the sole attraction, but what we do not have is a university providing the right kinds of courses with the right numbers and the transport infrastructure to connect the city to the rest of the island. That is why lower corporation tax on its own does not work.

Ask the people of north-east Donegal, who have had corporation tax at a very low level for a long number of years. They have seen no impact from it, because the roads were not invested in at that end of the country and there was no investment in higher education to the proper level to attract the inward investment that we require. Whilst we can discuss the Budget, and we have, we need to be investing to save in the upcoming CSR period. We need to be investing in infrastructure, particularly in the north-west, and skills.

We send 5,000-odd students out of Northern Ireland every year; we need to stop doing that. We cannot say that we are going to support DETI to bring in foreign direct investment and then reduce the number of students in our universities. We should be increasing the number

of students. Every other part of the world understands that, even in tough economic times, if there is only one place in which to invest, that should be higher and further education. That is the only way in which to attract foreign direct investment, encourage entrepreneurship and create jobs.

If we spend our time doing a great job with education and then, when they hit 18 , send our young people to Manchester, Liverpool, Dublin or London, they will never come back. Something like 80% of them stay within a 22-mile radius of where they go to university. They do not come home. We are educating children for export. My plea is that, if we do anything after this budgetary process, it should be to work out how we can invest in infrastructure and skills, because we will still be facing the high levels of unemployment in my city, in Strabane and in areas around there that we have been for years if we do not expand Magee and build proper and decent roads from Derry to Belfast and Derry to Dublin.

No matter how you tinker with the budgets or anything else, unless you do those fundamental things, my end of the North will be forever languishing in economic deprivation because we do not know what it is like not to have a recession.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Before I call the next Member to speak, I make it known to him that, if he has not concluded his remarks before 2.00 pm, I will be interrupting him for Question Time. He will then be invited to speak immediately after Question Time.

Mr Ó Muilleoir: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. That sounds like a tempting and generous offer, but I am hoping to finish by 2.00 pm. Deputy Speaker, many have congratulated you on your elevation, so I will do that as well. You have been here for quite a while now, like me, but congratulations on your appointment.

I want to touch on matters that would, perhaps, enhance the Budget on the basis that we have many pressing demands on our funds. When I last looked, the Minister had managed to put over £40 million into the new investment fund. Perhaps that has increased in the last seven days. I would ask him to explore, as part of the growth of the investment fund, the opportunity to attract funds from abroad. I am thinking in particular of pension funds, which would see an investment fund in this region as an attractive proposition. Of course, that would mean a loan that would have to be paid back, but I believe that the rates would be favourable and that it would give us that extra “za-za boom”, I believe they call it; that extra push in our investment programme.

When the Minister was in kindergarten in 1995, there was talk of a peace bond. The Minister does not have the power to issue a bond, but we need to explore in an imaginative fashion how we could work towards a bond if we had the powers. However, it would certainly give our allies and friends across the globe, but particularly in north America, an opportunity to invest in building the peace and the economy.

The baby sister of the investment fund is the social innovation fund, which has only £5 million from dormant funds but hopefully will grow. Again, I ask the Minister to look beyond making that a fund from which voluntary, charitable or faith group bodies can borrow. Is there a way to match funds that are contributed by philanthropists? I am thinking particularly of the Community First programme in England, which runs until the end of March this year. The Treasury set aside £50 million and said that, if those with wealth came forward and wished to establish a fund, it would match it. If a generous individual came forward in Bristol, Manchester or London and said, “I wish to have a new fund with £1 million”, the Government came forward with their kitty and matched that.

We know of the great work that the Community Foundation here does in making sure that funds that are donated by philanthropists are distributed to those in need and agencies that are tackling poverty and building the social economy. That may be something that we should do as well. There are other bodies and agencies that lend to voluntary and charitable groups, enterprise agencies and so on, but at this stage we do not, to my knowledge, have a scheme whereby if someone wished to contribute, perhaps to their local area, they could come forward with funds and we would match them. Through the social innovation fund, the Minister might look at that.

There is an organisation in the US called the Calvert Foundation. It asks individuals to lend it funds and it distributes those, usually to inner cities.

The Calvert Foundation model could be used around our peace lines. People who want to support the peace and build the economy could make small donations to our social innovation fund, have them matched by the Minister and see their money contribute to building peace.

Lastly, I want to echo the comments of Mr Eastwood. It always stops you talking when your name is mentioned. I echo his calls. I made it up to the city that I call “Derry”, the Minister calls “Londonderry” and my esteemed colleague Ms Boyle refers to as “Greater Strabane”. I was in Derry city last week, where I met representatives of the chamber of commerce and Ilex and the new CEO of Derry City and Strabane District Council. I make a plea to all the parties here: in the next Programme for Government, we really need to get our act together on the north-west; we need to expand Magee College and create the infrastructure. The potential with corporation tax powers is limitless. We could move into a new era of job creation, and, as part of that new era, there needs to be a new peace dividend and a new era for the north-west. Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Order. As Question Time begins at 2.00 pm, I suggest that the House take its ease until then. The debate will continue after Question Time, when the next Member to speak will be Mr Mike Nesbitt.

The debate stood suspended.

2.00 pm

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

Oral Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Clerical Abuse Victims: Support

1. **Mrs Dobson** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for their assessment of the support available for victims of clerical abuse who are not included in the historical institutional abuse inquiry. *(AQO 7563/11-15)*

Mr P Robinson (The First Minister): With your permission, Mr Speaker, I will ask junior Minister Jonathan Bell to answer that question.

Mr Bell (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): From the outset, I will say that clerical abuse is no less important or emotive than institutional abuse. We are mindful of the equally destructive impact that it has had on many individuals.

Apologies, Mr Speaker. I have a bit of a flu, and it is man flu, which is the most virulent variety. So, I apologise for my voice.

The Health Minister has helpfully provided a range of detail on the services that are available. We have the domestic and sexual violence helpline, which is a 24-hour service that provides key support, advice and signposting for victims of domestic violence. We also have Nexus NI, which responds through the provision of counselling services to the needs of adults who have experienced sexual violence and abuse, and we have the Rowan. That is a sexual assault referral centre that provides services in the aftermath of a sexual assault, rape or an incident involving childhood abuse. Those services include a 24-hour advice and information line that anyone can ring.

There is also a range of psychological therapies and counselling that cover a wide spectrum of services in the statutory and voluntary sectors. In primary care, we are looking at establishing talking therapy hubs across the five health trust areas. In fact, they are currently being established. They will provide a range of psychological therapies and lifestyle support for people who are experiencing common mental health problems.

Mrs Dobson: I thank the junior Minister for his lengthy answer, despite his man flu. In what sense is it fair and equitable that two boys may have been abused by the same person on the same day but only one has access to the historical institutional abuse (HIA) inquiry? That is based not on the nature or scale of the abuse but merely where it happened.

Mr Bell: I think that the Member and the whole House supported the historical institutional abuse inquiry's terms of reference. It is a difficult issue, because, as I saw over two decades of professional practice, the impact on children who have suffered sexual abuse is exactly the same. Individuals will differ in how they respond to it, but the trauma is the same. Whether they have been abused by a teacher, somebody in the clergy or in an institutional setting, difficulties, psychological traumas and post-trauma reverberate from that. While not every victim will respond in the same way, the trauma is particularly difficult.

Why the House chose, I think correctly, to set the terms of reference in the way that it did for the historical institutional abuse inquiry was because those children did not have parents or caregivers to go directly back to. They had nobody else. They found themselves in a situation where their primary care was provided in those settings, and the inquiry is looking at abuse that occurred within those settings. That was the rationale for it, and I believe that the House chose correctly when it set that rationale for the historical institutional abuse inquiry.

It is vital that we provide all those others who experienced abuse in a range of settings, many within their own family homes and by people they knew, with the best services that are available so that they can be put on the process of healing. I have talked to many victims and survivors over the last number of years who are making a hugely positive impact on society. We need to ensure that the care and support that are needed to help with that healing are provided to them at the point of need.

Mr Lyttle: Does the junior Minister welcome the UK Home Affairs Committee's recommendation that the Kincora Boys' Home allegations be included in the UK independent inquiry into child sex abuse and the recognition that it gave to the Assembly's united position that that be the case?

Mr Bell: Yes, the question in relation to Kincora and the Westminster position on the historical institutional abuse (HIA) inquiry role is an important and critical issue. I know that the First Minister met the Secretary of State specifically on the issue. The Member correctly refers to the fact that on 30 September 2014, the Assembly unanimously agreed that the allegations of a cover-up by intelligence services and MI5, relating to abuse at Kincora Boys' Home, should be investigated by the Westminster child sexual abuse inquiry.

We are naturally disappointed that the Home Secretary did not do that, but we are pleased that the Home Secretary and the Secretary of State are fully committed to full investigation into any and all aspects pertaining to abuse at Kincora Boys' Home by the inquiry into historical institutional abuse here. On 8 January 2015, the HIA inquiry received a written undertaking from the Attorney General, Rt Hon Jeremy Wright QC MP, that any evidence presented to the inquiry relating to a matter within its terms of reference will not be used in any criminal proceedings against the person providing the evidence. The letter states specifically:

> *"For the avoidance of doubt, ... the undertakings cover any allegation of an offence arising under the Official Secrets Act."*

The chairperson of the inquiry here is also satisfied that the assurances that he has been given will allow him to investigate all aspects of Kincora fully, even if they relate to evidence outside this jurisdiction. I hope that that answers the Member's question adequately.

Mr Attwood: Even since the last OFMDFM Question Time, the voice of victims and survivors has become stronger, meaning that, at the very least, a scoping exercise should be done in respect of financial redress.

Indeed, I believe that many victims and survivors will meet Church representatives this very Wednesday in Armagh and that they will press the Churches on that point. In those circumstances, is it not the time for the First Minister and deputy First Minister to pivot, to respond to the growing voice of victims and survivors and to begin to scope out financial redress?

Mr Bell: I am not sure why the Member refers to the First Minister and deputy First Minister, given that the terms of reference for the historical institutional abuse inquiry were set by the House and by all the parties here, including his own. At that stage, we sought to do and put in place what we now have. What we asked, at that stage, was that the inquiry be allowed to complete its work.

Victims and survivors asked that the inquiry be allowed to act independently, so we have given it to an independent chair; a very distinguished chair, as the Member knows from his previous career. They asked that the independent inquiry would carefully examine the evidence and report back to us. The House agreed to all those terms of reference, and all the parties agreed that, when the inquiry is concluded and has heard all the evidence — let us be clear: evidence is still being heard — the chair of the inquiry would make a recommendation to the Executive about redress. That is the position that has been adopted and that we will be dealing with.

Mr Speaker: Before we move on, I inform Members that questions 6 and 7 have been withdrawn.

International Relations

2. **Mr McKay** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how they plan to build international relations in the future. *(AQO 7564/11-15)*

Mr P Robinson: The Executive's international relations strategy sets out a clear framework for our engagement internationally over the coming years. It aims to enhance Northern Ireland's international credibility and develop mutually beneficial relations with targeted regions around the world. Securing investment, improving trade and attracting tourists and international students to Northern Ireland are key to the strategy.

Our offices in Brussels, Washington and now Beijing play a major role in our international outreach. The work of the Washington bureau is establishing and developing important relationships with senior US Government representatives and has been integral to Invest Northern Ireland's unprecedented success in attracting US investment here. The deputy First Minister and I are looking forward to meeting key decision-makers and business executives when we travel to the United States next month to highlight the benefits of a competitive rate of corporation tax.

Our relationship with China represents an exciting opportunity for Northern Ireland. The Beijing bureau opened for business in September last year. We are already starting to see the benefits of direct government-to-government relations in the work of Invest Northern Ireland, the agrifood industry and the third-level education sector. The Chinese Government's plans to open a consulate general in Northern Ireland, based in Belfast, are at an advanced stage. That is further evidence of the growing confidence and mutual understanding between Northern Ireland and China. Within the framework of our international relations strategy, the deputy First Minister and I will continue to promote Northern Ireland as a great place to do business and to visit.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I welcome the work by the First Minister and deputy First Minister to attract investment, create employment and tap into the correct markets internationally. Will the First Minister provide us with an update on the work of the international relations working group?

Mr P Robinson: We have an international relations strategy and want to make an international development statement. Much work has to be done on international development, and we are working with the Committee in that respect. The international relations working group was established, I think, back in July last year as part of the Executive's strategy. Each Department is represented on the group. Its aim is to coordinate the international activity of Ministers and Departments to develop a corporate approach. That includes establishing communication links to best share information, the coordination of future international travel and diplomatic events and agreeing a set of key corporate messages. It continues to work, and we continue to improve our international relations.

In international relations, we use not only the fixed offices that we have with the bureaux in Washington and Europe, and now the office in Beijing, but we avail ourselves of the opportunity to use the various Invest Northern Ireland bases around the world and, where necessary, embassies.

Mr Weir: I thank the First Minister for the answers that he has given so far. Does he believe that the Executive could better harness the UK presence across the globe to promote Northern Ireland internationally?

Mr P Robinson: Nobody can do it better than ourselves. That is why, in the key areas, we have set up our own offices. For investment, there is a massive advantage in using Invest Northern Ireland's facilities, and we do that right around the globe. Everywhere we go, we visit the embassies. We seek to discover the extent to which they have promotional literature that helps Northern Ireland. It is not always the case, and perhaps we should pay more attention to ensure that all the embassies at least have the various documentation that they need, such as investment strategies and information on our education sector and others. It is not simply a case of the embassy selling Northern Ireland; we need to sell ourselves to the embassy. If any of our Members are on any foreign journey, it would be useful if they would call into the embassy in the area to discover for themselves how much that embassy is doing to tell the story of Northern Ireland and to report back to us.

Mr Dallat: Does the Minister agree that, in developing international relations, we should have in place a cohesive policy on international development? Can he tell me why, after so many years, the Assembly has yet to bring forward a policy on how we approach the Third World? I ask the question in the knowledge that Northern Ireland accepted millions of pounds from donor countries to rebuild our own society.

2.15 pm

Mr P Robinson: Of course we work with the Government on international development. We also have an Assembly

group on international development — I think that there have been some changes in that group — and we want to continue to work with it. We are working on an international development statement that I expect to come forward fairly soon. No matter what we say about how difficult times are in Northern Ireland, there are shades of poverty. If people think that we are having difficult times and that there are people in poverty in Northern Ireland, they should visit or look at other parts of the globe, and they will see the massive need that there is. In a region that has a relative abundance, we do well to remember those who are in much greater need than ourselves.

Corporation Tax: Update

3. **Mr Anderson** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, given their role of monitoring the delivery of the Programme for Government, for an update on the commitment in relation to the devolution of corporation tax. *(AQO 7565/11-15)*

Mr P Robinson: Developing corporation tax-setting powers is a key commitment in the Programme for Government, as a wide range of evidence has shown that there is significant economic benefit to lowering the rate in Northern Ireland. While the legislation to transfer responsibility for the tax continues to progress through Parliament, consultation events are being held with key stakeholders on the technical aspects of the Bill. We remain confident that the legislation is on track to receive Royal Assent before the general election. Further preparations to reflect the changes in the legislation will then be required by HMRC and tax software suppliers, so a reduction in the rate will not be introduced until at least April 2017. However, as we already have a very strong talent pool, the economic benefit will be seen in advance of that date as indigenous companies and inward investors will increase their investment levels in anticipation of a rate reduction.

Mr Anderson: I thank the First Minister for his answer. First Minister, you touched on the possible date for the legislation for our corporation tax powers. When do you want corporation tax powers to become effective? What do you think the rate should be?

Mr P Robinson: The deputy First Minister and I have met the chief executive of Invest Northern Ireland and people from the Department of Finance and Personnel. It is fairly clear from an Invest Northern Ireland point of view that we would waste a massive opportunity if we were to wait until 1 April 2017, which is the date on which it could be in force in Northern Ireland. The potential for us to sell two years without any cost to our Budget would be lost if we were to wait until then. The advice from Invest Northern Ireland is that we should decide as soon as possible what the rate and the date should be, and give a clear commitment that we intend to keep that level of corporation tax for a long term.

Previously, the fear was that we would be faced with a bill in the region of £325 million for the first year of its operation. The indications from the last briefing that we were given are, happily, that it is now clear that that will be phased in over three years, with a likely reduction from our block grant of between £100 million and £150 million in the first year. That makes it much more doable. It means that we would not face the final and larger figure until about 2019-2020, which Treasury forecasts and modelling suggest as the time when we should be coming out of the period of austerity, and when we would get the full benefit of the changes under the Stormont House Agreement for the streamlining of our services and the costs in Northern Ireland. They would put us in a much better position to be able to endure that reduction in our block grant.

Mr Kinahan: If the First Minister looks at the three Programme for Government milestones and outputs regarding the commitment for corporation tax, he will see that the 2012-13 milestone/output of needing a Government decision through participation in a joint ministerial working group did not happen; the 2013-14 milestone/output to ensure that the required Westminster and Assembly legislation was in place did not happen; and the 2014-15 milestone/output on the need for an Executive announcement on the rate did not happen. So, in fact, we have had nothing but fail, fail, fail. We need corporation tax powers. Will things change? Will we see a better and more dynamic approach?

Mr P Robinson: Of course, the decisions on all of these matters were ultimately decisions of Her Majesty's Government; they were not decisions of the Northern Ireland Executive. However, it was his party that gave up and his party that surrendered on the issue. It was his party leader who stood in the Assembly and told us to move on and forget it, asking what plan B was and telling us that we were not going to get it. It was this party that stood by its commitment; it was this party that continued to try; and it was this party that succeeded in getting the commitments from Her Majesty's Government. He would be much better standing up in his place and congratulating us for what we have achieved than emphasising the fact that he failed, because he was the one who walked away from a commitment to get power over corporation tax for Northern Ireland.

Mr B McCrea: Does the First Minister consider corporation tax to be a volatile tax? If so, what safeguards will be put in place to make sure that, if there are large annual swings, we will be able to meet our commitments?

Mr P Robinson: I think that the Treasury will recognise that there is volatility, in that the level of profit that any company makes depends on a number of international events, some known and some not known. Clearly, there is that level of volatility, and the Treasury will want us to have in place a reserve fund to deal with that. We are looking at that issue, which, I suspect, will require us to have available a fund of somewhere in the region of £100 million. I just wish that, if we are to go down the road of looking at corporation tax, people would not always look at one column and not the other. Let us look at the positives — the benefits that flow from corporation tax. Let us look at the additional jobs that can be brought into Northern Ireland. Let us look at the international companies that are already here and which will increase their investment in Northern Ireland. Look at the indigenous companies that will be able to use the increased profits that they can hold on to in order to invest further and expand their business. That means more jobs and more spending power. All of those are the positive aspects that economists have recognised could bring about 50,000 additional jobs to Northern Ireland. Perhaps we can get our chins off the ground and start looking at the positive side of bringing corporation tax powers to Northern Ireland, rather than always talking about the doom and gloom of our economy. This is a good news story.

Victims: Pensions

4. **Mrs Hale** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister if they intend to provide severely injured victims with a pension. *(AQO 7566/11-15)*

Mr P Robinson: The Stormont House Agreement sets out our commitment to look at the proposal for a pension for physically injured victims. Significant background work has already been completed on many elements of a proposed pension. The Victims' Commission has been tasked with providing a research report on the issues, and that has now been received by us. However, the report did not deal with eligibility, other than to look at types and levels of injury. That matter remains outstanding, and it is likely that it will be challenging to find consensus on it. Officials in our Department are considering all the issues that need to be addressed in relation to the introduction of a proposal for a pension for severely physically injured victims.

Mrs Hale: I thank the First Minister for his answer. First Minister, you are aware that many of the injured victims are now elderly, so this has become urgent. You will also be aware of my private Member's Bill on the issue. Can you give an assurance that your Department will work collaboratively with me on the case?

Mr P Robinson: Yes, I am aware of the details set out by the Member, and I commend her for her initiative in bringing forward a private Member's Bill. Knowing her background, I know that she feels very strongly about these issues and is keen to do everything that she can to assist. I do not expect anything less from the officials in OFMDFM. Obviously, there are political issues that they will not involve themselves in, but the Department will, of course, cooperate in any way that it can on the background information that she needs for her Bill.

Mr Hussey: I thank the First Minister for his response. I, too, like members of my party, am very concerned to see that people who were injured as a result of terrorist activity are compensated through a pension. How many people have been identified in the initial soundings as requiring a pension?

Mr P Robinson: I received a delegation some months ago, and I suspect that its figures were right at that time. Somewhere in the region of 300 to 350 people were considered to be likely and eligible, if the criteria were similar to what was initially set out in the consultation document put forward by my friend.

Mr Allister: It is clear from what the First Minister says that the stumbling block is the present obscene definition of "victim". Can the First Minister give an assurance that there are no circumstances in which a victim-maker who injured himself or herself in the pursuit of terrorism will ever qualify for a pension such as is being discussed here?

Mr P Robinson: I think that we need to be careful that we do not create a problem for the Bill as it might come forward. The issue will not be the definition of "victim". The issue will be about the eligibility criteria that are set down. There are tens of thousands of victims, and only 300 to 350 of those are likely to be entitled. It is those who are defined, even under existing law, as being victims who are eligible to go forward for the pension. I think that the consultation document that my friend has already published indicates the view that we take on those matters. There are others who have another view, and clearly the Assembly is going to have to decide on that, but I have no doubt that the Member and I will probably be in the same Lobby on the issue.

Culture/Arts: Safeguarding

5. **Ms P Bradley** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how the importance of culture and the arts will be safeguarded in the proposed reorganisation of Executive Departments. *(AQO 7567/11-15)*

Mr P Robinson: The reduction in the number of Civil Service Departments and the reorganisation of their functions is a Programme for Government commitment. We believe that it is an important step towards having a more efficient Civil Service. The reorganisation should not be interpreted as a change of Executive priorities. It is important to remember that all existing functions will continue to be delivered and resourced in the new departmental context. We fully recognise the importance of culture, arts and the creative industries; indeed, we are proud of the esteem in which this sector is held throughout the world. 'Game of Thrones', for example, is a phenomenal success, and 'Boogaloo and Graham' winning the short film category at the BAFTAs last week is testimony to Northern Ireland's successful film industry.

Ms P Bradley: I thank the First Minister for his answer. As we know, most of the money for culture and the arts in Northern Ireland comes via DCAL, although there is considerable investment through other agencies, including those responsible for good relations and community engagement. Can the First Minister confirm that culture and the arts will be integrated into the Together: Building a United Community project?

Mr P Robinson: There is to be no change in the direction of any of the programmes as a result of the reduction from 12 Departments to nine. The same level of enthusiasm will still be there. In many cases, it will be the same people in Departments who will be moving across to carry out the same work. Reorganisation should not affect in any way how that work is carried out. I know that there will be concerns for some if a particular sector's name does not appear in the title of a Department, but whatever the departmental names turn out to be, I can give an absolute assurance that that will not in any way dilute the work that is being carried out or the importance that the Executive attach to it.

Mr Speaker: That ends the period for listed questions. We now move on to 15 minutes of topical questions. Mr Dominic Bradley is not in his place.

Irish Language Bill: Executive Approval

T2. **Mr Allister** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether, in light of her consultation launch last Tuesday into what she calls an Irish language Bill, the Culture Minister had the approval of the Executive to launch that consultation and ought she to have had that approval, given the Bill's cross-cutting and controversial nature. *(AQT 2102/11-15)*

2.30 pm

Mr P Robinson: No and no.

Mr Allister: Is the First Minister saying to us that a Minister is at liberty to waste public money on a consultation that

does not even fit into the Programme for Government and that he and Executive colleagues, who were supposed to have stopped solo runs, are impotent to do anything about it?

Mr P Robinson: I am saying that the Member should be aware of the distinction between a consultation document and a decision. Any controversial decision has to be taken by the Executive, and any Minister is required to bring it to the Executive. We have a rule that no Minister is restricted in any way from going out with a consultation document. Each Minister must decide for himself or herself the best uses of resources in their Department and the likelihood of their consultation being agreeable when it comes back by way of a strategy. That is a decision that each Minister must make. I have not changed my position on the issue, and nor has my party. I trust that people will respond to the consultation and indicate that there are better ways for us to take forward expressions of culture than simply through an Irish language Act that would have massive expenditure attached to it if we were to go down that road.

Dealing with the Past: Importance

T3. **Mr Campbell** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline, following the Stormont House Agreement, the importance that they would attach to dealing with the past. *(AQT 2103/11-15)*

Mr P Robinson: Our history in Northern Ireland shows us that, no matter how hard we try, the past comes back to trip us up. Therefore, it became vital, when we sat down to deal with a series of issues in the Stormont House discussions, that we tried sensibly to reach agreements where they were possible in relation to the past. I am glad that we have reached a series of agreements on how we address those issues and how we can give some hope to victims that they can be heard, their grievances can be properly pursued and we can seek to get at the truth.

Mr Campbell: On dealing with the past, can the First Minister outline what his view is of the former junior Minister Martina Anderson MEP, who, last week, talked about the killing and secret burial of Cypriots by the Turkish military being wrong, given the context that she was in an organisation that killed and buried people like Jean McConville, Columba McVeigh and others and would not tell people where they were for 20 or 30 years? Is that not brass-necked, 24-carat hypocrisy at its worst?

Mr P Robinson: I am sure that the Member, like me, rejoices in the fact that the Member of the European Parliament who made those remarks now recognises the hurt that is caused to families who are not aware of the whereabouts or details of their loved ones who were disappeared. I met recently the McConville family, and I have to say that it was a very sobering and serious occasion. Here was not just one life lost because of murder and the difficulties that arose from that in relation to the body not being discovered for many, many years, but the lives of the family in many ways ruined. They were separated at a young age, ending up in care and then finding themselves in circumstances where they were abused as children. I think that one can see the circumstances that they faced, so I hope that there is greater awareness of the impact on very real individuals. If it is right for those who point the finger towards Turkey to do so, it is also right for those who look closer to home.

Welfare Reform: Four-party Agreement

T4. **Mr Brady** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to confirm that, although four of the five Executive parties — the SDLP, the DUP, the UUP and the Alliance Party — endorsed a provisional welfare agreement on 17 December, which did not include a multimillion pound supplementary payment fund, the four-party agreement did include a two-year loss of benefit sanction. *(AQT 2104/11-15)*

Mr P Robinson: The one thing that I can be absolutely certain about is that, on the principle that you never ask a question unless you know the answer, the Member knows the background details to the issue, and those facts are accurate. I am somewhat disappointed by the attitude of some parties in the Assembly to welfare reform. We should rejoice that we have managed to resolve an issue that had very real and destructive abilities for the future of the Assembly. Instead of reaching an agreement one day and trying to renegotiate it or vote against it or pretend to people outside that you are not really in favour of it, we would all be far better recognising our responsibilities and moving forward with an agreement that we reached.

I listened open-mouthed to the SDLP Member for Upper Bann, Dolores Kelly, on a programme at the weekend. I could not believe what I was hearing. If the Member were to do what she should do at the speed that she should do it, I would not like to be standing between her and the confessional. For anybody to suggest, as she did, that her party had not endorsed either the four-party agreement or the five-party agreement is totally misleading. Indeed, the facts go beyond simply agreeing around a table. Five party leaders took that document collectively to Stormont House where we sold the idea to the Secretary of State and she, in turn, to the Prime Minister. Do not let any party try to wheedle its way out of agreements that were reached by us all at Stormont Castle. We would do well to remember that, while there was a four-party agreement, ultimately, we agreed a five-party agreement that was much more detailed and had much more meat on the bones than the four-party agreement had.

Mr Brady: I thank the First Minister for his answer. I hope that he does not think that the supplementary question is rhetorical. Can the Minister further confirm that the multimillion pound supplementary payment fund and a range of protections, including top-ups for children with disabilities, adults with severe disabilities and the long-term sick, was included in the final Stormont Castle agreement negotiated between the DUP and Sinn Féin and later endorsed by the SDLP, UUP and the Alliance Party on 19 December? Go raibh maith agat.

Mr P Robinson: As I indicated in response to the Member's first question, the five-party agreement at Stormont Castle was much more detailed and precise than the four-party agreement. I think that I can do better: I can confirm to the House that at 1.55 pm, before I came into the Chamber, I ensured that a copy of the Stormont Castle agreement was placed in the Library of the Assembly. Therefore, Members will be able to look at the question raised by the Member and satisfy themselves as to what the correct response should be.

Social Investment Fund: Northern Trust Allocation

T5. **Mr Beggs** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the timescale for social investment fund payments, which are only now hitting the ground, given that, of the £80 million committed in the social investment fund, only some £6·5 million has, to date, been committed in the Northern Trust area, part of which he represents, albeit that the Programme for Government originally had that funding being spent within its period, which will run out in six weeks' time. *(AQT 2105/11-15)*

Mr P Robinson: The Member should look at the precise wording that he uses and choose his language more carefully. He said that, of the £80 million, only six point whatever it was had been allocated to his area. There was not £80 million for his area; the £80 million was for the whole of Northern Ireland, both capital and revenue. A small fraction of that was for each of the zones. I am glad to hear from him that the commitments have already been made in his area. A lot of this is rolling out much more slowly than we want or are comfortable with. I have two cases from my advice centre on Friday that I intend to raise with colleagues about the slow movement in either the Department of Finance and Personnel or OFMDFM. I am at one with him in wanting to speed the process up, but it is important that we have the proper checks in place, because we are dealing with public money and we want to ensure that it is used properly.

Mr Beggs: I thank the First Minister for his answer. I think that, if he reflects on Hansard, he will see that I never said that £80 million was expected in the Northern Trust area; I was simply reflecting the total amount.

Will he not acknowledge that it has been very slow to get to ground? In what time frame will this be delivered, and when will disadvantaged members of my constituency expect to see some benefit from it?

Mr P Robinson: Hansard will show that he said that, of the £80 million, there was only £6 million-odd in his area, clearly implying that a very small amount of the £80 million had been assigned to his area. There was a division among the zones. We have had countless discussions in the Assembly since then, and nobody has complained that we got the division of that money across the zones out of kilter.

Of course, we want it to happen as quickly as possible. If the Member wants to write to me or to see me about any particular project in his constituency, I am happy to bring forward our officials or, indeed, officials from the Department of Finance and Personnel to discuss the stage the issue is at and what can be done to speed up any particular project.

Executive Office: Brussels

T6. **Mr Byrne** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to confirm that the bureau office in Brussels has four desk officers and one head of department and to state what benefits they hope to accrue over the next four years in our relationship with Brussels going forward. *(AQT 2106/11-15)*

Mr P Robinson: Mr Speaker, with your permission, I will ask my colleague junior Minister Jonathan Bell to answer this question.

Mr Bell: The work that we have been doing with the desk officers ranges across areas such as climate change, energy, competitiveness and employment. The success of the desk officers is in the strategic approach that they take to building contacts in the European Union and maximising the drawdown of funding for people here and for small to medium-sized enterprises and businesses here. The work that they have been undertaking with groups and businesses has always been critical in trying to ensure that small to medium-sized enterprises can plough their way through the very complex European legislation, which, for them, can be extremely difficult. In many cases, from examples that I have seen, it is about making that work manageable and making sure that people get timely information on what they are eligible for at the correct time. There are major funds out there that are simply overwhelming when they are looked at in the first instance, but, when they are broken down almost to chunk size, you can see that there are opportunities for Northern Ireland businesses. That is just one example of some of the positive work that they do.

Mr Speaker: We are almost out of time, but there is time for a very quick supplementary question.

Mr Byrne: I thank the junior Minister for his answer. Does he accept, however, that we need to maximise the opportunities that are coming out of Brussels? Does he further agree with me that Mr Gerry Mulligan has done a wonderful job? Can he confirm that he has been replaced by a new civil servant from Northern Ireland?

Mr Bell: Yes, I can, and I join you in paying tribute to Gerry Mulligan. I have been out numerous times, and, every time I have been out, a comprehensive programme has been put in place. We look for that work to be continued under the successor there.

Some major work has been done with Gerry. Last week, we were dealing with Safer Internet Day. When we were out previously, we got to speak to some of the key influencers in the European Union about a safer Internet and on trying to ensure that those who provide material on the Internet are actually held accountable for what they do.

2.45 pm

A second example is that we went to look at the apprenticeships that are available, particularly in Germany and Austria, to see what we could do. I know that the Member will agree with me that too many of our young people are not in education, employment or training. Countries in Europe, particularly regions in Austria and Germany, are providing their young people with a different way forward, and young people are actively engaging with proper apprenticeships, leading to full-time jobs at the end of them, particularly in the engineering industry. Gerry, with the support of the desk officers, ensured that we could take all of that and make sure that we could maximise the potential for Northern Ireland.

Mr Speaker: Thank you. I thought that you were going to destroy your voice there.

Finance and Personnel

Sickness Absence: Civil Service

1. **Mrs Cochrane** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how he plans to address the high levels of sickness absence in the Northern Ireland Civil Service. *(AQO 7577/11-15)*

Mr Hamilton (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): Managing attendance and reducing sick absence is a key priority in the Civil Service, and the work of all Departments in managing their sickness absence must continue and, indeed, intensify in some areas to ensure that the targets set out in the Programme for Government are achieved. I have asked my officials to review our Northern Ireland Civil Service policies and procedures and consider any changes or strategies that may be necessary to ensure that our ministerial targets are met.

Mrs Cochrane: I thank the Minister for his answer. Given that there are already a number of work/life balance initiatives, such as flexitime, in place in the Civil Service, which is more than what is on offer in the private sector, is the Minister concerned about the level of stress-related sick absence? Does he think that it could increase in the coming months when more restructuring and reform measures are implemented?

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Member for her question. The analysis provided by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA), which measures sickness absence rates on our behalf, shows up a lot of interesting issues around the causes and is broken down by gender and work area. One of the more concerning statistics is that stress-related absences account for over 30% of working days lost. I am sure that everybody in the House will agree that that is a worryingly high number.

I appreciate that the Civil Service is no different to many walks of life and that members of staff will face stress and pressures in the work they do. It is a reflection of broader society, and the stresses and strains of life will then be reflected in our workforce.

The Member is right to highlight our policies around flexible working, work-share and job-share initiatives and so forth. That shows that, in the first instance, we would like to consider ourselves to be a caring and compassionate employer in the Civil Service, but there are also a range of policies in place to try to work around some of the pressures that people will feel in their everyday lives.

I appreciate that stress can be caused in any walk of life, but we are trying our best, as a Government, to mitigate some of the problems. That is done through routine intervention by the occupational health service, our employee assistance programme, which is delivered by Carecall, and all the other initiatives that we are actively trying to take forward to reduce levels of stress. I do not think that the voluntary exit scheme, by itself, should or should not affect that, but I appreciate that reform and restructuring in its broadest sense is a sensitive issue and needs to be handled with care.

Mr Girvan: I thank the Minister for his answers so far. What percentage of civil servants take no sick days at all?

Mr Hamilton: In the discussion around our high but falling levels of sickness absence in the Civil Service, there is sometimes an understandable focus and concentration on those who are off sick; but it is worth noting that, in the last full year for which we have statistics, which is 2013-14, the percentage of civil servants who took no sick days throughout the year was 55·3% and that was up from 52·3% in 2012-13. It is not often understood or appreciated that well over half of all civil servants take no days off a year. That figure has been consistent. What causes the figures to be worryingly high, although they are falling, is that, of those who are off, one in ten are off for an average of three months, thus distorting the overall picture. The Member raises a very good point. It is worth acknowledging that the vast majority of civil servants take no or, indeed, very few days off sick each year.

Ms Boyle: Go raibh maith agat. Will the Minister consider exploring new ways of providing stress management and stress-reducing initiatives? Will he take them forward in his Department?

Mr Hamilton: As I mentioned in my response to Mrs Cochrane's question, stress accounts for around a third of all sickness absence. Clearly, we want to focus on finding out the reasons for that and on putting in place initiatives and policies to alleviate it. There was a Northern Ireland Civil Service-wide stress survey in 2014, the previous one having been conducted five years before that. The survey is being managed by a cross-departmental working group, whose role is to develop a response to the findings on behalf of their Department and feed back best practice and shared experiences. We have found frequently from handling sickness absence that very good and, indeed, best practice in some Departments leads to a measurable decrease in the numbers of staff who are off sick. Sometimes that will not work in every Department, but the good practice that is going on needs to be shared across the board. Dealing with stress is no different. A Civil Service-wide stress action plan is also being developed and has been included as a key action point in the Civil Service people strategy, which we are now rolling out. We are very keen to do all that we can whether through innovative or new policies to address stress, in particular, and sickness absence across the board.

Mr Speaker: I inform Members that question 5 has been withdrawn.

Northern Ireland Investment Fund

2. **Ms Sugden** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on the proposed Northern Ireland investment fund. *(AQO 7578/11-15)*

12. **Mr Humphrey** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on the progress made on the Northern Ireland Investment Fund. *(AQO 7588/11-15)*

Mr Hamilton: With your permission, Mr Speaker, I will take questions 2 and 12 together, as they both relate to the Northern Ireland investment fund. Members will recall that as part of the draft Budget I announced my intention to establish a Northern Ireland investment fund. I am pleased to report that significant progress has since been made. A DFP-led project board has been set up, which includes representatives from DSD, DETI, Invest NI and the Strategic Investment Board. This project board met before Christmas and will now meet regularly as the project advances.

The first key milestone in the establishment of the investment fund is the completion of a feasibility study. Consultants Deloitte were appointed on 3 February to take forward the study, and work is now under way. They have previous experience of advising on the establishment of similar funds and are well-placed to deliver the study. I expect this study to conclude in late May, and I look forward to considering its conclusions and recommendations.

Ms Sugden: Was the Northern Ireland investment fund created to provide a space for upgrading the electricity grid, which would in turn satisfy the policy on renewables?

Mr Hamilton: The feasibility study will hollow out in much more detail the areas for future investment from the fund. It will try to take a very long-term view of infrastructure investment. Energy production, energy efficiency and renewables are some of the areas of potential investment opportunities we identified in consultation with the European Investment Bank. Government has an interest in investment in these areas, as it does in other areas like social housing and urban regeneration, but does not always take the lead role. Energy production is one that it might invest in. I do not want to prejudice the outcome of the feasibility study or, indeed, what money might be given out of or lent from the fund in future, but there are any number of energy production projects or schemes rolling out across Northern Ireland or in the pipeline or at various stages of development that could avail themselves of this. Let us bear in mind that at the outset we hope there will be around £1 billion, primed by up to £100 million of the Executive's own funds.

Some energy production or infrastructure schemes would swallow up all of that £1 billion very quickly. It may be smaller-scale energy production projects at the outset. I stress again that this is very much a long-term fund. We want it to grow from £1 billion into much more. Therefore, the possibilities of what might be funded in the future are quite exciting.

Mr Humphrey: I thank the Minister for his answers so far. How will the Northern Ireland investment fund be financed?

Mr Hamilton: The Executive have agreed an indicative allocation of over £40 million to the investment fund in 2015-16 to kick-start it by getting some finances into its balance sheet. We hope that that will leverage in additional finance from, first and foremost, the European Investment Bank (EIB), which we have been working with incredibly closely on this project from roughly this time last year. I pay tribute to the EIB for its engagement and work in the genesis of the fund and throughout the last year. I look forward to its input to the feasibility study and to having it as a partner in taking the fund forward. The EIB and I are not against trying to draw in finances from elsewhere. Obviously, it is keen to top up what we put in. It has encouraged us to look at other opportunities to finance the fund; someone raised that issue during the Budget debate earlier. I do not want to get into details about who it might be, but we are beginning conversations with large-scale potential international investors that might be able to take the initial £1 billion in the fund up to a much higher level and, therefore, do much more for Northern Ireland in developing our infrastructure.

Mr McKinney: I thank the Minister for his answers. The fund is described as a leverage fund, but will he tell the House what the key strategic drivers are to enable that leverage to happen and inform the specific projects that would ultimately be picked?

Mr Hamilton: I know that it can sometimes be frustrating that there is a lot of process in delivering things like this. Although there is a feasibility study, some people might say that we should just get on with it and identify the sort of schemes that we want to fund. This is an absolutely essential stage. Whilst we indicated some areas of investment and infrastructure where it might be possible, including social housing, urban regeneration, energy efficiency and energy production, it is not limited to that. It might be limited in the short term because of the volume of money in the fund, but, in the longer term, as we leverage in more funding, there might be the opportunity to expand that even further.

We have an exciting opportunity through the fund to do things on a scale that we have not done before. From the public-sector side, we have used conventional capital to invest in infrastructure. Traditionally, that has gone to roads infrastructure, hospitals, new schools or whatever. This gives us the ability, on a large scale for a long number of years, to invest in other sorts of infrastructure that are of economic and social benefit to Northern Ireland. I look forward to the feasibility study and to dealing with many of the issues that the Member raised. It will give us the confidence to move forward with creating the fund, to leverage in finances from the EIB in the first instance and to try to work with potential international investors that might see the attraction of investing in Northern Ireland.

All of us will appreciate that there has been underinvestment in our broad infrastructure over the last 10 or 20 years. That is where there is a great opportunity for those investors, some of which we have already spoken to, that see the potential of investing in Northern Ireland. That will attract the sorts of players that have not really been in Northern Ireland or entertained investing in Northern Ireland in the past. It is a vehicle that will bring those sorts of players to the table.

Voluntary Exit Scheme

3. **Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline the anticipated annual saving to the Northern Ireland Civil Service of the voluntary exit scheme. *(AQO 7579/11-15)*

Mr Hamilton: Plans to develop a voluntary exit scheme for the Northern Ireland Civil Service are well advanced. The Executive agreed the preferred option at their meeting on 5 February. It is intended that the scheme will be launched on 2 March 2015 and will be open to virtually all civil servants, including part-time staff, below permanent secretary and analogous grades. We anticipate that those selected to leave under the scheme will do so in tranches between 30 September 2015 and 31 March 2016.

3.00 pm

The overarching objective of the Civil Service voluntary exit scheme is a permanent Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) pay bill reduction in the 2015-16 financial year and beyond. Civil Service Departments have advised that the pay bill savings they need to make via the voluntary exit

scheme in 2015-16 equate to approximately £26 million, and around £88 million a year thereafter. This is based on the indicative number provided by Departments of around 2,410 full-time equivalent posts to be suppressed. These figures assume sufficient applications to effect this quantum of pay bill savings. However, due to the voluntary nature of the scheme, it is not possible to be definitive at this early stage on the numbers who will be released or the savings that can be generated.

The indicative pay bill savings were calculated using the median salary by grade of the total full-time equivalent posts required to be released to generate the required savings. Staff will be released in tranches throughout the period between September 2015 and March 2016. This means that the full six months' pay bill savings will be realised only for those released in the first tranche, with savings reducing for those released in later tranches. The £88 million saving represents a full 12-month period when all staff have been released.

Mr Weir: Why was a voluntary exit scheme considered necessary rather than the alternative options that, as he outlined, were considered as well?

Mr Hamilton: The objective, as I said in my first answer, is a permanent pay bill reduction. That is, of course, in the context of trying to deal with significant pressures on our Budget next year. Even though those pressures were able to be closed somewhat by the allocation of a further £150 million in the final Budget, some Departments, including mine, are dealing with significant reductions next year. A permanent pay bill reduction is the number one objective.

It is worth reiterating that it is one of a number of strategic personnel interventions. The others include a recruitment freeze, an embargo on promotions and the suppression of what are called funded vacancies in Departments. Those interventions alone will save an estimated £30 million in 2015-16, which is very welcome. It is, perhaps, a little less painful than other interventions might be, but £30 million, while very welcome, will not deal with the pressures that Departments are facing. A voluntary exit scheme is necessary because it will achieve much larger savings and will do so much more quickly than a recruitment freeze might be able to achieve.

In addition, time is of the essence, and that is why we need to progress very quickly with the scheme. I am glad that the Executive agreed in recent weeks to proceed, which will allow the scheme to be opened to staff at the beginning of March. We are still on timetable to release the first tranche of people by around September 2015. That will allow Departments to realise, from the first tranche of people who go, six months' worth of salary savings, which will help them to live within their means and set them up very well to make a full year's savings in future financial years.

Mr Allister: I want to ask the Minister something that I have asked him in a question for written answer. He is notoriously slow to answer those, so I still have not had an answer. How long would it take under natural wastage and a recruitment freeze to run up the saving of 20,000 posts across the public service? That is, obviously, a key question in balancing whether it is wise to borrow £700 million to fund an exit scheme.

Mr Hamilton: I know that the Member has submitted a question for written answer. He will appreciate that, sometimes, the answers that come back first throw up issues that I would like to tease out so that I can give the Member or, indeed, any Member in the House a good answer and the answer that they want.

The leaver rate for the Civil Service is roughly 4%, which means that you would ordinarily expect just over 1,000 members of staff to leave next year for whatever reason, whether it be retirement or just deciding to go. The Member will appreciate, therefore, that releasing 2,400 people — Departments have identified that they need 2,400 fewer staff next year — would not be achieved by a recruitment freeze alone or by other measures. That is why I said to Mr Weir that time is of the essence. The Civil Service needs to release 2,400 people next year, and we would not achieve that by recruitment freezes alone. The same applies to the 20,000 figure across the whole of the public sector. Recruitment freezes and those other strategic personnel interventions will play a key role in getting us to 20,000, but, given the pressure that there is on public finances immediately — from the next number of weeks into the start of the next financial year — it is essential that, to realise those sizeable savings, we have a voluntary exit scheme.

I have no hesitation in saying that it is far from an ideal course of action, but it does reflect experience elsewhere. Whitehall had a voluntary exit scheme in 2010 and was able to reduce its size by around 10%. We have done nowhere near that, which is why we need to do what we are doing now. The simple answer is that, whilst recruitment freezes are part of the equation, they would not realise quickly enough the quantity of savings or number of people to leave the service.

Mrs Overend: Is there a preferred plan B that will need to be considered if the voluntary exit scheme is not accepted by staff or the desired grades in the Civil Service?

Mr Hamilton: I accept the point that there is a degree of risk in proceeding with such an ambitious and radical scheme over such a short period. One of those risks, as the Member identified, is that it might be undersubscribed.

My belief, and the anecdotal evidence, is that there will be no problems in the first year, or, indeed, in the first couple of years. It is a scheme over a four-year period, so there will be many for whom voluntary exit does not work or suit their circumstances now but may do in the third or fourth year.

The Executive have agreed to proceed with a voluntary exit scheme. They have not considered any other option at this stage, but if the scheme did not work or realise the savings that we are anticipating, we would have to look at what other options might be there. We would do that in the context of a changing budgetary environment. We have predicted the need to reduce the headcount by 20,000 over the next number of years, but that was done on the basis of Budget projections that were valid six months ago. The reality of the Budget in the future may change positively or negatively. Many things around budgets and the impact of the headcount need that we have in the Civil Service and the broader public sector are sometimes in a state of flux.

It is something that we will have to keep under review, but I do not think that there will be much escaping the need to reduce significantly the numbers working in the broad public sector in Northern Ireland.

Banking and Access to Finance

4. **Ms P Bradley** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on the work of the Joint Ministerial Task Force on Banking and Access to Finance. *(AQO 7580/11-15)*

Mr Hamilton: The Joint Ministerial Task Force on Banking and Access to Finance has met four times, most recently on 2 February. My key focus on the task force has been on ensuring that everything possible is being done to improve access to finance for local businesses. I am pleased to be able to say that the lending environment is improving, with more businesses successfully securing the finance that they need to prosper and grow. I also recognise that challenges remain for many of our firms. That is why I have been pressing to ensure that the benefits of national initiatives are being felt in Northern Ireland. Thankfully, we are seeing progress on that front. The uptake of programmes delivered by the British Business Bank in Northern Ireland is improving, with latest figures indicating that those have facilitated £40 million of lending and investment to businesses in Northern Ireland.

Access to finance is a crucial issue, and I assure the Member that I will continue to press for suitable initiatives where they could have a positive impact in Northern Ireland.

Ms P Bradley: I thank the Minister for his answer. Will he elaborate on and outline the volume of lending by banks to local business?

Mr Hamilton: A primary objective of creating the joint ministerial task force, which I sit on alongside the economy Minister, Arlene Foster, was to get better data on lending in Northern Ireland. Many of us in the House will recall that, when the crisis began, and there was a drop off the edge of the cliff in lending in Northern Ireland, whilst we knew that that was happening, we had no data to back up what we believed to be the case.

We have been fighting a long, but thankfully fruitful, battle to get better data published. We now receive much better data quarterly from the British Bankers' Association.

The latest figures available are for the third quarter of 2014, and they show that new approved borrowing by SMEs in Northern Ireland stood at £407 million. That was the highest quarterly amount since the data series started back in 2010, and it was 15% higher compared with the same period the year before. The approval rate for SME loans remains high, with over nine out of 10 applications being approved.

I appreciate that there will still be many issues, which is why the Executive, principally through Invest Northern Ireland, continue to have a range of products like the growth loan fund and the small business loan fund in the marketplace to assist those who still have difficulties with getting conventional finance from our banks. Those figures are testimony to the fact that, just as our overall economy is changing, so is the availability of finance to businesses. Whatever about the banks and what happened in the past, we need our banks to function properly if we want our economy to function properly, and all of us will welcome those very positive figures and the move in the right direction.

Mr McCallister: I am grateful to the Minister for his reply. He knows — indeed, he indicated in his reply — the importance of managing access to finance for SMEs, and I include our farming sector, which is going through a difficult time. Does he have an opinion on whether Northern Ireland needs more competition in its banking sector, more access to finance and more flexibility in the financial products that are on offer? Does he agree that there needs to be a rebuilding of personal relationships between customers and their banks and a move away from the mentality of "Computer says no"? I would be grateful for the Minister's views on that.

Mr Hamilton: In some ways, my view on the structure of the Northern Ireland banking situation is not going to change it. It is what it is. There has been an encouraging entrance of what might be described as "challenger banks". The interesting thing about that is that the challenger banks in Northern Ireland are the established banks in mainland UK. The likes of Barclays, Santander and HSBC are becoming much more active in the business market in Northern Ireland and are obviously backed by pretty healthy balance sheets. They provide some competition for the four local banks. Even though none of them are owned locally, they are the four big traditional banks in Northern Ireland, and they are getting some competition from those challenger banks.

The access to finance implementation panel that Arlene and I created made the point in its conclusions that we did not need to radically change the structure and that what we needed more of was different products, recognising that the lending environment had changed, probably utterly, so it is not a case of getting new banks to come into the market. I would not dissuade any new banks from getting into the market. If they want to come, that is perfectly fine — it is a business decision for them — but all banks, including those that are established in Northern Ireland, need to behave differently and produce different products. That is why, to reiterate the point, Invest Northern Ireland has moved into the space by providing products that can offer a bit of a bridge between what businesses can get from regular banks and what they need to take forward projects. Different products and a recognition that there are different ways to finance business growth are probably what need to be appreciated more than the need to bring more competition into the local market.

Mr Kinahan: Will the Minister advise on what actions have been taken as a result of the access to finance report that was produced by the independent economic advisory group last year?

Mr Hamilton: The access to finance implementation panel has produced a very good set of recommendations, many of which are being progressed. One of the key ones that we continue to progress between my Department, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and the British Business Bank is the proposal to develop a property overhang fund in Northern Ireland. As Members will appreciate, it is the overhang of bad debt around property that stifles the ability of many businesses in Northern Ireland to grow. Again, in an innovative and creative way, we are looking at trying to produce a product or a fund that would help to deal with that issue to allow those otherwise very solvent and very able businesses, which are capable of growing, to grow and to do so free from the property overhang that has been stifling their ability to do so.

Spending Review 2015

6. **Mr Newton** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of the forthcoming UK 2015 spending review. *(AQO 7582/11-15)*

Mr Hamilton: At a UK level, it is widely anticipated that the current trend of reducing public-sector budgets will continue in the short to medium term. In that respect, we should anticipate resource DEL reductions and plan accordingly. The precise impact of the forthcoming 2015 spending review on the Executive's budget will ultimately be shaped by the policies of the incoming UK Government and the degrees of protection that they offer to comparable services such as health and education.

3.15 pm

Mr Speaker: I apologise. We are at the end of the time for listed questions. We now move on to topical questions.

Civil Servants: Pay Claim

T1. **Mr Hussey** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on the pay claim lodged by civil servants, given that he will be aware of the stress civil servants are working under and, with other Members, will acknowledge the stress suffered and bravery shown by those who worked in police stations and the Court Service during the Troubles; people who are still waiting for their pay claim, which is the subject of legal proceedings, to be settled. *(AQT 2111/11-15)*

Mr Hamilton: The House and, indeed, the Member will know and, I hope, appreciate that I have had huge sympathy for that issue since coming into office. Indeed, I tasked officials in my Department to look at the issue again and, as a result of that work, I brought a paper to the Executive that I believed was capable of resolving it. Unfortunately, that paper has yet to be tabled before the Executive, and, therefore, no decision has been taken. That is regrettable. There are some in the House who have pretended to support the very members of staff whom Mr Hussey has spoken about, but, when a proposal to resolve the situation was put to them, they walked away and have not allowed it to be taken forward. That is deeply regrettable.

I want to correct the Member in one respect — well, not correct him but point something out: there is no equal pay issue in this regard. That was clearly proven by the courts in the judgement by Justice Babington a couple of years ago. That does not take away from the very valid points that the Member and, indeed, many others Members have made to me. I recognise those points and hope that those who have at least verbally supported the calls by those members of staff in the past can now back that up with positive action.

Mr Hussey: I thank the Minister for his response. He is correct that, legally, there is no valid equal pay claim, and he has made that clear in many responses. However, the Civil Service staff concerned clearly believe that they have a valid claim. Will you advise the House if and when you think the matter will be resolved? Will it be resolved in the life of this Assembly? There are civil servants in distress that the matter is ongoing some five years after the initial claim.

Mr Hamilton: Having looked at the issue again and having brought forward an Executive paper that included a satisfactory way of dealing with the issue that, while not dealing with any legal claim — there is no legal claim — dealt with the need to recognise the work that was done, I recognise that that has not proceeded. As I said, I think that that is regrettable. I am hopeful that the changes to the way in which the Executive do business that were agreed in the Stormont House talks may allow the paper to be brought forward in a way that would not have been possible in the past. That does not naturally translate into automatic agreement on the paper, but I assure the House and, more to the point, the members of staff who may be listening to or reading what I am saying that I will bring that paper to the Executive when I am permitted to by the changes in how the Executive do business. It will then be up to those who have been holding it back to put their money where their mouth is on the issue. I hope that, in the not too distant future, we can get some resolution.

Teacher Training Colleges: Premia

T2. **Ms Lo** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how he reconciles the Executive decision to continue funding the teacher training colleges' premia with the stated Executive commitment to a strategic Budget, public-sector reform, addressing the cost of division and promoting a shared future. *(AQT 2112/11-15)*

Mr Hamilton: No one, including me, would deny that reform of teacher training in Northern Ireland is required, and I have heard many saying that in the House over the past number of weeks when the issue has been discussed. I would be one of the first to accept that we still produce too many teachers in Northern Ireland, with, I think, four institutions producing qualified teachers. There is an absolute need to reform the system. I do not agree and the Executive have not agreed with the way in which her colleague — indeed, my Executive colleague — the Minister for Employment and Learning has gone about trying to achieve the desirable aim of reform. You do not achieve change, in my view, in the way that Minister Farry brought forward his proposals. There was no consultation or attempt to bring the colleges with him. There was no political consensus in the House, where a motion was clearly passed with 80-odd votes in favour of the proposal not to cut the premia. Proceeding in a blunt and crude way by simply cutting the colleges' budgets in a very un-Alliance fashion, I have to say, by just doing it over the heads of those institutions and without consultation would have produced a perverse result. In particular, Stranmillis college, which is, of course, in the Member's South Belfast constituency, would have fallen by the wayside very quickly, and I do not think that that would be an intention or consequence that any of us would want. Maybe some wanted to see it, but certainly I and many in the House did not want to see that happen.

The decision that the Executive took not to cut the premia now gives us the space to work with the colleges. It also gives an opportunity for consultation with them to achieve the reform that is absolutely required but would not have been achieved in a way that any of us would have wanted by just crudely and bluntly cutting their budgets.

Ms Lo: I thank the Minister. As he has admitted, we train too many teachers. How can he justify using that excessive amount of public funding to fund teacher training colleges

while neglecting other, maybe very crucial, areas of building up the economy, taking into account the need for skills building ahead of the reduction in corporation tax?

Mr Hamilton: There are many areas of higher education where we produce too many graduates; it is not just teacher training. I welcome the fact that universities have been reducing the number of places in what, I think, we would all agree are lower-priority areas for our economic development. That is a good first step in the direction of reform.

This is not a problem that has appeared overnight; it is a long-standing one. There have been unsuccessful attempts to resolve it. Frustrated as the Minister and many others might be, he might have achieved a reduction in the number of teacher training places, because it might have forced the closure of Stranmillis college in particular — something that I and many others did not want to see happen — but the best way to achieve a successful outcome that everybody buys into is to proceed on the basis that we have now created a space to consult the colleges, bring them into the tent rather than keep them outside and work with them to agree a way forward. If they fail to agree that way forward, the Executive and the Minister will have to look at other ways to achieve reform, but crudely and bluntly cutting their budget and forcing them into slow but certain decline and death is not the way to achieve reform.

VAT: Hospitality Sector

T3. **Mr Hilditch** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what support he has afforded to the Pubs of Ulster campaign, which is calling on the Chancellor to reduce the rate of VAT for the hospitality sector. *(AQT 2113/11-15)*

Mr Hamilton: When I was on the Back Benches, not that long ago, I tabled a motion calling on the Chancellor of the Exchequer to reduce the VAT rate for the hospitality sector, as he is permitted to do under EU law. That would mirror the experience of the Irish Republic, where the VAT rate for the hospitality sector was reduced very successfully. My predecessor Mr Wilson followed that up with the Treasury about two years ago, and, in the last number of weeks, I have written again to the Financial Secretary to the Treasury, David Gauke, building on the campaign that the Member has highlighted, which is led by Pubs of Ulster but is backed by many other hospitality sector bodies in Northern Ireland and beyond, for the VAT rate for the hospitality sector to be reduced.

One of the points I made to the Treasury Minister was that my counterpart, the Irish Finance Minister, Michael Noonan, in his Budget in October, confirmed that VAT for certain parts of the hospitality sector in the Irish Republic would be cut indefinitely. The reason he took that decision was that an independent evaluation showed that the reduced rate of VAT for the hospitality sector in the Republic, where it is down at 9% for some categories, has increased employment through the creation of 30,000 new jobs and brought a benefit to the Irish Exchequer of €165 million. It is because of that compelling case that I want to back Pubs of Ulster, and the other organisations that are pushing for this cut, to see the same thing happen across the UK.

Mr Hilditch: I thank the Minister for his answer. Given that, are you hopeful that the rate of VAT for the hospitality sector will be reduced?

Mr Hamilton: There is now a broad campaign across the whole of the United Kingdom. We are not permitted to reduce VAT within regions of a member state; you can do it across the whole of a member state in the EU and specifically within the hospitality sector. The fact that there is now a broad-based campaign across the UK is helpful.

We have evidence from our near neighbours in the Irish Republic of how successful it can be, not just in boosting tourism numbers but in boosting employment and bringing a net benefit to the Irish Exchequer. That is the point that I would labour with the Treasury.

Yes, you will have a reduction in VAT revenue because you will have reduced the rate. However, because of the increase in employment, PAYE receipts, National Insurance contributions, and the profits that companies in the hospitality sector will make and the tax they will pay on those profits over time, it can yield a net benefit for the Exchequer.

Clearly, this is something that the UK Government will have to consider in the round of the pressures they are facing in public spending, just as we are facing pressures. I sympathise with my Treasury colleagues in having to take those sorts of decisions, but the fact that we now have good, strong evidence from the Irish Republic that the policy, when pursued, can work and can work substantially well, means that there is no reason why it should not happen across the UK.

Meeting: Welsh Finance Minister

T4. **Mr Sheehan** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on his recent meeting with the Welsh Finance Minister. *(AQT 2114/11-15)*

Mr Hamilton: I regularly meet Ministers from other devolved regions. At the start of the year, I had a very positive meeting with Jane Hutt, the Welsh Finance Minister. It was a meeting that she was very keen to have to learn of the experience we had in the Stormont House Agreement. It was not a discussion about the very late nights and lengthy discussions but was about the results coming out of the Stormont House Agreement, particularly around financial flexibility and borrowing.

It is fair to say, and I am sure that Jane will not mind me saying it, that the ability to borrow to offset the resource pressures of a voluntary exit scheme and the ability to hold on to receipts from major asset sales and convert some of that into resource expenditure is of interest to the Welsh Government in their pursuit of more powers around borrowing. They have the ability to borrow only up to £400 million, whereas we have the ability to borrow £3 billion. Those are flexibilities that the Welsh Government, and, I am sure, the Scottish Government, are quite interested in and would like to take forward in their conversations with UK Government Ministers.

Mr Sheehan: Go raibh maith agat. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire. Has the Minister scheduled a similar meeting with his Southern Irish colleague?

Mr Hamilton: I meet regularly with Brendan Howlin, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform. I meet

Michael Noonan regularly as well, but for budgeting, public spending and reform matters, it is with Brendan Howlin that I have most engagement.

He and I meet regularly at the SEUPB and North/South Ministerial Council bilaterals. We also meet in plenary session, but we use those opportunities to have broader discussions about our respective responsibilities. We have been taking forward work around reform and talking about the experience that the Irish Government have had in reforming their public sector and trying to learn some lessons from their experience. Equally, they have been trying to learn from our experiences of reform of government in Northern Ireland. It is a good, healthy, productive relationship, with a lot of shared and mutual interests. I want to keep it that way and continue to learn from each other on an ongoing basis.

3.30 pm

Executive Committee Business

Budget Bill: Second Stage

Debate resumed on motion:

> *That the Second Stage of the Budget Bill [NIA Bill 45/11-16] be agreed. [The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr Hamilton)].*

Mrs Dobson: I welcome the opportunity to speak on the Budget Bill. I will split my remarks into two sections to broadly reflect what the Bill is seeking us to approve. First, I will look back at the year that has been, and, secondly, I will look at the year that now looks likely.

There is no doubt that 2014-15 was an immensely challenging year. The institutions faced one crisis after the other; in fact, they came close to what looked like a likely collapse on more than one occasion. The lack of political control at the top of the Executive was, unfortunately, repeated in a lack of control on their financial management. Of course, I am talking about the 4·4% in-year reduction that 10 of the 12 Departments were hit with, simply to keep key public services operating. There were a number of reasons for that, not least the ridiculous spectacle of the £87 million penalty that was paid to the Treasury. That, along with £13 million the year before, was money that the Executive could ill afford to lose, yet it did — all because one party walked itself into a corner for fearing what the voters of the Republic would think, only to, very publicly, roll over at the last minute, because after playing and losing their one and only card with the Prime Minister, they knew they had no other ideas or options left. Nevertheless, if some in the Chamber had had their way — I look to the Minister's party for this — they would have had all of us believe that all the in-year reductions were to pay for the fines. In reality, the majority was required to smooth over the deep and dangerous cracks that were appearing in the 2011-15 Budget. Some parties quite clearly decided to place political spin far ahead of being honest with the public.

Of course, the four-year Budget was always more of a calculated political agreement than any sort of genuine attempt to use public funds appropriately. The last Assembly was assured in late 2010 and early 2011 that the numbers worked and that those individuals or parties with even the slightest bit of doubt would be proven wrong.

This was the year that the Budget deal finally fragmented beyond all recognition of what was agreed almost four years ago. We need only look today at how different the final settlements were to those agreed. In fact, I ask the Minister if there has ever been a year with such in-year shifts of departmental budgets. It is not about scoring points, Mr Speaker. I am simply saying that it is about time that we had a little bit of honesty around what happened between early summer and autumn last year.

As my party's health spokesperson, I will make a few specific points with regard to the Department of Health's year.

Mr Girvan: Will the Member give way?

Mrs Dobson: Yes.

Mr Girvan: Would it not be right to state that one of the biggest areas in which there was a difference was the

capital end of things? It was in relation to your Minister, his reluctance to deliver the A5 and how that had to be dealt with.

Mrs Dobson: I thank the Member for his intervention, but I will move on.

As we are all aware of the fact that the Department ended with a £13 million deficit in 2013-14, despite receiving a further £100 million in monitoring rounds that year, it was clear that all was not well within our local health service even before this year had started. That deficit, however, turned out to be a relatively small problem for the Department, as its financial prognosis kept going from bad to worse. Only in late August 2014 did the then Minister gather the political confidence to accept that he had made a mistake and that the numbers in the 2011-15 settlement, which he and others had praised for so long, did not add up. He need not have warned about refusing to implement cuts, because, not long after his statement, he was unceremoniously out of office.

In my opinion, mistakes were made. It is unforgivable that the Minister and his officials waited so long to ring the alarm bells. They knew, by waiting well into the last year of a four-year budget, that it would be all but impossible to reallocate emergency funding without having a major and damaging impact on other areas. Had they spoken up earlier — the former Minister is responsible here — much of the pain could have been avoided. However, aside from a half-hearted attempt at TYC, nothing was done to avoid what happened this year. The Minister simply sat back and watched the local national health service walk into a major funding crisis. Whilst the Department eventually received significant in-year allocations, even still, they were either not enough or, more likely, came too late to mitigate all the damage that had been done. The decisions of each of the five health trusts are well known and do not need to be repeated here today. I stress, however, that decisions to scale back domiciliary care, to close minor injury units and to slash intermediate beds not only go against nearly every policy that the Department is meant to have but show an astonishing lack of financial insight. I have said this in the Chamber before: short-term gains for much, much longer-term pain.

As our health service prepares to turn from 2014-15 and looks ahead to 2015-16, the horizon, sadly, looks even worse. This will inevitably start to become clear in the few months between now and the Estimates in June. Whilst the budget settlement for next year included an additional allocation of over £150 million, that is entirely offset by £220 million of pressures being carried forward from 2014-15. In fact, the Health Department is forecasting its pressure increasing to £317 million, up again from £304 million this year. In addition, I note that the Department believes that it has identified savings opportunities and cost reductions of £164 million. Of that, the vast majority — £113 million — will come in the form of cash-releasing efficiencies and productivity gains in trusts.

In the absence of any new approach to organise our health service, I simply do not believe that all those savings from the trusts will be attainable. Whilst the Vote on Account is crucial to keep the service ticking along until the Main Estimates later in the year, if we are heading for another funding crisis in our health service, we should be preparing for it now, not in October. I hope that the new controls that the Executive and the Finance Minister have over the Department of Health spend, as unprecedented as they may be, will ensure that the scene last year on 21 August, when the former Minister set out his belated request for extra urgent funds on the radio, will not be repeated.

As we are in the process of granting permission for a large proportion of next year's spend, I want to turn to the specific issue of what has already been termed in the House as "the forgotten service": the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service. The Minister will be more than aware of the concerns amongst Fire Service management and staff that they are, for some reason, not viewed by government as a front-line emergency service. Maybe that is because the Health Department does not have a definition of a front-line service, so I will take the opportunity today to ask the Finance Minister. His press release of 19 January talked about a Budget for next year:

> *"Supports frontline public services and economic growth".*

However, it is a Budget that does not support the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service. I assure the Minister that it is, indeed, viewed as a front-line emergency service by the general public, and rightly so. It is often first on the scene of some of our most horrific and life-threatening incidents. Its responses are time critical, and its dedication and training should be supported to the hilt by government. Personnel put their life on the line for everyone and should not be in any way hampered from doing what they are fully trained to do best: save lives.

Recently, I visited those who hold the front line of the Fire Service at Portadown fire station. I wanted to hear first-hand what was being proposed and how it would affect them and the service that they provide. I met an extremely dedicated bunch of individuals who care deeply for their community and feel that their voice is not being listened to when it comes to the Budget. They are the experts with the experience and knowledge, and their voices should be heard.

I know, having also spoken to Fire Service management, that they will continue to work to deliver greater efficiencies within the service. However, the proposed reduction in their budget of just under 10% forces decisions upon them, rather than allowing them to make changes and efficiencies that would not threaten the life-saving front-line service that they provide. I would be grateful if the Minister considered the current position of the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service relative to its sister services in England and Wales, which plan their budget for the next five years. In Northern Ireland, because of the lack of detail, Fire Service management are unable to plan their budget for even the next 12 months with any certainty. Minister, urgent clarification is required. At this stage, we do not care who gives it to them — you or Minister Wells.

The men and women of the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service, just like our medical staff and security services, are front-line emergency services and should be viewed in that way by government. Failure to do so is not only disrespectful to dedicated men and women who put their lives on the line daily, it is dangerous because it has the potential to lengthen response times and put lives at risk.

I have nothing but admiration for the firefighters whom I met in Portadown and for firefighters across Northern

Ireland. I urge the two Ministers to look again at this forgotten service before it is too late.

Mr Hazzard: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate. I welcome the fact that the central pillars of the Budget for 2015-16 are the protection of key front-line health and education services; investment to support economic development; and putting in place the foundations of the reform and restructuring of our public sector agreed as part of the Stormont House Agreement.

Sinn Féin will continue to provide security to public-sector workers through its policy of no compulsory redundancies. We place delivery in health and education at the very heart of our economy. Let us be very clear: the health service is a vital service that all of us will rely on at some stage in life, and it is, therefore, vital to protect investment in it. However, we need the Minister to get to grips with the financial department in the Department of Health. We need the better management of resources in the Department, and the use of in-year monitoring bids to create conditions around pressures in the Department of Health needs to stop. We need a reduction in negligence bills and fraud, and the eradication of frivolous court battles fought on a whim of the Health Minister.

Education, too, is a key tool in the battle against inequality. It is perhaps one of the most significant opportunities to overcome inequality provided in a person's lifetime. That is why we must continue to protect education budgets.

There is no doubt that, collectively, we have had to make some difficult decisions in order to live within our Budget. Since the Conservatives took power in Britain in 2010, their austerity policies have reduced our Budget by £1·5 billion in real terms. The Westminster Government's austerity economics are morally unjustifiable and economically unsustainable. British economic policy has failed, even on its own terms. It has failed to reduce the deficit as planned, and it has failed even more comprehensively to rebalance the economy. The human cost of austerity is too high a price to pay.

Sinn Féin does not accept that there is a trade-off between balancing the books and having a balanced society. Fairness and prosperity go hand in hand. Sinn Féin's approach is part of a growing international consensus. It is basic common sense that, as a society, we will do better if we can benefit from the skill, talent and innovation of all of our people. Since 2011, Sinn Féin has opposed welfare cuts and insisted on welfare protection. Sinn Féin is for equality, social justice and enterprise. We believe in economic growth, and we believe in competitiveness. That will not happen without investment in our communities, investment in training, investment in infrastructure and investment in job creation. A major strategy is needed to grow our private sector and to reindustrialise the North —

3.45 pm

Mr McKinney: Will the Member give way?

Mr Hazzard: I will indeed.

Mr McKinney: Can the Member explain how what he has just said is consistent with his party's decision last week to vote through the bedroom tax?

Mr Hazzard: I thank the Member for his intervention. I will come to that in a second.

A major strategy is needed now to grow our private sector and reindustrialise the North, but that should not be done at the expense of maintaining public services or the welfare of its citizens, especially those who are the most disadvantaged. All the other parties, including the SDLP, were prepared to compromise on welfare protections. As a result of Sinn Féin's determined refusal to back down on the issue, we ensured a better negotiated outcome and welfare system for the North. At its core is a six-year package of £565 million to create, among other mitigation funds, a supplementary payment fund specifically to protect children with disabilities, adults with severe disabilities and people who are long-term sick. Additionally, despite the political rhetoric of the party to my left, not a single person in the North will have to pay the bedroom tax. Anti-poverty measures have been retained, and the success rate for new disability applicants will be no less between the new system and the previous system.

Our approach is based on what Sinn Féin believes is in the interests of the people in the North and what is required immediately to assist us to build a just, fair and equal economy for the North and the island. We will continue to seek economic power from Westminster to pursue a different course from that of austerity, inequality and poverty. Sinn Féin wants to build an economy that is based on prosperity, fairness and equality, not cuts. Westminster promises only austerity, pain and hardship for our people. The human cost of the Union is now too high for our citizens to bear. The only way in which to end austerity —

Mr Beggs: Will the Member give way?

Mr Hazzard: No, I have taken enough interventions for today, thanks.

The only way in which to end austerity is to take the powers to make our own economic future and to carve out an alternative economic path. The Tories are wedded to austerity. Left to its own devices, British Labour has made it crystal clear that it intends to carry on with the Tory cuts that are inflicting real pain on families across the North. In recent weeks, we have seen Labour and the Tories vote for £30 billion more in cuts. It is time to end the imposition of slash-and-burn economics in the North by the British Government. Collectively, we can seek the powers from Westminster to build a strong and sustainable economy. We can choose to leave austerity behind and actively work together to revive our economy here in Ireland. We must move beyond bookkeeping to driving economic growth. That means working collectively to exploit every avenue that we have to build a progressive, strong local revenue base that does not harm but strengthens our people, our competitiveness, our economic security and our economic growth.

Mr McCausland (The Chairperson of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure): The Committee was briefed by the Minister in early October 2014, and, at that stage, members began to probe what the likely size and impact of the reduction to the departmental budget would be. At that stage, the Minister did not know the exact size of the reduction. However, she indicated that the departmental arm's-length bodies had been instructed to make plans for savings at a variety of different levels. The Committee ascertained at that stage that a strategic approach to budget reductions, rather than a simple salami-slicing exercise, would be taken by the Minister and her arm's-length bodies. The Committee also heard from some of the

Department's arm's-length bodies on how they will seek to manage reductions to their budgets in the year ahead.

Throughout the budget reduction process, the Committee has stressed that reductions must be applied as part of a strategy that seeks to protect front-line services to our communities and to support the Department's stated objective of promoting equality and tackling poverty and social exclusion. The Committee began its scrutiny of the draft DCAL budget for 2015-16 on 25 November and heard from officials about the Department's plans for the allocated budget reduction. We were then briefed on the content of the consultation. The Committee subsequently received a summary of the responses to the original draft Budget consultation. In addition, at the Committee's meeting on Thursday, it received and considered a further budget paper from the Department. It sets out the Department's savings delivery plans, impact assessments of the budget reductions and risk management plans, as well as those of its arm's-length bodies. The Committee has also written to the DCAL's arm's-length bodies for more detailed savings delivery plans and will seek to be briefed on those in the weeks ahead.

Like all Members, I and the Committee would prefer that budget reductions did not have to be made.

However, Northern Ireland is subject to the same financial realities as the rest of the developed world and is subject to the same pain in the wake of financial crises that are beyond our control.

The Committee also considered reductions to the DCAL budget from the perspective of ensuring that no aspects of the Department's remit are so hollowed out that they are damaged beyond repair. That is not an easy task. DCAL has a relatively small budget, and the reduction may also seem small in terms of the overall Budget at the Executive's disposal. However, the Department is facing a 10% budget reduction compared with the 2014-15 budget, and that will inevitably cause pain.

The Committee welcomes the fact that the initial budget reduction was lessened by the Executive finding a further almost £2 million for DCAL. That will go towards addressing inescapable pressures in the Department and to NI Screen for its skills development work, including Cinemagic. Therefore, rather than the budget of £89·9 million as first anticipated, DCAL will have a current expenditure budget of £91·7 million for 2015-16.

As a result of delays to the Casement Park development, the DCAL capital investment allocation for 2015-16 will be £8·1 million, not the £54·1 million first envisaged. The Committee has put on record its concerns around the delays on Casement Park having a knock-on impact on the other aspects of the Executive's regional and subregional stadium programme. It is important to the Committee that work continues, and members were pleased to note an allocation of £630,000 for the development of the subregional stadium plan in the January monitoring round. The Committee is probing how that money will be spent and what work that will entail.

The upshot of the Executive's reconsideration of the DCAL budget means that the reduction amounts to 8·2%, rather than 10%. There will be a reduction to the Libraries NI budget of 7·5% and reductions of 11·2% in all other areas. The core departmental budget of £19·6 million includes the additional allocation for the development of the subregional stadium plan and £500,000 for essential building overheads at the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI). The Department intends to manage its budget reduction through decreasing its pay bill by £1·4 million, reducing grants and programmes by £867,000, and reducing overheads by £100,000.

The Committee accepts the need for the Department to reduce administration costs to more manageable levels. Members hope that that can be achieved equitably and sensibly through a voluntary exit scheme for staff and other measures. The Committee will scrutinise reductions to the core programme budget in the months ahead.

We also commend the efforts that have been made by the Executive and the Minister to minimise the reduction to the Libraries NI budget. That will now amount to 7·5%, and it is anticipated that no libraries will have to close. However, temporary and relief staff will go, opening hours will reduce and the budget for new stock will see a considerable fall. The Committee has been a strong supporter of our libraries and believes that they are not only at the heart of our communities but that they can further be developed as venues and hubs for arts and culture. That could provide new revenue streams and, potentially, allow for longer opening. The reduction of almost £2·4 million will leave Libraries NI with a budget of £29·4 million for 2015-16.

The Arts Council sought to minimize the impact of in-year budget reductions over the last year on its clients by absorbing those internally. The Committee applauds that principled approach. However, it will not be possible for the body to absorb the £1·4 million budget reduction it faces in 2015-16. Over £1·1 million will be reduced from intended grants, as well as pay bill and administrative cost reductions of almost £250,000.

The Committee knows that the Arts Council intends to approach grants reductions in a strategic way that will seek to minimise the impact on the body's overall strategic functions, and members commend that. However, its budget of £11·1 million going into 2015-16 will create tremendous challenges, and the Committee is hopeful that an upcoming Executive arts and culture strategy may see greater cross-departmental funding of arts and culture, which could see overall funding for the sectors increase.

Sport NI's budget reduction for 2015-16 of just over £1 million will see decreases in grants and performance and coaching activities of £800,000; it will also see the body reducing its administrative overheads by £250,000. However, Members are aware that the body has exciting plans in the year ahead that will see greater cooperation with the new super-councils. It is to be hoped that economies of scale, together with the pooling of resources, will ensure that ambition in sport here will not be diminished.

The North/South language bodies and Waterways Ireland, while outside the scope of this budget reduction exercise, will see their budgets fall by over £1 million collectively, as agreed at the relevant North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) meetings.

Armagh Observatory and Armagh Planetarium will go into 2015-16 with a budget of £1·4 million, a reduction of over £170,000 on this year. With such a small budget to start with, it is imperative that the impact of the reduction on the bodies' budget be carefully monitored so that it does not have a disproportionate impact. The Committee

places considerable value on the work of those bodies and appreciates the global reputation that they enjoy.

As I have already indicated, NI Screen has benefited from additional funding from the Executive to ensure that inescapable pressures can be met. The Committee welcomes this. The Northern Ireland Museums Council must find savings of £30,000. However, the Committee is discussing options with the body, and the Department and members are hopeful that solutions can be found.

Inevitably, important programmes and projects are lost when budgets are reduced. However, we must all become more creative and collaborative in our use of funding and look to other sources of revenue. In that context, the Committee was briefed last week by the EU unit of Belfast City Council. There was a general belief that more could be done in accessing money and resources from that source. We were impressed by the unit's success in placing, effectively, this work — EU networks and policy development — at the heart of what it does. It really does provide a model that Departments and the new super-councils could learn from. There is no alternative to new ways of thinking about funding, and the Committee is keen to play its part.

We face difficult financial times, and it will be difficult for a number of these arm's-length bodies over the coming year. Nevertheless, we wish them well. The Committee supports the Bill.

Ms Lo: I rise as the Alliance Party's spokesperson on the environment. When departmental officials briefed the Committee for the Environment on 5 February, we were advised that, after meeting inescapable expenditure, the Department has only £1·4 million to fund a range of programmes and projects being carried out by councils and the private and voluntary sectors. The shortfall is over £8 million, although officials stated that the Minister would look at the £4·2 million from the carrier bag levy to see whether any money could be reallocated. This will be limited, given the already committed funding for projects and the restriction on how receipts can be spent.

Seeing projections from officials, it looks like the axe will fall mostly on activities that are currently undertaken by NGOs. I cannot emphasise enough the importance of the NGO sector in getting value for money for us by delivering government objectives in a cost-effective manner. Funding for this sector can bring significant added value through match funding and co-funding, accessing the passion and energy of volunteers, the involvement of students and people of all ages, and managing significant areas of land for public benefit.

The environmental sector is also of value to Northern Ireland in the retention of skilled and qualified young people. DOE cuts would inevitably contribute further to the Northern Ireland brain drain.

4.00 pm

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

I understand from the Northern Ireland Environment Link that, within natural heritage grants alone, DOE funds around 50 organisations through grants and contracted services. Total funding in 2014-15 to those organisations is approximately £3·5 million. That is over 110 posts affecting more than 130 individuals. Within that relatively small government input, those NGOs tap into a volunteer workforce of over 350,000, manage over 314,000 acres of land for government benefit, spend over £20 million in the Northern Ireland economy and leverage in £3·20 for every £1 invested in core funding. The potential loss of those jobs in some of those organisations will have a detrimental effect on the local economy. Those organisations tend to be small and lack resources and they are likely to find it difficult to navigate through a period of sudden budgetary loss that may result in their closure. The kind of activities that will be affected are managing natural and built heritage sites; providing access to sites; education programmes; managing and improving habitat; protection of wildlife; developing research and knowledge; monitoring sites, wildlife and access; and enabling the public to access and understand the natural and built environment.

NGOs in Northern Ireland have been very successful in accessing non-government funds. A good example is the Heritage Lottery Fund landscape partnerships, of which there are now at least seven in Northern Ireland. They all draw in significant leverage. The leverage is, on the one hand, evidence of the quality and potential of the Northern Ireland environment and, on the other, a good example of what will be lost if the NGOs that have leveraged that input are lost. Furthermore, there are clear linkages between what the NGOs deliver in Health, Education, Agriculture and Rural Development, Regional Development, Enterprise, Culture and Leisure, and the community development aspects of OFMDFM. The same issue emerges in all those areas.

The environment is the foundation for our society and economy, yet it is taken for granted and not treated as the key resource upon which future well-being and prosperity depend. A relatively small investment in the environment sector could lead to significant savings across all those Departments. The environment sector has advised me that it strongly encourages DOE to look at ways to develop those relationships and to work in partnership with NGOs on delivery.

According to departmental officials, for them to fund the current programmes that are contracted out to councils, the private and voluntary sectors, as well as road safety campaigns, DOE would have to lose 500 posts to save £8 million from salaries. That is a third of the workforce. That is impracticable, if not impossible. As a voluntary exit scheme will not start being implemented until at least autumn 2015, the Department is unlikely to find the necessary money through staff reduction within six months of the next financial year. It does not make sense for the Department to lose one third of its staff, who are mostly professional or technical staff carrying out the Department's vital functions and services.

It is most likely, therefore, that the non-ringfenced areas of departmental expenditure limit will not have the necessary funding and that this will impact mostly on the NGO sector.

Looking beyond the next Budget, before discussions on how the DOE will be broken up and its functions absorbed by other Departments, it is important that the House again considers the urgent need to create an independent environment agency to ensure that our already neglected environment is not completely abandoned. The agency needs to be external to any Department so that it can hold all Departments to account for their policies and practices

in relation to the protection of the environment, which is a responsibility for all in government.

Mr Clarke (The Chairperson of the Committee for Regional Development): I welcome the opportunity to contribute to this debate. I do not think there was anyone in this House who expected that the budgets for 2015-16 would not be tight, even though some of the pressure was released by the Stormont House settlement. What we in the Committee for Regional Development did expect, however, was a mature and detailed debate about the options available to the Department with a view to identifying the best solutions to the financial constraints placed on the Northern Ireland block grant. Instead, we got what the Committee described in its response to the Finance and Personnel Committee on the draft Budget as a sensationalist approach from the Minister and his Department.

What we got was a Minister who chose not to debate his budget but to run to the press to bemoan his lot. What we got was a Minister who was more interested in the sound bite than in sound financial scrutiny; a Minister more interested in getting his own picture on TV and in the papers than in providing the citizens of Northern Ireland with a picture of how to deal with these financial pressures. The current vice-president of America, Joe Biden said:

> *"Don't tell me what you value, show me your budget, and I'll tell you what you value."*

Mr Deputy Speaker, if we examine the budget that the Minister for Regional Development brought to the press and announced to the world, we will be in a position to gauge his values and those of the officials advising him. He does not value the social and economic well-being of Northern Ireland, as he slashes capital and structural investment in roads. He does not value the quality of our water or the treatment of our waste water, as he slashes Northern Ireland Water's budget, thereby increasing the risk of an EU infraction. He does not value those living in isolation, as he allows Translink to accumulate more cash with not one but two above-inflation increase to fares and to cherry-pick the most profitable routes. He does not value the safety of the most vulnerable in our society, as he boasts in the press that tens of thousands of street lights across Northern Ireland will be lost.

The Department for Regional Development does not have the maturity to manage its budget, never mind debate it. Instead, it allowed and encouraged its Minister to indulge in begging-bowl politics. My colleague, the Minister of Finance, stated previously that it is unacceptable for Departments to manage their budgets in the expectation of additional funding through the Executive's in-year monitoring process, as the Minister attempted to do through the release of value of the Belfast Harbour Commissioners. This advice continues to be given to the Minister for Regional Development, yet in its consultation paper on the draft Budget, the Department clearly stated that it:

> *"will be reliant on the Executive's in-year monitoring process to secure tens of millions of pounds of additional funding necessary for essential structural maintenance."*

The Department will also need to get out the begging bowl to bail Translink and itself out of the mess it has made of budgeting for phase 2 of the Coleraine to Londonderry rail track. This is not the mature handling of a departmental budget, but a recipe for disaster, as evidenced by the release of value and the Coleraine rail track.

The Committee for Regional Development wants to, and has tried to, engage and debate with the Department on its budgets. We will continue to do so. However, the Minister and those who advise him must be willing to inform the Committee and bring options to the table. They must be willing to take the initiative and be innovative, not like the Department we have experienced with regard to its budgets, which is non-transparent, reliant on the begging bowl and resistant to change. It will undoubtedly be a tough journey, but it will at the very least be a shared one, and one that benefits Northern Ireland. The Committee is keen to take this path, and I hope the Department is too.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the opportunity to speak in the Budget debate and the agreement that was finally reached on the Budget. It is not an easy Budget. We certainly have a difficult task ahead in protecting public services. It is quite clear that we have received no gifts from those who are trying to drive our agenda in London.

The task of balancing our books, tackling inequality and driving economic growth has to be to the fore of our minds as we move forward. Tackling inequality starts with the economy and how we deliver public services. It starts with supporting businesses and creating sustainable employment, ensuring that people have access to a decent job and wage. The Budget prioritises education, skills and development, job creation and growing the economy. Growing the economy and tackling disadvantage was the number one priority of the 2011-15 Programme for Government, and this Budget follows on very much in that guise.

The final Budget makes additional allocations of more than £150 million. It prioritises Health and Education. The final Budget sees DEL receiving a total of £33·2 million in additional funding. DETI will receive £3 million, which will go to Invest NI, as well as over £7 million in the change fund allocation. It must be remembered that all that has been agreed against the backdrop of an austerity agenda from Westminster.

We want to build a society that protects our environment and promotes the life chances of every child, young person and adult in the North to ensure that they have the opportunities to fulfil their potential and develop their talents. Few, if any, countries in the world have the economic potential that we have here in Ireland, North or South. We have a talented and skilled workforce, world-leading universities and a modern college sector. We have a strong international reputation for producing quality goods and services, with notable successes in sectors such as food and drink, the creative industries, life sciences and modern manufacturing.

With the limited devolved powers that we have, our economic performance is improving, but far too many people still feel that they have to leave each year to get a job or further their career. Of course, some people will always want to travel and work elsewhere, but that must be a choice, not a requisite for those looking to succeed. I was looking through the latest spreadsheet from an Cumann Lúthchleas Gael, the GAA, on the number of people who have transferred out of their home club, and it is quite clear

that emigration still presents a deeply worrying problem in rural communities. The number of young men and women who are transferring from clubs in rural parts of Ireland to England, Australia and America is a deeply worrying trend. We need to make sure that there are proper jobs and a well-built society for those people to return to.

With greater fiscal powers, our economic policy would be tailored precisely to our own needs to create jobs here and to tackle the barriers to employment by exerting control over tax, welfare and National Insurance. We would want to see improvements in productivity, employment and population. That would lead to additional tax revenues, which would help close the fiscal gap that we hear so much about.

Together we must put every effort into developing a more sustainable and balanced economy, and that means driving investment in science, innovation, skills and infrastructure, while encouraging a more enterprising and entrepreneurial culture. Our IT sector and professional business services show particularly strong growth, and we must build and capitalise on this. Invest NI does great work in promoting and creating jobs, but much more is required if we are to tackle regional disparities, as that is, after all, a Programme for Government commitment.

Recent figures I have obtained for job creation show that Invest NI helped to create over 2,000 jobs in Belfast but only small numbers in areas west of the Bann during 2013-14. There is a direct link between the number of visits by foreign investors to a given area and the number of projects and jobs that are located in that area. It is therefore extremely disappointing to me that so few visits take place to places like Fermanagh on an annual basis. We all know and are told ad nauseam, that you cannot force an investor to locate in a particular area. I might not agree with the principle, but I acknowledge that that reality exists. However, there is absolutely nothing stopping Invest NI using its substantial budget to better direct investors into areas west of the Bann that have been neglected since partition.

Everyone who comes to my county of Fermanagh falls in love with the place, and why wouldn't they? It is one of the most beautiful counties in the whole of Ireland. We have a great deal to offer visitors but also potential investors. Fermanagh has a highly educated, vibrant and hard-working population, with plenty of young people looking for employment opportunities. We have excellent schools spread across the county that help to produce a skilled workforce, which could attract investors if places west of the Bann were promoted effectively.

4.15 pm

Fermanagh also provides a good work/life balance for people, with good opportunities for social and cultural expression. These are the types of positives that should be promoted about Fermanagh, but Invest NI will not give potential investors the chance to fall in love with the place. It should be using its substantial budget to incentivise investors into neglected areas. However, during 2013-14, the year in which £92 million was wasted hosting the G8, only three potential investors were brought to Fermanagh. Despite all the lofty promises that were made in advance of the G8, none of them has materialised. We got new paint on our bollards in Enniskillen, some temporary mobile phone masts were erected to facilitate those who were coming, and many run-down shops were given false fronts to present Fermanagh as a thriving county. The mobile phone masts have been removed, the paint on the bollards is chipping, and the closed shops remain closed.

Invest NI is failing Fermanagh. It has been given a substantial budget, year after year, but most of us west of the Bann speak out in a unified voice to say that we are not getting our fair share of investment. There are some dissenting voices to those remarks, but they do not stand up to scrutiny when you look at the facts. Growing a sustainable and balanced regional economy must become a political and social priority. It was a Programme for Government commitment, but some of the parties involved in this commitment seem to pick and choose which commitments they support at any given time.

The policies of the British Government are working for too few and denying opportunities to too many. We should not merely adopt their policies. Britain is highly imbalanced, and regional inequalities have grown alongside social inequalities. Britain now has the highest levels of inequality of anyplace in the EU. If we are to address this, we need to work together connectedly. We need to create an education and training environment that will equip our young people to fulfil their potential and maximise the opportunities for island-wide education and training.

We need to gain control of the tax system so that we can simplify it, close poverty gaps, create a progressive tax system, remove barriers to business development and maximise the opportunities from the island economy. We need to develop employment policy to bring together employers and unions to boost workforce participation and increase skills and productivity. Boosting our productivity by just 1% would create thousands of jobs in the long term and generate substantial tax revenue.

We need to address the scandalously uncompetitive price of energy for our manufacturing companies. We must tailor policy to boost key job-creating sectors in which the North has an international comparative advantage, such as in renewable energy and the agrifood sector. We need to reindustrialise the North and, indeed, the island as a whole. Our combined focus must be on strengthening manufacturing, promoting innovation and encouraging international trade and development. We cannot simply tell everybody to get a degree in computer programming and move to Belfast. That is not building a sustainable economy.

We must boost our infrastructure and transport networks. We cannot repair and rebuild our economy and our public services without maximising the returns for all our citizens, building sustainable employment opportunities across the North and the island as a whole and ending regional disparities, and job creation is central to this.

Our wider economy is too heavily focused and reliant on consumer spending, which is often driven by consumer debt, funded by extortionate payday loans and high-interest credit cards. Such economic drivers need to be adjusted, and we need to move to a more sustainable economic driver.

What are the priorities as I see them for Fermanagh in the coming period? I know that the Minister for Employment and Learning is working on a capital build for a new rural university on the site of the old Erne Hospital in Enniskillen. Anybody who visits Enniskillen now will see that most of that site has been cleared. There is a huge

opportunity there for a shared services site on which we can have a range of public-sector services all located in the one place instead of, as some Ministers are trying to do, moving them to Omagh or Dungannon. There is scope there for the likes of a library, the jobs and benefits office and the Housing Executive to co-locate along with the further education college in Enniskillen. That would provide synergies for delivering public services and help to regenerate a part of Enniskillen.

The DEL budget has been given a considerable uplift from the draft Budget to the final Budget, but I have serious questions about how that has been used.

It is quite common for us to attack the Minister, but we might excuse him for this one.

Queen's has implemented a serious cut to the students' union and the student support mechanisms that it offers, yet there has been absolutely no mention of addressing the salary of the vice chancellor, who earns £250,000 a year and gets a house, a car and probably a driver. He also has a wine budget, but it is more important to cut somebody working for the students' union than to try to address those issues. Those are the types of solution that we want our universities to work towards. Instead of hammering students by campaigning on the radio for an increase in tuition fees, they should be looking at where substantial savings can be made closer to home without having an impact on front-line services.

The hospital in Enniskillen is constantly promoted as one of the great things that the Executive delivered in recent years, and it certainly is, but there are problems with it, too. We have simply built a hospital that may well become a white elephant unless adequate services and investment are put into it. The hospital needs an investment of between £1 million and £1·5 million to protect maternity services, which are under threat. At present, any expectant mother with an elevated BMI or diabetes is encouraged to go to Derry to give birth. That has to change. It is not good enough to tell mothers that they have to drive an hour and a half from home to have a child.

There are certainly enough people in Fermanagh, Tyrone, south Donegal, Leitrim, Cavan, Sligo and Monagahan to justify a fully functional maternity services unit in the Enniskillen hospital. We need investment in staff at the hospital to meet the standards in the 2012 maternity strategy. We need ST3-level resident cover in obstetrics, paediatrics and anaesthetics, as well as compliance with the review of paediatric health-care services in hospitals and the community. To do that, the paediatric resident on-call medical staff have to be at ST4-level or above. So, this investment has to be a priority. It has been sitting with the Department, the Public Health Agency and the Western Health and Social Care Trust for a considerable time. I encourage the Health Minister to put that investment into Enniskillen hospital at the earliest opportunity and to retain and expand maternity services there.

In wider terms, we are missing a significant opportunity in Fermanagh. More people from across the border availed themselves of services in the old Erne Hospital than use the current hospital. I cannot get my head around that because coupled with that has been the reduction of services in hospitals adjacent to the border in the South. Common sense tells you that more people would try to use a hospital near to them, so why have we not increased the number of people crossing the border to use our world-class hospital, as the Health Minister would, rightly, describe it? There needs to be a focus on attracting patients from the South. There were problems with the availability of insurance cover in the old hospital, but it is my understanding that all of those have been sorted out.

An increase in patient numbers would bring increased revenue for the Western Trust. It would also allow for services to be expanded in the hospital because clinical professionals would be able to build up more hours and deliver more services locally instead of people having to travel to Craigavon, Belfast or Derry for a routine clinic appointment. As far as I can remember, the logic for building the hospital in Enniskillen was the opportunity that it offered for patient cross-border mobility. Effective cross-border planning for our hospital is not happening yet, but there is still time.

In Fermanagh, people wait for up to two years for a routine hip or other orthopaedic operation. That is simply unacceptable. The amount of money that the Western Health and Social Care Trust, and probably the other trusts, spend on managing pain and providing often inadequate home-help provision for people stranded in their beds because there is such a lengthy waiting list for hip operations makes no sense to me. It does not make financial sense, and it certainly does not make social sense that you leave somebody lying there for two years, taking a wide range of pain management medication daily.

We have been told that the Health Department is implementing Transforming Your Care and invest to save in the long term. I do not see that strategic approach being implemented by some of our overpaid managers, who have amassed over £1 million in pension pots and earn colossal salaries every year. All the while, front-line staff, many of whom are paid below the living wage, have a claim for a very basic pay increase to meet inflationary demands rejected. That two-tier payment policy in the health service is not acceptable, and it needs to change.

In closing — I am kind of getting there — the Budget that we have agreed is not the Budget that we would all have wanted if we were starting from a blank canvas, but we must remember that we do not have the full range of fiscal powers to make the changes that we need to see here. Nobody got everything that was wanted out of the Budget, but the parties that are speaking against it and that may vote against the Bill do so without offering any alternative. To be fair to the Alliance Party, it proposed some alternatives, including an increase in tuition fees and the introduction of regressive water charges. Thankfully, the Executive have decided not to introduce those measures, and that will be the case as long as we are about.

Finally, I want to give the Minister something that he can address by touching on the impact of rates on businesses across the North. RPA has had a negative impact in some areas, and nowhere more so than in Fermanagh. However, the £30 million in rates conversions that he and his colleagues introduced have significantly softened the blow and reduced considerably any potential rates increase that domestic householders and businesses in Fermanagh face.

However, in the revaluation of non-domestic rates, which was recently announced, there were always going to be winners and losers. That is just the nature of a rates revaluation, but it is my belief that the rates system is unfit

for purpose. It does not give any consideration to the level of profit that an organisation makes, which is unfair. Simply to take the estimated rental value of a building over a year and set that as the rates bill is not a good approach. We have businesses from completely different sectors paying the same rates, which is deeply unfair. There is a small restaurant and guest house in Belcoo that pays the same rates as a commercial bank on High Street in Enniskillen. I have spoken about that bank before, because it keeps charging me £42 a go in unauthorised overdraft fees. I will tell you this, though: the bread that I buy out of that restaurant is very nice, and I will not have anything bad said about it.

Such an approach is regressive and does not support our business sector. It is deeply unfair, and I implore the Minister to give some consideration to changing completely how rates here are calculated so that they are not solely based on the property that a business occupies and at least take some consideration of the level of profit that a business can make. If the Minister will oblige and is willing to grant me more time to bend his ear, I have put in a request for him to meet me and a number of business organisations.

I will leave it at that, in the hope that we get out of here at some stage this evening.

Mr Allister: In normal arrangements of government, you can usually detect from the direction of travel of the Budget of that Government what their values and ethos are, and you can see within it the pointers as to the policy of that Government. Mr Trevor Clarke, in a rare excursion into erudition, reminded us of something that Joe Biden said when he said:

"Show me your budget, and I'll tell you what you value."

Show anyone this Budget, and could anyone tell what this Executive value? It is such a mishmash of contradictions that it stands for nothing other than keeping those who penned it in office. That is the indisputable priority of this budgetary document: cobbled together to keep this place, and those who benefit from it, in office.

It is not so as to lay out a clear, dynamic way forward for Northern Ireland — oh, no. Rather, it is to say, do, spend and borrow whatever it takes to keep Stormont ticking over.

4.30 pm

The document is so eminently contradictory. On one hand, we read in it that there is supposed to be, in accordance with the Programme for Government, a great desire and ambition to drive Northern Ireland forward economically. We then discover that the greatest innovation in the Budget is to implant in it, not for this year but for future years, the underwriting of overspend on welfare. I turn to page 14 of the Budget document and see the quite appalling chart of economic inactivity rates in Northern Ireland, which continues to have the most unenviable of positions: top of the league of economic inactivity. One just might have thought that, in consequence, this would be a Budget designed to incentivise people into work, but it is quite the reverse. It is a Budget to cocoon people on benefits. That, of course, has been the centrepiece of the Stormont House Agreement. Rather than following the path of incentivising people into work — oh no — we have conjured up, through borrowings and cuts elsewhere in the block grant, a spend of £565 million over the next six years. In consequence, I suspect, we will continue to have the highest rate of economic inactivity in the whole of the United Kingdom.

This is not a Budget of clear, dynamic direction; it is a Budget of trying to blend the inherent irreconcilabilities of rants about austerity from Sinn Féin and the timid attachment that some still hold to trying to build the economy. I suggest that what we have is exactly as I have described: a document of mishmash and muddle. It is also a document of further squander, because that will be the outcome.

All that is against the background of this devolved region, on foot of these arrangements, having the highest public borrowings per head of population of any part of the United Kingdom. This small region with £1·8 billion of public borrowings. Whether Sinn Féin likes it or not, that will have to be paid back. In listening to Sinn Féin, of course, there is nothing new in that — it has always had a sponging mentality. You think that nothing ever has to be paid for in life or in government, that you just keep increasing the size of the begging bowl and that the rest of the world owes you a living and must keep filling it to your demands. That is exactly the mentality that we see and hear from the second biggest party of this Government and what manifests itself in the Budget in order to make it an agreed Budget. One really despairs about the economic direction of this Government other than to aid the bankrupting of Northern Ireland, which, of course, suits Sinn Féin fine. That, of course, fits entirely with their political philosophy.

Of course, it is no surprise that tucked within the Budget are the now standard levels of squander on "North/Southery", propping up institutions for the sake of calling them institutions that, frankly, bring nothing that a Skype phone call or a phone call could not bring in terms of North/South cooperation — oh no. For the sake of it, because someone else is paying, we need to have all these North/South institutions, not because they deliver anything for anyone but because they are essential to the political infrastructure. So, let us pour millions upon millions of pounds, year on year, into them. Then, when we get to the point of needing to top up welfare and everything else, let us just cut the money for our schools, our vital services and our hospitals because the priorities that must be met from Sinn Féin are those that are, to them, far more important than making government work.

One could go on about the squander. I look at the expenditure that the Budget will allow to continue. I look at the squander in the neighbourhood renewal programme, the idea of which is good and sound if it were restricted to obtaining economic advancement for deprived areas. However, who would believe that, under neighbourhood renewal, and under a DUP Minister since 2011, someone somewhere thought it proper to spend £2·1 million on Irish language groups — not a penny, I might say, on Ulster-Scots groups. Someone thought it appropriate to give £250,000 in funding to LGBT communities under neighbourhood renewal; £170,000 to an LGBT group in Strabane and Lifford, which I think is outside the jurisdiction; and £2·6 million of neighbourhood renewal money to the GAA. It is that squander and that abuse of programmes that could produce good results that bring all these matters into disrepute.

I look at the budget of OFMDFM. The biggest growth industry in OFMDFM since 2007 has been its coterie

of equality staff. We now have 124 OFMDFM staff — of course, OFMDFM has almost twice the staff of the Prime Minister — working in a unit called "equality and strategy". They obviously do not do irony when it comes to strategy. That is a phenomenal growth. Yet a real equality issue, like the long-standing claim for equal pay for civil servants who worked in the PSNI etc on secondment, is still, even yet, unresolved.

The Finance Minister apparently prepared a paper. He tried to table it, something like last June, and it still has not even got onto the Executive table. We can find time and money to squander on the matters that I have referred to, yet we cannot find time, because Sinn Féin has been blocking it, I suspect, to address a real, a genuine equality issue such as that of equal pay. I do not think that there is a penny in the Budget to resolve that issue. It is shameful that, after all this time and after all those people have been short-changed on the equal pay issue, there is not a penny in the Budget to redress that and give them relief. I find that quite, quite shocking, but it speaks to the perverse priorities that seem to dominate this Budget.

If the opportunity provides itself, I will happily vote against the Budget, not because — taking care of the attempt to pervert, sometimes, what is said — I do not want to see money spent on our hospitals, in schools, for victims or on vital services, but because I want to cry out against the squander in this House on totally unmeritorious matters. This is an occasion to do that. I am glad that the Finance Minister has brought the Bill to the House. Reading some correspondence from him at the weekend, you would have thought that we had had the Budget debate. What we had three weeks ago was a mere motion recommending the Budget. It takes this Bill, and it took last week's Vote on Account, to actually implement anything of a budgetary nature, making this the proper forum for these discussions.

Then, I think of business in this community. I look at how some businesses in my constituency have been treated. I think particularly of the burden of rates that has been placed on businesses. Let me, for a moment, tell the House of a real-life example of a business in Ballymoney Street in Ballymena.

In 2009, a lady of initiative sets up a business on that street. The Minister's rating department writes to her to say that her rates shall be £3,000 a year. She budgets, sets out her financial plans on that basis and is making out accordingly. Two years later, the same rating department from the same Department writes to that lady to say, "We made a mistake; your rates are £10,000 a year and you owe us the difference for the last three years". This is a lady who, in good faith and through no fault of her own, balanced her books on the premise of what the Department told her: that her rates would be £3,000 a year. Then, in that most high-handed of ways that only departmental officials sometimes can carry off, they simply tell her, as if it is nothing to do with them, "We made the mistake; it is £10,000 a year and you owe us an extra £7,000 for the three years". That lady has been faithfully paying the £10,000 a year ever since. However, she naturally has said to the Department, and, through me, to the Minister, "Now, come on: it is so unfair that you make the mistake, then apply that as an albatross around my neck and expect my business to survive because of your mistake".

4.45 pm

What does the Department do? They throw back in her face the money that she is prepared to pay to try to pay down the debt. She offers to pay them £50 a month, because her budget is so tight. The Department says, "Not at all. We need it all". The best they will do is, I think, £260 a month. That is what they need. It is undoable for her. What does the same Department, headed up by the Minister who tells us so many times at the Dispatch Box that he is interested in helping business, do? It issues bankruptcy proceedings against the lady to try to put her out of business. Instead of recognising their fault and trying to stretch to make an arrangement that can keep her in business, their cruel action is to try to bankrupt her.

No later than today, I have a letter back from the Finance Minister in which he stands over how they have treated that woman. Shame on this Department, which has squandered so much money elsewhere; it cannot even find an accommodation for someone who is struggling and who, through no fault of her own, has been put in this position. All she gets is the bureaucratic slap down from the Minister and the Department. That is shameful. I thought that the Department was capable of better than that. I also thought that it might have taken them less than three months to reply, but there you are.

It seems to me that we have a Budget that faces in so many different directions that it does not know where it is going. It is motivated only by doing whatever it takes to keep things together. As for delivery, who knows? Who knows where it is going? Who cares? That seems to be the attitude. Thank you.

Mr Irwin (The Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development): The Agriculture and Rural Development Committee, like other Committees, takes regular briefs on financial and budgetary issues from the Department as part of its role to scrutinise the Department. I have, on behalf of my Committee, expressed the Committee views on the Budget for 2015 to 2016 a number of times in the last few weeks. So, Members will not be surprised that there is very little in this speech that is new.

As always, the Committee position is that, as far as it is concerned, one of the main remits of DARD is to pay grants to farmers. By that I mean the payment of EU grants, particularly what used to be called the single farm payment, but which, since 2015, is the basic payment. In the Committee, we count that as the front line, and we want to make sure that that is protected.

We also count as front line the provision of other services to the wider rural community. That covers such areas as the rural development programme, the rural White Paper and the tackling rural poverty and social inclusion (TRPSI) framework.

I just mentioned the TRPSI framework. As some of you will know, it is a Programme for Government target. As a Committee, we recently undertook some in-depth scrutiny of the framework and have just produced a paper on it, which we hope to have debated in the Assembly in the near future. We have a number of recommendations for any successor framework, including one that relates to budget.

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development has provided the framework with a budget for the 2015-16 year that is more heavily weighted to capital than previous. As a Committee, we had no major issue with that, but we did have some minor concerns. We feel that the Department must acknowledge that the funding for the TRPSI framework has been largely resource-based and that, without doubt, engagement with the stakeholders will be required to ensure that suitable capital projects can be identified and that such projects can be delivered within the framework.

As with all aspects of government, the DARD budget may be challenging in the next few years. Tomorrow, we will be hearing from Agri-Food Strategy Board (AFBI), an arm's length body of DARD. From what I have seen, its budget will be very difficult. The Committee will take oral evidence from AFBI tomorrow. I have had a quick glance through the papers that it has provided, and they do not make happy reading. AFBI has a key role to play in the industry, and its research is essential in growing our farming and agrifood industries. AFBI also has an important role on disease control for both plants and animals and is heavily involved with both bovine TB and bovine viral diarrhoea (BVD). However, like every publicly funded body, it is going to have to cut its cloth to match the new reality of decreasing budgets. The role of the ARD Committee will be to ensure that the AFBI budget and work programme is aligned to that of DARD and to the farming and industry priorities. DARD has already told us that it needs to shed around 300 jobs to meet its payroll costs, and AFBI is looking to shed slightly under that figure. Between the two, that is a massive cut in jobs.

When the Committee took evidence from the Minister and her officials in January, she outlined that savings of £29·9 million are required in one financial year. She also outlined her five key priorities. Those priorities are the successful implementation of CAP reform; the implementation of the Going for Growth action plan; the headquarters relocation programme; continued support for the TRPSI programme; and continued investment in flood alleviation work. In this coming year, the Committee will keep a close eye on those five priorities and make sure that the budget is aligned to those priorities.

We will continue to watch and make sure that services are delivered as efficiently and as cost-effectively as possible. For example, I outlined previously concerns that the Committee had around the Northern Ireland food animal information system (NIFAIS) programme. This is a large-scale IT project and its costs, both resource and capital, are substantial. We have had a closed-session briefing on that and had a very frank and open discussion with DARD officials. We also commissioned some research, which helped us to compare and contrast it with similar projects in other countries, including New Zealand and Canada. I cannot speak for the rest of the Committee members, but I feel a little more assured that, despite the high risk factors and the consequence to our industry if it all goes wrong, DARD is working hard to make NIFAIS a success.

As we debate the Budget Bill today, I will finish by saying that we know that hard times are coming, but the Committee will continue to play its part to ensure that the cuts and savings are made in line with priority services and that the front line is protected as much as possible.

Mr Kinahan: I am pleased to be able to speak on the Budget. I am going to speak on education and enterprise, as those are the two fields that I am spokesman for. It is sad though. We really feel that, so often, we do not follow the consensus that was set up in the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, and so many of the comments that have been made today about the Budget are because one Minister is doing his own thing compared to another. It is sad that we did not make all the cuts when we should have made them four years ago. We should not be going through the agony that we are going through at the moment; it should have been slow pain over four years instead of all in one go.

I will start with education. I very much welcome the £150 million that we moved to the Departments of Health and Education, especially the large sum that went to Education. I congratulate the whole of the education establishment for its strong lobbying, as it battled with its appalling Christmas present. It was told just before Christmas that £78·7 million was going to be taken out of the aggregate schools budget, along with numerous other cuts in early years, earmarked funds, some major capital, some minor capital, and — what really matters to must schools — the maintenance budget, which, I think, was being cut by £13 million. That is what they had to live with through Christmas. Still, today, they have to live with uncertainty, so I hope that the Minister will push his colleagues to try to ensure that that uncertainty stops.

I wonder, when we went through all this before Christmas, before that £150 million came, where was it actually found. Was it really part of the Stormont House Agreement, or was it sitting there? Why did we not give those in health and education some idea of priority — that health and education were the priorities — so that, after Christmas, they had some hope?

Anyway, I must not be too grumbly and should not speak ill. It was good to see that money coming through, but we have not seen any more money since then. There has been one press release, which confirmed that £18 million was going to the aggregate schools budget on 19 January, £2·5 million was going into preschool education, and £2 million was going into education and library board youth schemes. That is all that we have heard. All the schools and everyone in education are still sitting there wondering what is going on. Surely, Minister, there has to be a better way to do this to make sure that people are told what is happening.

The Irish National Teachers' Organisation said last week that 500 jobs could still be lost under the revised budget, so we are still sitting there. Are those 500 jobs to do with the jobs that will be cut back in the Civil Service, or are they 500 jobs that they are still concerned about in schools? We must have clarity. It is unfair on everybody to let this run on and on. There is a complete lack of certainty, and there is no transparency or consistency in how we do things. Schools do not know what is happening in the next few years. They have to work on three-year budgets, yet no one else seems to look more than six months to a year ahead. We need to start to deliver more accurate information to schools.

It is interesting that the Treasury tells us that Northern Ireland, per head of population, receives more for education than any other region in the UK. The following figures are for 2012-13: England £8,529 per head; Wales £9,709 per head; Scotland £10,512 per head; and Northern

Ireland £10,876 per head. That is a huge figure and is 24% above the UK average. Where does all that money go? Where is the Treasury getting its figures from? Schools are certainly not seeing it. I hope that, with the new Education Authority, less money will be siphoned off to bureaucracy and more will go to pupils and better education.

One school rang me last week, wondering where its classroom assistant was. They did not know whether to appoint somebody or not. Another school has to change one of its classrooms into a dining room every day, and, even though that is done very swiftly, the school loses teaching time. We need to get so much right in our schools, so I ask the Minister to push hard to get proper budget details down to the schools.

We all know that there is £500 million to help with shared education, but that is only capital. A shared education Bill is coming, yet we are cutting all the other areas that will allow us to promote the sharing of education. Are we really thinking things through properly? At the same time, area planning continues. We are reviewing transport policies and coming up with many more initiatives. We must have a long-term strategy. Will the Minister use his influence, through budgets and other things, to get a joined-up education plan for the future so that people know what is happening?

I am also concerned that, if we are to go ahead with redundancies — voluntary redundancies first — we will lose all the highly skilled and most experienced people in one go. If they are like me and have learned from mistakes in their careers, they learn a great deal. If we lose all those experienced people, we will go through the same mistakes again and again.

I move on to the economy and DETI. I tried to find out whether we could look at the figures being spent on Invest NI and other matters in more detail, but we lost the argument in Committee. Most people said that we need to spend more because of being legally contracted, and it is what brings jobs in. However, you should not give up. We should still look at all the figures all the time to make sure that moneys are being spent properly and efficiently.

We wait for corporation tax to come in. I would love to know whether all the companies to which we have given big sums of money to come here in the last few years knew that corporation tax was coming, or whether there may be more flexibility in the future with corporation tax. If those companies have been given a nice chunk of money to come here, and suddenly they are being given a second whammy with corporation tax, have we budgeted for that, and will less money be given to them?

5.00 pm

Also of concern in tourism is that we do not get our fair share from what is happening with the Irish. That is not because we do not get our fair share from the moneys that go to the tourism body but because the Irish do a whole mass of other things — they bring in lower air passenger duty and look at proper railway access to their airport — that have a knock-on effect on our tourism, and we always pay the penalty.

Our tourist figures today show no great increase in the numbers of people staying in Northern Ireland or coming from Great Britain. Yet we have the terrific success of the Titanic centre, and we have had golf and many other things happening, so why are we not getting many more people coming here? I think that it is because we do not yet have a tourism strategy on the ground that works for all of the smaller tourism events. I look at the wonderful Antrim Castle Gardens or at what we could do with Lough Neagh, and I think of the fishermen, anglers, shooters and all the other people who come here. We need a budgeted tourism strategy that feeds all the way down to the people on the ground. We must not have only big events and rely on the trickle-down effect. We have this great little country, so let us make sure that it works, and let us make sure that everything that we do in this Budget helps not just our schools but our whole economy.

Mr B McCrea: As I rise in this place, it is like death warmed up. It has gone to sleep. The energy has dissipated, and there is paralysis. People —

A Member: Is that self-analysis?

Mr B McCrea: I am just trying to tone myself down to get to the same level, Mr Deputy Speaker. I commend you, and I will commend the Minister, because you have had to sit and listen to every single word in the debate. There are a few things that I want to say, and, at 5.00 pm, it probably does not matter because nobody will be listening.

Mr I McCrea: It is not on the news.

Mr B McCrea: It will not be on the news, as Mr McCrea rightly points out. The press will have gone home or to the coffee shop. Nobody will care, yet there are really important things that people want to say.

I will make a few general points to the representatives of Sinn Féin. I absolutely acknowledge your mandate. You have every right to say what you want to say, but, having listened to you, I have to tell you this: what I, as someone considered to be different, hear when you make a speech is that you bring up arguments at one end of the spectrum and then, at the very last minute, say that you support the Budget. I think that Michaela Boyle was saying, “We can do it. Yes, we can”. It was like Bob the Builder. Where is this sense of optimism coming from? Where is the sense of economic and financial reality about where we are as 1·8 million people on the edge of western Europe? We need to trade and be part of other places. As someone who is happy to engage, I think that we need to have a proper Budget debate.

I will talk about DCAL now. I am on the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure, which is, I think, the smallest Committee. I think that I was put on that Committee because people thought that that was where I could do least damage. Let us just see what I can do on this. I believe that DCAL needs a champion. We need people to argue for culture, arts and leisure. It is not the Department for fun. It is not some add-on that we have because other people have it somewhere else.

I listened to Mr Kinahan’s finishing words on tourism. We will have tourism, but the Budget that we have here will cut the Ulster Museum, the Folk and Transport Museum and all sorts of things that we could do in tourism. We then say that we will give more money to DETI because it might do something useful on this. I am sure that the Minister would like something to attend to in this speech, so I refer him to the Budget debate on 27 January:

"DCAL is facing an 8·3% resource DEL reduction. It has offered a degree of protection in that context, with the arts having only a 7·1% reduction." — [Official Report, Bound Volume 101, p212, col 1].

The information that I have in front of me comes from the departmental notes, and, in the draft Budget, there was to be a 10% reduction, which then became 8·2%. The issue is that all the arm's-length bodies, including those for the arts, are now facing an 11·2% reduction, not 7·1%. When I look at the detail that is being brought forward, I see an increase, but the only two organisations that got the benefit of that increase were the Department and NI Screen. I have the documents here, and I am reliably informed that nobody else has such a comprehensive amount of information. Apparently, this is what the Civil Service does to you. When you ask questions, it says, "Here, have a big file. Read it. You will not read to the bottom of it". Well, I did read to the bottom of it, and I see that the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure's entire focus apparently is on NI Screen. We have magically secured an increase from £1 million to £1·87 million. I am not against NI Screen. I think that it is a fantastic organisation, but I wonder why we have not tried to deal with some of the other issues. I will see whether I can get some detail here. When I listened to the Chair of the Committee, Nelson McCausland, go through the top-level view and heard him say that we have seen this reduction in this Department, and this amount of percentage decline, it all became a blur, but when you drill down a little bit further, you get to see the things that we are passing.

The point that I made to the Minister in previous discussions is that poor old DCAL gets only £100 million, yet we are taking £10 million off it. It is a drop in the ocean, but wait until you see the effect that that will have. The Arts Council will save £120,000 by reducing salaries, by not replacing leavers or agency staff, by not recruiting students and by offering voluntary redundancy. That is to find £120,000. It will save £104,000 in administration. The impact of that will be a lack of regional spread, instead focusing only on Belfast and Derry. Therefore, I ask those people who argue for rural proofing and rural inclusion and who talk all the time in the Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee about rural issues, where is your defence of trying to make sure that culture, arts and leisure are spread throughout our rural areas?

Where do the real cuts come from? Where are the real cuts in the Arts Council, which we were supposed to be supporting? A total of £1·154 million in direct grants will be cut, and some organisations are likely to cease operating. I know that we did not get the 15% cut — we got only 11·2% — but the previous survey said that we will lose over 500 people from our arts centres.

We then move on to some smaller things that people used to say were quite important to tourism, science and outreach here. The Armagh Observatory and the Armagh Planetarium has to save £177,000. One of the few things that it can do is increase ticket prices by 10%, but then you will be into all sorts of issues around whether it is an internationally recognised scientific centre any longer. You will not get your children going to those places, yet it is part of the core curriculum.

I will look now to National Museums. This is what it means: we will reduce staff by 24 full-time positions with approximate salaries of £36,000 each. The voluntary reduction will cost £1·512 million. That is the cost this year. It is part of the £700 million that Mr Allister was talking about for a resource saving of only £400,000. We are going to strip away our assets in National Museums. We will see the complete closure of the folk gallery at the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum. We will see additional gallery closures in the Ulster Museum. There will be a reduction in outreach activity and special programmes for non-traditional people. We will see cuts in matters that are important to DETI, because National Museums produce three of the top tourist spots in Northern Ireland. We will see cuts that impact on DE and DEL, because it delivers key aspects of the curriculum. We will see cuts in areas that affect DSD, because National Museums NI works to deliver social-inclusion and community-based programmes. We will aim to save £859,000 in a reduction in pay bills through vacancy management. That means that we will leave posts open, we will not fill them and we will see a reduction in service.

What really disappoints me in all this is that the sums of money are so modest. The saving from the Ulster Museum is £43,000, yet you then go and close half of the folk museum. You get £16,000 for the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum and £15,000 for the Ulster American Folk Park in Omagh, which will actually see it cut for four months of the year. All of that is supported by a complete and utter stopping of traditional marketing amounting to £184,000. Now, when everybody else is talking about millions and billions of pounds, I am talking about really small sums of money, which, if we were so minded to protect our core issues, we would be able to find.

I do not know who is making the argument for this. The Minister said previously that I should make the argument to the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure. That does not seem to be working, so I am making it to him and this House. I will point out that, when he was talking about the issue in the Budget debate on 27 January, he berated the Ulster Unionist Party. At least now we can see that its opposition to the Budget — unlike other parties, which is to its credit — was that it hinged on less than one quarter of 1% of the total Budget. I am telling you that it was £60 million. All that I am looking for is £10 million, just to keep our arts programme alive and to do what is right for things that unite Northern Ireland.

You get to the issue of what else we will cut: Sport NI. I hear everybody here talking about how great it is about our sports champions and when our boxers do well at the Commonwealth Games. We sing their praises and do all that. What will we do? We will take £23,000 from Tollymore. There will be a reduction in seasonal staff, the number of courses and weekend services — the most popular time. We will take £75,000 out of performance coaching; the removal of the entire funding programme for performance coaching. How will we build our athletes of the future if we do not have coaches? We will take £57,000 out of club development performance. As for Activ8 for children in primary, post-primary and special education, for whom participation in sport is recommended by the Chief Medical Officer, we will take all that funding away as well. The loss will result in Sport NI having zero engagement with the education system. We know that this is not the right way to go forward.

We will also see the Sports Institute Northern Ireland seek a £180,000 reduction in high-performance service to athletes. We currently fund 200 athletes and 25 sports. Both will be reduced, meaning that we are unlikely to see medals at international level. We will also take £138,000 out of performance sport, which is likely to have an impact on participation at the Commonwealth Youth Games in Samoa in 2015. Is that really what we want? When you do surveys of what people are proud of, you find that they are proud of our people in Northern Ireland competing on an international stage. We will take away £44,000, £12,000 of which is from the Giro cycling legacy. We invested in the Giro and now we will not follow it up. We will take away £15,000 from Women in Sport and £16,000 from Disability Sports NI, which will threaten the future of the organisation, according to Disability Sports. I have made my point on where we are making really modest cuts that will have profound effects. The athlete investment programme will face a reduction of £63,000 in training for our expert athletes. A survey of public attitudes found that 90% of people thought that NI teams should have international representation and that 90% of people supported public funding for our young athletes. As a result of the Budget, we will have to stop all funding for the 55 development athletes whom we have identified.

5.15 pm

I will finish on the issue of Disability Sports NI. DSNI directly impacts over 20,000 people with disabilities every year. The cuts in the Budget suggest that numbers of people who are part of the programme will be one third lower next year. People tell me that they have had a look at this from a section 75 point of view. This cannot be right; these people need our support. We have had debates in the Assembly, and there was complete agreement two years ago that we should support the work of DSNI. I ask: how do I make a case? How do I implore the Executive or whoever controls the purse strings in this arena? Culture, arts and leisure is not an add-on or bolt-on; it is the very basis of being Northern Irish; it is what makes us proud. It is about our culture and about celebrating what brings us together. I am not talking about high culture but about everything from marching bands to whatever. We ought to be investing in it, not cutting it.

I understand the financial reality that we face in that we have to make some attempt to reduce expenditure. We have to do that because of the area that we work in in the United Kingdom, but I am saying to you that the sums of money are so small for culture, arts and leisure in the monitoring rounds and suchlike. The Minister said on the record that he understands the benefit of legacy work, maintaining investment and so on. I would like us to look again. I am not in a position — you all know this — to bring forward amendments or to change anything. The only thing that I can do is tell you that these are the unintended consequences of the actions that we are taking. On behalf of people from rural places and all those people who make their living from, take enjoyment from or participate in culture, arts and leisure, I ask you to think again.

I will conclude my general remarks, because the Minister told me previously that it would be unreasonable of me to expect him to be in command of the detail of everything for fear of him being a megalomaniac. I accept and understand that point. However, when you drill down into the detail and look at what is there — I do not think that any other Departments have been able to give the information — you get to the stage where you think, "I would not do that; that is not joined-up". There are some areas that I really am interested in. I hope to finish on a positive, and the Minister may well be talking about this. I heard him talk at Question Time about how we might have an investment bank, how we might do more on energy and how we might use our financial transactions capital. All those are positive things, and I commend that, but we need a Budget that we all genuinely agree with. There is no point in people saying, "I disagree with all of this", and then saying, "I will vote for it".

Equally, there is no point in people voting against it on principle when they have no other ideas. You will be pleased to hear that, at twenty minutes past five, when the media has yet to pay any attention and nobody is listening, I have, at least, said some things on the record, which, in the cold light of day when I am not associated with them, people may well take on board and say, "Do you know what? There is something that we should do. We need to find a way forward, and that needs consensus." That is the only way forward in this place. We cannot keep taking potshots at each other: we have to find a way to agree, and when we agree, we should be arguing for it, not making excuses.

Mr Byrne: Arising out of the Stormont House proposals, there is a strong emphasis on a voluntary exit scheme (VES) proposal, as has been outlined by many other speakers. The voluntary exit scheme is hailed by some parties as a means of tackling over-reliance on the public sector, but how can it be delivered? There needs to be a skills needs analysis for each Department to sustain viable public services at the delivery end. Otherwise there will be a lot of disappointed people. We are told that the target in the public services should be 20,000 posts — around 10% of the whole sector. Managing that through a voluntary process is a tall order.

In terms of DARD, 300 posts are to be targeted — around 10% of the Department. Again, how will the professional and technical needs be maintained to a sufficient level to provide the quality of service that people expect? It is therefore crucial to have a planned approach to implementation of the VES. That is the challenge for each Department and, in particular, for the Minister who will oversee the process.

The phrase "invest to save", or "borrow to save", is the theme of these public-sector employment cuts. How can this major restructuring project be managed successfully so that rising unemployment is not the headline outcome? It could be an economic disaster for the local economy, leading to a downward spiral in business confidence if there is no consequent improvement in the private sector as we cut the public sector.

Mr Deputy Speaker, where is the evidence of an economic plan for the North in this Budget? The reality is that there is none. That is the biggest gap in the entire Programme for Government, and it is still lacking in the current Budget proposals. It is now more important than ever to have one, if we are going to realise 20,000 job cuts in the public sector.

Northern Ireland has never had a focused, targeted economic plan or policy for the entire region. Regional imbalance has been the order of the day, because of the

custom and practice pursued by the public bodies charged with shaping economic development. That is the historical legacy. The infrastructure deficit in the west and border areas highlights the regional imbalance in FDI trends and economic development in general across the North.

Does the Budget provide a focus and a road map to a more successful local economy, or is it primarily about implementing austerity cuts? That is the outstanding question, and I remain to be convinced.

Mr McCallister: I am reminded at the outset of the old adage about a Government that is in office, but not in power. I think that best sums up this Budget and probably this process. That, to be fair, is not all the Minister's fault, because he is struggling to get Executive colleagues together.

I will make some points about the Budget and the policy direction. We are in a budgetary period without a Programme for Government and any resulting targets or objectives. Looking at the last Programme for Government and how meaningful some of it appeared to be, you might say that it is not a disaster or a bad thing because everybody ignored the last one anyway, but you also have to look at the effect on a Northern Ireland Executive that is at odds with itself. There is a 3:2 split on this Budget. Thankfully, the two are the two bigger parties, and they have the numbers over the three smaller parties who are against it. There is a 4:1 split over Minister Farry's issue on St Mary's and Stranmillis. I am not quite sure about Belfast port, but clearly the Finance Minister is at odds with the Minister with responsibility for the ports. We had a broad 3:2 split on welfare reform, with the two being mainly the SDLP and the Ulster Unionists.

When it comes to Transforming Your Care and the Donaldson report, I am not quite sure where we are on any of that, whether we are going to deliver full steam ahead on Transforming Your Care or whether some parties are now opposed to that. There is probably broadly a 3:2 split on the voluntary exit scheme; I am not quite sure where some of the parties are on that. That has always been the difficulty that this Minister has faced, because he does not have a united Executive.

Let us look at some of the policies, such as the voluntary exit scheme. It was agreed at Stormont Castle or Stormont House — or maybe even both — and then some people suddenly realised that this was not where they wanted to go. My biggest concern over the scheme, and welfare reform, is the broad acknowledgment that this Executive are only doing these reforms under pressure from Westminster. Where is the vision and strategic direction of this Executive? Where are they going and where are they leading Northern Ireland to? The broad parts of the policies do not add up to make a complete and coherent Executive with a direction. The key aspects of economic policy and welfare reform do not add up.

Let us look at where we are on other strategic parts of public-sector reform, such as TYC, local government reform, education, DARD headquarters and reducing the number of Departments. As the Minister is aware, I have asked him to publish a strategy on the voluntary exit scheme linked with a strategic plan for public-sector reform. I have yet to receive an answer but I am sure he will reply in his winding-up speech.

We have proceeded with welfare reform only because of pressure from Westminster. The resultant cost of that is £565 million over six years. How is that going to be paid for? Again, we have set the bar at defending budgets rather than looking at outcomes. We have not been told how this is going to be paid for or where the money is coming from. The Minister must know that this is not a zero-sum equation.

The danger for him is that this money will have to come from education, health, social investment and employment and learning. We may find that with an incoherent Executive policy on welfare and the economy we are robbing the very services that might help people to get out of the trap of welfare and move into the world of work; those training and employment opportunities that this Executive will have to cut. In attempting to address health inequalities we will struggle to meet the demand. That is where this Executive, in this Budget, fail so dramatically because there is no joined-up purpose to this Administration.

Remarkably, corporation tax is the one policy on which there is a 5:0 agreement around the Executive table. All the studies that we have looked at on corporation tax suggest that to get the gain from it we have to invest in skills and training, yet DEL is facing a 6·4% cut next year. Where is the joined-up approach of the Government? Where are we going to create these jobs?

During the welfare reform debate last week, I asked whether Sinn Féin had now forgotten about social mobility for some of its constituents. I also asked whether it had moved into the area of trickle-down economics because a cut in corporation tax has a long way to trickle down to some of its constituents. That is the problem that this Budget is delivering and this Minister faces.

5.30 pm

We hear much about strategic vision. Mr Allister made the point that OFMDFM did not quite see the irony in having an equality and strategy unit. That is because there is no sense of strategic direction. Take even one Minister making a funding decision about Stranmillis and St Mary's, and then all the Executive closing down. What is worse, that Minister is still in post. He is still there, clinging on to office, and that builds into the First Minister's line about the dysfunctionality of this place and this Executive. We cannot continue in that vein.

The problem is that key parts of this Executive's policies do not add up. The economic policy of the Executive is incoherent. The public-sector reform policy is incoherent. The social policy is incoherent. Our health policy is incoherent. Our fiscal policy, to borrow and pledge spending with no indication of where the cuts are going to come, is completely incoherent.

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

Can the Minister stand up when he replies here and claim that it has been a great achievement? He will claim that it has been a great achievement getting Executive agreement on this and that the public should be grateful to him for that. The only reason why he and his colleagues are getting away with this is because there is no credible alternative in this Assembly. There is no opposition, and that is why this Assembly so desperately needs an

opposition and alternative view. Quite frankly, the people out there have long-since switched off from this debate and what this Assembly does.

Even Sinn Féin have taken their hollow rhetoric to breathtaking new levels. Northern Ireland and your constituencies, as well as my constituency, have been bankrolled by a very generous UK Exchequer and taxpayer. Let us look at this notion that Sinn Féin have been pushing about the Union being the price of austerity. I am sure that the Minister will give as accurate a figure as he can of what the subvention currently rests at. If it is in the region of £9·5 billion to £10 billion, that comes very close to the entire income tax take of the Republic of Ireland, so where do Sinn Féin think in the real world that that money would come from? If we were not part of the UK and getting a generous handout from the UK Exchequer, how do they think we would prop up our National Health Service, our schools or our roads infrastructure? Where do they think in la-la land that we would get that money? Where do they think the Finance Minister would get that money?

It is just incoherent nonsense to think that we join this all-Ireland republic and it will somehow be blissful and easy. Our friends and colleagues in the Republic of Ireland have had to take some real pain in the last seven to eight years — real pain that we have largely been shielded from. If you look at even public-sector reform and job losses between 2010-13, the UK average was a cut of 10%. Northern Ireland was 3·5%, so where do they think any of that would come from? I am not quite sure.

Add up some of the figures. Take £70 million per year on welfare reform. At some point, this Minister is going to move, and his colleague beside him will cut corporation tax at a cost of £325 million. That starts to rise to £400 million per year. At a time when the Minister has been warning us that we are in for a difficult period in this coming Budget and in the years to 2020, how do those two things add up?

This at a time when we are cutting our skills budget, topping up welfare payments and possibly trapping people in welfare and more. This at a time when we cannot make any decisions due to an inability to make decisions. When we listen to the likes of Mr Flanagan talk about the blank canvas for our economy, we find that he means a blank cheque, not a blank canvas. He wants a blank cheque that we can write and spend, which means that we never have to face the realities of what is out there in the real world. The realities are that, if you want to spend money at that level, you will have to raise it at some point. The Minister knows that I have been critical of the DUP line that says that we are a low-tax Assembly. We are virtually a no-tax Assembly. Five per cent to 6% of what the Minister will spend comes from his regional rate. So we are imposing no charge; everything else goes into a central pot and comes back to us in the form of the block grant and other separate payments.

The idea that this is a low-tax Assembly does not stand up to scrutiny. The idea that anyone would somehow want to pay more into such a dysfunctional body is also a worry. To the Alliance Party's credit, it talks about having the debate on revenue raising, putting tuition fees on the table, water charges and prescription charges. It is a debate that the Assembly needs to have. However, it needs to have it in the context of a reformed Assembly, which should be an Assembly that has a coherent Executive policy on welfare, the economy and on where it is going. People should know what it is doing. In that context, you might make those decisions.

Talking about revenue raising brings me to the Port of Belfast and the debate on that. We can look at that as one of the best examples of growth in our economy, which even John Simpson described as an "artery" for our economy. Minister Hamilton and Minister Kennedy were interviewed for 'The View' last Thursday night, and instead of having an Executive policy and strategy, they had diverging views of where the port is going. Why would we want to strip, I do not know, £800 million with no clue about the Executive's ability to deal with it, get on top of the issues, spend the money properly and invest wisely in Northern Ireland's future? At the minute, all we see is an ability to borrow. You might argue that we should be able to borrow if we are going to cut corporation tax, and you probably need to be able to borrow to match the volatility of that tax. You would also need to be able to save in better years. However, what are we borrowing mainly to do? We are not borrowing mainly to build roads and infrastructure, to extend our rail network, to build schools and health centres or to do whatever is needed for the Executive's strategic plan. We are borrowing to make people redundant.

The Minister knows my concerns on that about getting a policy, and he knows that we could end up with a brain drain. He also knows that we could end up doing something similar to the Patten reforms of the Police Service, when you could end up having to bring people back in who know how things work. We end up at Mr Allister's point about economic inactivity. This is where these parts of our economy and economic vision, with Sinn Féin's idea on welfare reform and the Minister's idea and drive on public-sector reform, do not add up to a coherent policy with associated costs. That is where we get into trouble, and we always end up defending the Budget line rather than looking at outcomes. We end up saving St Mary's and Stranmillis colleges, continuing to train too many teachers while not having enough IT graduates. Where is the joined-up economic policy in that?

The private and public sectors are mentioned. Even in my constituency, the centre in Tollymore is a great asset, but it is funded and continues to be funded by the public sector, offsetting private sector activity. That needs to be looked at when we consider how things should continue.

We look at various policies, such as what is in the Budget for delivering anything on the Maze site. Will it be a hub for agri-excellence? Would it not be better to think about relocating DARD headquarters there? Is the new community safety college too big and too difficult for us to deliver? Does some other venue need to be looked at? Meanwhile, we are spending millions looking at these ventures with no collective government policy.

We come back to the simple point that the Executive or the Assembly must reform the process or it will fail. Mr Allister quite rightly made the point that the Budget buys the Executive and the Assembly time through to May 2016. It has bought the full five-year term. However, the challenge after this Budget is that whoever is elected here in 2016 cannot come back to this unreformed Assembly and unreformed Executive and try to deliver a Programme for Government. It cannot be a Government with no real ideas other than what is being driven by a Westminster Government, whatever colour that happens to be, with no

real incentive or motivation to do anything and with nothing more than the mutual veto hanging over it. We cannot continue to do business in that way as our people switch off from politics and the Assembly. We have looked at this too many times. There is no revenue raising, no way of changing it and no drive or ability to deliver, and we keep on doing it.

During one of the previous debates, when the Minister was in great quoting form, I quoted JFK to him:

> *"Efforts and courage are not enough without purpose and direction."*

The challenge that I put to the Minister on that day was to show me where his purpose and direction and that of his Executive colleagues was. I am not seeing that purpose and direction. I would like to be able to see a coherent Executive that is joined up with purpose and direction and an ability to lead, govern and serve in the best interests of us all. Quite frankly, I do not see that in the Budget and that is very much to my regret.

Mr Hamilton (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): Mr Deputy Speaker, you are now the fourth Chair of the debate. Mr Basil McCrea congratulated the Deputy Speaker last in the Chair for his longevity. I have had to sit here through the entire debate while the Chair has had the luxury of changing.

I thank Members —

Mr Allister: *[Interruption.]*

Mr Hamilton: Sorry?

Mr Allister: I said that now we have to sit.

Mr Hamilton: You have to endure it. It is payback time, Mr Allister.

I thank Members who contributed to the Second Stage of the Budget Bill. As I did in my opening remarks, I want to place on record my thanks to the Committee for Finance and Personnel for ensuring accelerated passage, which means, of course, that the tight legislative timetable can be adhered to at this critical point in the financial cycle.

Many issues have been covered in the debate. Some Members clearly heard my opening remarks about keeping their speech focused on the Budget Bill, but I think that only one Member did so. It is safe to say — it is probably the safest thing that I will say in the Chamber — that some Members may have strayed somewhat beyond the specifics of the Bill.

Mrs Foster: No.

Mr Hamilton: I know that it shocks many Members to learn that. I appreciate the time that Members have given to the Bill and the debate, and I will do my very best to respond to as many of the issues raised as possible, although, given that we would all like to get home for some form of tea at some stage, I will not respond to every issue raised.

I start with the Chair of the Finance Committee, Mr McKay. I thank him for his work in that capacity and for ensuring that accelerated passage was secured. I think that he spoke on behalf of the Committee when he said that there was a "fundamental weakness" in our budgetary process and begged the question of whether it was "effective or efficient". Those are questions and points that I have considered many times. We at least had the benefit — it is a dubious benefit — of having a week between the debate on the Estimates and the debate on the Second Stage of the Budget Bill.

Usually, we do them back to back, on a Monday and a Tuesday. In retrospect, the benefit of doing it that way is that energy is sapped from Members on the Monday, and, consequently, the debate on the Tuesday is usually much shorter than this has been. It seems that the week that has passed has reinvigorated Members, so we have had to endure probably a longer debate than we might have had to in the past.

5.45 pm

Mr Cree is not here. He is usually the first to raise this issue during these debates, and all Members who do so are absolutely right. I inherited a review of the financial process that had been taken forward by my predecessor. It was probably not initially perfect, but it was amended to reflect various concerns raised by the Minister for Regional Development and the Minister of Education. Changes were made to try to reflect their concerns.

Reflecting on the final points made by Mr McCallister, about the operation of the Executive, I can say that the paper before the Executive that is the longest outstanding is that on the review of the financial process, and the party that is holding it up is Sinn Féin. It is probably now too late for that review to go through as it is, and it may not even be required to go through as it is currently crafted. The reorganisation of Departments from 12 down to nine probably requires us to change the financial process somewhat anyway, because there will be fewer Departments. That therefore gives us another opportunity before this mandate is out. Mr McKay made the point about whether it is an effective or efficient process, so I hope that he takes time to reflect on the fact that it is his party that has refused to let the review of the financial process proceed.

The memorandum of understanding between the Committee and the Department would not, of course, have decreased the number of debates that we have had this year. I am content for work on it to resume, but, if the experience of the past year is indicative of anything, it is that the memorandum of understanding would not have worked in the circumstances that we have. I do not think that the memorandum was fit for purpose to have been engaged in this Budget process. I think that the process would have collapsed and fallen apart fairly quickly.

It is useful for us to be able to reflect on the Budget process this year, try to tweak or change the memorandum of understanding accordingly and then, hopefully, get the MOU in place for next year. However, for it to work, it obviously has to adhere to certain timetabling issues and, as the Chair and Committee members will appreciate, that is somewhat outside my control. If there is not political agreement to move forward on the Budget at all — never mind within certain preordained stages in time — the memorandum of understanding, even with the best will in the world, will not work in many regards.

Mr McKay mentioned the Smith commission and further fiscal devolution. There are a couple of points that I want to touch on there. One is to do with the Crown Estate. That is something that is contained in the Smith commission report as a recommendation for the Scottish Government, and one that they are keen to take forward. Although it

would have little or nothing to do with my Department's policy responsibility, I see merit in exploring that proposed power further to see whether it is something that could reap a benefit for Northern Ireland into the future. I say that without having studied the report particularly and without looking at whether there are downsides to it. I tend to view Treasury offers of the devolution of things with that perspective. There are opportunities, and I can see some particularly for our renewables sector and our fishing sector that might be huge for Northern Ireland. It is a matter on which I very much have an open mind.

The Member has frequently raised the issue of APD. As the House knows, we already have devolved APD for direct long-haul flights. That is kept in place, albeit on a reduced service now. There is the United Airlines flight to Newark, and some other long-haul flights have been added, albeit most of them are to outward tourist destinations. The argument made by the Member, and by some others, although I think that the number is decreasing, is that we should extend the devolution of APD to short-haul flights. My stated position, and it remains the case, is that it is an issue for Her Majesty's Government to deal with, but I think that they should eradicate it. I think it is punitive to remoter parts of the United Kingdom, particularly to Northern Ireland, which shares a land border with the Irish Republic, where there is effectively no tax on flights in the same way that there is in Northern Ireland.

However, we should acknowledge the good work that has been done in attracting new routes to Northern Ireland, particularly recently, even without having no or a reduced rate of APD for short-haul flights. In the last months, for example, daily routes to Amsterdam by KLM have been announced; the Flybe flight to London City was introduced and then extended to two flights a day; and flights to Verona, Rome, Prague and now Barcelona have been announced. Some of those will be more for outward tourism, but some, such as those to Rome, Prague, Barcelona and Amsterdam, will bring tourists back in the other direction as well. Those are the sorts of routes that I want to see us increasingly getting. Get into bigger markets, cities and hub airports, yes, but I also want to see routes to where the resident population might want to come in this direction as well. My concern around APD for short-haul flights has always been that, if it was reduced, it would also be reduced for many of the holiday routes to the Mediterranean, the Canary Islands and elsewhere, which would take money out of Northern Ireland and not bring money back into Northern Ireland.

Mr McKay and Mr Flanagan raised the issue of rates, and did so on the back of the revaluation, which is starting to roll out. I make the point, as I have in a lot of correspondence to Members and in various press utterances, that the revaluation is not itself the rates bill. It is to do with the net annual value (NAV) and the valuation of the property. Councils are in the process of setting their rates and we have struck a low increase in the regional rate of 1·4%. It will be only when that is worked through that an increase in the valuation will be reflected in an increase in the rates bill as well.

Mr McKay is right: it is a long time since we have had a revaluation; 13 years, in fact. There were very valid reasons for postponing the previous revaluation, which was due to go ahead a couple of years ago. Such was the lack of movement within the market that it may have produced very distorted results, which would have been appealed by probably the vast majority of people and ended up in a significant increase in work for our valuation teams. I do think that the concerns expressed by some — a small number of people have expressed concerns about their valuation — is a reflection of the fact that their valuation has gone from here to there and they see that as one move, as opposed to perhaps happening over a 13- to 15-year period. It is important that we get back, very, very quickly, to regular five-year revaluations, almost come what may and despite the circumstances in the wider economy.

Again, I make the point that the whole purpose of a revaluation is not to increase the overall take on rates; it is to smooth that out and for a fairer distribution of the rating liability across businesses. There will be some winners; there will be some losers; and there will be some who remain the same. Glyn Roberts, chief executive of the Northern Ireland Independent Retail Trade Association, spoke for the majority of non-domestic ratepayers when he welcomed the outcome of the rates revaluation and said that it represented good news for independent retailers and town centres. That sentiment was shared by a Sinn Féin councillor Mr Jay McCauley, from the Strabane area, who was quoted back in November as saying that the revaluation — he said "re-evaluation", but I have polished it up for him — would:

> *"help to create a more level playing field in terms of the rates burden and give a long-overdue boost to many small struggling businesses and enable them to survive and possibly grow".*

The small business rate relief scheme has been extended for a further year. That will offer some support, particularly for smaller businesses, which may see their rates go up as a result of the revaluation. There have been comments by some Sinn Féin Members over the last week or so, including by Mr McKay and Mr Flanagan, of the need to review the non-domestic rating system in Northern Ireland. I stood in the Chamber, having been not long in office, and made the point that, after we went through the range of changes that are happening to the rating system this year — RPA; rates convergence; the revaluation — and that had all settled down and bedded in, it would be an opportune moment for that, because it would be almost 10 years since the last review of the non-domestic rating system. That will be carried out very, very soon.

I enter into that with no preconceived conclusions, but I appreciate fully that it will be a challenging undertaking to find an alternative system that is better than the current one. I am not arguing that our rating system is in any way perfect, but, perhaps, one of its benefits is that it is at least understood. Far from perfect as it is, people at least understand how it works.

Mr McKay: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Hamilton: I will, yes.

Mr McKay: Will the Minister elaborate on what he means by "very, very soon"?

Mr Hamilton: I mean that we will start it off in this calendar year. It will take some time to work it through. If there was a recommendation for change, it will take some time to work that through the system, whatever way it is done. I say this having no preconceived conclusions about what the results should be, but I have heard it suggested by colleagues of

his that, perhaps, it should be based on audited accounts. Not every business in Northern Ireland meets the threshold to have audited accounts, so that does not work for every business. I have also heard it suggested by some of his party colleagues that we should use VAT returns as the basis upon which, somehow, we assess the taxation bill for local businesses. Not every business in Northern Ireland pays rates — sorry, VAT. Sometimes not every business pays rates either, but not every business pays VAT, so that is not a sound basis upon which to do it either.

One of the other downsides of moving away from rates is that, with rates, there is a lack of volatility in the take-in. That said, it has gone down. Since some businesses have not been able to pay in recent times, because of the crisis, it has, perhaps, not been as much as we might have expected, but you do not get the same volatility as there is in sales taxes or taxes that are based on income, profit or whatever it might be. Imperfect as the rates system is — I accept that — there are downsides. Therefore there would be losers in moving away from a system that is at least well understood.

I turn now to the Deputy Chair of the Committee, Dominic Bradley. I want to correct several inaccuracies made by Mr Bradley in his contribution. He said that the basis of any Budget should be an agreed Programme for Government. The SDLP said that there was no agreed Programme for Government. There is an agreed Programme for Government. The Budget Bill before us tidies up the end of the current financial year that we remain in. That is clearly covered by the agreed Programme for Government that, when it was designed, was due to conclude in the 2014-15 financial year. It will be extended by the Executive. The Executive have agreed to extend the Programme for Government, build upon many of the commitments that are there, and add to them with new commitments. That work will be done on the basis of new Budgets, because, obviously, the Budget has an impact on Departments' ability to meet targets or to stretch them further.

Mr Bradley also asked what the rationale was for a reduction in the rates support grant to local government. That, of course, is a question, not for me, but the SDLP's Minister, Mark Durkan. He should be asked why he took a decision to reduce the rates support grant. I believe that he played politics in doing so. He has full policy responsibility for the rates support grant; it is not my responsibility. I appreciate that the Minister, like many Ministers, has a budget cut to deal with, but it is up to him to prioritise his budget. It is significant, I believe, that, in November, he published draft rates supporting grant levels for local government but did not change one iota between draft and final budget. In my view, no serious effort was made by the Minister to do anything to offer additional support for local government. So, when Mr Bradley asks what the rationale for the reduction is, he would be better asking his colleague.

Mr Leslie Cree is not here. In a break with modern tradition, I do not think that he asked about a review of the financial process. He asked about a range of things around the £50 million for shared and integrated education and the money that was allocated in the Stormont House Agreement for the past. He will note, as will Members, that, in the Budget for next year, that is not specifically allocated to any Department at this stage, because decisions are required on the bodies that will deal with the past and on shared and integrated education. There needs to be agreement between ourselves and Her Majesty's Government about those projects as they move forward. As they are agreed, those projects will require the release of funding, and that will go into the Department of Education's budget as appropriate. He asked about the voluntary exit scheme and whether there was going to be any delay. There is no delay. I think that some of the comments I made during Question Time will have have leapfrogged his query. As I said at that time, it is opening on 2 March and is only one of several strategic personnel interventions that we plan to do.

6.00 pm

With regard to his comments about the Port of Belfast, that is an issue that his own party colleague, the Minister for Regional Development, is responsible for. Whilst I am touching on the Port of Belfast, Mr McCallister referred to it in some of his final remarks. I am not sure what he thought the differences were in the views expressed by me and Minister Kennedy. I think that the real difference in views around the sale of the Port of Belfast is not so much between me and Danny Kennedy; I believe it is between Mr Kennedy and his party leader, Mr Nesbitt. In the 'Belfast Telegraph' on 17 December, Mr Nesbitt confirmed that the sale of the harbour had been proposed by his party during the Stormont House talks process. Yet, last week, on the aforementioned 'The View' on the BBC, Mr Kennedy said that he was "not inclined" to support the sale or privatisation of Belfast harbour. If there is a difference in opinion anywhere, it is less between me and Mr Kennedy and more between Mr Kennedy and his own party leader. However, as the Member will appreciate perhaps better than anyone, no difference there.

I have stoked those fires, as I did in the past. For what it is worth and to make my position clear, our Budget next year or in future years will not be predicated on the need to sell the port and get a receipt from its sale. There would be a large receipt to be had from the sale of the port, and that makes it attractive to examine, but as many commentators and I have made clear, whilst there would be a large receipt from the sale of the port, the port is an economic driver in Northern Ireland, and that is a factor that you would have to consider in moving towards any sale.

I do not think that it has to be just an issue between keeping the port in broad public hands and selling it. I think that there are other options short of a sale that we should also consider. I hope that the Minister, in the proposals that he has yet to bring to the Executive to create a panel to look at that, might want to consider that there are other option hybrids between those that might realise ongoing receipts for the Executive short of selling the port and putting it into private hands.

Mr Cree asked for an update on INTERREG funding. Our INTERREG programme was agreed by the European Commission as recently as Friday, and the fund has £282 million in it, which will be spent on areas including research and innovation, environmental protection, sustainable transport and health. It is hoped that by the spring or at least the early summer INTERREG IVa will be open to calls.

Trevor Lunn criticised the Budget and said that it did not deal with financial problems or the financial issues that the Executive are facing. I disagree, and you would expect me to do so. It is a balanced Budget. It was a requirement that

we had a balanced long-term sustainable Budget or there would have been no proceeding with the legislation on corporation tax. That, and progress on welfare reform, was a condition. I appreciate that the Budget is not to everyone's satisfaction, but it is a balanced Budget and it is getting us back on to a longer-term and more sustainable footing, and that is being endorsed by the actions of Her Majesty's Government in taking forward corporation tax legislation. It, at least, begins to deal with some of our longer-term financial problems by focusing on workforce restructuring and enabling that to happen, and on reorganising our Departments and reforming our public sector, particularly through the likes of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD's) review.

Mr Lunn asked what the Budget was doing in respect of preparing for corporation tax. There is ongoing preparation in terms of investment in skills, infrastructure and economic development. Of course, there is no need to address the cost issue in next year's Budget. There are still a number of what could be described as uncertainties around corporation tax and its cost.

Before some people jump down my throat and say, "Well, if there are uncertainties, that is why you shouldn't proceed with the devolution of corporation tax," I want to point out that these are uncertainties that will only become more certain in the next number of years. One is what the next comprehensive spending review means for Northern Ireland. Like many of us, I am observing the utterances coming from the Conservative Party and the Labour Party about what they propose to do with various areas of public spending. Each time, they try to outdo one another, one by protecting health in cash terms, and then the other wants to protect it in real terms. The next day they want to protect education spending in cash terms, and the next day, another party outdoes them by wanting to protect it in real terms.

The net effect of all of that for Northern Ireland is actually quite positive. Sixty-five per cent of our Budget is spent on health and education, and we get almost full comparability. That means that, if that is what happens after the next election, whoever is in Downing Street, it is good for Northern Ireland. It might put our public spending in a somewhat better position than perhaps we might have feared. I am not saying it is going to be easy, by any means. There will be challenges ahead, but if those promises are fulfilled after the election, it could have beneficial outcomes for Northern Ireland. There are still areas of negotiation, particularly around the ongoing adjustment formula for corporation tax.

Another uncertainty, I suppose, if you want to use that word, is the savings that we will realise through the voluntary exit scheme. Whilst we do not have to deal with the cost issue right now, we have some time to prepare, and there will be some things that I believe will work out beneficially for Northern Ireland.

Mr Lunn criticised allocations to the Health Department; I point out again that health and education account for 65% of our total Budget. Health alone is 46% of our Budget. As an Executive, we have sought to increase, and agreed to increase, our budget for health by £204 million, which is over 3% of an increase. I agree with Mr Lunn that the Health Department still requires reform, but the points made by Mr Weir are worth bearing in mind. The pressures that our health service is facing — and undoubtedly it is facing pressures — are not just pressures that are being faced in Northern Ireland. These are pressures that are happening elsewhere in the United Kingdom, that are being faced in the Republic of Ireland and, arguably, that every Western Government is facing in terms of difficulties in funding, need and demand in health.

Not too many people spoke about health spending today, but while Mr Lunn talked about the need for reform — and he is absolutely right that there is a need for reform in the health service — whenever the Minister comes forward with any number of different reforms, those who call upon him to introduce reforms are very rarely standing behind him, backing his reforms. They are usually standing in front of him with a placard, protesting against the reforms. I can probably include several party colleagues in that. In asking the Minister to bring forward reforms, we all have a responsibility to try to support him and those in the NHS more as they do try to reform in what is a very difficult set of circumstances.

I turn to Michaela Boyle's contribution. I am not picking on her, but the comments that she made were pretty typical of comments made from Sinn Féin Benches throughout the debate. It is not a personal attack on her. Sorry, I have prefaced it by saying "attack"; I should not say that. It is not a personal critique of her comments. It is a critique of Sinn Féin comments more broadly.

She talked about an over-estimation of the fiscal deficit — a point that was picked up by several Members in the corner, principally Mr McCrea and Mr McCallister. This is a fundamental issue: what is the subvention, the fiscal gap, or the fiscal deficit? Sinn Féin's stated position is that it does not believe the figures that are put out there showing that there is a subvention. The most recent figure in the net fiscal balance report is that it is £9·5 billion. If I was to not believe those figures but believe the Sinn Féin position that that figure is wrong, it begs the question of what Sinn Féin believes the fiscal deficit is. Does it believe that there is a fiscal deficit? I am not even sure whether it believes that there is a fiscal deficit. If it does not believe that, there is something seriously wrong with the position that it is espousing.

Accepting, as most of us do, that there is a fiscal deficit, some of us believe the figures in the net fiscal balance report. Perhaps some others do not, but most people accept and agree that there is a fiscal deficit. It is important that we accept that there is a gap, because it goes to the heart of the other points that Ms Boyle and others on the Sinn Féin Benches were making.

Sinn Féin Members got up one after another and talked about the need for more and more fiscal devolution and for it to happen almost immediately. As long as the corporation tax debate has gone on, we have tried to be very careful to say that one fiscal devolution — in this case corporation tax, which is fairly significant — is not in itself a panacea to all our economic ills and is not the silver bullet that will solve our economy, but the Sinn Féin position seems to be that outright, almost immediate fiscal devolution is the panacea for all our economic ills. I am not, and nor is my party, against further fiscal devolution, and we pursued the devolution of corporation tax aggressively.

Some Members wanted us to move on to plan B. I recall that the deputy First Minister, who is from the Member's

party, came out of a meeting in Downing Street stating his belief that the devolution of corporation tax would never happen. Some of us got stuck in and kept at it, and we have now secured the power to lower the rate of corporation tax. You cannot question my commitment or my party colleagues' commitment to further fiscal devolution as long as it has a defined economic and social benefit for Northern Ireland. I do not think that anybody — well, there are some — doubts the case with corporation tax. It is not a point of principle that we are against further fiscal devolution because we are part of the unitary state of the United Kingdom. We have devolved APD as well as pursuing corporation tax.

Mr McKay: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Hamilton: Yes, I will.

Mr McKay: The Minister mentioned the deficit. It has been quite clear from the Finance Committee's work that a number of witnesses from universities and other institutions are saying that we do not have enough financial information to know that these figures are accurate. You talk about the deficit being £9·6 billion, and different figures are bandied about. We cannot be assured that the figures are accurate, because we do not have the information in front of us. Other countries do things differently and have accurate information. There is no doubt that there is a deficit, but, unless you have the economic levers to generate more wealth for the society that we live in and set policy in our primary interest, you will not overturn that deficit. You are in a vicious cycle of a deficit that will not be overturned.

Mr Hamilton: The Member's contribution shows some progress in that he accepts that there is a deficit. That deficit is not £1, £100, £1,000 or £1 million; we are talking about billions of pounds. If Mr McCrea's contribution was not going to make the media, I can be absolutely certain that my contribution on the 'Net Fiscal Balance Report' will not make the media. The methodology applied to produce that report is similar to that used by the Scottish Government for their equivalent report. It has ONS status, and ours does not. If it is based largely on the same methodology, it is capable of getting ONS status, should we wish to pursue it.

Mr B McCrea: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Hamilton: Yes, I will.

Mr B McCrea: I wonder whether we should take the argument from a different position. Maybe not now but at some stage, we have to look at the amount of revenue that Her Majesty's Government raise from the City of London and the contribution that it makes. There is also the polarisation of tax-paying corporations' headquarters in London. If you take it from that basis, it is impossible that we, as a peripheral region, can be self-sustaining. Frankly, this is what really makes me depressed when I hear arguments that are not based on sound economic fact. I want some way to be able to challenge the issue and get it sorted. Once the facts are established, you can decide your policy.

Mr Hamilton: The Member is right about the huge benefit of the City of London to the UK as a whole, even with all its problems over the last number of years. It highlights the problem for a state such as ours, particularly given that Northern Ireland is peripheral to London and the south-east, which are huge drivers for the economy. The same is true, of course, in the Irish Republic, in that Dublin is a huge city that dominates the Irish economy. It offers a subvention through its wealth to places like Kerry, Donegal, the west of Ireland and many parts of the midlands.

So, that is not unusual. Clearly, you would not want that to be the case if you could wave a magic wand, but it is a reality of many states. The same is true in France and Germany and anywhere around the world that you want to look at.

6.15 pm

I want to reiterate the point that my position is not one of opposition to further fiscal devolution. By backing consistently the devolution of corporation tax and now securing that power, my party and I have shown that, in the right sets of circumstances, we are in favour of the further devolution of fiscal powers to this place. That gives us more of the economic power or levers that Members of Sinn Féin were talking about, and it will have a beneficial impact on our economy.

Full fiscal devolution, which, I think, is what is being advocated by Sinn Féin, and very quickly, runs the risk of huge volatility in tax receipts and, therefore, less public spending. Somebody may bounce up and say, "That is the case with corporation tax as well". I think that there is a risk of volatility, but I do not think that it is anywhere near as big or dangerous a risk as the volatility that there would inevitably be if you had income tax, National Insurance and all these other taxes as well. That is why I make the point about the deficit. It is important that Sinn Féin accepts that there is a multibillion-pound deficit. We modify the methodologies that we use, and we can look at those further to try to get more accurate figures, but I sense that that will always produce a result that shows a multibillion-pound deficit and a multibillion-pound subvention, and, of course, that argument does not suit Sinn Féin. Therefore, I believe that it will never accept the methodology underpinning any of the work done on that.

Mr Byrne: I appreciate the Minister giving way. Does the Minister believe that the regional economy can be made economically viable or sustainable in the medium to long term, given the subvention of £9 billion plus or minus £1 billion? Given that we will get corporation tax, which may be a net cost in the short term, will we be able to proceed and hold the economy together without a strategic economic plan? If corporation tax leads to a recovery in the private sector, the Treasury will be the net beneficiary through increased income tax receipts, increased VAT receipts and a reduction in the welfare payments to the region.

Mr Hamilton: The Member has reiterated the point that he raised in his contribution about the lack of an economic plan. The Executive have agreed an economic strategy, which his party, through its representation on the Executive, has signed up to. So, there is an economic strategy that takes us up to 2030. The first point in the Member's intervention gets to the nub of what I am trying to discuss: how long would it take to become a place that can stand on its own two feet, whether in the medium or long term? Some people's idea of medium and long term is different from that of others, of course. My belief is that that is what we ought to strive for and what we are striving for.

That is what our economic strategy is about. That is what devolving powers on corporation tax to try to transform our economy is all about. We are trying to close the gap.

In recent times, the only two periods when we significantly closed the productivity gap were when there were huge injections of public spending into Northern Ireland. That will clearly not happen in the short term, never mind what the medium term might hold, so we will have to do things differently. That is why we have been pursuing the economic strategy and pursuing corporation tax. The subvention, which, the Member accepts, is sizeable, means that we should be cautious about full fiscal devolution. We run the very serious risk of huge volatility and huge reductions in the public spending that, in the short to medium term, we would be very reliant on. Put simply, at this minute, the Northern Ireland tax base is not strong enough to sustain that.

We do not compare favourably with, for example, our neighbours in Scotland. When pursuing more and more fiscal devolution, they do so on the basis of an economy that may be going through issues with the price of oil and went through issues in the past with the financial services sector, but is in a much stronger position economically than we are. Therefore, I believe that it can deal with more than we can. In the past, I have compared this with children growing up. Scotland is a child of about five and we are a child of one and a half, yet some propose that we take the stabilisers off our bikes at exactly the same time. The five-year-old will cope a little better. The one-and-a-half-year-old will fall over. That is where we need to be very careful.

Mr B McCrea: I thank the Minister for giving way. I will not detain him too long. I would just like it on the record that income tax and VAT are likely to be bigger and more stable than corporation tax. You could argue that, in looking at it the round, there would be a balancing act involved. I will conclude by saying that the Minister is right to look at it before jumping straight into things. It is something to bear in mind. It is important that we understand where the volatility really lies.

Mr Hamilton: I remember having a debate with the Member in the past about income tax and its volatility. Volatility in percentage is smaller, but, because it is a bigger take, the percentage is worth more. The solidity of public spending moving forward is where the problem lies.

I thought that Ms Boyle's contribution was an interesting one, as indeed were those of many of her colleagues. The picture of Northern Ireland that they were painting was one of huge strengths in the economy. That is not something that I am used to hearing from the Sinn Féin Benches, but I agree with it nonetheless. It is undoubtedly the case that we have a lot of strengths in our economy that have been enhanced, improved or, indeed, started and encouraged as a result of policies that were pursued by the Executive and various Ministers. We have a well-educated population. We have a good global location. That is not something that the Executive have effected but a fact of life, I suppose. We have improving skills and improving R&D. We have a growing FDI attraction. Indeed, as Mr Flanagan talked about, we have an international reputation in certain sectors. I agree, but we have to accept that, at the same time, there are structural weaknesses in our economy that we are trying to iron out and deal with. By that, I mean the highest level of economic inactivity and under-representation in higher value-added sectors in our economy, such as finance and business services, and a low level of exports.

It will be a long road for us to travel to transform our economy. We have made huge progress in the past number of years. We should welcome that. We should all appreciate the efforts that have been put in by Ministers in this place and, indeed, our captains of industry, who have made that happen. It is absolutely the case that it is we in Stormont — politicians who are locally elected, representing local people — who are best placed to take our economy further down that long road of transformation. What I will say to Members opposite — I hope that they appreciate the spirit in which all these comments have been made — is that we have to do it step by step. We have to make sure and steady progress down that road rather than try to fast-track to the end, only to find ourselves very quickly back at the start.

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I thank the Minister for giving way. I thought that he was starting to lose a bit of pace there anyway.

I have two points to make on trying to find some common ground. First, the Minister will accept that we need more transparency. We talk about trust and transparency from the Treasury. I take it that he accepts that we would like more transparency in Treasury figures. I had a little debate with it recently when trying to get an exact figure for VAT.

The second point is that we can have the fiscal levers and then decide when to use them. In fact, that is exactly what we will be doing with corporation tax. A week does not go by in the Chamber without someone's voice being raised in support of the tourism industry. We know that it is suffering under a 20% VAT rate and is asking for some flexibility. That surely is an area in which, if we had the fiscal lever, we could decide whether to pull the metaphorical trigger.

Do you think that we need more transparency? Having the fiscal levers and using them are two different things, but surely we need to have the choice.

Mr Hamilton: I am not batting for the Treasury, but, on the point about information and transparency, particularly around tax take, I do not think that it was designed to produce regional figures. I think that the Treasury is grappling with the impact of devolution as well and, indeed, the demands in English regions for more transparency around these things. It is now starting to produce better estimates of tax take across the regions. We are using that work to inform our work. As it develops better transparency, we will all be the beneficiaries.

I do not think that the Member was in earlier for Question Time, when Mr Hilditch asked me about the VAT rate for the hospitality sector. A great campaign has been led by organisations such as Pubs of Ulster and other groups from the Northern Ireland hospitality industry that is now starting to spread across the UK. They took that campaign to Westminster as recently as last week. I wrote to David Gauke, who is the Financial Secretary to the Treasury, at the start of the month asking him again to look at the issue. There is one more Budget left before the election, and it is an opportunity to do something on it. It would not be specifically for Northern Ireland but would have to be for the whole UK. In writing to Mr Gauke, I cited the very good evidence from the Irish experience. Since 2001, 30,000 jobs have been created in the tourism sector,

and it has produced a net benefit to the Irish Exchequer of €165 million. That is good, solid evidence and is why Michael Noonan was then able to stand up and say, "I am keeping this cut in place indefinitely". That evidence almost makes the case for us in Northern Ireland. Even though you cannot have a differential rate within a member state, because we have the land border — it is the same issue with corporation tax — I think that there is a compelling case for Treasury Ministers to look at it. That evidence from the South shows that it is not simply a cut and that they will lose revenue but that they can make some money back through increased PAYE and National Insurance contributions.

I will turn to Mr Ó Muilleoir's comments. He prefaced them by saying that he wanted to be helpful, and I think that he was. He made comments around the investment fund and the social innovation fund. At Question Time today, I pointed out, in response to questions from Ms Sugden and Mr Humphrey, that I see the potential to expand the number of investors who are putting money into the investment fund. The £40 million that we allocated in the draft Budget can almost be seen as seed capital. That is our initial contribution, and I want that initial contribution to grow to at least £100 million. We hope and expect to draw in another £1 billion from the European Investment Bank, and the feasibility study that is being carried out on our behalf by Deloitte and working with the EIB will draw out the sectors that that may be invested in. I do not see that as the end: £1 billion is impressive enough from a standing start, but it is not the end as far as I am concerned. We will absolutely work with EIB on an ongoing basis to, if possible, draw in more funds from it, but I see the potential of other international investors who we have started conversations with already. I do not want to disclose who they are for obvious reasons, but there has been an initial positive response from those organisations and institutions that would operate in that sort of space. I intend to have officials take that further forward and will personally intervene as and when required to try to make that happen. We should not be satisfied with a £1 billion fund; we should be looking to grow that to £2 billion, £3 billion and beyond. The impact that that will have on infrastructure in Northern Ireland will clearly be immeasurably better the bigger the scheme is.

There will be a consultation on the development of the social innovation fund. That will launch very soon. It will use the dormant accounts money initially and will be focused on loans rather than grants so that the £5 million that is there does not disappear very quickly, as would be the case with grants, but is there, gets paid back and is there for others to benefit from in the future. Those others will be social enterprises, charities, community organisations and faith-based organisations. It also has the potential to draw in additional investment. The Member has, in correspondence to me and in the Chamber today, drawn my attention to examples from other jurisdictions, and I am happy to follow those up with him and, indeed, with the organisations concerned.

Jo-Anne Dobson talked about the in-year financial difficulties. I give Mrs Dobson credit for being one of the only Members who stuck to talking about the Bill. She spoke more about in-year financial issues as opposed to next year's issues and was almost a lone voice in that regard. She rightly started off by placing blame for the in-year financial difficulties where it should lie; namely, that we had to find £87 million in year to pay penalties because of our failure to move forward on welfare reform. Whilst we are grateful that there has been a resolution on welfare reform, we should not forget that it has come at the cost of £100 million being lost to date to the Executive in their ability to invest in essential public services and to help many people who are on welfare.

She is wrong, though, in saying that many of the problems in-year were the result, not of welfare reform, but of other pressures that the Executive should have known about.

6.30 pm

Two point three percent of the 4·4% in-year reduction was a result of the need to find money for welfare reform penalties. The decisions that the Executive had taken, and for which finances had to be found, included the historical institutional abuse inquiry and local government reform. I am sure that she did not intend to say, although it sounded like it, that the UUP opposed funding for those things. I know that they did not want to fund the social investment fund a couple of weeks ago, and I hope that they are not now saying the same of the historical institutional abuse inquiry and, indeed, local government reform.

She asked why there were so many fluctuations in-year and whether there had been so many redistributions and reduced requirements in any other year. Mr Girvan made the point during the debate. One of the principal reasons for such large changes to the Budget in-year was the failure to move forward with the A5, the Minister responsible for that being, of course, her party colleague, Danny Kennedy.

She raised several issues to do with health, including the pressures on health, which are well recognised. She did not recognise the fact that £500 million of efficiencies had been delivered since DUP Ministers took control of the Department of Health or, indeed, that there has been a £200 million plus allocation to the Department of Health in next year's Budget, which reflects that 46% of our expenditure goes on health.

I now turn to comments made by Anna Lo. Ms Lo made a very good case for investment in the environment in Northern Ireland. I have been encouraging privately, and I encourage her to take up with environmental NGOs the need to alter slightly the way in which they present their debate. It is an argument that is relevant to Mr McCrea's point about culture, arts and leisure. If the Executive's number one priority is, as it has been for nearly 10 years, to grow the economy, virtually all expenditure, particularly in those areas that see themselves as a bit Cinderella-like, needs to be argued for first and foremost through an economic prism. That does not mean that there is no merit in protecting the environment or in having a good arts community and cultural infrastructure.

In an environment where we have less money, the argument that will find more favour, and therefore perhaps more pounds, is the one that identifies the contribution to the economy through investment in environment or in culture. Mr Bradley on the SDLP Benches raised the issue of heritage-led development, something that I have backed in previous Budgets and am backing again in next year's. One of the reasons for my taking a personal interest in that area is the work of the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) to present the argument for investment

in heritage-led development from the perspective of the benefit to the economy and the jobs that it creates. Therefore I say to Anna Lo: yes, there is merit in arguing for what the Department of the Environment does to protect the environment, but there is also a need to make the argument about what investing in the environment means for our economy.

Ms Lo highlighted the concerns of the voluntary and NGO sectors in environment about Budget cuts. I say to the Minister of the Environment what I would say to any Minister: the voluntary, community or third sector should not be seen as an easy target for cuts in difficult financial times. There are some Departments and some Ministers who think that the third sector is an easy target. They think that they can go after them, because, "I do not have to worry about them. I am not responsible to them. They do not work for me. They are not in my Department, so they are an easy target for cuts." That should not be the way, particularly when those organisations are often delivering services in a much more efficient and effective way than central Government could do.

Trevor Clarke raised concerns about the management of the DRD budget, which concerns I share. It is regrettable that that Department is heading for an unacceptable overspend in this financial year, because the Minister failed to plan properly for the Port of Belfast receipt not being obtained. He failed to plan for that, and spending on the basis of having money that you do not have is not the way to manage your budget, particularly in difficult financial circumstances. I share Mr Clarke's concern and that of his Committee about the poor estimating of the cost of the Coleraine to Londonderry line upgrade.

Mr Flanagan raised the usual issues that he does around investment, or the lack of it as he sees it, in Fermanagh. I note that today, the MP for Fermanagh and South Tyrone issued a statement calling for more investment in the constituency. It is interesting that, in making that call, never once has the MP for Fermanagh and South Tyrone asked me or the economy Minister for a meeting to look at investment, or the lack of it as she would see it, in that area. Such negativity from Sinn Féin on this issue does not make the job of the economy Minister in attracting investment from anywhere any easier.

Mr Allister made the point that the values and ethos of a Government can be revealed by its Budget. He asked what the Executive value and could not find what they value through this Budget. This Budget is based on many values and principles, including support for key public services. That is reflected in an allocation of an additional £204 million to the Health Department, and which reflects the value that we place on the health service, which the Member voted against. It also includes a £60 million boost, over and above the draft Budget allocation, for the Department of Education, which has been topped up by the Minister of Education with a further reallocation from within his budget of around £17 million or £18 million, so that £80 million is going into the schools budget. That reflects the value that this Executive place on education and on schools, a value not reflected by Mr Allister's vote against the Budget.

This is a Budget that seeks to underpin economic growth. There is a 10% increase for the DETI budget to ensure its continued impressive record in attracting investment into Northern Ireland and in creating jobs in Northern Ireland. That is a value that this Budget underpins, a value, again, not reflected by Mr Allister in his vote against this Budget. It is a Budget that also underpins economic development and growth by boosting the expenditure in the Department for Employment and Learning from its draft Budget allocation by £35 million, an allocation that Mr Allister voted against.

I do not need to ask too much about what Mr Allister's values are. His value, of course, and his sole stated purpose, is to see an end to this place. He wants to see a return to direct rule. That is the value and the ethos that he has.

Mr Allister: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Hamilton: No, I will not give way. *[Interruption.]* It is absolutely true. The Member wants a return to direct rule. That is the outworkings of the policy he has —

Mr Allister: No.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Order.

Mr Allister: I want durable, workable devolution, not this farce.

Mr G Robinson: He wants to take part in it.

Mr Hamilton: Absolutely, Mr Robinson. He loves being here. He absolutely loves it here. He wants to see a return to direct rule. That is the outworkings of the policy that he would have us pursue. He wants to see an end to devolution and an end to Stormont. *[Interruption.]* I would be the first to accept and agree that this system of government is far from perfect, but it is a hell of a lot better than the system of government —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Order. All remarks should be made through the Chair and Members should avoid making remarks from a sedentary position.

Mr Hamilton: The system of government that we have, imperfect as it is, is far, far better than a return to direct rule and an end to devolution, which the Member advocates. In terms of helping vulnerable people in Northern Ireland, we would have full-blown, unadulterated welfare reform if we returned to direct rule. On 27 January in this House, after railing against the package of reforms and the package of measures to mitigate welfare reform today in the Chamber, Mr Allister said:

> *"I think there were sensible reforms to be made about the bedroom tax ... that had to be ameliorated". — [Official Report, Bound Volume 101, p210, col 2].*

However, in wanting and seeking a return to direct rule and an end to devolution, we would not have a package of measures to ameliorate the bedroom tax or any other part of welfare reform. The Member sits and shakes his head but that is the truth. If there was a Conservative — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Allister, there is nothing to explain when your position is wanting to see the collapse of this place and the inevitable return to direct rule, which you once described as a return to Dublin rule.

Mr Allister: Yes.

Mr Hamilton: A return to Dublin rule is what the Member is advocating as the natural outworking of the policy that he is pursuing.

You would have the Conservative Party with the Liberal Democrats in power implementing —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Could all remarks go through the Chair, please?

Mr Hamilton: — welfare reform without any changes, without an end to the bedroom tax that Mr Allister said in the Chamber almost three weeks ago:

> *"I think there were sensible reforms to be made about the bedroom tax etc that had to be ameliorated". [Official Report, Bound Volume 101, p210, col 2].*

There would have been no amelioration of the bedroom tax had it not been for devolution and the existence of this place, so what are the Member's values and ethos when he wants to see a return to direct rule?

He rails against borrowing, and he has been told in this place before about the borrowing powers that we have, how they are the envy of other Administrations and how other Administrations and devolved regions of the United Kingdom want the borrowing powers and flexibilities that we have secured. It begs the question about Mr Allister's values when he would not have borrowed in difficult times to invest in infrastructure projects, the new roads, hospitals and schools that, otherwise, we could not have afforded.

It says something about Mr Allister's values and ethos that he would not have borrowed to rescue the members of the Presbyterian Mutual Society (PMS). Borrowing is how the rescue package for the PMS was funded, so it says a lot about the Member's values and ethos when he rails against borrowing, why we should not be borrowing and why we should not have borrowed, when he would not have invested in much-needed infrastructure projects or in any PMS rescue package.

It says a lot about the Member's values and ethos when he wants a return to direct rule and talks about the economy and trying to help out the little guy, when he would see, as a result of a return to direct rule, hugely increased household taxes, an almost immediate introduction of water charges — £500 bills landing on the doormats of everybody in Northern Ireland courtesy of Mr Allister — increased rates bills —

Mr Allister: It is all about losing the limo. It is all about losing the limo.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Order, order.

Mr Hamilton: — and an end to concessionary fares. Any of us involved in the talks before Christmas know fine well that the Government in Westminster would love to get their hands on the things that we are doing in having no water charges, the lowest household taxes in the whole of the UK and the concessionary fares scheme. They would want to bring to an end industrial de-rating, which has kept £300 million in the pockets of local businesses. There is also the small business rate relief scheme that is helping local businesses to the tune of £20 million per year. Those would all go if there was a return to direct rule.

In questioning the values and ethos of this Budget and this Administration, Mr Allister revealed more about his values and ethos. Not once in his diatribe did he offer a single positive alternative to this Budget — not once. That is Mr Allister all over: no positive alternative offered.

Mr Danny Kinahan congratulated — he was here briefly —

Mr Allister: You did not tell us about how you treated the lady —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Order. The Minister has indicated that he is not giving way.

Mr Hamilton: Mr Danny Kinahan congratulated the education sector for securing a boost to the education budget. However, on a tweet that he put out on 19 January, he said:

> *"Excellent, £63million more to Education..UUP and schools' pressures worked".*

At least he had the courtesy and good grace to acknowledge the pressure applied by the schools sector to the Minister and myself. You can certainly congratulate them for the lobbying that they did. One organisation that you cannot congratulate for the £63 million increase to the education budget is the Ulster Unionist Party, which voted against the £63 million allocation to education in the Budget.

Mr Basil McCrea started by saying, and I am paraphrasing, that he had been at livelier wakes. I think that was the import of what he said.

He talked about the DCAL budget, and I touched on some of these points already. Nelson McCausland also raised issues and concerns about that in his capacity as Committee Chair. It is not my job to do the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure's job, as attractive as that might be to all of us at times. She has to prioritise her budget as allocated to her. She has to balance competing priorities between libraries, museums, sport and the arts. That is very difficult to do on a budget that was already very small and that has been reduced by 8·2%. The cut that the Department is facing is lower than that that was initially applied to it, because we as an Executive accepted that making a 15% reduction to that budget would have proportionately decimated it more than others.

6.45 pm

The Member said it was only £10 million, which is a lot of money, and to say "only £10 million" is perhaps accurate enough in the context of our overall Budget. Someone might say something like, "It is only £10 million. Can you not just give it to us?" The question to the Member, as it would be to anybody who says that, is this: where are you going to find that £10 million? That is the problem —

Mr B McCrea: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Hamilton: Let me just finish.

That is the problem that I and anybody who might occupy my chair has. Looking at the Northern Ireland Budget at a global level, we find that we have to balance competing priorities, just as Ministers in their Departments have to balance competing priorities.

Mr B McCrea: I thank the Minister for giving way. I accept his point. I understand that it is £10 million here and £10 million there and that we have to find cuts. All I felt that it was appropriate to do was to argue that, when you realise the draconian impact of this, you find that maybe these arguments have not been made elsewhere, so somebody should do it. I apologise if I have come forward with details. I understand that the Minister cannot be on top of every single line of the Budget, and I have taken on board what

he said about perhaps needing to reframe the arguments in the context of the Executive's economic priorities, with the result that there might be a different way to go forward. Nevertheless, I still think that it is appropriate for me to stand up and say, "These are the impacts of this Budget. Do we really want to do this?"

Mr Hamilton: I am not saying that the Member should not have brought forward the long list of concerns. I have no reason to question the validity of the issues that the Department is putting forward. I am not saying this about the DCAL budget, but as we have seen in some Departments, between draft and final Budgets and even since then, to try to win an argument with the Executive or elsewhere, some Ministers will put out scare stories on what is almost the worst possible position.

It is only £10 million in a Budget of £12 billion, but it is still difficult to find. It also has to be justified. That is the point that I was trying to make. Finding £10 million would offer outright protection in cash terms to the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure for next year. However, finding more money for protection in cash terms is an argument that the Education Minister, who still faces a cut, could make, as could the Justice Minister, who still has to deal with pressures and, indeed, a reduction. The Environment Minister, the Minister for Employment and Learning or whoever it might be could also make that argument. So that is where there needs to be a justification and a better argument. I am sure that the Minister is grateful that the Member is rounding in behind her and trying to help her, but it is an argument that is more for her to make than anybody else. It is certainly her job to do that.

Joe Byrne was our penultimate Member to speak, and he raised his concerns about the voluntary exit scheme. He called finding 20,000 fewer posts across the public sector a "tall order". Again, this is where I get confused, although some might say that I am easily confused. The SDLP agreed that figure. On 19 December, the SDLP agreed a position, which is now being referred to as the Stormont Castle agreement. The position was agreed amongst ourselves that our target would be a reduction of 20,000 in the public sector's headcount. It was a position that was taken to the Secretary of State, who then took it to the Prime Minister and sold it to him. It helped to inform their response to our overall call for a financial package.

Mr Byrne: I appreciate the Minister giving way. Does he accept, however, that there has to be a calibrated and managed approach to make sure that we do not end up with a net deficit of 20,000 jobs? As we reduce the public sector, we have to create jobs in the private sector. An economic development plan is crucial to making that happen.

Mr Hamilton: I have made the point that there is an economic plan in place. That is the economic strategy that the Executive, including his party colleague, the Minister of the Environment, agreed. In fact, it was probably the previous Environment Minister, who is sitting behind the Member, who agreed that economic strategy when it went through the Executive. That is in place. The devolution of corporation tax will obviously add to and enhance that.

The Member is right to raise issues and concerns that I have also expressed. There will be an effect on our economy of having 20,000 fewer people in the public sector. If he is trying to raise concerns on the basis that the SDLP was almost opposed to that, which is what I felt that he was doing, I remind him that, as with welfare reform, his party signed up to a package of reforms, to an agreed position on objectives and to reducing the size of the public sector.

I think that I have dealt with several of Mr McCallister's points. He raised the Port of Belfast issue, which I addressed. He also raised the cost of corporation tax, and I talked about the stepping and staging of costs and the potential savings from the voluntary exit scheme. We may be able to deal with what the comprehensive spending round meant for the protection of health and education in the Northern Ireland Budget. That may not be done easily, but we may have more room to do that.

I was not entirely sure whether Mr McCallister was for or against the package of welfare reform measures. There were so many votes last week that I cannot remember how he voted. There is a cost, and he asked where the money would come from. The Executive, in my view rightly, agreed a package of measures, and that comes with a cost. The Budget Bill gives effect to the Vote on Account for next year. In the first year, which is next year, the cost will be only — only, I say — £25 million. That is significantly less than the estimate of £70 million that we set aside a package for in the draft Budget, so we have saved money. There is some room in the future cost estimates. They have been quite liberal in their estimation, and I do not think that it will cost anywhere near as much as was estimated. He was right to point out that that is money that will come from somewhere else, but I think that, on balance, faced with having welfare reform without any changes or welfare reform with the changes that we were able to afford and deliver, we were right to go for the latter. That will come with a cost, but it is a cost and a price worth paying.

The Budget Bill brings to a close the 2014-15 financial year and makes provision for the early months of 2015-16. It also provides for expenditure on the new judiciary pension scheme. The Assembly has played a vital role in the formation of the Bill. It is a result of the Executive and the Assembly's agreement to Budget 2011-15, the associated Main Estimates voted for in June 2014 and the changes agreed by the Executive during the June, October and January monitoring rounds for 2014-15.

As decision makers, we have spent much time debating, agreeing and revising the Budget plans. The process started back in 2010 — at times, it feels like the debate started back in 2010 — with debates on the 2011-15 Budget and concluded only last month with the Executive's agreement of the January monitoring round. I commend the Assembly for the role that it has played in that process and I ask it to support the Bill.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Before we proceed to the Question, I remind Members that the motion, as it is on the Budget Bill, requires cross-community support.

Question put.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 67; Noes 19.

AYES

Nationalist

Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr Brady, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Hazzard, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Mr McElduff,

Ms McGahan, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McKay, Ms Maeve McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr Ó Muilleoir, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Unionist

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

Other

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

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr McQuillan and Mr G Robinson.

NOES

Nationalist

Mr Attwood, Mr Byrne, Dr McDonnell, Mr McGlone, Mr McKinney, Mr A Maginness, Mr Rogers.

Unionist

Mr Allister, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson, Mr Elliott, Mr Kinahan, Mr McCallister, Mr B McCrea, Mr McGimpsey, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mr Swann.

Other

Mr Agnew.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr McKinney and Mr Rogers.

Total Votes	*86*	*Total Ayes*	*67*	*[77.9%]*
Nationalist Votes	*34*	*Nationalist Ayes*	*27*	*[79.4%]*
Unionist Votes	*45*	*Unionist Ayes*	*34*	*[75.6%]*
Other Votes	*7*	*Other Ayes*	*6*	*[85.7%]*

Resolved (with cross-community support):

That the Second Stage of the Budget Bill [NIA Bill 45/11-16] be agreed.

Adjourned at 7.07 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 17 February 2015

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Ministerial Statement

Individual Funding Request Process: Evaluation Findings

Mr Wells (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): Mr Speaker, at the outset, I thank you for your letter regarding my wife's health. It was much appreciated, along with all the messages of support that I have received from Members throughout the House.

My predecessor launched an evaluation of the individual funding request (IFR) process for specialist drugs on 24 September 2014. The evaluation is now complete, and I want to take this opportunity to brief the Assembly on its findings and on how I propose to take the issue forward.

Like the previous Minister, I have heard the concerns raised by cancer patients and survivors, charities, the pharmaceutical industry and, indeed, many colleagues in the Assembly that the current process of providing access to new specialist medicines in Northern Ireland could be strengthened. Before going into the results of the evaluation, I should be clear that, while I absolutely recognise the importance of new drugs to patients, we do need to acknowledge that drug therapies are only one aspect of cancer treatment. Early diagnosis, timely surgery and radiotherapy are of paramount importance in improving patient outcomes, and those are also the treatments that have the potential to lead to actual cures.

In recent years, we have seen significant investment in cancer services in Northern Ireland, and that has led to real improvements in outcomes for patients across a range of cancers. A recent European-wide study has shown that survival rates for lung, breast and prostate cancers in Northern Ireland are the best in the United Kingdom. The improvements that have been made have been brought about through investment in cancer services and by a major refocusing on how the service is delivered. We have established cancer targets, instigated extensive reforms and invested in the staff and infrastructure necessary to bring our cancer services up to the standard expected of a modern high quality health service. We have also been able to provide better access to a wide range of evidence-based treatments, including drugs and radiotherapy. Cancer services have been reorganised in recent years so that professionals with an expertise in treating the most common cancers can be brought together.

Patients who are treated by professionals specialising in cancer and working together as a multidisciplinary team have a better outcome than those not managed by such teams.

Investment in cancer services over the past 10 years has been considerable. It has included: the opening of the Belfast cancer centre in 2006 at a cost of £70 million; additional radiotherapy capacity at the Belfast cancer centre, where two new linear accelerators have been installed at a cost of around £3 million; and a £66 million investment has provided a new radiotherapy unit at the Altnagelvin Hospital, which is planned to open in 2016, by which time the Belfast cancer centre will have reached full capacity. Older Members of the Assembly will remember that, at one stage, that very welcome new facility was cancelled because of an apparent lack of funding. I am glad to say that my predecessor, Edwin Poots, made absolutely certain that funding was found for that much-needed facility, and I have committed myself to providing the funding for the running of it, in conjunction with my colleagues in the Irish Republic.

The improvements have been impressive, but we cannot afford to be complacent. This has all been achieved against a background of increasing demand. The next few statistics that I am about to give you will be quite shocking. Since 2009-10, the number of patients receiving treatment for cancer after an urgent referral has increased by 42·3%. There are approximately 8,500 new cases of cancer diagnosed each year in Northern Ireland and, with an ageing population, that is likely to increase. Indeed, on World Cancer Day, Cancer Research UK announced that, according to its findings, one in two people will be diagnosed with the disease over the course of their lifetime. That is a staggering statistic, but it is also at least partly good news, in that it means that more people are being diagnosed and are surviving longer. Although that is categorically a good thing, it will of course lead to increased pressure on our cancer services.

I move on to the IFR evaluation. The evaluation in the report that I am dealing with this morning was originally intended to test purely whether the IFR process was meeting its objectives. However, its remit was later widened to include additional factors, such as: arrangements for access to specialist drugs in other UK jurisdictions; the early access to medicines scheme (EAMS); the pharmaceutical price regulation scheme (PPRS); and the potential for the reintroduction of prescription charges to finance a specialist drugs fund.

The evaluation report covers each of those areas, and I will outline the findings in a moment, but I want to make it very clear, to the avoidance of all doubt, that I am opposed to the introduction of a cancer drugs fund (CDF) similar to that operating in England. I am opposed to that. There are a number of reasons for that, not the least of which

is that specialist drugs are used to treat a large number of serious conditions other than cancer. We should not simply confine our understanding of the situation to cancer alone. As I see it, any solution should therefore address access to specialist drugs for all patients, rather than focusing on one distinct group, to the disadvantage of the rest. Furthermore, there are a large number of new licensed drugs coming onto the market each year. In order to determine which of those new treatments offers the best prospect of improvement over standard therapies, they must be assessed for clinical and cost effectiveness before they are made routinely available. The National Health Service and Health and Social Care (HSC) in Northern Ireland are guided in that process by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE), which has an international reputation of excellence in scientific rigour, independence and objectivity.

In its original format, CDF offered no incentive to the pharmaceutical industry to keep prices low and, in fact, introduced a risk that companies could bypass and undermine NICE assessment of new drugs. Indeed, in the aftermath of the well-publicised overspend of £150 million on the CDF, the authorities in England are developing an enhanced link to clinical and cost effectiveness for any drug to be made available through it. The new Scottish system, the new medicines fund, is a more attractive model, offering as it does a new clinical peer-review process and an enhanced role for the patient within that.

However, the Scottish national health service is in a very different financial position to our own and is using receipts from the pharmaceutical price regulation scheme to resource this new fund. The PPRS agreement is a UK-wide arrangement, negotiated between the Department of Health in London and the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry (ABPI). The 2014 PPRS was implemented in Northern Ireland on 1 January 2014. At this stage, I cannot be definitive about the scale of the payments Northern Ireland is likely to receive through PPRS. The current financial pressures on the health service also mean that it is not possible to commit to using PPRS receipts solely to fund new medicines. However, I very much welcome the scheme and the positive way in which the ABPI has worked with government to bring it about.

In Northern Ireland, the IFR process was originally set up to provide access to specialist drugs that are not normally commissioned in circumstances in which there is an agreed clinical need. Officials in the trusts and the Health and Social Care Board have worked hard and shown great commitment in making decisions about access to new specialist drugs within the constraints of the existing IFR system. I thank them for this work and emphasise that the changes that I am now proposing are no reflection on their performance; rather, they are about improving the system in which they operate. Having considered the available evidence, I still believe that, with the significant changes that I will now outline, the IFR process can remain an effective mechanism for providing access to specialist drugs for patients in Northern Ireland.

With this in mind, the findings of the evaluation are as follows. First, the existing exceptionality criteria should be amended to remove the reference to 95%. In the course of discussions with stakeholders, the most commonly cited difficulty with the current system has been the 95% exceptionality criteria, whereby clinicians who seek to apply for an IFR must be able to demonstrate that their patient is:

> *"outside the range of clinical circumstances presented by at least 95% of patients with the same medical condition at the same stage of progression … and is likely to gain significantly more benefit for the intervention".*

While it is reasonable to expect clinicians to demonstrate some level of exceptionality, there is a compelling case that the current definition applied in Northern Ireland sets the bar too high. Many groups have contacted me in the last four or five years in my position as Chair of the Committee, Deputy Chair of the Committee and currently as Minister to say that they felt that this is an incredibly high threshold and is very difficult to meet.

The second main recommendation is that the establishment of regional scrutiny committees should be considered to ensure that all IFR applications are subject to regionally consistent clinical input and peer review. At trust level, the scrutiny of IFR applications varies significantly, which may result in some variation in decisions made regionally. The Department also heard anecdotal evidence that this local variability can have the effect of discouraging applications and may have a negative impact on patient confidence through a perceived lack of transparency in the process. To resolve this, the Department proposes to work with the Health and Social Care Board and the trusts to establish one or more regional scrutiny bodies to consider all IFR applications at trust level.

The third recommendation is that the existing IFR guidance should be revised to include greater transparency. Throughout the evaluation process, the team received feedback criticising the alleged lack of openness of the process for patients. The team also found that there was a perceived lack of accessible information on the numbers and detail of unsuccessful applications. As well as reviewing the administrative arrangements, as I mentioned, it would be a worthwhile exercise to review the existing guidance to increase transparency for clinicians and patients in the overall process.

The fourth recommendation is that the Department should establish a specialist medicines fund to meet the costs of administering and maintaining access to specialist drugs.

I suspect that there will be a lot of interest from Members in that recommendation.

10.45 am

Removing the 95% exceptionality criteria and creating one or more regional scrutiny committees will, of course, attract costs, whether due to the increased number of IFR applications or the administrative costs attached. To ensure that the changes are sustainable, I propose the creation of a specialist medicines fund to fully resource the developments and support wider medicines pressures.

To resource the new fund, the recommendation is that the HSC reintroduce charges for prescriptions. I empathise entirely with patients who have undergone trauma and stress related to their treatment, and I want to make certain that they receive the most effective treatment possible for their condition. However, we need to face the fact that my Department does not currently have the

finances required to introduce the changes that I have set out in a sustainable manner. The issue is one that I feel passionately about. I want to make sure that the changes happen and that they are sustainable in the long term, but I cannot do it sustainably without finding a source of additional funding.

Prescription charges were abolished in Northern Ireland in April 2010. The cost of providing free prescriptions was found from increased efficiencies in the Department of Health's budget at that time, and no additional funding was sought to support the introduction of that policy. In view of the current financial position, I do not think that it is unreasonable to ask people to contribute to the cost of their prescriptions and to provide a financial foundation for innovative and specialist medicines for the future. I believe that this is an appropriate time to reconsider the provision of free prescriptions in Northern Ireland.

Reintroducing charges for prescriptions is about making funding available for specialist medicines in a secure and sustainable way in the long term. I understand that it will take time to put this into practice, and, in the coming months, I will explore every possible option for making the changes to the IFR process as quickly as possible. I assure Members that once the public have had their say on this important issue, I will bring it to the attention of the Executive as a matter of urgency.

In view of the tremendous interest in the evaluation, I release today the findings of the report for public consultation. The consultation period will run for 12 weeks from today, and my Department will hold a number of consultation events to make sure that everyone's voice is heard before we finalise these proposals. I look forward to hearing the public's views, and I also look forward to hearing the views of Members, especially those who sit on the Health Committee, on this important issue.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin (The Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his statement on a hugely important topic to us all. I welcome his acceptance that the exceptionality clause is set too high. It is a barrier for clinicians, GPs and patients alike. The question is this: what will it be replaced by? I note that the Minister was very specific in his opposition to the cancer drugs fund in England. A view shared by a number of charities is that it is not sustainable.

The Minister talked up the concept of a specialist medicine fund. I think that most people would accept that as a concept. However, will the Minister clarify to the House the current cost of waste in the system, the potential savings from the use of generic drugs and, importantly, the cost of implementing the scheme that he refers to today? If he is convinced that prescription charges are the only answer, maybe he will clarify to the House, given the huge health inequalities, exactly how much people will be expected to pay.

Mr Wells: The Chair asks some very valid questions, which I would expect from the House. First, the model that we are thinking of, which will go out to public consultation, is along the lines of a 30p, 50p or £1·00 charge per prescription per person for everyone. However, because there are so many people with long-term conditions who could not possibly afford to pay that regularly, we are thinking about a season ticket — let us call it that for the sake of argument — costing, we think, although we do not know, about £20·00 or £25·00.

Those are the sorts of figure that are being suggested. We are still working on the model at the moment. Figures will be released for the consultation to work out how much each of the models would produce. That would cover all prescriptions for an entire year. In GB, in England, at the moment, the cost is £26 a quarter. Many people have told me that they would welcome the chance to make some contribution to health-care provision. They feel that it is unfair that people are getting prescriptions entirely for free.

The Chairperson makes a very valid point about wastage. As she knows, the permanent secretary is looking at administrative wastage in the service, with a view to taking out significant savings. I see the administration of what is being proposed costing several hundred thousand pounds rather than several million pounds. There will definitely be costs associated with it. We found that, when we had prescription charges under the old model, we were spending a very large amount of money on enforcement and scrutiny. That was not a good use of resources. In the proposed situation, it would not be a case of having to check prescriptions to see whether a person was entitled to free prescriptions. It would be relatively easy to scrutinise because everyone would be paying.

We have been driving up the rate of our use of generic drugs. I think that the last time that I looked at it, it was at 72%. It is still 72%. Each one percentage point rise saves us £6 million a year. Of course, the difficulty is that we have picked the low-hanging fruit. The result is that it is more and more difficult to increase the level of use, but I certainly want to see that work continue. For instance, the cost of the administration of prescription charges under the old model was £2·5 million a year. That was a drain on resources. We have here an initial set-up cost and administrative costs. Again, we are working on those models. I certainly want to keep cost down to an absolute minimum.

Mrs Cameron: I very much welcome the Minister's statement. The issue of cancer drugs was first raised to me by the late Mrs Una Crudden. I think that her husband and family will also very much welcome the statement and a move towards looking at the reintroduction of a prescription charge that could potentially lengthen the lives of the terminally ill, especially cancer patients.

Can the Minister confirm that the income raised from any such charge would be dedicated to specialist drugs and not be eaten up in any other part of the health service?

Mr Wells: That is a very important question. Members will not agree to anything that simply fills a black hole in some other part of the health service budget. What we are committing ourselves to is to using the money to help establish the specialist medicines fund to support approved and unapproved medicines. I can guarantee that the additional funding will allow HSC to improve access to unapproved drugs, but some of it may also be required to meet pressures in approved drugs. I will commit myself here to openness and transparency on that. We are more than happy to allow the Health Committee, the cancer charities and so on sight of exactly what is coming in and where it is being spent. There has to be absolute openness and transparency, because we are going to ask people to make a small contribution for their prescriptions. If they

are handing their 30p, 50p or whatever across the counter, they will want to know that it is being used to help people in need.

One of the most painful experiences that I have had as Health Minister was sitting across the table from Una Crudden on several occasions and her making an impassioned plea for a drug that would help those with ovarian cancer and extend their life. The present system means that we were unable to offer people such as Una hope. I hope and pray that, as a result of the changes, we will be able to look at those people and say that, provided that the local committees are happy that it is an effective treatment being provided, we can offer them that hope. Implicit in what we are doing here is a significant increase in expenditure on specialist medicines. That is why we need the extra money.

More will be spent on those specialist treatments in Northern Ireland, but we cannot have the situation of an open-ended chequebook that has occurred in England, which has run out of control. It still has to have some form of exceptionality test. I will give you an example. I dealt with two drugs yesterday, which I will not name. One of them costs £220,000 per year per patient for four people in Northern Ireland, and the other one costs £252,000 per patient in Northern Ireland. That is the sort of money that we are talking about. Those drugs are often what are called orphan drugs. The costs of development are spread over such a small number of patients that the cost is incredibly high. That is unfortunately where we are moving and is why we need the extra money to fund them.

Last year, we spent an extra £12 million simply funding the NICE-approved drugs that became available automatically. That has eaten up any PPRS income almost entirely. Therefore, we need a fresh source of income so that we can offer hope to those very needy people. I do not want to sit in my room any longer and say to folk that, because of our restrictions and the 95% exceptionality test, we cannot offer them any possible outcome.

Mr McKinney: The SDLP welcomes the announcement in large part. It is a tribute to the many people who have campaigned against what is a fundamental inequality in that many of these drugs have been available elsewhere in the UK but not here. I welcome, as a point of principle, the fact that the Minister has made a number of announcements. The SDLP will have reservations about tying it to prescription charges, and we will reflect those in any consultation.

In relation to openness and transparency, I note that the Minister has not revealed any details around the PPRS. Will the public not need to be doubly convinced? The PPRS was about making drugs available to people, yet it has been used elsewhere in the system. What practical guarantees can the Minister give today and throughout the process that any concept of a prescription charge will relate to specific cancer and specialist drug provision?

I have one other comment, if I may. The Department is in dispute with pharmacies over moneys, and they find themselves very stretched. Who will collect that? Will they get remunerated for doing so?

Mr Wells: If I was sitting in his chair, I would be asking those exact questions. I am indebted to MLA John McCallister, who asked a question on that subject very recently, albeit that the answer may not yet be available on the website, and so I can answer Mr McKinney's first point specifically. He asked me to outline the quarterly income from the PPRS to the health service budget. In quarter 1, which is from January to March, it was £3·53 million. In quarter 2, it was £3·83 million. These are all 2014 figures. In quarter 3, it was £3·92 million. It does not take a mathematical genius to add that up; I can do it. If you extrapolate that, you are talking about over £12 million. That has been entirely eaten up by the extra £12 million that we have committed to spend to deal with the increase in NICE-licensed and agreed drugs. While all this is going on, NICE is still adjudicating on a series of new treatments. Once NICE agrees with that at a GB level, we are then in a position where we have to implement those treatments. Therefore, the money has been swallowed up. Whilst we welcome the PPRS — it is good news, and I am very happy that ABPI has agreed to it — the reality is that it does not provide us with the new money that we need.

He also raises the issue of wastage, which is a very valid point. Having listened to him talk about that issue in the media, I know that he feels that, at the moment, he is not in a position to sign up to any administrative charges for prescriptions if there is still perceived wastage. We have set the pharmaceutical budget a very stringent target of £20 million of savings next year, and that will be the tool that we will use to eliminate any perceived wastage.

I can say to him that that aspect of our budget has become more and more efficient. When I was Chair of the Health Committee, we spent £400 million a year on community pharmacy. That is now down to £362 million, largely because of a decrease in wastage, but also a greater uptake of generics. I want to satisfy him that we are dealing with this before I would expect him to agree to what we are proposing. This is a different model; this is not going back to prescription charges of £6·40 per script or £8 in England. This is a standard tariff for every man, woman and child in Northern Ireland, with a ceiling for the year of an unspecified figure, which, we hope, is affordable to the entire community.

11.00 am

Mrs Dobson: Minister, I hope that you share my belief that cancer sufferers, including my constituent the late Mr Brian Coburn, should not be focusing on having to pay thousands for treatment in the final few months of life. Minister, you say in this statement that early diagnosis is paramount, and your ministerial target for treating people following an urgent referral for suspected cancer is 95% within 62 days. Last month, we heard that less than two thirds — just 64·5% — of patients were seen within this time. Is there a crisis in cancer waiting times? What are you doing to address that, considering that it affects all types of cancer?

Mr Wells: First, I pay tribute to Mr Coburn. I watched the programme on BBC 1 about cancer at 3 o'clock in the morning in the Royal on my iPad as I was sitting with my wife. I was taken by his comments, which were very legitimate. Mr Coburn had, of course, made an outstanding contribution to the economic life of Upper Bann.

We face huge pressures on cancer referrals at the moment; I accept that. We get periods when we do not meet the target. That is caused, on this occasion, by an increase of 8,500 people per year getting the bad news about their condition. I am somewhat relieved to hear

that, despite that pressure, our outcomes for many forms of cancer are excellent by UK standards. That is the benefit of concentrating resources in the Belfast cancer centre at the City Hospital site, where all the experts on the conditions come together to give the best possible treatment. We are working hard and trying our best to get back to the target of 95%. Again, however, this emphasises the need for additional resources for cancer treatment.

If some of those drugs were available, it may be that the outcomes for patients in life enhancement would be better. That would put more pressure on the system, because if people live longer, they have to be treated for longer. I made the very important point in answer to one of my first questions in the Assembly — from Mr Brady in 2014 — that, for the first time ever in Northern Ireland, more people who have been diagnosed with cancer will be alive in 10 years than will have passed away. There was also a very useful question from Mr McKinney, which is in the system, asking for an outline of where those improvements have occurred. For some conditions, like childhood leukaemia and prostate cancer, the outcomes are extremely good in Northern Ireland. However, we have a long way to go, and I need a mechanism to raise additional resources to continue that improvement.

Mr Lyttle: I welcome this overdue action today and pay tribute to all those who have been involved in the campaign for equal access to cancer drugs in Northern Ireland, including Cancer Focus NI. I hope also that this demonstrates a departure for the DUP from political campaigning against responsible, fair revenue-raising as a way of funding essential services. I welcome the leadership that the Minister has shown in that regard.

I would like to scrutinise further his dismissal of a pharmaceutical price regulation scheme as an option. He said in his statement that, at this stage, he cannot be definitive about the scale of payments, and he went on to detail those and, indeed, in his answer to my question, he detailed receipt of around £3 million by the regional Health and Social Care Board in June 2014. I ask the Minister to state again why the pharmaceutical price regulation scheme has not been used for a Northern Ireland cancer drugs fund or a specialist medicines fund as per Scotland and what it is being used for instead of achieving equal access to drugs for cancer patients in Northern Ireland?

Mr Wells: Mr McCallister's question for written answer is dated 18 February, so it is literally hot off the press. No doubt he will use that against me in the local press and say that he was on the ball.

We need to understand that PPRS is based on a refund to the Department based on receipts of drug expenditure undertaken. Therefore, to some extent, it is difficult to predict exactly how much is going to come in. It always comes in retrospectively. We introduced the PPRS in Northern Ireland only on 1 January 2014, so whilst we very much welcome it, it is still in its infancy. The Member needs to understand that that income, which, according to the answer given to Mr McCallister, could be £12 million or £13 million, is in the context of £165 million that I need to find to deal with financial pressures in 2015-16. I made the point that we are already committed to spending £12 million in increased budget for pharmacy simply to take cognisance of decisions that NICE in London made. So, we are not yet in a position to be definitive, but it is pretty clear that we are running fast to keep still. That will not provide us with the additional money that we need to do what we should, which is to offer hope to many cancer patients and other patients. Keep remembering that this is beyond cancer. Other life-threatening conditions in Northern Ireland also require those specialist treatments. I know that he has written to me on several occasions on behalf of his constituents on these issues, as has almost every Member and every MP.

The sums clearly indicate to me that the PPRS is useful, but it is not going to meet our ultimate need. I welcome his support for some form of additional charge for prescriptions. I want the Health Committee and the Assembly to debate the issue and to come to a thought-out view on it. At the end of the day, I am going to need that support because the system that we have here in the Assembly means that things can be stopped very quickly if they do not have cross-party support.

Mr Speaker: We have just completed the first round of questions. I have quite an extensive list of Members who have their names down. I ask Members to come as quickly as possible to their question and to restrict themselves to one question. That will give us the opportunity to bring in those who are on the list.

Mr Givan: I welcome the Minister's statement, particularly the news that Northern Ireland has one of the best survival rates for some types of cancer anywhere in the United Kingdom. I commend the Minister for wanting to take forward the issue. I believe that he is with the public on this, who are ahead of some politicians on the reintroduction of prescription charges.

Cancer Research UK has indicated that the cancer drugs fund in England is not financially sustainable and does not sit well with other cost-effective assessments, such as NICE. Will the Minister elaborate on why he believes that the cancer drugs fund established in England is not the best way forward for Northern Ireland?

Mr Wells: We spend £600 million a year on drugs in Northern Ireland, and we spend £27 million on specialist cancer drugs already. I do not want people thinking that we are not already committed to that field. All NICE-approved cancer drugs will be made available to people in Northern Ireland.

The English CDF was established at £200 million a year. There has been a growing consensus throughout England — it was echoed by many of the respondents to the consultation on the individual funding requests (IFR) review — that it is only a short-term fix to a complex problem. It is not sustainable or equitable because it deals only with cancer patients; it does not give hope to those with other conditions. In 2014, it went over budget by £140 million. That is on the basis of a £200 million budget. That indicates the enormous stress that it is under. English authorities are having a rapid review of how they are doing things to make it more sustainable.

We have looked at models in Wales and Scotland. I like to think that what we are proposing takes extracts from all the models to try to bring some form of sustainable model to Northern Ireland. When we go out to consultation on this, if folk feel like we have got it wrong, by all means, please let us know. We are trying to find a system that offers hope to many hundreds of people in Northern Ireland but does not lead to an unsustainable model where we are going to end up having to close the fund because it is running out

of control. We feel that we have a fine balance between the various models. I understand that, at the moment, we are spending about £1·9 million a year on these specialist, non-NICE-approved drugs. Our model suggests that that could treble or quadruple under the proposals that I am making this morning. That is a genuine commitment to many people, but there will still be patients in Northern Ireland to whom the committees, after they have looked at the applications, will say no. There will still be situations where the assessment will be either that the drug is not effective or it is not cost-effective. There will still be difficult decisions to make, but much fewer than today.

Ms McCorley: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a ráiteas agus cuirim fáilte roimh an ráiteas s'aige inniu. I thank the Minister for the statement, which I welcome. The establishment of regional scrutiny committees is a welcome recommendation, because it is about addressing inequalities in the system where local variations may exist. In that context, can he give an assurance that a new regional scrutiny committee coming into being to consider applications for IFR will not incur any unnecessary delay for people requiring treatment?

Mr Wells: The benefit of those new committees is that they will not be bound by the 95% threshold which, we all agree, is so ridiculously high that very few people can avail themselves of it. We will be asking these committees, which will be made up of experts in the field, to move quickly on applications, examine them very carefully and be transparent. Part of the problem at the moment is that many patients are left without any detailed knowledge of why their IFR application was not made.

I also need to emphasise that inherent in what we are doing is that many clinicians who, up to now, have felt it was not worthwhile applying because of the 95% exceptionality criteria will now feel that it is well worth their effort in going through the paperwork to apply. Initially, there is going to be a surge in applications if we go into this model. The committees will meet weekly, which will certainly help the situation, and it will be a much more efficient system. It will also ensure that there is equal access to drugs throughout Northern Ireland, so we will have some consistency. Do not be surprised if the numbers of IFR referrals rise quite significantly in the first few months; that is good news, because that means that clinicians feel that, under what we are suggesting, there is a much more realistic chance of getting the drugs made available and paid for. We will watch that very carefully.

I find this issue very difficult personally, because some of the people whom I have dealt with have passed on even in my short time as Health Minister. I want a system that allows me to look patients straight in the eye and say that we have a lean, fast and efficient system that will give you a decision quickly on your clinician's IFR referral. I will be watching this very carefully to make certain that bureaucracy is kept to a minimum and that we ensure that we can offer hope to these people, who are often at a terribly low stage in their lives.

Mr Spratt: I thank the Minister for his statement to the House this morning. Given that I benefited from a specialist drug some two and a half years ago from an oncology point of view, I certainly welcome the statement. The Minister is just after saying that the scrutiny committees would have experts in the field. Will he ensure that those experts will be the oncologists, the surgeons and the very dedicated teams that we have that deal with cancer and things such as MS? I welcome the fact that other drugs are included, as well as cancer drugs.

Mr Wells: I thank Mr Spratt for his question and pay tribute to Mr Spratt, Ms Bradley, Mr McMullan, Seán Rogers and others in the Assembly who have gone through that journey of a cancer diagnosis and who have been courageous enough to come forward and make their views known in the Assembly about their personal circumstances. We have all learned a lot from listening to their experiences, and that has been helpful in the improvement of services.

11.15 am

I can absolutely guarantee that this is not going to be a committee made up of administrators or bureaucrats. This will be a committee largely of experts in the field, the oncologists who know what they are talking about and whether a drug treatment or new form of treatment will lead to a real improvement in the condition of the patient.

Sadly, most of these drugs are not life-preserving; they are life-enhancing and increase life expectancy. There are very few treatments that we can say lead to a cure, although Allister Murphy from east Antrim, who came to see me to lobby on this issue, made the point that sometimes that can extend the life of a patient to the point when another drug becomes available. Therefore, it can, on occasion, offer hope.

The committees will be made up of leading clinicians. Oncologists will be an important component because 66% of IFR applications are the result of cancer diagnosis. One committee will be dedicated to oncology and one to other conditions. These are the people at the coalface; experienced clinicians who are European leaders in the treatment of cancer and who will be making the decisions. I would put my trust in them because the evidence would indicate that the cancer centre, particularly under the management of Paddy Johnston and his team, was producing first-rate results for people in terribly difficult circumstances.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I, too, welcome the Minister's statement. Minister, obviously you envisage a specialist medicine fund that will include other conditions. Mr Spratt mentioned MS and other chronic and debilitating conditions. The Chair asked about cost. I am not sure if you gave her a figure, so I am just wondering whether you have any projected figure at this time for that specialist medicines fund.

Mr Wells: No. We envisage that the cost of running the committees would be relatively small in the overall scheme of things. Remember that we are already spending. For instance, last year we spent £1·5 million on 170 individual funding requests. It is difficult to separate out the cost of the additional expenditure on drugs from the cost of the committees, but I do not see them being a large component of the overall cost.

Going by the Barnett formula as a guide, if we were to implement the cancer drugs fund on the same ratio as the rest of the United Kingdom, it would be between £6 million and £10 million. Our model is being considered specifically for Northern Ireland and is not directly comparable, but we expect the extra cost in drugs to be between £4·8 million

and £9·5 million, roughly. Please do not hold me to that because that model has to be refined significantly. That, of course, depends upon at what level the committees agree to funding. It could be up to the higher end.

That is on top of all the other pressures that we are facing in Northern Ireland in health. Unfortunately, there are some difficult decisions to be made in terms of finding the £50 million in savings in the non-health trust element of the budget — that is, the Fire and Rescue Service, the PHA, the BSO etc — and the £165 million in efficiency savings that have to be found within the six trusts. I can tell you that there is some burning of the midnight oil going on within the Department as we work out how to do that. What we simply do not have in that context is the extra £6 million to £9 million required to fund cancer and other drugs on top of the £12 million that we have to find for the NICE-approved drugs.

We are coming through a very difficult phase. I know that Members will say, "Well, what's different now from the decision made by Mr McGimpsey six or seven years ago?" Since then, we have moved on to a totally different financial planet for health in Northern Ireland, and that is the problem. Demand is rising inexorably. When you consider that there has been a 43% increase in referrals for cancer diagnosis since 2009, that gives you an indication of the speed with which this condition is growing in Northern Ireland. One in two means that 54 people in this Chamber will face cancer. That is how frightening it is. Four have faced it already, but there could be another 50. That is where we are going with this disease.

Mr Byrne: I welcome the statement by the Minister. Paragraph 4 states that early diagnosis, timely surgery and radiotherapy are of paramount importance to client outcomes. What advice will the Minister give to a family that has a member who has been diagnosed with cancer and needs surgery but cannot get it under the NHS for at least six months? They could get it next week if they pay £2,000 to a surgeon who works in the NHS but who also does private work.

Mr Wells: That would be an unusual case. It is mostly orthopaedic surgery that is carried out in the private sector. He, from the Western Trust area, can at least tell his constituents that in 2016 there will be a state-of-the-art £66 million facility at Altnagelvin in Londonderry, which will be co-funded by our colleagues in the Irish Republic and will mean that the capacity problems that we have at the City Hospital are somewhat relieved.

That is a commitment that I have made, and Edwin Poots also made it. Others said it could not be done, but the Member will no doubt be invited to the ribbon-cutting of that much-needed facility in a year's time. That offers hope for his constituents in Omagh and Strabane that there is extra capacity.

In the meantime, we are working as hard as we can to relieve the waiting list. If a case is red-flagged — if it is put forward by the oncologist as an urgent case — we will endeavour to see that person within two weeks. I am very interested in the case the Member raised, and I ask him to write to me and quote the difficulties. I am very keen to see why that person has been waiting six months and is looking at the option of private treatment. I would like to check with Western Trust officials and the City Hospital's cancer centre to see why that is happening, because something just is not right about the difficult dilemma his constituent is in. If the Member writes to me, or even emails me today, we will turn that round as quickly as we can.

Mr Beggs: I too welcome the Minister's statement and indicate my continuing support for a specialist medicines fund in Northern Ireland similar to that in Scotland. I have concerns about a potential £25 charge, or £1 charge, for those who may have long-term conditions and particularly those who may be living in poverty. Given the recent Northern Ireland Audit Office report into primary care prescribing, which indicated that very significant savings could still be made and that one drug alone — Pregabalin — could be costing an additional £10 million because of oversubscription. The report also found that some GP prescribing rates per patient are twice that of others. Why is he not gaining efficiency savings to fund such a proposal?

Mr Wells: That is a very valid point. First, we are imposing very stringent savings on the budget for 2015-16 to try to deal with those issues. Like everyone else, I am determined to drive down the cost of prescriptions; and we have been successful in the move to generic medicines.

He made the point that I expected to be made at the very start of this debate on the £25 or £20. The consultation, which will be open to all of the public, will have several options, including the "do nothing" option, which would mean that we stay as we are. Various models will be set out, and one of them includes the figure of £25. We want to set it at a figure that is affordable to our community. For most people, £25 for an entire year's supply of drugs, the value of which could be running into tens of thousands of pounds worth of value, is welcome.

My wife is on four or five prescriptions a day, and I am sure that that is running into thousands of pounds per year. Obviously, I could pay the £25, but what I want to hear from the community generally is whether that is acceptable. If we drop it to £15, the fund will be smaller for vital drugs. The difficulty is in getting a model that produces the income in a way that is sustainable in the community. From the various views I have received, a figure of £25 could be seen as a sensible compromise for people who could not possibly afford to pay £1 every time they went into the pharmacist because it would cause real poverty.

That is why the consultation will be so important. What do the public really think about that suggestion? Generally speaking, I find a lot of support in the community. People regularly write to me and say, "Why don't you address this issue?" and, "Why, when I go into the pharmacy, am I not expected to make a small contribution?" Remember that the pound comes nowhere near the cost of the prescription; it is only a tiny fraction of its value. We were paying £6·40 before the end of prescription charges. In England, they pay over £8·00. A season ticket in England costs over £100. Ours will be significantly different. We continue to press on inefficiencies, and it is a long-term situation.

I have seen some of the figures that have been quoted for bespoke designer drugs for specific patients. With the sort of money that is coming down the pipeline for what can be assigned to a particular patient for a specific condition, we will have to develop a model that will mean that we can answer that demand on a long-term basis. Some of those drugs are incredibly effective, but the prices are, quite

honestly, frightening, so we need a long-term, sustainable model that we can use to pay for them. I cannot see the health service being in a position, in the foreseeable future, to meet that increasing demand. I know that the Member's constituents in East Antrim will be lobbying him intensely when those drugs become available.

Mr Dickson: Minister, thank you for your statement. I welcome and recognise your point that you cannot make those changes or make them sustainably without finding a source of additional funding. So I will turn to the additional funding and the suggestion that there may be a £20 or £25 charge. The previous prescription-charging regime was a shambles, and more of the income went on administration than on what the job was supposed to be about: paying for drugs. We are talking about very specialist drugs, and that is very welcome. Will the Minister assure the House that the administration of any future prescription regime will be effective and efficient? From my £25, I expect only a few pence, if even that, to go on administration.

Mr Wells: I thought that that point would have been raised in the second or third question today. As we are guaranteeing total transparency, people will know exactly what is coming in and what is going out. If we are successful, I want to be able to stand here in a year's time and show Members that, if we have brought in £20 million, we were spending £19·5 million or whatever on specific cancer drugs and other drugs. That is why that commitment, which I will also make to the Committee, is so essential. The Member will be able to see the costs.

One interesting model has been suggested, although none of this is concrete. At the moment, we pay pharmacists a small administration charge of about a £1 for every drug that they dispense. One idea is to stop paying that and simply collect the £1 and put it into the kitty. That would eliminate a huge amount of administration. I am sure that that is too simple and that there would be resultant issues. I have spoken to pharmacists about the concept and their overall view of it, and there is general support for it. We do not want a model that will eat up vast amounts of money in administration.

The Member is absolutely right about the old prescription charge. We had communities in Northern Ireland in which 90% of those who walked through the door of the pharmacy got free prescriptions. I find that very hard to believe. That happened even in areas in the Member's constituency, like Carrickfergus, which is not an area of rural poverty and where there are high rates of employment. It always amazed me that practically everybody got free prescriptions.

When I was quite ill, just before the end of the prescription-charging regime, I was asked whether I got free prescriptions. I thought that that was a pretty silly question, but I was invited to sign the back of the form — not that I did. I thought to myself that, if I signed the back of the form and was not entitled to do so, what would the chances be of getting caught. We were spending £2·5 million a year trying to police that, and one of the reasons why I supported Mr McGimpsey when he abolished prescription charges was that I did not see it as an efficient model, as we were spending so much money policing it.

The good thing about a small blanket charge is that there are no problems with enforceability or fraud, because everybody will pay it. People need to get their heads around the fact that there will be people in Northern Ireland who will be paying that small charge for the first time ever. That is understandable.

There is a second issue in that, since the abolition of prescription charges, the numerical demand for prescriptions has risen very significantly. If you put some value on a prescription, albeit quite a small value, people will stop and think whether they really need it and whether they should be demanding it for free when they can buy it across the counter. That aspect is a very minor consideration in the overall scheme. We are trying to purchase essential drugs, not save on demand.

11.30 am

Mr Allister: I welcome the Minister's return to full operation and wish his wife a continuing and full recovery.

On the issue of potential prescription charges, the Minister seems fairly clear that he is looking for something modest and universal. Does it therefore follow that he emphatically rules out, as I think that he should, means-testing, so that there are no out-of-control administration charges? What assurance is there that, once introduced, these charges will not creep or gallop endlessly upwards?

Mr Wells: That is the third question that I predicted was going to arise.

We have a specific idea of the sort of funding that we need to meet demand. We are working on various models as to how we achieve that. We will definitely not be going down the route of means-testing, I can assure him of that. That would negate the whole issue. Let us be honest: it is quite clear that, under the old scheme, people were getting free prescriptions who were not entitled to them. We have to accept that. If you are the local pharmacist in a community and are faced with someone you have known all your life saying, "I'm entitled", in what position is the pharmacist to contradict that? It is very difficult for the customer/pharmacist relationship. In the consultation, a number of options will be set out for prescription charges and the potential exemptions; in other words, the fee. We are finalising those models, and it is not possible at the moment to give any further detail.

I am very aware that this could be seen as a tax by stealth, which we would gradually crank up. We will have total transparency around how this is operated. Members will know what is needed and what we are doing with it. Of course, the Committee will be consulted regularly as to how it is operating. Even if we did not do that, I know that the present Chair would be constantly badgering us about it anyhow. I do not know who will be Minister by the time this is all up and running, but, for as long as I am there, I certainly will not be using it as a way of funding other aspects of health service budgets. We are certainly not going to use it to plug any black holes, of which there are many, in the health service budgets. It will be very clearly ring-fenced for this purpose. It has to rise, but it will rise because demand for these essential drugs and treatments is rising. It is not rising because we are using it as a way of finding money for other things. In addition to the cancer drugs, other treatments are coming online, which are expensive. I would like to be able to offer people the prospect of those new services as well; for example, vaccines. That is my commitment. I know how the House

would react if we tried, by stealth, to use it as simply a fundraising device for health generally.

Mr Agnew: I thank the Minister for his statement. I welcome the advances in cancer treatment. As the Minister knows, many of us have been affected by cancer, directly or indirectly. Less than four years ago, I lost a very close friend to it.

The Minister has acknowledged that there will be those who would have been exempt from paying under the old scheme who will now have to pay under this proposal and those of us, like me and him, who can afford to pay more than what is being proposed. Has any consideration been given to a voluntary payment scheme, which would not have the administrative burden of means-testing but would allow those in need to get their prescriptions free of charge?

Mr Wells: We are talking about maybe 50p or £1. We are not talking about going back to the model of £6·40 or, as in GB, over £8. Certainly, in the consultation, I will be interested to hear whether anyone suggests a voluntary approach. The problem is this: what degree of certainty can you achieve with a voluntary approach? We know what we need to meet the demand for these drugs. We will model how that need can be dealt with, given the fact that we have very clear knowledge of the present demand for prescriptions. The problem is that you could end up committing yourself to very substantial expenditure on much-needed drugs and find that the voluntary income comes nowhere near what one would expect or need. Whilst initially it is attractive, I do not see it being realistic.

Equally, once you get into means-testing and the situation where you ask people whether they have the income to pay, previous evidence shows that, unfortunately, the vast majority of people prefer not to pay. What worries me is that people had the opportunity to be open and honest under the old scheme, and, in many communities, the vast majority chose to say that they could not pay for prescriptions.

I have my doubts about whether all of them were in that position. The figures from his constituency were quite remarkable. I am not convinced that over 80% of the people living in North Down were consistently in a position in which they could not afford prescriptions.

Mr McCallister: I am glad to see the Minister back and wish his wife continued progress in her recovery. I was a little nervous, Mr Speaker, when, as soon as the subject of raising money came up, the Finance Minister rushed down to the Minister's side. I would like an assurance from the Health Minister that health will keep any money raised.

Will the Minister come back with more detailed proposals on how much he thinks that he needs to raise and what an acceptable level of charge is? In many aspects, Mr Givan is right: the public are ahead of the politicians on the need for some level of charging. Will he also look at things like using money from the charge to extend the HPV vaccine programme to young boys?

Mr Wells: I am glad that the Minister of Finance is here with me because I will make absolutely certain that this is additional money. I am certain that the Minister of Finance, even in his darkest hour, would never dream of saying, "The health service is introducing a scheme. The public will take the pain of the small charge and raise £10 million. Therefore, I will reduce the health budget by £10 million to compensate for that". I know that the honourable Member for Strangford is a man of honour and integrity. He would never dream of such a thing, but I remember that additionality was a problem in European funding. This will be extra money, and it will be hypothecated — I was dying for a chance to use that word — in order to secure additional funding.

The Member asked about the amount of money needed. Various models are being postulated. It could be £6 million; it could be £9 million. If I wanted to introduce all the additional services or drugs, including the vaccine that the honourable Member mentioned, it could be up to £24 million or £25 million, but it is a matter for public consultation. The options will be clearly set out, and option 1 will be to do nothing. I will be very interested to hear what the public say on the "do nothing" option, which would mean staying as we are but with no funding for these much-needed treatments.

I welcome the Member's very positive engagement and detect that all Members are at least keeping an open mind. I understand entirely where the Chair of the Health Committee is coming from — I do — and, if I were her, I would be raising the very same points. We have to decide whether our community is ready for this. Will they buy into it? Will they buy into it on the basis that they know that every penny that they put into the till will go towards much-needed treatment for their friends, relatives and, maybe, ultimately, for them?

Mr G Robinson: I thank the Minister for his very welcome statement. How have the numbers of people diagnosed with cancer been changing in Northern Ireland?

Mr Wells: Earlier, I mentioned that the figures are rising very significantly, by 8,500 new diagnoses a year. I do not think that any of us who have not been through that experience — of course, four of our Members have — can understand what a body blow it is for someone to be brought into what is known as "the bad news room". Within the last fortnight, I have been in the "bad news room" twice, so I know exactly what that entails. Individuals sit down with their husband, wife or family and are told, "I'm afraid, Mr Smith or Mr Jones, that the diagnosis is cancer". To this day, that phrase instils fear in the hearts of many. However, I have a friend who has had stomach cancer for 23 years and had a work colleague in Saintfield who has had breast cancer for 19 years. We meet such people regularly. A gentleman in my church was diagnosed with prostate cancer nine years ago and thought that it was terminal. Since the diagnosis, he has become a grandfather three times, got a degree and is still very much alive and healthy thanks to the magnificent treatment that he received in the Belfast City Hospital cancer centre. Therefore, we have to accept that, as we age as a population, there will be more and more cancer. Indeed, I have to set aside £35 million a year in my budget simply to take account of the fact that we are living longer and that much of the disease that we encounter is a result of age.

As we become more successful in treating cancers such as breast cancer and prostate cancer, costs will rise even further, because we will have to continue to find the drugs and treatment to keep those people alive and healthy. The fact that we have four MLAs who are serving their constituents diligently in this House — they are very much with us, I am delighted to say — indicates that real success is being achieved. We want to see that becoming the norm.

We want to reach a situation in which cancer is seen not as a death sentence but as a long-term condition. For 50% of the population, that is where we are at. I believe that the extra money can ensure that others reach that position. We would all be quite happy to pick up the tab for that because it would mean that people are living long, fulfilling and active lives with a long-term condition.

Mr Speaker: Thank you, Minister. That concludes questions on the statement.

Executive Committee Business

Budget Bill: Consideration Stage

Mr Speaker: I call the Minister of Finance and Personnel, Mr Simon Hamilton, to move the Consideration Stage of the Budget Bill.

Moved. — [Mr Hamilton (The Minister of Finance and Personnel).]

Mr Speaker: No amendments have been tabled to the Bill. I propose therefore, by leave of the Assembly, to group the Bill's nine clauses for the Question on stand part, followed by the five schedules and the long title.

Clauses 1 to 9 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Schedules 1 to 5 agreed to.

Long title agreed to.

Mr Speaker: Well done, Minister. That concludes the Consideration Stage of the Budget Bill. The Bill stands referred to the Speaker.

Public Bodies (Abolition of the Advisory Committees on Pesticides) Order 2015: Assembly Consent Motion

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): I beg to move

> *That this Assembly consents to The Public Bodies (Abolition of the Advisory Committees on Pesticides) Order 2015 in the form of the draft laid before the UK Parliament on 15 December 2014.*

Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I am seeking the consent of the Assembly to the abolition of the advisory committees on pesticides (ACPs).

The Public Bodies (Abolition of the Advisory Committees on Pesticides) Order 2015 will abolish the advisory committees on pesticides. In practice, the order dissolves the ACPs in law. By way of brief background, the ACPs are based in Britain and the North of Ireland. They are non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs) that were established under the Food and Environment Protection Act 1985 to give independent advice to government on all matters relating to pesticides.

The ACPs advise Ministers in DEFRA, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), the Department of Health, the Scottish and Welsh Governments, and our own Executive.

The Advisory Committee on Pesticides covers England, Scotland and Wales, while the Advisory Committee on Pesticides NI covers the North of Ireland. In practice, the same body of experts has been appointed under both regulations, meaning that a single committee serves as both legal entities.

Although there is currently no one from the North of Ireland appointed to the ACP here, there is local representation on various pesticide bodies. The Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) is an observer member on the ACP and the working group on pesticide residues in food. The ongoing local representation on relevant bodies is appropriate and sufficient.

The Government's intention to replace the statutory ACPs with an expert committee was announced on 14 October 2010 as an outcome of their 2010 review of public bodies. The First Minister and the deputy First Minister obtained the agreement of the Executive and, subsequently, the Assembly in March 2011 to a legislative consent motion on the then Public Bodies Bill. The ACPs are listed in schedule 1 to the Public Bodies Act 2011 as public bodies that could be abolished.

Following the passing of the Public Bodies Act, DEFRA carried out a wide consultation exercise in March 2012 on the future of the ACPs, with the intention that it would be reconstituted as an expert committee. No responses to the consultation were received from stakeholders across the North of Ireland. Analysis of the 45 responses showed majority support for the British Government's preferred option, and DEFRA made the recommendation that the ACPs be reconstituted. The procedure to move that forward requires the ACPs to be abolished by the making of an abolition order, and for the new expert committee on pesticides to be formed and operate to terms of reference agreed by DEFRA and the devolved Administrations. Existing members will be invited to transfer to the new expert committee.

11.45 am

The running costs for the activities of the ACPs are modest and met by DEFRA, which will continue to fund the new successor expert committee. The abolition of the ACPs is the joint responsibility of the four Agriculture Ministers in Britain and here. The making of the abolition order therefore requires, in line with section 9 of the Public Bodies Act 2011, the consent of our Assembly, the Scottish Parliament and the National Assembly for Wales. The British Government have requested such consent from us, and that is the purpose of the debate today. DEFRA laid a draft order before Westminster on 15 December 2014 under the Public Bodies Act 2011 to abolish the ACPs.

The change to the status of the ACPs is essentially an administrative issue. The members and functions of the committee will remain the same in the new single expert committee. The impact for the North is therefore regarded as minimal. However, legal procedures are required to implement the change, and this includes the bringing of an Assembly consent motion. I therefore commend the motion to the Assembly.

Mr Irwin (The Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development): In March 2011, the Assembly agreed to a legislative consent motion on the Public Bodies Act 2011, which allowed certain public bodies to be dissolved or abolished. One such body is the Advisory Committee on Pesticides, the ACP. The ACP is a non-departmental body established under the Food and Environment Protection Act 1985 to give independent advice to government on all matters relating to pesticides. The function of the Advisory Committee on Pesticides is to provide independent advice to government through the four devolved Administrations. Its key output is about whether a pesticide or an active substance is approved for use. It examines whether it is safe, whether controls can be put in place to make it safe and so on. Essentially, it is the key advisory body on pesticides policy and safety.

The Advisory Committee on Pesticides covers England, Scotland and Wales, and the Advisory Committee on Pesticides NI covers Northern Ireland. In practice, the same body of experts has been appointed for both, meaning that there is a single committee serving both legal entities. The Government have proposed to abolish both those ACPs and replace them with an expert committee of DEFRA. That committee would work for the UK Departments, including the Food Standards Agency and the devolved Administrations, including DARD. The new expert committee on pesticides will be formed and operate to terms of reference agreed by DEFRA and the devolved Administrations.

The process will see the abolition of the committee and will result in its re-establishment as an expert committee, meaning that the committee will be under a different name and status, but its functions and members will remain the same. The procedure is essentially an administrative change that has no real practical impact on the functions that the committee carries out. The main outcome expected from the abolishment of the ACPs and replacement with an expert committee is greater transparency and more effective working. It is considered a non-controversial issue, as it is an administrative change only.

As part of the process, a UK-wide consultation took place, with DARD advising local stakeholders. A total of 45

responses were received, with none from Northern Ireland. As a Committee, we considered the proposal from the Department at the meeting on 9 December 2014 and at the meeting on 13 January 2015. The information received by the Committee clearly showed that the abolition will have minimal effect in Northern Ireland. Therefore, the Committee is content for the Department to proceed in seeking the Assembly's consent to the Public Bodies (Abolition of the Advisory Committee on Pesticides) Order 2015.

Mrs O'Neill: I thank the Chair of the Committee for his comments on the motion and welcome the opportunity to remove from the statute book the Advisory Committee on Pesticides and Advisory Committee on Pesticides for the North of Ireland as listed in schedule 1 to the Public Bodies Act 2011. I commend the motion to the Assembly.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

> *That this Assembly consents to The Public Bodies (Abolition of the Advisory Committees on Pesticides) Order 2015 in the form of the draft laid before the UK Parliament on 15 December 2014.*

Judicial Pensions Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): I beg to move

> *That the draft Judicial Pensions Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 be approved.*

Under the provisions of the Public Service Pensions Act (Northern Ireland) 2014, my Department is the responsible authority for establishing a pension scheme for devolved judicial office holders, principally the tribunal judiciary. The judicial scheme must be established by scheme regulations, a draft of which must be approved by the Assembly.

Following the recommendations of the Independent Public Service Pensions Commission, chaired by Lord Hutton of Furness, all public-service pensions are being reformed. The purpose of the reforms is to make public-service pensions more sustainable and affordable in the long term and fairer to scheme members and other taxpayers.

On 8 March 2012, the Northern Ireland Executive agreed to commit to a policy for a new career average revalued earnings scheme model, with pension age linked to state pension age, to be adopted for general use in the public-service schemes and to adopt that approach consistently for each of the different public-sector pension schemes, in line with their equivalent schemes in Great Britain, and not to adopt different arrangements for Northern Ireland. The 2014 Act provides the statutory framework for the reform of public-service pension schemes. The main changes are the replacement of final salary pension schemes with career average revalued earnings pension schemes and the linking of normal pension age to state pension age for those schemes.

I believe that the reforms to judicial pensions constitute a fair balance between judicial pension scheme members and other taxpayers. The scheme regulations make detailed provision for the operation of the reformed scheme, including the payment of pensions and other benefits and new governance arrangements. The scheme regulations also contain certain technical modifications of primary legislation that must also be made for the other public-service schemes. The other schemes must do this in a separate instrument, subject to the draft affirmative procedure. In accordance with the Executive's agreement, the scheme regulations are closely modelled on the Ministry of Justice's pensions scheme regulations, establishing a new career average revalued earnings scheme for eligible members of the judiciary in England and Wales, Scotland and the non-devolved judiciary in Northern Ireland.

The Department of Finance and Personnel consents to the regulations. At this stage, I thank the Justice Committee for its careful consideration of the draft regulations. It is with the Committee's support that I bring the draft regulations before the House and commend them to it.

Mr Ross (The Chairperson of the Committee for Justice): I am pleased to speak very briefly on the motion on behalf of the Committee for Justice.

The Committee considered the proposals for the statutory rule in May and December of last year. The Committee then considered the draft statutory rule more recently at the meeting on 4 February 2015. As already outlined

by the Minister, the rule provides for the establishment of a career average revalued earnings (CARE) pension scheme for the devolved judiciary and sets out the governance arrangements for it. As Members are aware, the establishment of the scheme is a small part of the wider reform of public-service pension schemes across the United Kingdom. As the Minister stated, there is a strong imperative for the scheme to be in place for 1 April 2015, as benefits to the devolved judiciary under existing schemes end on 31 March.

The Committee noted during its consideration of the rule that, whilst the Department of Justice was statutorily responsible for reforming pensions for judicial office holders, responsibility for the devolved judiciary was a matter for a number of Departments, including the Department for Employment and Learning and the Department for Social Development. The Committee also noted that the scheme regulations had been closely modelled on those made by the Department of Finance and Personnel for civil servants and by the Ministry of Justice for the non-devolved judiciary, which is in keeping with the Executive's decision to adopt an approach in line with equivalent schemes in Great Britain. On that basis, the Committee agreed that it is content with the statutory rule and, therefore, supports the motion.

Mr Lynch: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I want to say that I am sorry; I have just arrived in. Things are moving on. This is in relation to the Road Traffic Bill. On behalf of Sinn Féin, I rise —

Mr Speaker: Sorry, I have to correct you: this is the draft Judicial Pensions Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015.

Mr Lynch: Sorry, I did not know that I was down for this, a Cheann Comhairle. Absolutely nobody warned me.

Mr Speaker: OK, we will proceed.

Mr Lynch: Thanking you.

Mr Speaker: As no other Members wish to speak, I call the Minister to respond.

Mr Ford: At this point in these technical debates, I tend to thank all those who spoke but perhaps not today. I thank Mr Ross for his contribution on behalf of the Committee, and, again, I genuinely recognise the close collaborative working between the Department and the Committee on many of these technical matters and, having said that and noted the Committee's full approval, I formally commend the regulations to the House for approval.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

> *That the draft Judicial Pensions Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 be approved.*

Police Pensions (Consequential Provisions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): I beg to move

> *That the draft Police Pensions (Consequential Provisions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 be approved.*

I am tempted to say, "Welcome to Groundhog Minute". In respect of the motion that we have just passed, I mentioned consequential provisions regulations as they will apply to the judicial scheme. I will endeavour to be brief in my summary now, given that the same instruction applies and that these regulations will also provide similar benefits to the police pension scheme.

DFP, on advice from HM Treasury, has identified three areas regarding scheme design that require modifications to the Public Service Pensions Act 2014. All three areas of change to the police pension scheme will be beneficial for members and are summarised as follows. First, the 2014 Act requires the police pension schemes to assign a different pension age to active and deferred members. That will mean that actuarial reductions for long- and short-term benefits will use different factors depending on the member's age and employment status. This modification will prevent the police pension scheme discriminating against deferred members by treating them differently to active members. Secondly, the amendment will ensure that police scheme members will have their benefits uprated as if they were active members. Their right to a cash equivalent transfer value and cash transfer sum will apply only when they leave the new 2015 scheme. The amendment will also ensure that the member, if leaving early, will have the right to a refund of contributions only when they leave the new scheme. Thirdly, DFP has agreed that ill-health benefits in the 2015 scheme should use the single-source model, as that prevents the threat of legal challenge from those who might otherwise claim residual rights under the old scheme.

The draft consequential provisions regulations before the House today have been subject to targeted consultation. The consultation ran from 21 October to 14 November last, and no specific comments were received. The regulations have been subject to an equality screening exercise, and no equality issues were identified. On 14 January, the Justice Committee agreed that it was content with the draft regulations, and it is, therefore, again, with its support that I bring the draft regulations before the House today and commend them.

Mr Ross (The Chairperson of the Committee for Justice): Brevity is the order of the day, so I shall try to keep to that in my contribution on this statutory rule.

In October of last year, the Department of Justice advised the Committee of the changes required to be made to the Public Service Pensions Act 2014 and that the police pension scheme was one of the schemes affected by the changes. In December, the Committee noted the detail of the proposed changes and, more recently at the meeting on 14 January 2015, the statutory rule itself. As the Minister has outlined, the rule makes transitional and consequential provision in relation to public-service pensions for members of the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

I do not intend to rehearse the detail that the Minister has already set out, other than to say that the Committee

noted that the rule would make provision for short-service benefits to facilitate split pension age; transitional provisions to stop transitional members being treated as deferred members of their pre-2015 scheme; and consequential modifications to the tax regime in respect of ill-health benefits. At its meeting on 14 January 2015, the Committee agreed to recommend that the Assembly affirm the statutory rule, and it therefore supports the motion.

Mr Speaker: I call the Minister of Justice. On this occasion, justice does not grind slowly.

Mr Ford: Thank you, Mr Speaker. We will grind it as quickly as possible. I thank again the Chair and the Committee members in total for the work that was done with my officials, and I commend the regulations to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

> *That the draft Police Pensions (Consequential Provisions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 be approved.*

Private Members' Business

Road Traffic (Speed Limits) Bill: Second Stage

Mr Ramsey: I beg to move

> *That the Second Stage of the Road Traffic (Speed Limits) Bill [NIA Bill 30/11-15] be agreed.*

First, I place on record my appreciation and thanks to the Bill Office for its continued support and advice leading up to the introduction of the Bill. I also thank the staff of the Regional Development Committee and the Environment Committee, as well as the Chairs of both. I know that the Chair of the Regional Committee has changed. I appreciate their help in facilitating the briefing sessions that I had with them.

12.00 noon

The Bill is not simply about reducing speeds on local roads; it offers an opportunity for neighbourhoods to reclaim their streets and for children to play safely. It is a fresh opportunity for us all to build better communities at minimum cost for a maximum return. There is no higher value in society than that of life. I am in no doubt that the new lower limits will save lives, perhaps not this year or next, but, if we save one life or reduce the seriousness of a victim's injuries with the passing of the Bill, surely it is good legislation.

Key to the success of the legislation is the mechanism for how we launch it. It will not be successful if new limits are imposed. Rather, we seek not a blanket ban but a phased-in, community-requested, community- and stakeholder-led approach with the Police Service, the public transport service and residents and young people alike. Community consensus is key to the success of the initiative. Having undertaken a considerable amount of consultation, I can report to the House in good faith that the reaction to and support for the Bill has been incredibly encouraging.

Mr Ross: I thank the Member for giving way so early in his contribution. He talked about the number of stakeholders. Does he share my concern that the Institute of Advanced Motorists (IAM) has pointed to evidence that suggests that the numbers of serious accidents and slight accidents in 20 mph zones have gone up in the last 12 months? Indeed, Simon Best, chief executive of the IAM, has said that recent advice and guidance and the relaxation of regulations has been making it easier for councils to put in place 20 mph zones, but they do not seem to be delivering fewer casualties. Indeed, that evidence is backed up by the Department for Transport. Second Stage is something that we can agree on, but it is important that we look at that in Committee. Does he share the concerns that have been highlighted by the Institute of Advanced Motorists that this does not deliver the results that some claim it does?

Mr Ramsey: I thank the Member for his intervention. The whole purpose of any private Member's Bill is to have a fully fledged consultation, reflecting everyone's consideration, but I will share clear, definitive evidence with the Member from other places, particularly Britain, that there has been a reduction in injuries and deaths on the roads.

Today, we are working hard to protect and improve life, reduce injury and make our streets more user-friendly

and community- rather than road- and car-orientated. I also believe that the Bill will tackle obesity rates and improve community health to increase rates of walking and cycling. If that does not carry the Bill past the threshold of worthwhile legislation, I wonder how high we set the bar.

Let us examine the reality of life on our roads today. In 2013, seven pedestrians and four pedal cyclists were killed on Northern Ireland's roads. In 2013, 162 pedestrians and 42 cyclists were seriously injured. In 2014 —

Mr Wilson: Will the Member give way?

Mr Ramsey: Yes.

Mr Wilson: Since he is into the statistics of this, perhaps he will tell us if those casualties were on the residential roads that are referred to in his Bill, or were they on roads that would not be covered by his Bill?

Mr Ramsey: I thank the Member for his intervention. As I progress through my speaking notes, it will be obvious that a number of clearly identified deaths on our roads have occurred in 30 mph zones. There are clearly other deaths on our roads that occur elsewhere and are not covered by the Bill.

In 2014, a total of 79 prematurely bereaved families were forced to deal with the consequences of a fatal road collision. Some 523 serious road traffic collisions were recorded by the Police Service of Northern Ireland between January and November 2014. Of those deaths, provisional figures for 2014 show that five pedestrian deaths occurred on urban roads where the limit was 30 mph. In response to the Member who intervened I say that there is evidence where five people have lost their life on roads where the present zoning is 30 mph. That number rises to 21 deaths on 30 mph urban roads where statistics for the last four years were collated. Last week, we lost a further two lives on the roads in Northern Ireland. I am not saying that this legislation would have any impact if implemented on those particular highways, but it is a starting point of legislating to reduce deaths on the roads.

Of course, as at all times, I extend my sympathy to those families on their tragedies last week. In the same manner, I extend my sympathy to those of the more than 600 people seriously injured as a consequence of road traffic collisions in 2014. I have some personal experience of the matter. I am aware that my own words of condolence will have minimal effect on families who are traumatised and struggling to come to terms with the death of a loved one, but they will have some. What is of more benefit is redoubling our efforts as legislators to improve and continuously improve road safety across the roads of Northern Ireland.

In the five years prior to 2014, the number of people killed on the roads in Northern Ireland halved from 115 in 2009 to 57 in 2013. That was certainly a good sign, but it is still too many. It is still too many to have one death in Northern Ireland and a family having to come to terms with the knock on the door by a police officer come to tell them. In 2013, a total of 720 was the lowest rate of serious injuries since records began in 1971. That is not a reason to reduce our efforts; rather it is timely to reinforce them. Certainly, I believe that the public are and will be listening to the debate. Only yesterday, campaigners for "Jake's law", proposing a 20 kph limit in housing estates in the South of Ireland, commenced a vigil outside Leinster House. My condolences go to the mother, Roseann Brennan, who lost her six-year-old child, Jake, in a road traffic accident outside her home in Kilkenny. It is specifically that type of loss that we seek to circumvent, prevent and stop by the progression of the Bill.

Most of us will be aware from the early stages of the Bill and television awareness campaigns that those hit by a vehicle travelling at 30 mph have a one-in-five chance of being killed. That is a 20% chance of death at 30 mph. Those struck at 20 mph have a 97·5% chance of surviving or a one-in-40 chance of dying. There is a huge difference there. I ask Members genuinely to reflect on the statistics that I have presented.

I will return to models of best practice internationally. It is worth noting that Transport for London found a reduction of 57% in serious and fatal accidents, while incidents causing lower-scale injuries fell by 42% in 20 mph zones. The Transport Research Laboratory (TRL) evaluation of 250 20 mph zones found that the average speed fell by nine miles per hour. Accidents reduced by 60%. Importantly, accidents involving children fell by 67%. These are not my figures: these are from the Transport Research Laboratory. The number of incidents involving cyclists fell by almost 30%. Incidents involving cyclists fell by almost one third despite a substantial growth in the number of those cycling in the new 20 mph zones. Hull City Council recorded a growth of six times the incidence of cycling after introducing 20 mph zones. Imagine the tourism ad for Northern Ireland: "Safe for you; safe for cycling; safe for your family". Maybe I am getting ahead of myself. In earlier consultations, many of the key stakeholders —

Mr Wilson: Will the Member give way on that point?

Mr Ramsey: Yes.

Mr Wilson: Maybe the Member will tell us how many tourists cycle around the Castlemara estate in Carrickfergus or the Antiville estate in Larne. If he is making an argument on the basis that this will increase cycling and tourism, at least let us be realistic about it. The streets that he is referring to are, by and large, not tourist streets. Let him be upfront about that.

Mr Ramsey: The streets that tourists visit when they come to Northern Ireland are in the city centres. That is where they will find a safer environment. They will not come into the streets but they will come into our city centres. I ask the Member to reflect on what appeared to be his very sarcastic questions identifying areas, knowing that I would not have a response to him.

In earlier consultations, many of the key stakeholders balked at the thought of a blanket reduction. I have reflected on that and will probably take it on board through possible amendments as we progress — hopefully we will do — to the next stage. We are not seeking blanket coverage, but the Bill offers a bottom-up perspective in lawmaking and social engineering. It will allow communities to come together and shape their own neighbourhood. It will allow us to reshape our public realm across many of our villages and cities as we see fit.

Mr Spratt: I thank the honourable Member for giving way. My point is on enforcement and lawmaking. If it is legislation, it should have to be enforced. I am sure that the Member remembers the contribution that the PSNI made to the Committee at a very early stage. It has very serious

reservations in relation to 20 mph speed limits and the enforcement of such limits given that it struggles, it is fair to say, to police 30 mph and 40 mph speed limits in most cases and in most areas. That is one of the complaints that most of us, as MLAs, get on a pretty regular basis. Given the police's reservations and that the policing budget has further reduced since that evidence was given to the Committee for Regional Development, I wonder what discussions the Member has had with the Police Service on enforcement. Frankly, any legislation without enforcement is useless.

I also wonder what conversations the Member has had with the Department for Regional Development on signage, because legislation requires proper signage. It is fair to say, during my tenure on the Committee for Regional Development, that the Department was very successful with a number of traffic calming measures in areas where they were necessary. Maybe the Member will shed some light on the conversations he has had on those issues.

Mr Ramsey: I thank the Member, the former Chair of the Regional Development Committee. He makes some good points. Legislation by itself will not change mindsets. There needs to be a cultural change in driving patterns. There needs to be a change in mindset. The Member previously referenced driving instructors possibly; maybe I picked him up wrong. It will evolve. It will take major changes. I will directly respond to your questions. I met two assistant chief constables and have correspondence from the police that is most encouraging. I will quote them verbatim. They said that I am pushing an open door. They want to see a bottom-up approach to the introduction of 20 mph speed limits in residential areas in Northern Ireland. That is your answer. I have met them. I can copy you into the correspondence that I had with them. In fact, I met them only four weeks ago in Knock PSNI headquarters.

I hope the Member is reassured by what I have said today.

12.15 pm

No one is seeking to impose these new speed measures. This is about engagement, education and actioning residents' views. It is important to allow young people to make a contribution and participate in the consultation on the streets that they see as their play area. Neighbourhoods will be empowered to make their streets safer for children to play in. In a small way, article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child — the right to leisure, play and recreational activities — will be realised. This Bill would assist in creating what the UN Convention describes as the optimum environment for the child: a street setting that is free from stress. Many of us as parents, as we get older, can reflect on the days when we did not have high volumes of vehicles on our streets, where we all played actively. Can many of us say that today? Would you allow your child or grandchild out on the streets to play? I think, at the very least, most mothers would have their heart in their hand at the mere thought of it.

The whole purpose of this Bill is to create an environment that encourages and motivates parents and grandparents. Reducing the speed on these roads will also secure greater participation and recreation in line with elements of the Programme for Government. I refer back to my conversation with Mr Spratt on the police and make the point that more people walking on our streets will deter crime in the community. People trying to break into houses will be deterred by grandparents out walking with their grandchildren, cyclists etc. It will have a hugely positive impact.

Mr A Maginness: I thank the Member for giving way. The Member referred to attempts to change attitudes and mindsets and said, quite rightly, that legislation alone does not change mindsets immediately. Effective legislation, however, imports values into society that change behaviours. Take, for example, no-smoking legislation. Some 10 years ago, smokeless zones in buildings, public service vehicles etc were unimaginable. Attitudes to smoking have been changed fundamentally. In the same way, this legislation could change attitudes. I see the Member disagreeing, but bear with me. That is the real effect, not immediately but down the line, of this type of legislation.

Mr Ramsey: I thank the Member for his intervention and example. Another very obvious example is seat belts in Northern Ireland. A few years ago a private Member introducing legislation requiring the use of seat belts would have been laughed at in here. Now there are policing campaigns across Northern Ireland on a monthly basis to make sure that people are wearing their seat belts.

Mr Clarke: Will the Member give way?

Mr Ramsey: Yes.

Mr Clarke: I want to address the previous contribution, when I was seen shaking my head. I do not make any apologies for shaking my head, because Mr Maginness's comparison with 20 mph zones is ridiculous. The ban on smoking in public places is easy to enforce. However, we have got 30- and 40-mph limits, and there is no evidence to suggest that reducing them will actually help. Indeed, the 30, 40, 50, 60 and 70 mph zones are there, but the enforcement is not. The ban on smoking in a public place is, however, easy to enforce. The enforcement has to be right. Indeed, if the 30 mph limit was enforced, there would be no need to reduce it to 20 mph or lower.

Mr Ramsey: I thank the Member for his intervention. I had genuinely hoped to meet with him as Chair of the Regional Development Committee, but time was not on our side. I know that he has reservations about enforcement, but I hope to convince him. The police have the unenviable task of managing the enforcement of the present limit of 30 mph. What difference would it make to enforce 20 mph? We are creating an environment of change across Northern Ireland. We are getting into schools, primary schools, post-primary schools and youth clubs. We are getting involved with policing and community safety partnerships across the new council areas. We are involving the new council areas. That mind change is necessary. Producing a Bill will not change things; it will take a generational change. If it takes a generation to do that, I am content, because it will make a difference.

I am sorry, Trevor, but I thought that I gave good, clear evidence from other places, and I will give it again. There is evidence of a reduction in road fatalities. There has been a serious increase in the number of pedestrians and cyclists killed. I will quote from some groups that clearly want to champion and advocate this cause. The Bill would assist in creating what the UN convention describes as the "optimum environment" for the child: a street free from stress, and:

"An environment sufficiently free from waste, pollution, traffic and other physical hazards to allow them to circulate freely and safely within their local neighbourhood".

Such an environment would increase opportunities for leisure time and an accessible space and time for play. The Bill would create a space and opportunities to play outdoors in a diverse and challenging physical environment with easy access to adult support when necessary.

After medical illness, traffic is the biggest cause of death in children. I want to repeat that: after medical illness, traffic is the biggest cause of death in children. Chief among the supporters of the Bill is the Northern Ireland charity PlayBoard. It is the lead organisation for children and young people's play in Northern Ireland. It makes no bones about it and told me that it would prefer a much lower speed limit than the one that I am proposing. Traffic volume and speed are a major anxiety for parents and people living in communities. PlayBoard research consistently shows that traffic is a recurring concern for children, young people, parents and grandparents. Traffic and the speed at which it travels are a serious barrier to children playing outdoors. In 2013, PlayBoard research found that 33% of children surveyed reported that their favourite place to play was the traditional playground and their favourite games were street games. One comment was that it was not safe because cars drive up and down the street and people park their cars on footpaths. PlayBoard reported that one in five children interviewed said that they did not have a safe place to play outside their own front door. Cars and traffic are the major inhibitors. Among the recommendations made by those children and young people to policymakers was that there should be traffic-less streets and roads for children to play on temporarily, more zebra crossings and restrictions on cars in areas where children play.

Road safety is an issue, as is the consequential failure of children to acquire the independent mobility required to develop and nourish their well-being. PlayBoard is in little doubt that a 20 mph limit in residential areas would considerably help children, young people and their parents to feel safer and less anxious, and it would also improve their children's development, well-being, physical activity, common sense and competency. The Bill is a step in that direction. It will show that the House recognises, respects and resources play opportunities, which in turn allow our children to flourish.

That said, the Bill is not slowing down drivers solely to benefit our children. It will, when desired, bring out many other members of our community. The more people who occupy public areas, the better public ownership we have, the greater sense of pride we have, and a greater sense of spirit will flourish in those communities. Air quality improves in such zones. I think that some members of the Regional Development Committee visited Edinburgh, which reports that its 20 mph zones have the best air quality in Scotland, bucking national and European trends. The evidence suggests that reduced acceleration and braking reduces fuel consumption and associated emissions. The Minister of the Environment assures me that he will continue to make safer driving and road safety a high priority despite a major reduction in his budget. However, I repeat my earlier point: this is minimal cost for maximum return.

Mr Spratt: Will the Member give way?

Mr Ramsey: Yes.

Mr Spratt: I referred earlier to the cost of signage. The Member has just referred to the visit to Edinburgh, and I think that Mr Dallat was there with the Committee. One issue was the high cost of establishing what is a very small area in the city of Edinburgh. I think that the cost of signage for that was in the region of £25 million or £30 million. Perhaps the Member will now tell us what discussions he has had with the Department about signage, because with legislation and enforcement comes the need for signage. I note that he referred to his Minister, but the signage would come from the DRD budget. What discussions have taken place, given the difficult position of a Minister who had to turn out the lights recently?

Mr Ramsey: I thank the Member for his intervention. There are clearly circumstances in which capital investment will be required. It will not happen within any one year; it will be phased in to ensure the greatest impact. I tried to secure a meeting directly with the Minister. I met his special adviser this week, and we had a detailed and lengthy discussion about the elements of the Bill. I will let the Minister speak for himself, but I think that he will be very encouraging. I certainly want to work with the Minister for Regional Development, who has overall responsibility for roads in Northern Ireland, to ensure that we have the greatest impact and effect —

Mr Ó hOisín: I thank the Member for giving way. He said that the provisions could not be enacted within a single year, but clause 7 specifies a period of two years. Is that an adequate period to bring in such measures?

Mr Ramsey: I appreciate the intervention, Cathal, which is a reasonable one. I said at the beginning of the debate that I would reflect on the submissions and on Members' contributions today even if it meant a longer lead-in period. I made the point previously that this will require educational change, cultural change and a change in the mindset of all those who drive in Northern Ireland. A number of elements of the Bill would have to be amended to help it to have more effect. We do not know the full costings, for example, and we will have to get them. There is absolutely no doubt about something that I will come to later in my speech, but I am not sure whether the Speaker might call me to task soon.

Mr Speaker: I will not call you to task, because it is important that you set out your argument, but perhaps you will advise me how much longer you require.

Mr Ramsey: I suspect that I will possibly need another 15 minutes.

Mr Dallat: Will the Member give way?

Mr Ramsey: Yes. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Please continue.

Mr Dallat: Is the Member aware that more people were killed on the roads during the darkest days of the Troubles than through violence? Does it not seem a bit disappointing to him that we are hearing arguments about the cost of road signage that could be introduced over one year, two years or 10 years? Is he aware that the

20's Plenty for Us scheme is not just in Edinburgh but in Glasgow, where I spent some leisure time walking around and witnessing for myself how neighbourhoods had been returned to the people who live in them and how children, for the first time, had the right to go out and play in the street? Does the negativity that we are experiencing here not disappoint him a little?

Mr Speaker: Perhaps you would respond to that, and then it would be an ideal time to call the lunchtime suspension.

12.30 pm

Mr Ramsey: I welcome the Member's intervention. I will not use the word "negative", but I will take on board any constructive comments from any Member, whether negative or positive. *[Laughter.]* I was about to get on to it, but it would not be fair to do so, given the Speaker's ruling. We are talking about the cost of a life lost on the roads of Northern Ireland. I remember putting a question to Sammy Wilson when he was the Minister of the Environment a number of years ago, and, at that time, it was £1·6 million. That is the cost to Northern Ireland of a death on our roads. Is somebody telling me that the investment of £20 million — if it is £20 million — is not a good investment for the families across Northern Ireland who are still coming to terms with the loss of a loved one? Is that not an investment to save, if we can in any way create an environment in which we save someone's life?

Mr Clarke: Will the Member give way?

Mr Speaker: May I intervene, given the time? The Business Committee has arranged to meet immediately after the lunchtime suspension. I propose therefore, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until 2.00 pm. The first business when we return will be Question Time.

The debate stood suspended.

The sitting was suspended at 12.31 pm.

On resuming (Mr Principal Deputy Speaker [Mr Newton] in the Chair) —

2.00 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Questions 9 and 11 have been withdrawn.

Transforming Your Care: Costs

1. **Ms McCorley** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if the commissioning plan direction 2015 is compatible with the financial costs of implementing Transforming Your Care. *(AQO 7590/11-15)*

8. **Mr McGimpsey** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the latest time frame and costs associated with implementing Transforming Your Care. *(AQO 7597/11-15)*

Mr Wells (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, with your permission, I will answer questions 1 and 8 together.

In response to the agreed budget for 2015-16, a financial plan has been developed that is expected to deliver a balanced position for 2015-16. However, that financial plan does not permit funding for any new service developments, including those that might support the delivery of Transforming Your Care (TYC). That said, the delivery of TYC remains a priority for my Department, and the draft commissioning plan direction is clear that the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) should, in setting out how services will be delivered in 2015-16, strive to shift services into the community or primary care settings in line with the objectives of TYC.

I and my predecessor have always been clear that ideally we are working to a three- to five-year implementation framework. That, of course, is dependent on financial circumstances. That remains the case, as does the broad requirement identified in the original report for transitional funding to support the new model.

Ms McCorley: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a fhreagra. I thank the Minister for his answer. Will he confirm that only £27·5 million has been shifted to care in the community, even though there was a target to shift £83 million?

Mr Wells: The Member is broadly right in her assessment of the situation. We had envisaged a shifting left, to use the parlance. John Compton, the author of 'Transforming Your Care', could not have envisaged the present financial backdrop. We have made bids to achieve the £83 million, most of them in the monitoring round, and they have not been successful. Therefore, that has put the whole Transforming Your Care process under considerable stress.

It is worth saying, however, that there are two aspects to TYC. First, there is the sea change in the trusts as they

align their working practices within TYC, which does not require additional service development or resources. Secondly, there is the £83 million required to make the major changes. The trusts are implementing service changes on the ground every day. It is difficult to quantify their value, but they are reaching the goal of TYC.

I have the task of trying to find or campaign for the funds to enable us to obtain the additional resources that we need to implement TYC. When I was first appointed to this position, I was asked for my three priorities, and I said that finding the resources to implement TYC properly was my number two target. We are still striving, as effectively as we can, to obtain that funding.

Mrs Cameron: What potential do GP federations offer for delivering Transforming Your Care more quickly?

Mr Wells: The formation of about 20 GP federations covering all of Northern Ireland was one of the basic tenets of Transforming Your Care. In some areas, particularly greater Belfast, there has been a great deal of progress. In other areas where I have visited individual GP practices, I have been a bit worried that there has not been the same success in setting up the federations.

The federations are absolutely essential because a one-man or a father-and-son practice in some remote part of Northern Ireland operating effectively on its own is simply not a sustainable model. Therefore, it is important that GPs come together. A practical example can be seen through GPs telling me that a huge amount of their time is spent on prescriptions and repeat prescriptions. One of the aims of the federations is to employ a full-time pharmacist who would take on that entire administrative role to free up the time of GPs for diagnosis, referral etc. I see it as a vital component of TYC. It is clearly working and working well, but, in other areas, it is certainly not making the progress that we had assumed it would.

One of my priorities will be to follow up with the board and the implementation team to see what we can do to encourage GPs to coalesce and have the quantum of resources and experience that is needed to deliver a 21st-century model of GP care. I do, of course, realise that, underlying that, is the problem that we are 20% short on our GP numbers in Northern Ireland. Through workforce planning, we will have to ensure that we get the numbers back up to a level that will allow us to create federations. That is a priority, as we are certainly not attracting enough young medical graduates into the field.

Mr McKinney: I thank the Minister. Minister, there are some who are trying to divert attention from the Donaldson review to the issue of hospitals and the number of hospitals. You will be aware that the people of Downpatrick, south Down and the wider area gave their answer to that in Downpatrick on Saturday.

The Donaldson report contained other very important issues, including an underpowered commissioning system and a TYC system that is not working. Given that the funding for TYC was to come from monitoring rounds and that the Minister maybe did not apply for it in the January monitoring round — certainly, he did not get it — is the system now not only not making progress but in reverse?

Mr Wells: First, I want to concur with him. The estimates are that between 12,000 and 15,000 people were on the streets of Downpatrick to express their support for the Downe Hospital. I issued a statement that I still see the Downe Hospital playing a crucial role in health-care provision in the South Eastern Trust in the future. Indeed, there are more patients going through the doors of that hospital than ever before, but I accept that the local community has difficulties and feels that it is the wrong sort of patient and that there are not enough ED, accident-and-emergency and surgery patients. Still, that indicates that there is a positive role for the Downe Hospital, and I welcome the huge support that the community has for that new facility.

On TYC, we are not going into reverse. Everyone, including even perhaps the Member, is agreed that it is the best way forward for our health-care structures in Northern Ireland, although it has made less progress than we would have liked. I would argue with him about the monitoring rounds: we have made a large number of monitoring round bids for extra resources for TYC. However, I accept that, on many occasions, there have been much more pressing demands on the Department of Finance and Personnel. I would not like to be in the shoes of the Minister during those four monitoring rounds each year, because, frankly, it is a wisdom-of-Solomon choice that he has to make.

We will continue to make those bids and will continue to find ways of freeing up resources in the Department to push TYC forward. The fundamental point that John Compton made — this is the one that we will all be very uncomfortable with — is that, if we do not crack the issue by 2025, the health service simply will not be able to continue in the way that it is going. We have far too many people up the ladder of health-care provision commensurate with their needs. Unless we tackle that issue and grasp it, we will be in a difficult position.

There was to be a three- to five-year horizon for the implementation of TYC, and I would like to have seen it happening slightly quicker than that. We are going at a slower pace, but we are still going in the same fundamental direction. I need to emphasise that, on the ground, apart from the funding issue, major progress is being made on the implementation of TYC. No one has been able to tell me that there is a better option for care in the future.

Mrs Overend: Will the Minister outline the costs, financial and otherwise, of removing the substance misuse target from the plan? I understand that the inability to develop the service in 2015-16 was due to a lack of funding.

Mr Wells: There is always one question that comes completely out of the blue that all the soothsaying and predictions of those in the Department have not been able to identify. I will get the facts on that for the Member. That is an important issue but one that has not had huge publicity. I will get the answer to the honourable Member for Mid Ulster. I will write to her and give her chapter and verse on it. That was one that I did not see coming at all.

Mr McCallister: I have listened to the Minister's earlier answers. In his report, Sir Liam Donaldson said:

> *"The policy document Transforming Your Care contains many of the right ideas for developing high quality alternatives to hospital care but few believe it will ever be implemented or that the necessary funding will flow to it. Damaging cynicism is becoming widespread."*

Does the Minister agree that that damaging cynicism among the public, hospital managers and doctors is doing enormous harm to the credibility of the health service, with people maybe wanting to leave through the voluntary exit scheme?

Mr Wells: I reassure him that we will not use the voluntary exit scheme to take out staff who are essential to front-line delivery only to replace them at the same cost. That does not make sense. I see the voluntary exit scheme as a way of perhaps looking at administration and management, rather than front-line services. We are still recruiting staff. It is worth mentioning that, since March 2011, we have recruited 218 full-time equivalent consultants, 823 full-time equivalent nurses and midwives, 91 staff grade and speciality doctors and 409 qualified allied health-care professionals. I know that people do not like to hear those facts, but that indicates to me a solid investment in front-line services throughout the health trusts and the Ambulance Service. I accept that, whilst we are doing that, we still have to concentrate on delivering TYC, and of course those staff will be doing so.

It is interesting that Sir Liam Donaldson, a world authority and internationally renowned expert on health — as I said, the Sir Alex Ferguson of health provision — concluded that TYC was still the best way forward. He understood the difficulty that we are having with funding. Therefore, I see it as a process that is not going as swiftly as we would like, but I believe that we are going in the right direction. We will eventually get there, but it will be at a slower pace. It is my role to try to ensure that my colleagues in DFP recognise that and continue to release resources to deliver a project that is fundamental to future health provision in Northern Ireland.

Medical Appointments: Non-attendance

2. **Ms P Bradley** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the cost to the health service of patient non-attendances at medical appointments. *(AQO 7591/11-15)*

Mr Wells: It is not possible to quantify the financial effect of missed appointments on GPs and health and social care organisations. However, it is clear that the real cost to the health service is the missed opportunity for GPs, consultants and other healthcare professionals to see and treat other patients, which in turn has an adverse impact on waiting times for other patients to receive the treatment they need. We all have a key role to play in ensuring that missed appointments are kept to a minimum and that our valuable health and social care resources are utilised in the most effective manner. I therefore encourage everyone who cancels a GP or hospital appointment in advance because they cannot attend to at least inform the health-care professionals so that the slot can be allocated to another patient. I accept that there are times when life becomes very complex and individuals cannot make it to the GP's surgery, clinic or hospital, but the very least that they should do is give adequate warning of that, so that another person who is perhaps waiting for an appointment can be slotted in at short notice. A deep concern of mine is that people are not showing that courtesy to health-care professionals by letting them know in the first place.

Ms P Bradley: I thank the Minister for his answer thus far. I am certainly in agreement with him that this is one reason why other patients have to wait longer for appointments. Has the Minister considered setting a target for the number of cancelled appointments? Could that improve the situation?

Mr Wells: It is worth adding that, by March 2016, I hope to have reduced the number of hospital-cancelled consultant-led outpatient appointments by 20%. Sometimes, the problem is not with the patient; the problem is with the consultant or doctor. Indeed, when the Health Committee looked at the issue, we discovered that the Southern Trust had implemented a new policy to drill down on cancellations caused by clinicians, which led to a dramatic fall in numbers. If we could get the rest of the health trusts to the same standard as the Southern Trust, we would have a much more efficient system.

I think that the honourable Member almost mentioned the possibility of charging —

Ms P Bradley: Targets.

Mr Wells: Yes, well, the target is that, by 2016, we will have reduced this by 20%.

Some Members have suggested to me that we charge for missed appointments; in the same way that I recently had to pay £25 to my dentist for a missed appointment. Unfortunately, I turned up on Friday and he extracted two teeth. I wish I had missed it in the first place. *[Laughter.]* I believe that it would be difficult to implement this on a Province-wide basis. It is not like the discussion we had this morning, where people may not be able to turn up for all sorts of reasons, and it places the GP or the doctor in a very difficult position. So, I am not minded to go down that route. I am glad to say that there has been a noticeable drop in the number of cancellations recently, so we are moving in the right direction. Again, however, informing the office of the relevant condition is absolutely essential.

2.15 pm

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat. I thank the Minister for that response. The Minister will be aware that one of the reasons given for the cancellation of consultant appointments was, "Consultant on annual leave". Will the Minister comment on that? Will he also clarify the cost to the system of cancelled appointments by consultants?

Mr Wells: The honourable Member for Foyle is absolutely right. Indeed, when the Southern Trust was implementing its change of policy, it made it very clear that that was a totally unacceptable reason for the cancellation of an appointment, on the basis that someone who was taking a holiday would presumably have had to book their flights and accommodation. They would have known in advance, so that should have enabled the trust to fill the gaps created. I commend the Southern Trust on that measure, and I urge other trusts to do the same.

It is difficult to pinpoint the total cost. There is, certainly, an intangible cost here because it leads to inefficiencies in the system. We are continuing to monitor and report the number of cancelled appointments. We have also established a short life working group to establish how information on cancelled appointments can be recorded in order to identify where there has been a direct impact on patients and to quantify actual lost capacity. As a result of that work, information on the number of hospital-cancelled

consultant-led outpatient appointments that have had an impact on patients is now available.

It is a terribly difficult thing to put a financial figure on, because what happens in most cases is that, if Mrs Smith does not turn up, Mrs Jones or Mr Jones, who have been waiting, go up the queue. Therefore it is difficult to assess the cost of generating the appointment and the cost of reappointing, and the amount of time that was spent by the consultant in, perhaps, reading up before the patient arrived. It is very difficult, but it is certainly a frequent complaint from clinicians at all levels in Northern Ireland that people continue to do this in an irresponsible way. The good news, however, is that the message is getting home and the situation is improving.

Mr Beggs: Missed hospital appointments have been particularly high in some units and in some specialised areas. Can the Minister advise what action he proposes to take in the forthcoming year to try to address that specific issue, particularly in relation to those who may have mental health conditions, an area in which absentee rates have been particularly high?

Mr Wells: The difficulty with many of the patients involved is that there are co-morbidities; there is a mixture of conditions. Whilst the person may be coming in to have a consultation on their back, for instance, they may have had depression or have a bipolar condition etc. Therefore, it can be very difficult to identify the reason for people not attending. We are not going to differentiate between various reasons or conditions where there have been cancellations or missed appointments. We are sticking to the target. If we can get it down by 20% by March 2016, I think that we will have done very well. In addition, the Department is proposing a number of performance indicators to monitor outpatient cancellation and non-attendance for new and review appointments.

The overall consultation rate in Northern Ireland rose from 4·04 consultations per person in 2003-04 to 6·6 in 2013-14. That is an increase of 63% in the Northern Ireland consultation rate per person. That is an incredible increase in such a short period — a 10-year period. That shows the pressure that our consultants and clinicians are under. Equally, as far as GPs are concerned, we have an average of 6·9 appointments per year per person. That is for every one of our 1·82 million population. In the Irish Republic, the average is three, yet the Irish seem to have very similar outcomes in health to ours.

Clearly, Northern Ireland people are very much in love with their GPs and consultants and are very keen to see them, but we need to, first, rationalise the demand on the service and, secondly, make certain that, once people are booked, they turn up and present themselves for treatment. The other aspect, of course, is that this can lead to people's conditions deteriorating significantly, adding further expense to the health service. There have been many cases of people whose onset of cancer and other serious conditions have been missed because they did not turn up for their appointment.

Mr Dallat: I am really sorry to hear that the Minister has been in trouble with his dentist, and I hope that his mouth is getting better.

The Minister will be aware that 180,000 people a year fail to meet their appointments. That is matched only by the hospitals themselves, which cancel 180,000 appointments. Does the Minister agree that the practice at the Causeway Hospital in Coleraine, where text messages are sent the day before an appointment, is good exemplary material? Will he look at that and see how that can be rolled out to other institutions, which, clearly, are not on top of it?

Mr Wells: I hope that the honourable Member for East Londonderry will not mind me commenting on the very helpful letter that he recently sent us about the Causeway Hotel — the Causeway Hospital, sorry. That was a Freudian slip. *[Laughter.]* I think that he knows what I am referring to. It was very helpful that he highlighted a high standard of service at the Causeway Hospital.

There has been a significant reduction in missed appointments. I have some cold, hard statistics. For instance, in 2009-2010, there were 1·5 million appointments, of which 172,000 were missed because people did not show up. That is a did-not-show rate of over 10%. That rate has gone down in 2013-14 to 9·1%. That is a 1·2 percentage point drop, which is significant. It is an improvement of more than 10%. Clearly, the message is getting through to the public that you really need to treat your health service with much more respect. I would like to see a continuation of that and to bring the rate down to the best performance in Northern Ireland.

We are not reinventing the wheel. In many aspects of health, if we could get all our trusts performing as well as the best trust in any particular field, many of our problems would be solved.

Donaldson Report: Recommendations

3. **Mr Lynch** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he will implement the recommendations from the Donaldson report. *(AQO 7592/11-15)*

14. **Mr McNarry** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how he will increase the pace of change in health service delivery to take into account the recommendations of the Donaldson report. *(AQO 7603/11-15)*

Mr Wells: Mr Speaker, with your permission — Mr Principal Deputy Speaker; I will have to get used to that accolade — I wish to answer questions 3 and 14 together.

As you will be aware, the Donaldson report makes 10 recommendations. In my statement on 27 January, I set out a number of actions that are being taken forward to progress some of those recommendations. However, many of the recommendations pose fundamental questions, and I want to ensure that stakeholders have the opportunity to provide their thoughts. That is why I have asked for views and comments on the recommendations to be submitted to my Department within a 12-week period.

Transformational change takes time, and it will be important to map out such a change fully at the outset and to address the budgetary issues. You will also be aware that some of the changes required to address the recommendations will require legislation and some will require Executive approval. However, I am determined to make substantial and steady progress wherever it can be made. With that in mind, I have already asked Sir Liam Donaldson to return to Northern Ireland next year to review progress against the implementation of his recommendations. Following the completion of the

consultation on Sir Liam's recommendations, I will inform the Assembly of its conclusions and any further actions that may arise.

Mr Lynch: Go raibh maith agat. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. I thank the Minister for his answer. Can he clarify the position around recommendation 1, and can he confirm the cost of the review and whether it represents value for money?

Mr Wells: The Chair of the Health Committee announced that the cost of the Donaldson review was £118,000, from memory. As we had engaged one of the leading authorities for a significant period to look at our health service, I felt that that was justified. Yes, I can stand over that. Will we, if we implement the Donaldson review, effectively save £118,000? We certainly will, and a lot more.

Recommendation 1 is only one of 10 recommendations in the Donaldson report. Indeed, it has been slightly disappointing that almost all the press attention has homed in on that issue. We have to have a very honest and open debate in this Chamber because this is where the decision will be made.

If we were starting with 1·862 million people today, bringing them to an area the size of Northern Ireland and configuring a hospital service, we would never start from where we are, with 10 A&Es, the Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children and six local regional hospitals. That is a model that would never be implemented anywhere in the Western world. We have to accept that, because of history, tradition and local support, we are in a rather different situation. The only way forward is for us to have an intelligent debate to decide how we progress and how we reconfigure our health service to ensure that a modern, high-tech, high-level service is given to all our people. Frankly, at the moment, some aspects of our health service, particularly in rural areas, are under the most enormous stress and strain, and we need to start that debate.

Some of you may have seen an interview that I did on the BBC on this very issue with Mark Carruthers. I call it elder abuse because I was given an absolute pasting for 15 or 20 minutes on the issue, when he tried to tease out of me the same answers that the honourable Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone is trying to get. I am not going to pre-empt that debate by saying what my views are on how we should go forward. I am encouraging the entire community to look at this terribly difficult situation, which for me is one of the most intractable problems that we face in Northern Ireland, and for us to reach a consensus.

Mr McNarry: Minister, as with many things these days, it appears that the Victor Meldrews and the Sir Humphreys are performing to their best. What is your assessment of the change in the balance of the health service between front-line staff and back-room bureaucrats? What obstructions, if any, are you encountering with interest groups acting to block the pace of reform?

Mr Wells: I have just quoted to the House the huge increase in front-line staff that my predecessor, Edwin Poots, instigated and which I support. The equivalent of 1,400 full-time additional staff have been employed in the health service since 2011. If Minister Foster were to announce a factory employing 1,400 full-time staff, we would all congratulate her on an outstanding achievement; fortunately, she has been making announcements like that in the last three or four years. That indicates that, under my predecessor's role and my own, we are making that commitment. We know that those folk are there because we are paying them, and we know that they are on the ground working hard. It is wrong, therefore, to indicate that we are overstaffed at administrative level and not bringing resources to front-line care. I accept, however, that there is a perception that we could be doing more to look at admin and management, which is why the permanent secretary has been tasked to do a full analysis of the structures of health care in Northern Ireland to see whether any further level of administration can be taken out to pump money into front-line services.

I will give the Member a few figures. We could maybe save £15 million or £20 million, but that is being very optimistic. I have to find £165 million in efficiency savings for 2015-16 and an additional £50 million out of non-health trust expenditure. That is real money from the Fire Service, BSO and the Public Health Agency. So I have to find £215 million. Even if we waved a magic wand and looked at his concerns about management, we are talking about only 12% of that. That is the difficulty that we are in, and we have to make some terribly difficult decisions in the next few weeks.

Mr G Robinson: Will the Minister outline what work is under way to implement some of the Donaldson recommendations?

Mr Wells: When you throw a document out into the public domain for consultation, you have to be very careful that you are not seen to pre-empt some of the outcomes. The six trusts, including the Ambulance Service, have already been asked to work with each other, their staff and their stakeholders to develop a combined response to the report and its recommendations by the end of April 2015 and to consider urgently the "never events" list for England and determine its applicability to Northern Ireland, and initial discussions on that have taken place with the board. I am sure that Members will remember my explanation of a never event. The RQIA has been asked to speed up the programme for unannounced inspections of hospitals, and a number of pilot inspections will take place between April and June 2015.

I hope that that shows that, in areas where there was not much in the way of dissension or where there had already been discussion, we are already setting up procedures to implement it. We also want to hear the public's view on Donaldson, particularly recommendations 2 to 10, on which we need an awful lot of debate, as well as recommendation 1.

2.30 pm

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: That concludes the listed questions to the Minister. We move to topical questions. Question 1 has been withdrawn.

Organ Donation: Opt-out System

T2. **Mr Flanagan** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the introduction of the legislation proposed in the public consultation, which the previous Health Minister launched in February 2013, and which had the support of the First Minister and the deputy First Minister, on the move to an opt-out system for organ donation, especially in the light of the tragic death last week of 13-year-old Oisin McGrath from Belcoo, a boy who had achieved much in a very short

life and whose passing is a terrible loss to his family, the wider McGrath and Dolan families and his many friends, and particularly because, as a result of Oisin's death and the bravery of his parents, five people have benefitted from his organs and have been given a chance to experience a more fulfilling life. *(AQT 2122/11-15)*

Mr Wells: I thank the honourable Member for giving me an opportunity to pay tribute to Oisin's family, who took the very brave decision in tragic circumstances to save or enhance not only one but several lives by giving up his organs. I think that that example will help enormously in our debate on the issue. I had intended to contact the family to praise them for their courage.

We await the introduction of a private Member's Bill from the Member for Upper Bann Jo-Anne Dobson and for the results of the PHA's second survey on public attitudes to organ donation. So we are very much in a situation of watching and waiting. We are also waiting to see the outcome of the Welsh model. The Welsh passed legislation on the issue, and we want to see what happens there. Does legislation lead to a radical increase in organ donation? We have had an advertising campaign to encourage organ donation and employed nurses whose role is to liaise with distressed families and encourage them to donate organs. This is a very complex and important period in the whole debate. I suspect that, when Mrs Dobson's Bill eventually comes forward, there will be a free vote for many of us. I would like to think that progress will be made within the next few weeks because of the coming together of various events.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answer and comments. Oisin's parents, Nigel and Sharon, were forced to make a very difficult decision on whether to donate their son's organs. They decided to do so, in the belief that it was what he would have wanted. In doing so, they demonstrated huge strength in dealing with their tragic loss, but parents and families should not be forced into making that decision. I say this to the Minister and his Executive colleagues: let one of Oisin's many legacies be the introduction of opt-out organ donation legislation. I support the introduction of such legislation. When that happens, will the Minister row in behind it and support it, as his predecessor and the First Minister appeared to do previously?

Mr Wells: I will be guided by the honourable Member for Upper Bann on when we can expect the introduction of her Bill, which deals with the very issues that the Member raises. As Minister, I am in a difficult position because I previously expressed my personal views on this. However, it would not, I think, be helpful if I were to hold hard and fast to those views as Minister. All I can say is that the debate will be a very interesting test of the maturity of the Assembly.

It is very difficult to predict what will happen because I suspect that it will be a free vote for every Member, and, therefore, 107 different views will become clear. So, we await the Bill with interest. I hope that Mrs Dobson will get a chance to come in on this because I am very keen to learn how it is progressing.

I realise that Oisin's family had to make a very difficult decision, but, no matter what happens, even under Mrs Dobson's Bill, families will still be consulted. They will still have to make that difficult decision. I am on the register and have made it very clear that, if I go under a bus, you are welcome to any part of me that saves lives.

I remember the courage of a Coalisland family when a young man was killed in a traffic accident. The donation of his organs saved three lives and enhanced another three. That example is tremendously important as we encourage people to have the conversation and make the right decision on organ donation.

Fire and Rescue Service: 2015-16 Savings

T3. **Miss M McIlveen** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he believes that savings of 10% can realistically be delivered by the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service in 2015-16. *(AQT 2123/11-15)*

Mr Wells: Earlier, I said that I have to find £50 million in direct reductions in funding out of what are described as the non-health trust organisations. I also mentioned that I have to find a huge amount of savings in 2015-16, and we have asked the arm's-length bodies initially for their scenarios based on 5%, 10% and 15% reductions for 2015. We have had an initial examination of the proposals for the Fire and Rescue Service, and, frankly, I consider savings at the upper end to be unachievable. They are not achievable while retaining a safe service. Consequently, the Fire and Rescue Service is working now on a 5% savings target for 2015, and I have made it clear that its focus should be on support functions and central management structures rather than on front-line service delivery. I have also made it clear that I am opposed to any form of compulsory redundancy in the Fire Service. I will require full detailed plans on how Fire Service savings can be delivered, and a final agreement on the savings proposals will take place after public consultation and be based on public safety.

This has been a very difficult issue. The very fact that we have been in a position in which we cannot define the Fire and Rescue Service as a front-line service in the same way as, for instance, blood donation or ambulances is causing us huge difficulties, but that is what the Executive agreed. We are working with the Fire and Rescue Service to find ways in which it can achieve its savings with the least possible impact on its front-line services, which, of course, are not only fires but traffic accidents, flooding and so on. I have seen proposals to take some management staff out of Fire and Rescue Service headquarters in Lisburn. We think that that is doable without affecting front-line support services, but this has been one of the most difficult issues that we have faced as a Department.

Miss M McIlveen: I thank the Minister for his answer. In acknowledging the challenges that he has outlined, does the Minister believe that the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) would make health service challenges even more difficult.

Mr Wells: I have had a lot of letters and questions from Members across the board on that particular issue. For those who are not aware, TTIP is a transatlantic trade agreement between the United States and the European Union. My colleague in DETI is very keen on the arrangement because it could open up new markets for Northern Ireland exports and further trade across the Atlantic, but there is a concern that it will open the door

for private American companies to come in and take over the running of the health service in Northern Ireland. I have seen a petition calling for the NHS to be taken out of TTIP, but there is no evidence at all to indicate that it is to be included, and there is never any indication in the negotiations that that will happen.

Contrary to that, as Members will have seen in some of my written replies, I have received assurances that EU member states will remain in full control of their public services, including their public-health provision. The EU has followed a consistent line of excluding public-health systems from free-trade agreements, and I want Northern Ireland to continue to determine how it runs its public services. I want the fundamental basis of the health service in Northern Ireland to remain the same, which is that it is free at the point of demand, paid for by the taxpayer and available to all. I cannot see how that model sits comfortably with any buy-in from the United States. Frankly, even if I in a wild, mad rush decided to do that, the Assembly would block it immediately, and that would be absolutely right.

For the foreseeable future, I see no change in the provision of the health service in Northern Ireland, and I do not see the remotest interest from elected representatives to change the present model in any way.

Mental Capacity Bill

T4. **Mr Milne** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when he intends to introduce the mental capacity Bill. *(AQT 2124/11-15)*

Mr Wells: I have sat on the Health Committee and on the Justice Committee. On six separate occasions, I think, I asked when we will see that legislation. I am told that it is definitely coming before Easter of this year. That is absolutely crucial because, if we are to get it through the Assembly in this mandate, we need to see the legislation very quickly. The complication has been because we decided, about a third of the way through the process, to combine the Bill to cover health and adults in the Prison Service. That caused complications. I am working alongside DOJ on the development of the Bill, and it is my aim to submit a draft Bill to the Executive next month. We hope that the Executive will pass that very quickly, with a view to the legislation having its First Reading in the Assembly in March 2016. Therefore, that is absolutely imminent. If that does not happen, I will ask some very pertinent questions.

This is perhaps the most important legislation that my Department will be pursuing in this mandate. I was here when the previous Bill went through in 1984, and little did I think that I would still be here for the next updating of that legislation. I am absolutely certain that I will not be here in 25 years when the third Bill arises. The Member raises an important point, and I will check again with my officials to see that that deadline of March 2016 will occur.

Mr Milne: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a fhreagraí go dtí seo. I thank the Minister for his answer and for his determination in producing the Bill and bringing it to a conclusion. How will the Minister address the concerns that the legislation leaves out the under-16s?

Mr Wells: The Children's Law Centre has been lobbying us consistently to include under-16s in the Bill. First, I have to say that that lobbying started at a time of the Bill's formulation that meant that, if we had gone down that route, we would have had to re-consult on the entire Bill. That would have knocked it back for a very long time and, really, it was impractical. I understand that there have been negotiations with the Children's Law Centre. It is reasonably reassured as to why we have taken this decision.

The Bill is a decision-making framework for adults. There is already a decision-making framework in place that, at its core, safeguards children and that recognises the importance that society places on the role of parents when it comes to making decisions in respect of children. The Bill, as proposed, will not affect that. It will not require any changes to the present situation. It will enhance the existing safeguards in the Mental Health (Northern Ireland) Order 1986, which will be retained as a temporary measure.

I think that it is unfortunate that that request was not made at an earlier stage, but even if it was lobbied for very early on, I do not think that we would possibly have reached the stage of at least giving a tentative commitment that we will have the Bill by March 2016. I can see both arguments, but I saw the greater good of getting a fit-for-purpose, modern mental capacity Bill to cover all over-16s quickly because we simply cannot afford to delay this any further.

Loane House, Dungannon

T5. **Ms McGahan** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what assurances he can give to the 8,100 people who signed a petition to oppose the closure of Loane House in Dungannon that rural dwellers will be facilitated through the Ambulance Service and other vital transport provision to access the relocated services at Craigavon, given the fact that the Southern Trust approved the closure of Loane House without having conducted a full rural impact assessment. *(AQT 2125/11-15)*

Mr Wells: The Member has lobbied extensively on this issue, and I met her, along with the MP for the area, this morning to discuss it. As she knows, I have become a bit of an authority on Craigavon Hospital over the last two weeks. The difficulty is that all the medical evidence is telling me that care for an elderly, frail person is best done in the community, or, if the person has severe needs, it is best done very close to full-blown A&E and ED services and all the diagnostics, equipment and expertise that is there.

The commitment is for a new 64-bed unit in Craigavon. Loane House will not be touched until that is up and running. As I said to her this morning, we have committed to that. There may be budgeting issues, but we will watch the progress very carefully. Until I or my successor is absolutely certain that we have a fit-for-purpose unit available in Craigavon to look after the needy people of Dungannon and south Tyrone, there will be no change in the configuration of Loane House.

I had negotiations on Wednesday with folk in Newry who were making the same point about the transfer of stroke services from Daisy Hill to Craigavon. I hope that I was able to indicate to them that the statistics show that the best chance of surviving a stroke and recovering quickly is when you are taken to a bespoke, specialist centre of excellence.

It is the same model for moving stroke patients and intermediate care bed patients from Loane House to Craigavon.

As a rural representative, I know how difficult this is for the community to accept. All that I can guarantee to the Member is that there will be no question of anything happening to Loane House until we are absolutely convinced that the alternative service in Craigavon meets the needs of her community.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: There is no time for a supplementary.

2.45 pm

Justice

Courthouse Closures

1. **Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the proposals to close eight courthouses throughout Northern Ireland. *(AQO 7605/11-15)*

9. **Mr Dunne** asked the Minister of Justice to outline the rationale to close Newtownards courthouse. *(AQO 7613/11-15)*

11. **Mr D McIlveen** asked the Minister of Justice to outline the rationale to remove the only remaining courthouse in the new Mid and East Antrim Council area. *(AQO 7615/11-15)*

13. **Mr Swann** asked the Minister of Justice how the closure of Ballymena courthouse will help to alleviate the delays within the justice system. *(AQO 7617/11-15)*

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): With your permission, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, I will take questions 1, 9, 11 and 13 together. I may require a little additional time to do so.

On 29 January, I launched a consultation exercise aimed at seeking the views of the public on the closure of up to eight courthouses across Northern Ireland. The consultation has been launched against the backdrop of the Executive's programme for public-sector reform and restructuring.

In the context of a significant reduction in the funding available to my Department, it has been necessary to reduce budget allocations to all spending areas, including the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service (NICTS). It is simply no longer sustainable to operate 20 courthouses in a place the size of Northern Ireland. In response, the service has established a modernisation programme aimed at ensuring that the organisation is structured and resourced to provide an efficient and effective service that is affordable. The programme will involve a comprehensive review of current processes and practices, with a view to designing an enhanced, integrated and affordable service delivery model. NICTS is also seeking to rationalise the court estate in order to deliver efficiencies and to ensure that a reduced estate is used to its maximum potential.

The recently published consultation document explains in detail how rationalisation could be achieved. NICTS has strategically reviewed the current court estate in order to identify venues that could be closed and business transferred to an alternative court venue with minimal impact, thus ensuring continuing efficient and effective service delivery. The proposals seek to make greater use of the more modern or larger court buildings in the court estate. The transfer of business from Newtownards to Laganside Courts, for example, will afford court users, including victims and witnesses, a better standard of facilities and accommodation. There is also a proposal for a dedicated family court centre in Belfast.

In relation to impact and delays, there are no proposals to reduce the number of scheduled sittings; capacity will therefore be unchanged. In addition, the colocation of judges dealing with a particular type of business offers greater scope for them to work collaboratively and to deal more effectively with the cases before them.

Under the proposals, a number of local government districts, including Mid and East Antrim, would not have a court building. There is no requirement for each council area to have a courthouse, nor is it the case that there is a courthouse in each of the existing local government districts.

I look forward to receiving the views of the public and will consider them carefully following the closure of the consultation exercise.

Mr Weir: Given the fact that the Lord Chief Justice is against the proposals, how will access to justice be guaranteed, particularly for the people of Bangor, Newtownards and Holywood, where approximately 150,000 people will be left without even a courthouse in the area? How can access to justice be maintained for the people in those circumstances?

Mr Ford: Access to justice does not mean having a courthouse at the bottom of the street; it means having access to a working courthouse that has suitable facilities for the arrangements that we now need, including facilities for witnesses and vulnerable victims and segregation from defendants. All those are more easily provided in the more modern facilities. There will be no change to the number of court sittings. There will be significantly enhanced use of court buildings, so that, instead of having a number of buildings with empty courtrooms, there will be greater and more efficient use of the buildings that are in use.

Mr Dunne: When Bangor courthouse closed in 2013, business was transferred to Newtownards. The legal representatives in the area warned that it was not fit for purpose. Now, Newtownards is closing. What additional resources is the Minister putting in place to serve the people of North Down and Ards? For 150,000 people, is it just a matter of rough justice?

Mr Ford: The population of North Down and Ards or Ards and North Down — whatever the district is to be called — is of no relevance to the issue of the services provided. The issue is whether there are adequate courtrooms available to provide for the services that are required. If Members had actually read the consultation document, they would have seen that there are plans to have the number of sittings in Laganside and to develop the dedicated family centre to ensure that the same number of sittings can be held as would have been the case spread across a wider number of buildings, with the result that there will be significant savings in costs at a time when the Department of Justice is under very significant pressure.

Mr D McIlveen: I thank the Minister for his answers so far. Does he agree with me that spending £1·7 million on Ballymena courthouse in one year and then subject it to closure the next shows a Minister and a Department that are fiscally irresponsible?

Mr Ford: That simply is not the case. A significant amount of money was spent a few years ago to comply with the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and to ensure that there was a roof that did not leak. Given that Ballymena courthouse is a listed building, the DOJ has obligations to maintain it, and that was carried through. That does not mean that we can continue to use old, inefficient courthouses that are half empty when there are alternative facilities available in more modern buildings in, in the case of Ballymena, Antrim and Coleraine that will provide a better service for those who use courthouses even if they have to travel 12 miles from Ballymena to Antrim to make use of them.

Mr Swann: Minister, not only must justice be done but it must be seen to be done. Local courthouses can be covered by local newspapers so that the local population has the confidence that your justice system actually works in some cases. Can the Minister give any reassurance as to how that will be facilitated?

Mr Ford: I can see no reason why, in the case of Mr Swann's constituency, a reporter from the 'Ballymena Guardian' or the 'Ballymena Times' cannot travel to Antrim courthouse and report what happens there, rather than sitting in Ballymena and reporting what happens there. These are fundamental issues of vital reform to ensure that the DOJ can live within budget. There is a very significant sum of money to be saved by making the reforms, and the DOJ budget is unsustainable if we do not carry through the reforms. Instead of focusing on having a courthouse in every town, people need to focus on the facilities that are provided and the way in which victims and witnesses are treated in courthouses, particularly some of our older ones. While they may be beautiful listed buildings, they are, in many cases, not providing the services that I believe our citizens need in the 21st century.

Mr Lynch: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I think that we have done the rounds, but another one of the courthouses is in Enniskillen. It may be old, but it is not inefficient. They are proposing that they go to Dungannon, which is almost an hour's drive away. That will hit the most vulnerable people, and it is the only courthouse in the county. Do you agree with me that it will impact on the most vulnerable people?

Mr Ford: I think that, if Mr Lynch reads the document, he will find that the bulk of business is intended to transfer from Enniskillen to Omagh. Of course there will be elements of impact in terms of people having to travel. We are not denying that, but one issue that was followed through was to ensure that there was a reasonable travelling time, even by public transport, to an alternative court venue, with the opportunity for people using public transport to arrive before court sits and to get home later in the day. The key issue has to be how we save the money that has to be saved whilst making use of the better facilities that exist in some of the more modern courthouses. I accept that there are particular issues with the age of the court estate in the west of the region and how we deal with that to ensure that we make the maximum use of the facilities that we have but do not spread resources so thinly that we cannot provide a decent service to those who make use of it.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Taking into account what has been said by the Lord Chief Justice and the fact that millions of pounds have been spent on Armagh courthouse, will the Minister agree with me that it would demean Armagh's status as a city to have its courthouse closed?

Mr Ford: No, I cannot agree with such a suggestion. The reality is that Armagh is no bigger than many other rural towns that do not have a courthouse.

I do wonder what some Members of this Assembly think of their constituents, when they suggest that a courthouse is so necessary for them, as if there were a major crime wave in their area. The reality is that the facilities at Craigavon and Newry courthouses are significantly better than those in Armagh, and we must make use of the better facilities that we have.

Mr Dickson: Would the Minister agree with me that the type of measures he is taking, which are similar to those proposed by his colleague the Minister for Employment and Learning for public finances, need to be taken by all Executive Ministers to meet the public service requirements under this current Budget?

Mr Ford: Yes, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. I understood that we had an agreement in the Executive to reform, restructure and cut out waste. It is easy for Members to engage in special pleading for a building in their constituency, but I am responsible for managing the budget for the Department of Justice, which is currently unsustainable over the next financial year unless we implement very significant cost-saving measures across a range of services.

If Members read the full consultation plan, rather than merely looking at the concerns that they have about a building in their constituency, they would see that the potential savings across the Courts and Tribunals Service and the prisoner escort and court custody service are in excess of £1·5 million. That simply cannot be ignored in the face of the difficult budget that is set for the DOJ. Unless Members can come up with something better than saying, "My constituency is special", they have not put forward rational grounds for doing anything other than what I am trying to do, which is totally in line with the Executive's overall policy.

Mr Allister: Why does the Minister think he knows better than the Lord Chief Justice? Does the David Ford who wants to close eight courthouses know better than the David Ford who spent £4·5 million upgrading those same eight courthouses? How many of the eight courthouses has he even visited?

Mr Ford: Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, I lost track of the number of questions. There is, as I have explained, an obligation to maintain courthouses while they are in operation, which means keeping the buildings functional. It is easy for Mr Allister to sneer. I could not tell you off the top of my head how many I have visited but I have visited a significant number of courthouses.

The Lord Chief Justice has certain responsibilities, and we will certainly listen to what he has said. It is the responsibility of the Courts and Tribunals Service, however, to manage the estate efficiently and to ensure

that there are adequate sittings available for judges to hear cases. We are looking at the detail of that at present. I hope that, instead of the sneering, derisory comments we have had from Mr Allister, he and others will put forward serious suggestions as to how we address the budgetary difficulties, provide better facilities in more modern buildings for victims and witnesses and make the justice system work more speedily and efficiently in the interests of something other than maintaining nice old buildings.

Faster, Fairer Justice

2. **Ms McGahan** asked the Minister of Justice, given his proposals to cut legal aid and close courthouses, how he intends to deliver faster, fairer justice. *(AQO 7606/11-15)*

Mr Ford: The proposals to reform legal aid and to close courthouses should not impact on the delivery of faster, fairer justice. I have just explained the proposals to close courthouses. I have also set out my plans to reduce legal aid expenditure on a number of occasions. Further significant reforms will be implemented shortly.

The need to reform legal aid is evident and urgent as the demand continues to outstrip the available budget. Let me reiterate what I have told the House previously. The forecast expenditure on legal aid for 2015-16 is £103·6 million. Following the cuts imposed by the Executive, the legal aid budget was reduced by 15% from £75 million to £64 million. This leaves a pressure of £40 million — more than the entire budget for the core Department. I have, by cutting elsewhere in my Department, allocated a further £18·5 million to the legal aid budget, which still leaves a pressure of over £20 million. I am resolved to bring forward further measures to reduce the legal aid spend. I am introducing further cuts to Crown Court fees, saving some £7 million a year. I am bringing forward measures to reduce the spend on civil legal aid, which will realise savings in the region of £13 million per year. I am also considering measures to reduce the scope of legal aid that will entail removing specific areas where representation has, until now, been paid for out of the public purse.

Due to the life cycles of these cases, these savings will take some time to be fully realised. Therefore, in the absence of additional funding, I have proposed to the Executive the introduction of emergency legislation to impose a temporary levy of up to a maximum of 15% on all legal aid payments where the forecast exceeds the available budget. That is designed to be a temporary measure. It will be strictly controlled; it will require Executive and Assembly approval. None of that affects the programme to deliver faster, fairer justice.

3.00 pm

Ms McGahan: Go raibh maith agat. I thank the Minister for his response. Does he not accept that the closure of so many courthouses will result in a backlog and a loss of confidence in the criminal justice system?

Mr Ford: No. As I have explained, there is adequate accommodation in the 12 courthouses that are proposed to continue in operation to provide courtrooms for the sittings required that are currently carried out over 20 courthouses. Therefore, there is no reason whatsoever to believe that that would slow up the programme. Indeed, as I said earlier, by co-locating judges, we have the opportunity to get better and more efficient management of lists and, therefore, potentially speed up justice.

Mr Ramsey: Following Bronwyn's question on legal aid, does the Minister not accept that there will be a hugely detrimental effect on progressing family law cases and developing them in court?

Mr Ford: Mr Ramsey certainly has a point about family cases, but I do not accept that there will be a huge effect. The reality is that we are looking in detail at the way in which cases are funded. The key issue around matters of some family cases is that, whilst the intention is to continue funding initial hearings, such as in the case of a divorce or separation, there is no doubt that, in some cases, people on modest earnings who, therefore, are ineligible for legal aid, will find themselves being subjected to repeated court cases by an ex-partner over things like the exact timing or duration of access to children, because a partner who can get legal aid will continue to go back to court. That is not the kind of thing that anybody funding themselves would do. It is not the kind of thing that we can afford to pay for continuously from the legal aid fund. It must be about getting the decision right and then finding better ways of arbitration or mediation rather than funding continual challenges where one party uses legal aid to damage the other party.

Mr Elliott: Will the Minister at least accept that, currently, there are unacceptable delays in bringing cases to a conclusion? If he accepts that, will he explain to the House how his actions are going to speed up delayed cases?

Mr Ford: Mr Elliott does not explain what kind of cases have unacceptable delays. What I have seen across a variety of criminal cases in Crown Courts, Magistrates' Courts and youth courts is a speeding up in recent years. There is not as much progress as we would have hoped at times, but the delays are certainly not getting worse. I do not know many times I need to repeat this: the issue is not the number of buildings; it is the number of court sittings that take place to allow judges to hear cases. There will be no reduction in the number of court sittings, even with the proposals to close a number of courthouses. Therefore, there is no issue of that adding to delay.

Abortion: Lethal Foetal Abnormality

3. **Mr Agnew** asked the Minister of Justice whether, as part of his consultation on abortion, he has received any evidence that lethal foetal abnormality cannot be diagnosed accurately. *(AQO 7607/11-15)*

Mr Ford: With permission, Principal Deputy Speaker, I will answer questions 3 and 7 together. Sorry; I was going to, but the Member who planned to ask question 7 has disappeared.

A large number of responses to the consultation have been received, including detailed submissions from the relevant medical professional bodies. Although the process of analysing the responses is not yet complete, and I do not want to pre-empt the outcome, it is my understanding at this stage that the main professional medical bodies have not raised any issue about the ability of clinicians to diagnose accurately foetal conditions that are lethal. A full assessment of the responses to the consultation will be reflected in the summary document, which I hope to publish as soon as possible.

Mr Agnew: I thank the Minister for his answer and clarification of the issue. He will be aware of the statement made by Dr Alasdair McDonnell on the 'Inside Politics' programme that fatal foetal abnormality was difficult to predict. He may have given couples and women who have received that diagnosis false hope that the diagnosis may be inaccurate. Will he make it clear that Dr Alasdair McDonnell was wrong in what he stated and that politicians should not be so irresponsible when trying to protect their party position?

Mr Ford: I will leave it to Dr McDonnell to justify his stated political position. I can go only on the evidence that I have — for example, from the Royal College of Midwives, the Royal College of General Practitioners, the department of foetal medicine at the Royal Victoria Hospital, the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists and the BMA. As I understand it, all those bodies make clear their belief that it is possible to diagnose accurately fatal abnormalities of a foetus of the sort that is proposed in the consultation, which is that two doctors will certify that there is a fatal abnormality that is incompatible with life and that no treatment can be offered after delivery that will make the situation any better. Those are the conditions that were being looked at. It appears to me, from a preliminary look — I am not trying to prejudge the issue — that those with the most knowledge suggest that it is possible that that can be an accurate diagnosis.

Mr Givan: Does the Minister accept that his consultation document departs from long-established principles whereby a mother's life — physical and mental — is the determining factor in providing choice in these circumstances and that his legislative approach would create an automatic entitlement to an abortion on the grounds of conditions that are incompatible with life, as subjective as that notion could be?

Mr Ford: Yes, just as an assessment of a mother's long-term physical or mental health may be subjective and may also be objective, those are exactly the same grounds that would be applied to determine, in the context of fatal foetal abnormality, the clinical judgement.

Mr A Maginness: I thank the Minister for his answers. Obstetricians and gynaecologists, to my knowledge, have said that option 4, which the Minister favours in his consultation paper, is not clear or precise and does:

> *"rely on an artificial or arbitrary line separating some difficult and sensitive cases."*

That gives rise to a situation in which a proper diagnosis cannot be made in all circumstances and which, I believe, is indicative of medical opinion on this very difficult area. I ask the Minister to comment on that.

Mr Ford: I would be in danger of prejudging the entire outcome of the consultation if I went too far on that. There may, indeed, be difficult cases. Mr Agnew's question was brought about by a comment from Dr McDonnell that "doctors always get it wrong". I do not believe that that is the case.

Mr Cree: Will the Minister clarify, in the case of foetal abnormality, whether there is a set number of weeks when a termination can be performed?

Mr Ford: At the moment, the answer to whether there is a set number of weeks in which a termination can be performed is no. Termination on the grounds of fatal foetal abnormality is not lawful in Northern Ireland at present. That issue would have to be considered if there were a proposal to change the law as to exactly how it would apply. However, Members need to be aware that, in many cases, the diagnosis, for example, in anencephaly, the condition that is most commonly cited, does not tend to arise until the 20-week scan, so there are issues that would not relate easily to the normal termination time as the law applies in GB.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answers so far. We welcome the consultation. As people bring their arguments to the table, they should do so on the basis of evidence and fact, but I ask the Minister that they should also consider a degree of compassion.

Mr Ford: I certainly agree with Mr McCartney's point. It is easy to bandy statistics or opinions or whatever, but the reality is that the small area in which the consultation recommended changing the law is about dealing with the traumatic and absolutely horrific situations in which a small number of women find themselves every year. If we cannot deal with them with compassion, whatever our preferred outcome, we are not in a very good place as a legislature.

Policing Board: Payments

4. **Mr Spratt** asked the Minister of Justice, given that he is responsible for the Policing Board budget, to outline the payments to the chairman, vice-chairman and independent members of the board. *(AQO 7608/11-15)*

Mr Ford: The Northern Ireland Policing Board is an independent public body. The level of detail sought in outlining all payments to the chair, vice-chair and independent members is not retained by my Department. The Policing Board's website contains a summary of all payments paid to political and independent members over the previous five years, including expenses. The current annual remuneration rates are as follows: chair, £58,606; vice-chair, £43,954; and independent members, £19,437. I propose to reduce those to £48,000, £24,000 and £12,000 in line with payments to members of other public bodies.

Mr Spratt: I thank the Minister for his answer. Given the stringent cuts to the policing budget, will he ensure that further cuts are made to the budget for the Policing Board, which has already had a dramatic cut in staff, as well as those that he suggests making to the remuneration rates for the independent members, chair, vice-chair etc?

Mr Ford: We need to consider the role that the Policing Board has to perform in overseeing the PSNI and the potential increase flowing from the Stormont House Agreement, meaning that it may well have a wider role in historical work. In addition, the Assembly has now agreed that the National Crime Agency should have a role in the devolved sphere in Northern Ireland, and the board would have a role there. However, I entirely take Mr Spratt's point that no part of the justice system can be exempt from the cuts needed as a result of the Executive's Budget decisions.

Mr Sheehan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Does the Minister agree that no steps should be taken by him that would undermine the effectiveness of the Policing Board in carrying out its work without fear or favour?

Mr Ford: I certainly agree with Mr Sheehan on that point, and I do not believe that I have taken or am contemplating taking any such steps. If he is hinting at the potential change in the way in which members of the Policing Board are appointed, I do not believe that, if we were to move to a rolling appointment system — that decision has not yet been taken — it would impinge on the independence and responsibilities of the board, but that is still under discussion in the Department.

Mr Beggs: Does the Minister agree that the cuts to the Police Service that have been highlighted and the effect that they will have on the ground mean that the public will want to ensure that appropriate funding is committed to administration and will want to see reductions in that area? Whose call is it, ultimately, to set the figures? Is it his call, and how will he deal with existing appointments?

Mr Ford: I accept my responsibility as Minister to look at the rationalisation of remuneration for the Policing Board and potentially for other bodies in line with the prevailing rates for similar bodies in Northern Ireland. If you compared, for example, the responsibilities of the chair of a health and social care trust with those of the chair or members of the Policing Board, you might well find that they are not much less onerous, yet the salary is significantly lower. We need to ensure that we have a rational way of determining appropriate remuneration.

I agree with Mr Beggs's general point. With significant cuts being imposed on the DOJ, it is not possible to continue to afford significant payments to those who serve on such boards. Given that the term of office of current members is up in the early summer of this year, this will not impact at all on current members. Those who wish to be appointed to the board when it is reconstituted will be fully aware of the salaries.

Prisons: Drugs

5. **Mr Dallat** asked the Minister of Justice what action is being taken to address the increased levels of drugs found in Maghaberry, Magilligan and Hydebank prisons. *(AQO 7609/11-15)*

Mr Ford: Substance misuse is a societal issue and is a significant factor in offending behaviour. For that reason, it is a problem inherited by and concentrated in the whole criminal system, not just prisons. By the time someone enters the criminal justice system, it is very likely that a number of interventions, including those in respect of education and health, will have been unsuccessful.

There is a real and concerted effort by the Northern Ireland Prison Service to address substance misuse based around a three-strand approach: restrict supply, reduce demand and assist recovery. In 2013, the Prison Service increased its focus on intelligence-led searching. The increase in drug finds in all three prisons is clear evidence that the approach is targeting the right people and drugs in particular are being detected. NIPS has also established a team to address the recommendations of the recent CJINI inspection report, 'The Safety of Prisoners Held by the Northern Ireland Prison Service', working in partnership with the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust, which has responsibility for providing health care in prisons. That includes an examination of the strategy to manage substance misuse in prisons.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: That ends the period for listed questions. We now move to topical questions.

3.15 pm

Roe House: Investigation

T1. **Mr D Bradley** asked the Minister of Justice whether the independent assessment team, led by Peter Bunting of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, has investigated the disturbances in Roe House last week and, if so, whether he has received a report from the team. *(AQT 2131/11-15)*

Mr Ford: I thank Mr Bradley for the question. I have two slight quibbles. First, I am not sure that the other three assessors would necessarily agree that Peter Bunting is the leader; I think that they regard themselves as four equals. Secondly, it is not their job to inspect specific incidents. There are other arrangements for that, including the role of the Prisoner Ombudsman. However, it is certainly the role of the assessors to make a collective assessment of the situation as it stands in Roe House at different times. I will meet them shortly to discuss their current view of the situation there.

Mr D Bradley: I thank the Minister for his answer. Will he share with the House the report that he receives from the assessment team?

Mr Ford: To talk about sharing reports suggests that sometimes they are more formal than some of the verbal reports that I or the director general of the Prison Service receives. The report published last year on the stocktake of the 2010 agreement was a clear example of openness in that respect. Much of the other work that the assessors do is at a rather more informal level than publishing a report.

Policing and Community Safety Partnerships: Recruitment

T2. **Mr McQuillan** asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the recruitment process for the policing and community safety partnerships (PSCPs). *(AQT 2132/11-15)*

Mr Ford: At the moment, my understanding is that the Policing Board is managing the appointment process for independent members of PCSPs. I believe that councils will largely nominate members to the new PCSPs at the initial AGM, which in most cases is held in March, I believe. The expectation is that independent members, when appointed by the Policing Board, will be in place by June this year.

Mr McQuillan: I thank the Minister for his answer. Given the pressure on budgets that we heard about earlier, are PCSPs talking shops? Are they a luxury that we can afford at the present time?

Mr Ford: Ironically, I was at a meeting in Coleraine Town Hall last night with Mr McQuillan's local PCSP. What I see when I visit PCSPs — maybe I visit only the best ones — is that good work is being done in a number of areas and on a variety of topics, such as addressing crime and the fear of crime; antisocial behaviour; diversionary work for young people; providing reassurance to older and vulnerable people; and rural crime, with trailer-marking and trackers. All of that is work that is being done because local partnerships have identified the needs in their immediate area. Although there may be cases of not all PCSPs being

as efficient as they might be, there is no doubt that some extremely good work is being done. We are trying to spread the message of that good work to all of them.

Legacy Inquest Cases: Funding Disparity

T3. **Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Justice why there is such a disparity in anticipated funding in the Stormont Castle agreement in respect of the legacy inquest cases, where some £19 million a year is being sought, in contrast to the Historical Enquiries Team (HET) cases within the historical investigations unit (HIU), where only a third of that figure is thought necessary to investigate hundreds of cases. *(AQT 2133/11-15)*

Mr Ford: I am not quite sure what point Mr Allister is trying to make. If he is saying that the funding that is proposed for the HIU is significantly greater than that that goes into the HET, that is entirely correct. Indeed, the Stormont House Agreement did not see the Government provide all the additional funding that was thought necessary, and detailed work is continuing on exactly how that will be managed as we look at the HIU establishment.

Mr Allister: Just to make it clear: the Stormont Castle agreement anticipated a budget of £19 million for legacy inquest cases. The question is this: why was that such an inflated figure in comparison with that required to investigate the hundreds of overhanging HET cases? Is there a hierarchy of victims in this matter? From a funding perspective, it certainly very much looks like it.

Mr Ford: I think that the figures that Mr Allister is quoting from — I have the Stormont Castle agreement in front of me — is the current issue of the costs of funding those elements that will go into the historical inquiries unit. He is quite correct that the current costing estimate for legacy inquests is significantly higher than that for HET cases. Of course, he needs to acknowledge that, when we get into legacy inquests, we tend to involve a large number of lawyers, many of whom will be funded by the state, as opposed to the HET's work, which is largely funded by people on the equivalent of police officer salaries.

Legal Aid: 15% Levy

T4. **Ms McCorley** asked the Minister of Justice, following his earlier statement about his plans to introduce legislation to impose a temporary levy of up to 15% on legal aid payments, how long temporary is likely to be and whether there is a danger that the levy could become permanent. *(AQT 2134/11-15)*

Mr Ford: I assure Ms McCorley that is not my intention that that will be the case. Subject, of course, to Executive and Assembly approval, the intention is that emergency legislation will provide for a levy of up to 15% on bills at the point of payment. The maximum levy to be set in any one year on the basis of the difference between the estimated expenditure and the budget allocated for it is allocated on a year-by-year basis with Assembly approval.

The DOJ's current intention is to have a sunset clause in the primary legislation at the end of the next Assembly mandate in 2021. I stress that the maximum deduction will be 15%. If the calculated deduction is less than 5%, it would not apply at all. The expectation is that, as reforms bed in to ensure that the legal aid system is managed more efficiently and effectively, the reduction would reduce over that time.

Ms McCorley: Go raibh maith agat, agus gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. I thank the Minister for his answer. Does he accept that perhaps not enough consideration has been given to the implications for the most vulnerable, particularly those involved in family courts?

Mr Ford: I answered something of that point to a colleague earlier. The expectation is that the cuts would apply evenly across all bills because there is no other way of doing it. At the same time, we are looking at instituting the wider reforms. I highlighted private family law proceedings where one ex-partner can make life extremely difficult for another by continually going back to court over minor issues of precise times for and duration of access to children, for example. It is certainly the case, as a number of MLAs have put to me, that an ex-partner on legal aid frequently does that against an ex-partner who does not qualify for it. Those are the kinds of issues that we have to address. The important point is to maintain the basic provision of legal aid for the key hearing and then to ensure that there are better ways of mediating to deal with those sorts of issues that, frankly, should not have a court hearing, such as determining whether access is half an hour earlier or later.

Racist Attacks: Police Resources

T5. **Mr Ó Muilleoir** asked the Minister of Justice, without moving him into policing matters, to give the House an assurance that the police have the resources and the will to bring to book those who are responsible for racist attacks, particularly those in south Belfast over the last year, for which, thus far, there have been no convictions. *(AQT 2135/11-15)*

Mr Ford: Mr Ó Muilleoir raises a serious issue that features a number of causes for discussion. As he highlighted, dealing with an attack is an operational matter for the police, and I shall definitely not stray into the Chief Constable's territory there.

We see good work being done. For example, the district policing and community safety partnership in south Belfast recently ran an ending hate crime event. Work is being done to train people in a variety of different areas on how we deal with the problem. The DOJ has responsibility for the hate crime multiagency group, and we part-fund the practical action scheme for dealing with the effects of hate crime. However, the important issue is to stop it happening. That involves partnership working and political leadership from every quarter to ensure that people stand up collectively against those who engage in hate crime of any kind. We should also acknowledge that there was an incident at St Anthony's Church in Willowfield last night, which presumably was not racist hate crime but was sectarian hate crime. That seems to be just another side of the same coin.

Mr Ó Muilleoir: Mo bhuíochas fosta leis an Aire. I thank the Minister. It is important to pay tribute to Anna Lo, your representative in South Belfast, who has borne the brunt of many of these racist attacks. In terms of language and leadership from all in this House who are in positions of civic leadership and leadership in society, can you assure the House that you and your Department will stand four-

square behind those who give the type of leadership that a multicultural society desires and demands?

Mr Ford: I thank Mr Ó Muilleoir for his tribute to Anna Lo, although we should not be asking her or others from ethnic minorities to stand up against racist hate crime; we should be asking people from the majority community to stand up against hate crime. The DOJ will continue to do the work, because, for example, the community safety strategy includes elements that relate to hate crime and the wider issues of partnership, particularly through PCSPs, through a variety of other issues and through seeing the agencies working better to tackle the reasons why hate crime appears to rise. All those are issues that need research, partnership working and a single, united voice from this community that hate crime will not be tolerated and that this House and the wider community will show the leadership that it should show against such crimes.

National Crime Agency

T6. **Mr Lyttle** asked the Minister of Justice what impact the extension of the National Crime Agency to Northern Ireland will have on the ability to tackle heinous crime in our community, such as the attacks in east Belfast on St Anthony's and the memorial garden at Pitt Park. *(AQT 2136/11-15)*

Mr Lyttle: I join the Minister in condemning the attacks on St Anthony's in east Belfast and on the memorial garden at Pitt Park in east Belfast this week and welcome his commitment to supporting the fight against that type of hate crime in our community.

Mr Ford: My colleague raises an interesting point. I am not sure that the National Crime Agency will be the key agency for dealing with issues like hate crime, but there is no doubt that some of that comes in alongside those who are engaging in a variety of organised crime and seek to use threats and intimidation — in many cases, principally against those who are perceived to be from minorities — to make life easier to carry out their fairly obnoxious operations. There is no doubt that having the National Crime Agency in place would help to deal with those organised criminals, although the front-line issue of dealing with hate crime will, naturally, fall to the PSNI, but it is with —

Mr Lyttle: Human trafficking as well.

Mr Ford: And human trafficking, which seems to have just been added.

Human trafficking is clearly an issue where there is a matter of international reach and national intelligence and reach. We cannot expect the PSNI to fully solve that problem on its own. As we heard on the BBC radio documentary at the weekend, it would have been pretty difficult for the PSNI to have somebody reading the Chinese language press in London to identify that people were being trafficked for the sex trade. There are other issues, namely people from organised gangs forcing others into forced labour, principally from central and eastern Europe. All of those are issues where the National Crime Agency's organisational reach and intelligence will be a major boost to the PSNI.

3.30 pm

Dr McDonnell: On a point of order, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. Is it in order that I have been misrepresented and misquoted in recent times? I want to put it clearly on the record that I never insinuated or implied that the doctors always get it wrong. I happened to be in another part of the Building, heard myself being misquoted in that way and felt it appropriate to challenge that. There was a reference to a radio programme during which the question of the termination of pregnancy or abortion was raised. The circumstances in which a woman has to consider a termination of pregnancy are stressful and difficult enough, and the subject deserves to be treated with sensitivity and compassion. Some of us believe that termination should be avoided if at all possible, while others take a more flexible approach, but no purpose is ever achieved by any of us grossly misrepresenting another.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member has put that point on the record, and I thank him.

Mr Ford: Further to that point of order, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. Dr McDonnell appears to be challenging my recollection of what he said on the radio programme. If I was wrong, I apologise, but I do not believe that I misquoted what I heard on the radio.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I thank the Minister for that.

Private Members' Business

Road Traffic (Speed Limits) Bill: Second Stage

Debate resumed on motion:

> *That the Second Stage of the Road Traffic (Speed Limits) Bill [NIA Bill 30/11-15] be agreed. [Mr Ramsey].*

Mr Ramsey: Unfortunately, my contribution had to be cut short earlier. I want to come back to an intervention that was made by Alastair Ross earlier in the debate. I want to quote from Rod King MBE, the founder and campaign director of the 20's Plenty for Us group. He commented:

> *"We are amazed and disappointed that the Institute of Advanced Motorists should make ... a woeful mistake in their conclusions from the DfT statistics. In fact, wherever 20mph limits have been piloted, on looking at the casualties in detail, councils have concluded that there was a positive effect on road safety and subsequently widened the implementation across most areas. Now 20% of the UK population live in towns, cities or villages where the Traffic Authority is convinced that 20 is plenty for most streets. The IAM conclusion is bogus and reflects a poor understanding of either the changing numbers and success of 20mph limits or basic statistics."*

It is very clear that it is important to place that on the record.

Mr Clarke: I thank the Member for giving way. I was looking for an intervention before the Speaker called the business to a halt before lunch, and I know that the Member was minded to give me that intervention.

I want to put two things on record. First, your colleague John Dallat referred to the type of the debate and said that he was disappointed at how it was going. However, this is a debating Chamber and people can have different opinions. I do not think that the language from anyone from these Benches indicated that they did not support the Bill's going forward, although I think that there is work to be done. You will accept — sorry, through the Chair, the Member will accept that, when I had a private conversation with him, we said that we would support the Bill going to the next stage. It was also interesting to note from your comments that you recognise that amendments are required.

The other thing that I want to put on record is that you referred to my colleague, who is not in the Chamber at the moment, and said that you spoke to another body about statistics. Maybe you will want to go back to the same folks in relation to 2020, because that does not address the Department for Transport figures that show that there has been an increase in accidents where a 20 mph speed limit has been introduced.

Mr Ramsey: I thank the Member for his intervention. I stand over any of the comments, figures or statistics that I have tabled and can provide the evidence of those. It is important that a debate of this nature flows. What disappointed me is that I spent some considerable time addressing the Regional Development Committee, which you are now the Chair of, and the Environment Committee, and the level of questions and concerns was not even raised. In fact, if truth be told, I got a much more favourable response and encouragement.

I know that the former Chair of the Regional Development Committee, Jimmy Spratt, who is not in his place, made reference to a visit to Scotland. On many occasions in the House, we look to the Scottish Parliament for best practice. They have a good practice guide. I say to the Member, as the Chair of the Regional Development Committee, to take a look at the Scottish guide. I am going to quote some of it:

> *"The Scottish Government is also keen to see a transformation of our towns and cities to ensure people are prioritised over motor vehicles and increasingly choose to walk or cycle when they make short journeys. ... The Scottish Government is committed to protecting vulnerable road users such as pedestrians and pedal cyclists on our streets."*

I will read three more short paragraphs. The Scottish model says:

> *"Introducing such speed restrictions will help us to reduce the number of accidents, casualties and fatalities on Scotland's roads. 20 mph speed restrictions can also help promote ... travel choices and can result in improvements to both the local and wider environment.*
>
> *Inappropriate and excessive speed is a significant cause of death and injury on the roads. Travelling too fast for the conditions or excessive speed is reported in 13% of all reported accidents and 20% of fatal accidents. Transport Scotland and its road safety partners want to see all road users travel, not just within the legal speed limit at all times, but at the speed most appropriate for the conditions, taking into account other road users."*

I am sure Members will agree that, over the past number of decades, we have seen a tsunami of an increase in vehicle ownership in Northern Ireland. In those circumstances, we have roads from 30 years ago that are not fit for purpose for the number of vehicles on them these days. I encourage the Member to look at the Scottish model. I am sure that the Committee and the Committee for the Environment will examine that as well.

I want to address the elephant in the room, as unpalatable as it might be to convert collisions and road deaths to financial figures. Doing so provides the best counterargument to those who cite cost as a reason to reject the legislation, so while it may leave a bad taste for some people, I ask for your indulgence. First is the cost of enforcing limits. As the PSNI agreed, enforcing 20 mph limits costs exactly the same as enforcing 30 mph limits. That is their language, not mine. Moving attention to the cost of changing road signage: in the last 10 years, Transport Northern Ireland spent £230 million on local transport and safety measures. Of that, £22 million has been spent on speed-reduction measures. We know what those measures are, and both Committees have raised traffic calming measures. We are all inundated with issues to address and take to the Department. Unfortunately, at times, it does take incidents of deaths before the criteria are met or the police are convinced that they are necessary. As we are seeking a phased-in, prioritised, community-requested approach, it is entirely feasible that the introduction of 20 mph would fall in line with scheduled maintenance works over a number of years, therefore

minimising the effect on annual budgets. I repeat that this Bill offers a maximum return for a minimum outlay.

Road fatalities change lives. They destroy families. Families will be forever traumatised by the loss of a son or daughter or a father or mother on the road. There is no shying away from the fact that it is true to say that they have financial implications for the economy. I made the point earlier that, when Sammy Wilson was Minister, I recall putting a question on that to him. It was £1·6 million. Department for Transport figures suggest that the figure today is as high as £1·95 million per fatal collision. That figure includes police costs, administration costs, insurance and the cost of damage to vehicles and properties. The cost to the economy resulting from collisions and slight injuries ranges from £15,000 to £23,544.

I ask people who may be opponents of the Bill, how those figures would stack up against the cost of road signage.

Let us examine best practice in other jurisdictions. Edinburgh, Birmingham, Liverpool, Manchester, Hull, York and Bristol have introduced them to great effect. At present, a total of 8 million people in Britain live in neighbourhoods that are governed by 20 mph limits. In Edinburgh, 60% of respondents to consultations were strongly supportive of these proposals. Evaluating the initial schemes of 500 roads, Bristol council discovered that 89% of residents were in support of 20 mph limits on residential streets. That is a huge consultation. Almost 90% of residents favoured that limit on Bristol streets. A total of 65% of Bristol roads saw a reduction in speeds. Over time, they were able to analyse and audit the speeds on those roads. The Bristol scheme will cost in excess of £2 million and will be funded by a local sustainable transport fund and the local transport plan. Bristol, however, has introduced a blanket ban. At this stage, I am certainly not seeking to do that.

The Bristol scheme was initially opposed by the business community. However, I say to the business community across Northern Ireland, particularly in Belfast, who may have a resistance to this, the scheme in Bristol proved that footfall increases as speed is reduced. More people want to get into the city centres as the car speeds are reducing. People feel a lot safer in the city centres. That is the evidence in Bristol. It will encourage more people into urban areas where they will spend more time and money. Footfall has risen by levels of 20% to 40% in some of the schemes that I have mentioned. Again, I say to Members that those figures are hard to ignore. Bristol also discovered that walking rates increased by 23% and cycling by 20%. Therefore, the evidence clearly suggests that these zones generate more walking and cycling while lowering incidents and accidents on the roads.

Hilden in Germany introduced a citywide limit, and the percentage of journeys completed by cycle rose by 23%. Put simply, more people cycle when convinced that the roads are safer. That has a knock-on effect on health — mental and physical well-being — and life expectancy.

Holland is clearly among the models of best international practice. I think the Minister will have knowledge of that. Holland has the highest percentage of journeys undertaken by cyclists.

Mr Wilson: And no hills.

Mr Ramsey: Probably. Of all journeys undertaken, 27% are completed by cycle, yet, and this is an important point, Holland reports the lowest cycle fatalities in Europe. So, there is a lesson there, in the country that is doing it right in encouraging more people into the use of cycles.

The public clearly support the Bill and want it to progress. The support has taken me by surprise. Not only have I been stopped in the corridors of this Building by Members from all parties, but the man and woman on the street stopped me, during the period when there was some engagement with the Committee, to tell me to support this move.

I want to move on to the PSNI, on which some Members made interventions. Clearly, the PSNI is the main player in enforcement and in dealing with the aftermath of every casualty and road fatality. Its feedback was overwhelmingly supportive. In fact, the PSNI assured me, as I said earlier, that I was pushing an open door as far as its support was concerned. That is straight from the horse's mouth.

I will not labour the point any longer except to take this opportunity to commend all those officers across Northern Ireland who, in the face of extreme and recurring carnage and tragedy, turn up to work every shift with professionalism, knowing that, that night, they might have to knock on someone's door to give them the awful news that a member of their family has been killed on the roads.

The PSNI's concern was also on a blanket ban. Allow me to reiterate that. The PSNI said that it was engaging in a bottom-up approach to social and road engineering. I am not interested solely in introducing lower speed limits when they are not requested by local communities. The success of this move depends on local communities, stakeholders, the police and transport providers, including public transport, believing and buying into the fact that new lower limits will improve their way of life.

3.45 pm

Mr Lyttle: I thank the Member for giving way, and I commend him on his work and on the important public debate that he is generating on the issue. I seek some clarification. It is my understanding that the Bill, as it stands, proposes a blanket approach to the introduction of 20 mph sign-only speed limit streets on all residential roads in Northern Ireland. He is now talking about a bottom-up approach that also includes traffic calming measures, but I do not see that in the Bill. Perhaps he could take the opportunity to clarify that.

Mr Ramsey: I know that the Member is very supportive of this course of action. As I said to other Members during the consultation, in discussions in Committee and in today's debate, it would be wrong not to reflect on points that are made to me. I will reflect on the best course of action, including in my discussions with the Minister's office, on how this can be best delivered. It would be wrong of me not to take those points on board.

I have said that I will take stock after the debate and bring forward, if necessary, some amendments of my own, if that improves the Bill and I get buy-in from the Department that takes the lead on the issue. My overall desire is to ensure that we put something in place that will make a difference to people's lives.

Mr Wilson: I thank the Member for giving way. Does he accept that, if he goes along the route of the changes suggested by Mr Lyttle, so that it is not just about sticking up signs at the beginning and end of a 20 mph limit area, the Bill will become significantly different, especially its cost?

Mr Ramsey: Yes, and I am also mindful of that. During the consultation and when I briefed the Committee, a number of Members made the point that traffic calming measures are important for many parents in our communities. Ramps have the physical effect of slowing cars down. Thankfully, we have that engineering and design in most new development schemes across Northern Ireland, particularly in social housing, where they are designed into plans from the outset. It also happens in private housing. We have to look at that. It is not part of the Bill at the minute. The Bill does what it states.

I hope for and have a full desire to have road signage across Northern Ireland that will ultimately mean change. I say again that this is about transforming the culture that people have had for decades in Northern Ireland. It is about trying to ensure that, over the next number of years, we go into primary and secondary schools to teach the drivers of the future to slow down and about the impact that they have in their communities. It should also be part of the driving test. It is about buy-in.

Consensus is important. When the new councils are set up, it would be wrong of me not to have a further consultation with them and with the new community and public safety partnerships. I want to hear from communities that want to be talked to. Young people have a voice, and I want to hear that as well. I am trying to find a mechanism to enable young people to come forward so that I can hear that voice.

DRD has told the Committee that it will back the Bill but not a blanket position of 20 mph. The Minister believes that the idea is right but that we may have to work hard at ensuring that we get the implementation mechanisms right. I fundamentally agree. The Department's preferred approach, as communicated to the Committee, would be to enable the introduction of reduced speed limits but not to impose them. That is a matter for debate and for Consideration Stage.

The Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service said that it would support the speed limit reduction in smaller residential streets. It welcomed the move as the most effective means to reduce incidences of deaths and serious injury on the road. Sustrans stated:

> *"We support the Bill and any move to reduce death on the roads."*

It went further:

> *"Road injuries are amongst the leading causes of accidental loss of life and disability worldwide."*

According to the latest available figures, seven pedestrians and four cyclists were killed on Northern Ireland's roads in 2013. Additionally, 162 pedestrians and 42 cyclists were seriously injured. That was not 20 years ago; that was 2013.

Sustrans supports a 20 mph limit on residential streets:

> *"as a vital tool in achieving the cycling revolution and improving the safety and quality of life in urban areas".*

I think that the Minister would probably concur with that, as I know that he has been very obviously promoting and championing it since taking up post.

Sustrans made this final point:

> *"We welcome the introduction of this Bill as a very important step to help to expedite the delivery of 20 mph as the default speed limit on residential roads. It is important to note that this Bill refers to sign-only speed limits, not traffic-calming measures. We suggest more thought needs to be given to its implementation".*

That is what we are doing today, and, if the Bill passes its Second Stage today, it will be given further consideration at Committee Stage.

The Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People welcomed:

> *"the key proposal to introduce 20 mph limits in designated restricted areas, particularly in respect of its potential to improve children and young people's safety and reduce the number of casualties amongst this age group".*

Another important group, Disability Action, told me:

> *"We support this campaign as a means to improve the accessibility of our streets for people with a disability, who are less mobile and would feel much more comfortable on the roads".*

At consultation stage, the road safety charity Brake said:

> *"We really support this Bill. We have found that, even when there is no increase in enforcement activities, the average speed still reduces on 20 mph limit roads that are signed only".*

I quote, as I have quoted all day, "This will save lives".

Mr Lyttle: I thank the Member for giving way and commend the work that he is doing. Does he accept that the evidence suggests that in a 20 mph sign-only street, the speed reduction, on average, is in the region of 1 mph? That, in itself, is, of course, to be welcomed, but it compares with an average 9 mph reduction in a street that contains traffic calming as well.

Mr Ramsey: That was one of the quotes that I was going to use. I welcome the intervention, and I agree with him.

The Northern Ireland Cycling Initiative agreed, stating:

> *"The public health benefits of more people walking and cycling, fewer injuries and what would be a more complete street environment would be an additional benefit of this legislation".*

Cycling group C2C supports the Bill, and a number of councils that responded to the consultation very clearly support it. We received responses from councils across Northern Ireland, not least my own Derry City Council, along with Strabane, Dungannon, Banbridge, Lisburn and Omagh.

As I finish, Members, I appeal to you to have common sense. My entry point on this has always and solely been to prevent loss of life on the road, particularly the lives of children, and there is clear evidence for that. I am absolutely sure that the introduction of the Bill would reduce the trauma and awfulness that come to a family

home following the loss of a child. Thank you for your support.

Mr Clarke (The Chairperson of the Committee for Regional Development): I welcome the opportunity to contribute to the debate in my capacity as Chair of the Committee for Regional Development. I will also speak in my own right.

I immediately place on record that the Committee for Regional Development agrees with the principal objective of the Bill, which is to reduce the number of road accidents and fatalities. We had concerns that the Bill, as it stands, proposed a blanket approach to 20 mph, and I am pleased that the Member has said that he is amenable to amending that should it progress to Committee Stage.

The Department already has the power to reduce the speed limit to 20 mph, but that power is normally exercised on a zonal basis. One of the key elements of the zonal approach is the support of residents in the zonal area. This has been integral to driving through 20 mph initiatives in the likes of Edinburgh, Portsmouth and Bristol and in the 500 or more 20 mph zones currently in Northern Ireland.

In briefing papers that it provided, Sustrans welcomed Edinburgh's approach to 20 mph speed limits in residential areas and acknowledged that that had been done zonally, rather than by default. Key to the success in Edinburgh was the garnering of public support for the pilot schemes. The Department's pilot schemes have shown that not everyone is in favour of the 20 mph zones. Three out of the four completed pilots run by the Department received objections — namely, Belfast city centre, Merville Garden Village and Ballymena — and cannot be progressed until the objections are resolved or set aside. In addition, there were only 44 responses to Mr McDevitt's consultation, and those are unlikely to be a representative geographic or demographic sample. Therefore, we need to have a wider consultation, and I hope that we will when the Bill gets to Committee Stage.

Among the other comments and concerns that the Committee will need to explore is the statement in the DOE's road safety strategy 2020 that, in 2007, 79% of fatalities caused by speeding happened in rural areas. The Bill as drafted does not cover any rural areas, so Members may wish to explore that particular aspect.

Of course, a number of references have been made to the enforcement of the schemes. Without the possibility of better enforcement, they will not succeed.

In conclusion, the Committee feels that the principal objective of the Bill — reducing the number of fatalities — is a worthy one. However, it will require a great deal of more detailed information on how that might successfully be achieved.

If you allow me, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, I will now speak in my capacity as a DUP Member. I want to put it on record that Mr Ramsey afforded me the opportunity yesterday to meet him, but, unfortunately, time did not permit that. I would have been interested in meeting him because it would have been fair to do so. We had only a brief discussion in the corridor on the Bill.

I will not be opposing the passage of the Bill to Committee Stage. Hopefully, my colleagues on these Benches will also support it so that we can see what improvements can be made to the Bill.

As elected representatives, we have all been involved in discussions in our various areas on speed ramps and in calling for better enforcement of speed limits by the PSNI. It is interesting that Mr Ramsey said that, with the police, he was "pushing an open door". However, where the PSNI is involved, it has been a revolving door, as whomever you speak to is here today and gone tomorrow. As a representative of South Antrim, where there have unfortunately been many incidents and many fatalities, I find that, when you speak to them, it is difficult to get the police to carry out enforcement. The Member is right. Whatever the speed limit, should it be 30 mph, 40 mph or, indeed, 20 mph, enforcement falls to the PSNI. If enforcement were carried out in a proper manner at present, there would not be such a requirement to reduce speed limits to 20 mph.

Reference was made to how much it will cost to implement the Bill. Mr Ramsey has changed the face of what he is suggesting. Perhaps the Minister will see fit to give us an indication of the cost. It will be interesting to find that out. I agree wholeheartedly with the Member's comment that one death is one too many. However, 2014 has recently ended, a year that saw the highest number of road deaths in many years. There has been no change in different areas as a result of those figures, and that is not because of higher speed limits; rather, it comes down to driver habit, and that is what I am most afraid of. In my area, we lobbied DRD officials, and they succumbed to pressure from public representatives to put in traffic calming measures. Where evidence of a high rate of violations was gathered by officials, traffic calming measures were introduced, yet one car was detected as travelling at twice the speed limit after measures had been put in place. That is one of the things that surprised me most. Therefore, we can put in place traffic calming measures and 20 mph zones, but, if we do not change driver habits, none of it will have any effect.

I take the Member's point about going into schools. He will meet no opposition from me on that. It is disappointing that DRD, or else DOE, has reduced its road safety budget. That is ill-judged. The more education that goes into our schools, the better. It is important to try to educate young people before they get behind the wheel of a vehicle.

I noticed an intervention or two from the Member's colleague on the Back Benches Mr Dallat. Let me remind Mr Dallat that, when he goes over the bridge heading from here to the M3, a 50 mph limit applies. On many nights, Mr Dallat goes past me, and you would not see him for dust. Maybe if this were to go into these zonal areas, Mr Dallat would need some sort of device on his car to get him to reduce his speed to 20 mph. I was not joking; that is true, but, on a more serious note, we cannot get away from the fact that far too many people are losing their life on the roads.

The only other thing that concerns me about this Bill is that we are focusing on urban areas. The highest number of deaths on our roads have been in rural areas, and, as someone who represents a rural constituency, I would not like to see a position where, although the highest number of deaths have occurred in rural areas, we are trying to address an issue that is urban-centric.

4.00 pm

Mr McKay: I support the legislation before us, and I certainly support ensuring that it goes to Committee Stage. As someone who has brought a private Member's

Bill to the House previously and is planning to do so again, I appreciate that a lot of the work goes into it. To the former Member and to Mr Ramsey, I say that it takes a lot of time, work and effort. Thanks also to the staff who are involved in trying to bring this legislation forward. A lot goes on behind the scenes that many in the public do not realise. A number of years ago, I tabled legislation on the carrier bag levy, and the Member for East Antrim opposed that as well. I am sure that he is delighted by its success. The point about that is that the Bill that I brought to Second Stage was completely different from the Bill that came out the other end at Final Stage, but, at the end of the day, the policy objectives were still met.

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

I certainly welcome the approach by the proposer of the Bill that he is open to compromise, and I hope that other parties are open to compromise on this particular issue because it is vital to our communities. It always comes up on the doors of constituents, whether in estates or in rural areas. This Bill is focused on 20 mph zones. It is about urban areas, villages, towns and cities, and I wonder whether there is capacity in this Bill to look at the issue of rural areas. Maybe that is something that we need to look at separately, but there is a problem of people losing their life in rural areas, and those lives are just as important as those of people in our towns and cities. Of course, this kind of proposal will meet resistance from many quarters. As Members said, there was resistance to the smoking ban, to seat belts being made mandatory and even to drink-driving legislation. Of course, all those things were introduced, and, within a couple of years, they became normal practice and acceptable in society.

This particular issue was raised with me two years ago by a constituent in Ballycastle concerning the speed of vehicles in Leyland Farm and Leyland Meadows in the town, and the Minister will be aware of this case. Philip Robinson's daughter Maebh was almost hit by a Volvo estate that was travelling at an excessive speed in this residential area of some 100 homes. He has written at length about the need for a 20 mph limit in built-up areas and he refers to the fact that we live in a driving culture where 30 mph is considered a minimum speed. He is absolutely right. The first thought that will come into the head of the majority of people and, dare I say, Members when it comes to 20 mph limits is that that is so slow or, "I could not drive that slow or my car will conk out". That is the kind of reaction that you are going to get. People think that 20 mph is such an inconvenience to their daily commute.

Mr Wilson: Will the Member give way?

Mr McKay: Yes.

Mr Wilson: The Member has cited a specific example, which is not always the best way of deciding what policy should be. Will he agree that, if a Volvo were travelling at excessive speed in a 30 mph limit, it would be likely to travel at excessive speed in a 20 mph limit? If he is using the example that he has given as justification for this Bill, it is a very poor argument.

Mr McKay: It is a very good argument because it is proven. The proof has already been put on the Floor that, when speed limits are reduced, even without the environmental measures, the speed ramps and so on, average speeds come down. Therefore, the risks come down as well. We can argue about how much the risk reduces, but it does reduce, and it makes it less likely, to one degree or another, that a child will be hit in a residential area in Ballycastle, Antrim, Carrickfergus or elsewhere in our communities.

When I refer to the natural reaction of commuters and drivers, there is no immediate thought given to the safety of children in residential areas of reducing the number of people killed and seriously injured on our roads. As public representatives, we all know of cases where people have died on our roads; we have all been to the wakes and the funerals again and again. In my view, there is an opportunity to reduce the number of people killed or seriously injured on our roads. It will not deal with the huge problem of people losing their lives on our rural roads, but it will help to reduce the number of adults and children who are hit by cars, vans, buses and lorries in our villages, towns and cities.

The financial , as well as the personal, cost of road deaths is huge. There is a financial cost to the Bill, and the Member has already referred to that. Each death on our roads, in addition to the huge tragedy that it visits upon a family and a community, costs the economy some £1·7 million. That does not include the cost of the seriously injured. There are police costs, costs for healthcare, drugs, counselling, the Fire Service, insurance, the physical damage and the years of medical care that result from serious injuries. So, when you look at it like that, it is clear that the human cost and the financial cost are greater by not supporting the introduction of measures to reduce speed and to change how people behave on our roads.

The estimated benefit to London from casualty reductions in current 20 mph zones has a value of at least £20 million per year, according to the Assembly there. In our villages and towns, we have many young families of all shapes and sizes. As we know, many families live in homes with no gardens, and there is nowhere for children to play. You can shout at the weans, as we say, all you like about not playing in the street, but they will do it anyway. When your back is turned, they will be out on the road kicking a ball about. Many people who have gardens have not had them fenced off to the road at all. So, it is not right that in cul-de-sacs and estates vehicles can legally drive at 30 mph. It is too great a speed limit and increases the risk of a child losing their life.

Mr Ó hOisín: I thank the Member for giving way. Central to the entire argument and to any amendment to the Bill is the definition of what constitutes a residential area and a built-up area, even the differentiation between urban and rural and the definition of through roads in some cases.

Mr McKay: Absolutely. The Committee has a great opportunity to delve into those issues in detail because the definition has to be got right. There has to be clarity, and there should not be any opportunity for this to be defined in such a way that the Main Street in Dungiven, for example, would come under a 20 mph zone. There will be, and should be, exceptions for main thoroughfares through towns and settlements.

When we talk of our cul-de-sacs and estates, I think of Bamford Park in my home village of Rasharkin where there has been a campaign to reduce the speed limit to 20 mph. I know the area well, and if you were driving at 30 mph and

a child were to slip out between the parked cars, they would not stand a chance. That is not tenable; it needs to change.

We were talking about traffic calming earlier and Transport NI. One of the inconsistencies that angers me is the fact that it has always been easier to get traffic calming towards the west than it has been in the northern area.

For example, there are road humps all the way through the likes of Ballinascreen and Draperstown, but when it comes to villages and towns in the area that I represent, there is fierce resistance to getting road humps down where they are needed.

Mr Frew: I thank the Member for giving way. He raises the example of Dunloy. We have worked in partnership to make roads in Dunloy safer. When we were there on site, Roads Service personnel stated that it was actually safer in their eyes if they extended the 40 mph speed limit and reduced the 30 mph speed limit, if my memory serves me right. You and I could not get our heads round that, but they said that it was factually correct. How does that sit with the Bill?

Mr McKay: I thank the Member for his intervention. I did not mention Dunloy specifically; I was thinking of other examples. Certainly, we have all been at site meetings and haggled with Roads Service officials as to what the best solution is. There is a need for greater traffic calming, especially in the estates around places like Dunloy, Broughshane, Glenravel, Ballymena town and so on.

Like I say, the Bill that is before us today needs scrutiny. It needs to go to the Committee and be amended. I think that its proposer recognises that as well. We have to get this right. That is especially true in some of the super-sized residential estates that we now have, where there are hundreds of houses in a single estate, with many branches of avenues, closes and parks. Because they are so large, there is more opportunity for vehicles to speed up and do 30 mph and beyond in those estates. It would take many, many years for Transport NI to introduce all the deterrents that we would like to see in different parts of our constituencies: ramps, mini-roundabouts, etc. A 20 mph limit, in my view, is a deterrent in itself. Yes, there are questions about enforcement and other physical measures to deter, but who here in this House, if they saw a 20 mph limit, would think that they would have to break that limit? No one, I would hope. Even if there were zero enforcement measures, introducing a limit that says that 20 mph is the law will ensure that the average speed of drivers will fall.

The Department for Transport's current guidance in England says that where average speeds are already around 24 mph on roads, introducing a 20 mph speed limit through signing alone is likely to lead to general compliance with the new speed limit. There will be enforcement. I will allow the Committee to delve into the issue of enforcement in greater detail. I mentioned this to a couple of Members yesterday when we were discussing the Bill: if the police are currently responsible for enforcing the speed limit, which is 30 mph today, on, say, five miles of road in a town, and the speed limit changes to 20 mph on that five miles of road tonight, the police would still have five miles of road on which to enforce the speed limit. The only difference is that they will have to adjust the numbers on their speed cameras. I do not accept that we should not strive to prevent people from getting killed on roads because the police do not have enough resources. That is not a good enough reason to kill this Bill. If there is an issue of resources, we, as elected representatives, should strive to address that.

Injuries are mainly fatal if a pedestrian is hit by a vehicle that is travelling between 30 mph and 40 mph. Pedestrians who are hit at speeds below 30 mph receive mainly survivable injuries. At a traffic speed of 20 mph, the pedestrian survival rate is increased to 97%, and 20mph limits are fast becoming the norm in many parts of Europe. Dublin City Council was the first local authority in Ireland to introduce a 20 mph or 30 kph speed limit, which has been enforced since 2006. This was introduced in the interests of road safety and to make the city centre more attractive to pedestrians and cyclists. The council now plans to extend this scheme beyond the city centre by introducing a default 20 mph or 30 kph speed limit to all residential areas in the city.

There were eight pedestrian fatalities in the Dublin city area between 2003 and 2007, and 224 pedestrians and 77 cyclists were injured. In September 2011, however, Dublin was reported to have the safest roads of any capital city in Europe. The gardaí chief superintendent Aidan Reid, head of the Dublin metropolitan area traffic corps, said that the 30 kph enforcement zone was a success. That was put down to enforcement, the ban on five-axle HGV trucks in the city centre and a huge increase in the volume of cyclists, which was down to the Dublin bike system. If the gardaí chief in Dublin says that it is enforceable in Dublin, I think that the PSNI should be equally capable of enforcing such a proposal in Belfast. Look elsewhere in the island and you will see that Cork county, Cork city, Clare and many other areas are introducing 30 kph zones.

4.15 pm

In 2011, the European Parliament adopted a resolution urging local authorities across the European Union to introduce a 20 mph standard speed limit in residential areas. In Portsmouth, the 20 mph scheme has been well supported by local residents and appears to be achieving its primary objectives of reducing vehicle speeds and associated road casualties. Levels of pedestrian, cyclist and public transport usage have all increased there as a result. In London, as I said earlier, there are 400 20 mph zones, and those have reduced fatal and serious casualties by 46%. The number of people who lose their life and are injured reduced by 46%. Manchester City Council announced in 2012 that it will also introduce 20 mph limits. Liverpool also plans to impose 20 mph zones on 70% of its residential roads by 2016. The number of car-related accidents on Newcastle's residential streets in England dropped by more than half in some areas of the city following the council's introduction of 20 mph speed limits. This is happening all over Europe and all over these islands, and we need to make sure that we are not left behind.

British Government research shows that the most effective way of saving lives is to slow traffic, and, in trial areas where speed has been cut to 20 mph, the number of cyclists killed or seriously injured fell by 50% and by 60% among child cyclists. A Norwegian study found that a 10% decrease in the average speed would result in a 37·8% reduction in people losing their lives. The Grundy study, which was published in the British Medical Journal,

found that a reduction to a 20 mph limit led to a 40% fall in casualties from collisions over a 20-year period until 2006.

Graz in Austria became the first European city to introduce a 30 kph limit in 1992, which was 23 years ago, and those limits cover approximately 80% of the city's road network. The main aims of the scheme were to improve road safety, reduce pollution and cut noise. The limit is in place on all residential roads, school zones and areas around hospitals, which equates to over 75% of the city's roads. Speed limits of 50 kph, which is 31 mph, remain on the through-roads through the city. They also found that, after two years, the majority of people who were against the proposal had changed their views, and support for the scheme is now widespread in the city. The result of that is that the number and severity of road accidents have been reduced by some 25%. The evidence is overwhelming.

As has been mentioned, what has greatly frustrated me, as a public representative, about my work on road safety over the years is the thresholds that have to be met in order for works to be done. I remember when we were lobbying for safety barriers on a fast road outside a village in my constituency and beside the road were a number of trees. It was a heavily wooded area and, given the speeds of vehicles and the shape of the road, the risk was very clear. However, it did not meet the threshold in place. A young man was then involved in a car accident in which he lost his life. The threshold was then met. The works were carried out, and there have been no serious accidents there since.

I applaud the fantastic work of Roads Service officials in significantly reducing the numbers of people who have lost their life on our roads over the years. They do over and above what is necessary to reduce the risk on our roads. However, I have absolutely no sympathy for the argument that the speed limit in residential areas should not be reduced from 30 to 20 mph because there are no accident statistics. Fathers, mothers, grandparents — all those living in these areas — see the risk, and the risk is always there because the potential for human error is always there.

According to the latest figures, 162 pedestrians and 42 cyclists were seriously injured on our roads in 2013. Seven pedestrians and four cyclists lost their lives. That is not good enough. A number of countries in Europe are looking at a zero tolerance approach. As much as humanly possible needs to be done to ensure that nobody loses their life on the roads. We are not there yet — far from it.

Mr Lyttle: I thank the Member for giving way. Would the Member accept that the debate is about not so much whether we reduce speed to 20 mph on residential roads as what is the most effective way of doing so?

Mr McKay: We need to find the most effective way of doing so. There has been much discussion today of environmental zones as opposed to limits. Ideally, we want 20 mph zones to ensure that you do not have people speeding through the area regardless of the speed limit, as the Member for East Antrim argued earlier. But the fact of the matter is that the limit itself does deter people from going over it; it is as simple as that. There will always be people who break the limits regardless of what it is, but setting the limit in law will affect people's behaviour, particularly drivers' behaviour.

The Minister talked of bringing about a cycling revolution. The revolution is not here yet, but this will certainly help it on its way. Making our roads significantly safer will make it safer for people, especially children, to cycle. At the moment, roads and streets are far from safe and, in some cases, getting less so. Rolling out the 20 mph speed limits on streets where people live is a key part of the cycling revolution to which he refers.

The potential health benefits are huge as well. Recent analysis of cycle deaths in London found that virtually all fatal collisions occurred on roads with a speed limit of 30 mph or higher. Research in London also found that, of pedestrians hit at 40 mph, 90% are killed; of pedestrians hit at 30 mph, 20% are killed; and of pedestrians hit at 20 mph, 3% are killed. Therefore, reducing the speed limit and drivers' speeds towards 20 mph reduces the chances of people being killed on our roads by a huge margin.

The cost of road signage should be weighed up against the many benefits of 20 mph limits, which include boosting walking and cycling, in particular, but also related health and environmental benefits and the reduction in roads casualties. Streets with 20 mph limits have 40% fewer road casualties and the greatest reduction in numbers of young children killed and injured. Default 20 mph limits are also cheaper to implement and can reduce the need to spend on significant new infrastructure. The benefits of 20 mph limits reach far beyond road safety to increased social interaction and physical activity, along with improved air quality and noise levels.

Sustrans research has shown that parents are far more concerned about road safety than so-called stranger danger to their children, and speeding traffic is the most common concern in our communities.

Sustrans make a very important point: all the North will be doing is catching up with elsewhere, where 20 mph zones are already being rolled out.

The Institute of Public Health outlined the potential health benefits arising from the introduction of a 20 mph speed limit in residential areas. It points to increased safety for residents, pedestrians and cyclists. Slower vehicle speeds result in perceived and actual changes to the built environment, which generate opportunities for walking and cycling. Increased physical activity will help to tackle obesity, reduce the risk of chronic conditions, improve cardiovascular health, improve social cohesion among communities, improve mental health and well-being and reduce emissions that contribute to climate change and air and noise pollution. We have to recognise that the 20's Plenty idea fits well with the public health agenda, not like the nonsense that we have seen from the Tories across the water, such as cutting benefits from people according to their weight. We need to take that seriously.

People want and should be given better choices. A better urban and community environment will make it more likely that people will make healthy choices about their lifestyle. We need to do more to promote the health benefits associated with increased physical activity as part of efforts to reduce overweight and obesity levels and improve mental health and well-being. That is consistent with the Health Department's strategy to tackle obesity, which aims to empower the population to make healthy choices and reduce the level of harm related to overweight and obesity by creating an environment that supports and promotes a physically active lifestyle and a healthy diet. A number of factors can contribute and create barriers to participation

in physical activity. Fast vehicle travel is commonly cited as a barrier to walking and cycling. In promoting cycling and encouraging greater uptake, safety remains a key concern. The NI cycling strategy outlines that it will examine the recommendations of the speed management review in Britain and, where appropriate, introduce further measures to reduce traffic speed in the North.

The introduction of 20 mph speed limits in inner south Bristol brought about a 12% increase in cycling and pedestrian activity and a 40% reduction in the number of cycle casualties in the first six months of the speed limits being introduced. Average speed reductions of 1·4 mph to 5·3 mph were reported across a range of roads in the area. Slower vehicle speeds are associated with increased opportunities for walking and cycling. According to the Health Forum in England, the associated benefits of walking and cycling include increased physical activity, encompassing weight reduction, reduced chronic conditions and better cardiovascular health, improved mental health and well-being, better social cohesion in communities and safer areas for children to play. We can see that the evidence speaks for itself.

Clause 1 concerns the speed limit on residential roads. The definition of a residential road has to be watertight; it has to address any possible anomalies. That should be discussed in detail in Committee. Some common sense has been shown in the Bill's memorandum, which states that the Department can apply 30 mph speed limits to residential areas if they are a main thoroughfare, but concerns about the definition need to be addressed through the Committee's scrutiny.

Clause 7 gives the Department two years to put the changes in place. The question is: how much will it cost? The Committee needs to establish what the projected costs are. Are the projected costs put forward by the Department accurate? Is two years enough? That is the key question that the Committee should consider. There needs to be discussion about what changes can be made at the edges of the Bill, but we would be missing a huge opportunity if the Bill were not to be introduced into law in one form or another.

Last month, Edinburgh's bid to become the first 20 mph city in Scotland moved a step closer when councillors approved a map of 20 mph, 30 mph and 40 mph limits for the city. The council said that it wants to dismiss a number of myths concerning that. Those myths are equally as applicable to here as they are to Scotland. Myth one is that slower speeds will increase congestion. The council does not anticipate any increase in congestion. In fact, research indicates that vehicles flow more smoothly through junctions at slower speeds.

Myth two is that slower speeds will increase emissions and worsen air quality. Research indicates that vehicles flow more smoothly through junctions at slower speeds. Additionally, as a result of reduced acceleration and braking, a 20 mph limit may help to reduce fuel consumption and associated emissions. Some environmental benefit from the change is expected from helping to unlock the potential for walking and cycling, as I mentioned earlier.

4.30 pm

Myth three is that the 20 mph speed limit will not be enforced. The legal speed limit on all roads in Edinburgh is enforced by Police Scotland, which says that this will be no different. Whether a street has a 20 mph, 30 mph or 40 mph speed limit, the police will direct their resources to particular problem areas as they do currently, and drivers caught flouting the limit will face a warning or fine.

Myth four is that 20 mph limits in shopping streets will be bad for businesses. It is considered that businesses will benefit from the increased liveability that slower speeds foster in their area, with more people attracted to spend time in shopping streets where they feel safer and the environment is generally more pleasant. Opinion research carried out in the south Edinburgh pilot area found that residents felt that the new speed limit had had a range of positive impacts, the most often mentioned being improved safety for children and for walking and cycling.

Myth five is that the city would be covered in speed humps. The new limit will be introduced without traffic calming measures. However, if monitoring finds that speeds remain significantly above 20 mph on certain streets despite signage, speed-reducing measures on the roads concerned will be considered.

Another myth is that signs alone do not lower drivers' speeds. Evidence has shown that sign-only 20 mph speed limits can help to reduce average speeds and improve safety. Evidence from the pilot scheme in south Edinburgh showed similar results: average speed reduced by around 10% to just over 20 mph, and there was a larger fall of about 14% on roads that had higher average speeds before the limit was introduced. Of 1,000 people surveyed in the south Edinburgh pilot area, 79% supported the 20 mph limit and just 4% opposed it.

Roseanne Brennan lost her young son Jake when he was knocked down and killed by a car outside his home on an estate in Kilkenny last June. She is sleeping outside the Dáil in a bid to force the Government to reduce speed limits in housing estates. A couple of days ago, she launched 'Jake's Law' with my party colleague Mary Lou McDonald TD in an effort to reduce the speed limit in residential areas. To lose your son like that and go on and campaign for a law that would prevent another family going through the same trauma is an extremely courageous thing to do, and we should commend the Brennan family for that.

The speed limit in that estate in Kilkenny is 50 kph, which is 30 mph, the same as applies in all our estates and residential areas here. It is too high for areas where our children live and play. Whether it is in the North or the South, it does not matter. We have to protect our children, our families and our communities.

Sinn Féin supports the Bill's principles and objectives and the approach of political parties in the House today. Some may have issues with it, but they are willing to take the Bill to the Regional Development Committee for further consideration and amendment, if necessary. Issues were raised about cost — the cost of the Bill can be counted in pounds and pence; the cost of not implementing it will be measured in lives.

Mr Lyttle: I welcome the opportunity to speak on this important Bill. I commend the proposer, Mr Pat Ramsey, for the work that he has undertaken to bring the Bill to

Second Stage, and I acknowledge its initial sponsor, Mr Conall McDevitt, and the work that he did on it.

As an MLA , chair of the Assembly all-party group on cycling and member of the Regional Development Committee, I wholeheartedly support the objectives and principles of the Bill, which I understand to be to increase road safety on residential roads; to reduce collisions, injuries and fatalities on residential roads; and to facilitate an environment that enables active travel in our community. I will, of course, support the Bill's passage to Committee Stage for further scrutiny. However, the Assembly should not confuse robust scrutiny with negativity. Members raised significant concerns today and will want to raise them again at Committee Stage.

It is important that we improve our scrutiny of legislation and absolutely ask the questions that measure whether legislation will achieve what it states it wants to achieve. We need to ask what exactly the Bill is proposing, how it will do that and whether this is the best and most cost-efficient way in which to achieve its objectives — objectives that, I think, everyone in the Assembly gives support to today.

The Bill proposes to make law sign-only 20 mph speed limits on residential roads. It attempts to define "residential road". I would have liked to hear a bit more from the proposer on his definition. The Bill proposes a public information campaign, and I would like to hear more about what that would look like and how much it might cost.

The Bill sets out a power for the Department for Regional Development to exempt certain residential roads. I ask the Minister for Regional Development how many roads are likely to require exemption and how much that might cost. It is important that we look at evidence, as some MLAs have done, to see whether having sign-only 20 mph speed limits on all residential roads is the best and most cost-effective way in which to achieve road safety and active travel.

The World Health Organization states that speed is the single most important contributor to road fatalities. The Department for Transport states that someone hit by a vehicle at 20 mph has a one in 40 chance of being killed, compared with someone hit at 30 mph, who has a one in five chance of being killed. Those are startlingly different statistics that show the improvements that can be made.

I ask the proposer of the Bill and the Minister whether any evidence can be brought to bear to highlight how many injuries and fatalities we have each year on 30 mph roads compared with those on roads on which the Department for Regional Development has piloted sign-only 20 mph speed limits and 20 mph zones. That information would really help us draw out the potential benefits of the law being proposed.

In England, we have seen mostly 20 mph zones, which have indeed led to a reduction in injuries and fatalities among pedestrians and cyclists. In London, 20 mph zones have seen a 41·9% reduction in road casualties and a 51% reduction in child casualties, which is to be welcomed. In Portsmouth, a 20 mph speed limit has reduced road casualties by 22%. In Bristol, a 20 mph speed limit pilot has seen an increase in walking of up to 36% and in cycling of up to 37%. In Hilden in Germany, the introduction of 20 mph speed limits has seen cycling journeys increase by 23%.

The Commission for Integrated Transport stated that 20 mph speed limits have transformed streets:

> *"from being noisy, polluted places into vibrant, people centred environments".*

Therefore, there is evidence to suggest that increased road safety and active travel are achieved by having 20 mph speed limits. However, there is also significant evidence to suggest that 20 mph zones can achieve that in greater measure, through speed limits, infrastructure, traffic calming measures and engineering combined.

In order to help our consideration of the proposals, I ask the Minister if it would be possible to take an opportunity today to provide the Assembly with a more detailed update of the outcomes that he has seen being achieved by the around 500 20 mph zones that have already been implemented by the Department for Regional Development in comparison with the five 20 mph sign-only speed limit areas he has piloted.

Mr Lynch: I thank the Member for giving way. I live in one of those housing estates that has been given 20 mph zones and traffic calming measures. I can say from experience that the traffic has reduced considerably. Would the Member agree?

Mr Lyttle: I am not clear if it is a 20 mph sign-only pilot area or a 20 mph zone. I take it from the Member's intervention that he believes that both measures would contribute to a positive outcome, and I agree.

As I said earlier, we have to ensure that, with limited resources, we achieve our shared belief in the objectives in the most effective way possible. That is why we need to get into the evidence.

The Department for Regional Development's Transport NI speed limits policy guide goes into significant detail in relation to these issues. It states:

> *"Drivers are likely to expect and respect lower limits"*

for a number of reasons: road function; road geometry; road environment; road density, and traffic composition. It goes on to state that without effective engineering changes to roads:

> *"actual ... speeds are unlikely to be reduced below the new limit."*

It also clearly supports 20 mph speed limits and zones in situations where there is a particular risk to vulnerable road users, especially in residential areas and at schools. It states that there is clear evidence that reducing traffic speeds does indeed reduce collisions and casualties on urban roads with low speeds and that any 1 mph reduction in average speed can reduce collision frequencies by 6%. I think that those are all positive aspects of these proposals.

It states that 20 mph encourages:

> *"healthier and more sustainable transport"*

including walking and cycling. Again, I think that this is something that the Assembly should give its full support to.

It also states that 20 mph has environmental benefits, particularly because when drivers drive at a steady pace, they save fuel and reduce carbon dioxide emissions as long as they are not using an unusually low gear.

Based on these reasons, the policy encourages 20 mph zones or sign-only limits for residential streets, cities, towns, streets where pedestrian and cyclist movements are high, schools, shops, markets and playgrounds, and where they are not part of a major route.

It goes on to state that 20 mph zones reduce speed more than sign-only 20 mph limits, and that zones make up more than 90% of all 20 mph schemes in England.

I think the policy supports both types of 20 mph provision but is moving towards suggesting that the evidence shows that the package of measures is the most effective way of achieving the objectives we all wish to achieve.

The DRD Transport NI head of engineering services gave evidence to the Regional Development Committee — before my time on the Committee — and had helpful contributions to make. He said clearly:

> *"speed limits should be set as part of a package with other measures to manage vehicle speeds and improve road safety".*

He also said clearly that a:

> *"blanket approach ... to establish a mandatory, enforceable 20 mph speed limit on all unclassified ... roads will impose the limit without seeking support from those affected in any particular location".*

He also said:

> *"It is important to note the difference between what we term a 20 mph zone and a 20 mph limit. In our terminology, a 20 mph zone uses physical measures such as humps, chicanes and gateway features to achieve speed reduction. The 20 mph limits use traffic regulation orders, signified by the use of 20 mph signs."*

4.45 pm

He went on to look at research from the Transport Research Laboratory, which provides evidence to show that, whilst both approaches can bring about speed reductions, the 20 mph zone is the more effective of the two measures.

He also touched on PSNI cooperation with these approaches, saying that the PSNI was encouraged to support 20 mph sign-only speed limit pilots on the basis that there was no significant expectation of enforcement. The 20 mph zones are significantly more self-enforcing, reducing speed limits by around 9 mph, compared with the 1 mph of the sign-only streets. He also stated clearly that the Department for Regional Development did not necessarily need legislation to introduce a 20 mph speed limit in any street and was reluctant to adopt a blanket approach as opposed to a more targeted one.

Whilst I accept that Members are committed to looking at improving and changing the Bill at Committee Stage, which the proposer acknowledged that he is open to, I think that there is a fundamental concern. In essence, at its core, the Bill proposes a blanket approach. Once we get into amending it, I think that there will be a debate about whether the tools that we need to achieve some of these objectives are already available to the Department. We need to look more at how we ensure that those tools are being used as actively and robustly as possible to deliver what we want to see achieved.

The contributor to the Committee from the Department for Regional Development also said that, rather than having a blanket scheme, the Department's approach would be to test 20 mph sign-only streets and to increase their introduction through current legislation on a targeted basis. The responsible legislator in me wants to make sure that we are putting in place legislation that will achieve actual outcomes. If we are to take that approach, having only five 20 mph sign-only street pilots is quite a low provision from the Department for Regional Development, given its aspiration to deliver a cycling revolution. I would like to hear from the Minister about whether, given that he has the powers and tools already available to him to do this, he thinks that it is possible for him to significantly increase the provision that we have seen to date.

The Regional Development Committee also heard evidence from PSNI Chief Inspector Diane Pennington, who stated clearly that:

> *"although the police welcome any move or any change that has the intention and the effect of reducing casualties on our roads, we are slightly concerned about the blanket approach proposed in the Bill to do it on all unclassified roads."*

We need to heed those concerns and to take them into consideration at Committee Stage.

There has been debate about the costs; there has been some dismissal of them, but we have to consider them. It is my understanding that DRD traffic calming for greater Belfast from 2007 to 2010 was around £500,000 per year. As a comparator, it is my understanding that around 400 kilometres of 20 mph sign-only streets in Portsmouth cost in the region of £573,000. My understanding is that there are around 4,300 kilometres of unclassified roads in Northern Ireland. An extrapolation of that would lead to sign only costing in the region of £6 million. I know that we heard quotes of £25 million to £30 million, but I think that for sign only, it would be more like an estimation of £6 million. That is still a significant amount of money and does not include the package of measures that so many people say we need to truly achieve the objectives that we want.

We can compare that with the £1 million per year that the Department for Regional Development and the Public Health Agency invest in the active schools travel programme. That delivers exceptional on-road cycle training for our young people and infrastructure improvements around schools. We have to acknowledge that the Minister has an extremely tight budget. I have not heard too many people today making any particular proposals as to where the extra £500,000 per year — £6 million in total — is going to come from. Perhaps the Minister can advise on that. We need to be realistic: we will have to allocate budget to achieve what is being proposed.

Other Members have touched on the significant support that exists for the proposal, which is true. A Sustrans opinion survey found that 70% of respondents supported a limit of 20 mph on residential roads. A Department for Transport poll found that 73% of respondents were in favour of 20 mph speed limits but that the priority, if necessary, should be areas where children travel or play, such as around schools. There has also been a NISRA/

DOE road safety monitor 2014 survey, which found slightly different results in that 63% of non-drivers supported the proposal compared with 47% of drivers, 55% of people living in built-up areas and 44% of rural dwellers. That survey also found that 70% of people were in favour of the proposal of 20 mph speed limits outside schools. So there is significant support, and the proposals would contribute to key Programme for Government targets in relation to encouraging active travel, particularly to schools, and the Northern Ireland road safety strategy, which has a clear commitment to considering 20 mph speed limits for cycling encouragement and to improve cycling infrastructure.

In conclusion, if, on further scrutiny, we find that the proposals will reduce speed limits on residential roads, ensure fewer accidents and fatalities and encourage more people to walk and cycle for everyday journeys, thus improving our environment and public health, the Bill will indeed have the support of the Assembly. We need to take heed of what the evidence shows as being the best way of achieving those objectives in the most cost-effective way.

Mr Elliott: Firstly, I apologise to the proposer of the Bill, Mr Ramsey, for not being here for his deliberations due to Committee business. I know the principles behind it, and hopefully it will make some progress, particularly to the Committee, where a number of people have indicated they would like to see it given significant scrutiny.

I listened to Mr Lyttle indicating that quite a lot of the proposals in the Bill are already in place and that it was just a case of implementing them. At least, that is what I took from some of what Mr Lyttle said. To be fair, I would be surprised if there was anyone here who would not want to put in place measures that would help to save lives and make our roads safer. That is one of the key aspects of it. However, it cannot be carried out in isolation. Many good traffic calming measures have been put in place over the years, and this may be another tool in the box, but we need to be extremely careful about how it is implemented. The one significant aspect that I have not heard mentioned is driver attitude and the attitudes of people on the roads. One of the key issues is changing the practical attitudes of people and how they respect other road users, whether they are drivers, pedestrians or cyclists.

I have heard a strong case being made by Mr McKay and Mr Lyttle that the Bill will improve the use of our areas for cyclists and pedestrians. However, I am not so sure that the Bill will create huge areas of 20 mph speed limits. That is not the idea behind the Bill; the idea is to protect residential areas. We need to be careful that it is not just something that will help bring more pedestrians and cyclists onto the road in itself. It may contribute to that, but it will not do that on its own.

We have heard quite a lot of statistics here today. I will not rehash some of those, but it is clear that there is quite a lot of research in the area. I re-emphasise that I do not think that that research is based solely on the issue of reducing speed limits to 20 mph.

I talked about driver attitudes, and we need to be quite clear that, just because a speed limit is 30 mph or 20 mph, it does not mean that you have to drive at that speed. The speed limit on quite a lot of the roads that I will travel home on this evening is 60 mph. I would defy anybody in the Chamber to try to drive at 60 mph on those roads. It would not be safe. People need to get it into their mind that, just because there is speed limit, it does not mean that you have to go up to that speed limit. It is the same even if it is 20 mph. There are some areas in which it may not be safe to drive at 20 mph.

If you are to provide any type of traffic calming measures — to a degree, I would include a 20 mph speed limit as a traffic calming measure — you need community buy-in. The key aspect is getting communities to lead on the areas that they want that speed limit in. There may be some areas in which a 20 mph speed limit may not be appropriate, and it may not be helpful to have it there.

While I support the principle of the Bill — there is no doubt about that — and Mr Ramsey's key points behind it, it needs that scrutiny.

Mr Frew: I thank the Member for giving way. I certainly agree with his sentiments. To cite some examples, if you are driving in a residential area, where there is a row of parked cars, it would be madness to drive at 20 mph. Also, if you are coming up to a school at 8.50 am, 9.15 am, 2.00 pm or 3.00 pm, it would be madness to drive at 20 mph. You would want to drive a lot more slowly. It might not be just a case of a blanket ban. It is all about habits and people driving appropriately.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Member for that. He makes a good point, particularly about schools. When children are getting out of or are going to school, it would not be appropriate to drive at 30 mph or even 20 mph. On the other side — I will only make a short point on this aspect — there are restrictions on HGV vehicles travelling on A-class roads, which, I think, might be 40 mph. It is not always safe for those vehicles to be driven on those roads at 40 mph. I have seen tailbacks of maybe 10 or 12 vehicles on the A4 when HGVs are being driven at 40 mph and the other vehicles cannot overtake. They almost take a chance to overtake in places that are dangerous, whereas they would not be tempted to do that if the HGVs were being driven at 50 mph. It is all about proportion, being responsible and driving to the speed that is safe at the time.

I go back to the issue of community buy-in. I do not know whether the sponsor of the Bill has looked at the potential of an opt-in system, whereby there is huge community support for 20 mph speed restrictions in that area.

The aspects on which the Committee could do significant scrutiny that have been mentioned are the costings and definitions. Those two aspects are critical to the proposals and to the Bill. I look forward to the Committee carrying out that scrutiny because it is vital. It is important that it goes through a wide range of exploratory measures and gathers the information and evidence that is out there, to collate good proposals and maybe make some amendments to the Bill that can help it in many ways. We want to ensure that the Bill is not looked at negatively. We want it to be looked at positively, and any proposals or amendments should also be positive.

Community buy-in and partnership has been central to developments in the past. Mr McKay, in particular, highlighted some areas in mainland GB where some good proposals had been put in place. I know that one of those is Cambridge, which is often held up as a real success story of community buy-in and proposals that have been done in partnership with the community. That did not just happen overnight. Those 20 mph limits were not put in place overnight. Pilot areas were developed, which were

expanded over time to cover the majority and then all of the city. That is an important aspect and one that I would like to see explored more.

5.00 pm

Apologies for referring to Mr McKay again, but he mentioned areas further west, such as Draperstown. Mr McKay, just to make you aware, in Northern Ireland, there are areas that are much further west than Draperstown, especially over in Fermanagh. Mr Lynch referred to a good example in his area, but we have good examples even further west in Northern Ireland as well.

I support the principle of the Bill and look forward to more scrutiny. We will see where that takes us.

Mr Easton: I believe that the Road Traffic (Speed Limits) Bill has been brought forward by Mr Ramsey with the very best of intentions. There is no doubt that all of us in the House want to see safety on our roads improved to save lives or have one less person injured on our roads. That is what makes this a worthwhile cause to consider.

Research from the Department for Transport shows that, if a pedestrian is hit by a vehicle travelling at 20 mph, there is a 2·15% chance, or a one in 40 chance, of them being killed, or a 97·5% chance of them actually surviving. Compare that with a pedestrian hit by a car travelling at 30 mph. There is a 20% chance, or one in five chance, of them being killed, or an 80% chance of survival. That represents a 17% better chance of survival by reducing the speed limit from 30 mph to 20 mph and is why the Bill is worthy of discussion and being taken very seriously. However, we need to take a closer look at the practicalities of being able to take a blanket 20 mph approach across all 30 mph roads in Northern Ireland.

What do DRD and the PSNI have to say about it at this stage? When taking evidence at the Regional Development Committee from Chief Inspector Pennington, there was acknowledgement that there was concern about the blanket approach proposed in the Bill for all roads. The PSNI said that it would prefer that the model was a bottom-up approach coming from demand from the community, primarily in residential areas. PSNI surveys seemed to suggest that drivers in those areas tend to drive closer to a 20 mph speed limit than a 30 mph speed limit. I acknowledge that Mr Ramsey has said that he is going to look at the blanket approach and maybe curtail it.

Another area of concern from the PSNI was the ability to enforce such speed limits. Comments made by the PSNI were that it is seen as "excessive and over the top" and a challenge to enforce. That begs the question that, if this cannot be enforced across the whole of Northern Ireland, is a blanket 20 mph speed limit the answer, or should we consider the PSNI's preferred option of community buy-in? However, I agree with comments made earlier that, if the PSNI can enforce the 30 mph speed limit, why can it not enforce the 20 mph speed limit, if you are swapping one for the other? That is something that we need to examine.

In evidence from DRD, the issue of cost was raised, with a view that it could be anything from £6 million to £26 million, depending on what level it was implemented at and the different types of measures that would need to be put in place. DRD's preferred approach would be to enable the introduction of reduced speed limits but not impose them. There are questions around that as well.

The question that needs to be asked is this: why was there such a lukewarm response from the PSNI at the Committee? I accept what you are saying, by the way, but they were a bit less welcoming when speaking to us, especially over being able to enforce it. Maybe, Mr Ramsey, you will look at that for us, as well as at DRD's approach of introducing but not enforcing it, which was another issue of concern.

Obviously, the cost implications are an issue. Where is DRD going to get this money? Maybe the Minister will tell us when he gets up to speak, because I know that money is tight. If we go for the £6 million approach, where will you get that money? If you go for the full approach, where will you get £26 million? It has certainly been a struggle in recent Budgets. This is a big issue that we need to look at.

I stress to Mr Ramsey that I am not knocking his Bill; I am taking it very seriously. There are issues. Saving lives and preventing injury is very important. We all agree with that, which is why we need to consider the Bill seriously before we reach a conclusion. I am looking forward to the Bill coming to the Committee so that we can scrutinise it well.

Mr Dallat: To my mind, the contributions to the debate in the afternoon have been a great deal more positive than those made earlier, and I am grateful for that. I single out Mr Tom Elliott, who said that, if there are to be amendments to the Bill, let them be done in a positive way. That is the right approach. He also mentioned attitudes. I know that he was not present when my colleague Alban Maginness spoke at length about attitudes.

Let me begin by thanking Pat Ramsey for putting in the time to bring forward the Bill. I know that, due to personal circumstances, it is very important to him. There are probably other Members who, due to their personal circumstances, know just how important the issue is.

As a former teacher who has worked in Donegal and Kilrea, images are etched in my mind for life of young people who needlessly lost their lives because of speed and in circumstances very close to their homes. In one case in Donegal, two little brothers lost their lives together. It is a serious subject, and I know that everyone in the Assembly will take it seriously.

I totally forgive the Chairman of the Regional Development Committee, who accused me of speeding on the M3. I am not taking him off my Christmas list for that; I know that the comment was light-hearted, and I accept it as such. Nevertheless, I do deny it.

Mr Wilson: Will the Member give way?

Mr Dallat: Well —

Mr Wilson: Is it true?

Mr Dallat: Mr Wilson, if you had come along on your motorbike, you might have been able to check it out.

The history of transport is fascinating. Young people really enjoy it, and I am glad that it is increasingly taught in schools. The story begins, of course, with the red flag Act, when someone walked in front of a steam engine and did not allow it to travel at more than 4 mph. We are talking about 20 mph, so perhaps we can consider that.

Any Act worth its salt will work when people are convinced that it is valuable and good. I know that 13 million people in the neighbouring island of Britain are already signed

up to 20's Plenty-type schemes. The beauty about those schemes is that they are done by agreement. Edinburgh was mentioned. There are 20's Plenty schemes in Glasgow, where my daughter, Helena, lives. I have deliberately walked around them. You experience a sense of freedom in those areas. It was clear to me that motorists respected the wishes of the local community. The road signs, whatever their cost, were a symbol of agreement in the community that people did not want motorists speeding through their neighbourhoods.

The fact that we are discussing the Bill at its Second Stage will help to develop in people's minds a positive attitude towards what we are trying to achieve.

I do not want to repeat this, but, as I said earlier, millions of pounds and the energy of world leaders brought us to a situation of peace. Surely the fact that more people were killed on the roads during that awful period is an indication that we should be prepared to invest in road safety. We need to be mindful that, in recent times, fatal accidents have been on the increase again. Sometimes, I think that we get a false sense of belief that we are really improving. Dare I suggest that one of the reasons why people are not killed as often now is the vastly increased safety of the cars that we drive, which we tend to overlook?

Some time ago, I attended a cross-community service in the cathedral in Newry. It was an opportunity to see at first hand the grief of families who were absolutely broken by people who had killed their loved ones on the roads.

Today is one small step. As the day developed, it became clear to me that we are taking this seriously. It is a rare occasion when we can dispense with party labels, forget about the general election coming up and focus on something that might well allow the Assembly to be remembered for something positive.

Yes, there has to be enforcement, and I encourage people to research how the French Government tackled the problem. The number of people being killed on the roads there was absolutely disgusting, and the French Government were ruthless in what they did, but, at the end of the day, they dramatically decreased the number of deaths. Scandinavian countries have done it well and perhaps not so ruthlessly. Nevertheless, they have done it in such a way that the motorist understands that it is a privilege and not a right to be on the road. Where should that right be respected and honoured more than in our neighbourhoods and where our children are? Of course, remember the elderly people who are slow at crossing roads, and they, too, need to be kept in mind.

In conclusion, I thank Pat again, not because he is a member of the SDLP but because he is somebody who genuinely cares about a problem that is on our doorstep and is prepared to do something about it. By all means, Members, wherever amendments are needed or whatever you think necessary, do it, but I urge everyone in the Assembly to approach it, as Tom Elliott said, in a positive way, not in a way that might influence people not to take it seriously. This is one of the most serious subjects that the Assembly could ever discuss. I wish everyone well with their future contributions on this most important subject.

Mr Wilson: First, I have absolutely no doubt about the sincerity and motivation of the Member who proposed the Bill. Indeed, I remember how, when I was Environment Minister, he used to plague me with road safety issues. He was not always right. In fact, I remember that when we were deciding to stop funding the Road Safety Council, he predicted all kinds of carnage on the roads and all kinds of consequences of going down that route. It did not come to pass. Nevertheless, the one thing that I know is that, in the representations that he made, he genuinely believed that it was an issue that had to be dealt with seriously. Having said that, I have to add that we do not judge legislation on the passion that someone demonstrates when bringing it forward or the sincerity that is displayed. We have to judge legislation on whether it will achieve the objectives that are set out in it, how it will affect other issues and whether it is competent.

5.15 pm

I know that this is not necessarily the Member's legislation. It was initiated by the former Member for South Belfast, who left the Assembly at a rate much faster than 20 mph. In fact, I think that he left it at about 100 mph. Nevertheless, Mr Ramsey inherited the Bill. However, it is deeply flawed legislation. Some of my colleagues have been a bit more gracious than I would be on the issue, saying that they are at least prepared to take it to Committee Stage, where it will be changed, altered, reconstructed or whatever other terminology has been used. I suspect that I will be in a minority in the Chamber, perhaps even in a minority of one, but my personal view is that the Bill is so flawed that it should probably have been strangled at birth. I say that not because I do not have concerns about road safety. In fact, I probably find that —

Mr Dallat: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Is it appropriate to use a term such as "strangled at birth" in a debate on such a serious subject as road safety?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): I will allow Mr Wilson to continue, but Mr Dallat's views have been expressed and are recorded in Hansard. The remark was made in the cut and thrust of debate.

Mr Wilson: If the Member is going to take exception to such a mild remark, I fear what he will think of some of the other things that I want to say later on about the Bill. He need not become all sanctimonious, as SDLP Members tend to do when they find that some of the things that they bring forward are either plainly stupid or do not measure up to proper scrutiny. That is the typical tactic from SDLP Members. It does not matter whether you are talking about the Budget or welfare reform: they get all sanctimonious on you, and you are not allowed to speak your mind on particular things.

Let me say that road safety issues, be they difficulties and dangers outside schools, in estates or in residential areas, are brought to me continually by constituents. In fact, I suspect that, if the Minister were to ask Roads Service officials in my area about the number of times, even within the past three months, that I have had them out on-site looking at road safety issues, he would find that I am probably one of the most prolific Members in the constituency at raising such issues. I know the importance of the issues to constituents, but the one thing that I do not believe it is right for a public representative to do is to bring forward legislation that is not going to be effective.

Let us look at the legislation on the basis of what we have heard so far from its proposer. We have no firm evidence that the Bill will achieve the objectives that it is designed to achieve. The proposer is not even clear about what

kinds of roads he wants to see covered. In fact, he did not even know the extent of the roads that would be covered. He had no idea of the cost. We have had contradictory evidence as to the period over which the legislation would be introduced. On the one hand, his Bill proposes a massive advertising campaign, designed to tell people that, if you are driving through a residential area that has not been defined, the speed limit is 20 mph. On the other hand, we are told that that might not happen for more than two years, for six years or for as long as it takes to spread about the cost.

The other thing, of course, is that it does not actually address the main issue. We have had contradictory evidence. Mr Lyttle gave some figures that were slightly higher than the figures that were given by the proposer of the Bill, and do not forget that all of the conversation so far has been about the impact on pedestrians and cyclists. Mr Ramsey suggested that five pedestrians were killed, and Mr Lyttle has suggested that seven pedestrians were killed. We do not know whether they were all killed within areas where there is currently a 30 mph limit, a 40 mph limit or a limit above 40 mph. We do not have those figures.

Mr Agnew: I thank the Member for giving way. Maybe he is getting to this, but he has made the sweeping statement that this Bill will not work and will not do what it seeks to achieve. Various pieces of evidence have been presented to the contrary to show that, where 20 mph speed limits have been introduced, they have reduced accidents and reduced deaths. Indeed, evidence has shown that hitting someone at 20 mph is significantly less likely to kill them than hitting them at 30 mph. Is he going to get to the point where he introduces the evidence that this Bill will not work, now that he has stated it so absolutely and so clearly?

Mr Wilson: Absolutely, I am indeed, if he has some patience. I was going to suggest, actually, that this Bill is so flawed that it probably sits beside the kind of manifesto that is put forward by his party. It does not go quite as far as wanting to ban people from eating bacon on a Monday to save the planet or not advertising for holidays that involve flying to Spain in case you bring the Mediterranean to Northern Ireland through climate change.

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): You taught him.

Mr Wilson: I know. I have been reminded on many occasions that he was one of my pupils, but not all of my pupils were successes in life, unfortunately, and we have to live with the consequences. *[Laughter.]* Unfortunately, it has come to haunt me in this Chamber.

I want to come to the evidence, but I want to point out that, first, I believe that the Bill is flawed. Secondly, there are arguments for saying that, in some places, the speed limit ought to be reduced. I think that Mr Elliott made a really important point: the speed limit does not indicate the speed at which you must drive. I, too, have got some roads around where I live where the 60 mph limit is not appropriate, as I have found out on occasions when I have tried to abide by what I thought was the minimum speed limit but which was the maximum speed limit. Mind you, I do try to drive at the speed limit on them because I feel obliged on occasions.

The whole point is that we might think that we will solve this problem by simply saying to drivers, "There is a big round sign with a figure inside it", and think that, once we have put that up, we have solved the problem. However, drivers have to use sense. I know that, at times, it is not appropriate for me to drive at 20 mph in certain places, and you slow down to a lower speed. On other occasions, of course, it is appropriate. I think that an awful lot of driver experience has to be applied here.

When it comes to the issue of the speed limits, as Mr Lyttle has pointed out, the Minister for Regional Development already has the ability, where it is believed that there should be a lower limit imposed, for example, where there are community demands or where accident statistics and evidence are produced to show that —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Can I ask the Member to draw his microphone towards him so that what he is saying is picked up?

Mr Wilson: Where there is evidence that the current speed limit is not appropriate, the Minister for Regional Development has the power to reduce that.

Mr Lyttle: I thank the Member for giving way. Will he also acknowledge that I also said that it may be questionable as to whether the Department and the Minister are using that power enough currently?

Mr Wilson: That is an issue not for legislation but for public representatives to press officials. If the power is available to them and if there is a clear case that the power should be used to have that power exercised, it does not mean that we go for one-size-fits-all legislation where thousands of miles of road will have a limit imposed on them that may not necessarily be the kind of limit that is required. It is another reason why I really cannot understand where the Bill is coming from. If the Minister did not have the power to do it, I could understand why we needed to introduce legislation; however, if the Department has the power already, let it be applied in a particular way.

Mr Poots: Will the Member give way?

Mr Wilson: Yes, I will give way.

Mr Poots: Would it not be better if the proposed legislation was more comprehensive and looked at speed limits in general? While there is an acceptance that, in certain places, speed limits should be reduced, it is also reasonable to look at where you could raise speed limits. There is a perception that motorists are bad for the environment, so we will impose all sorts of taxes and new rules on them, here, there and everywhere, often willy-nilly.

I was in Germany two years ago, and was there again last year, where there are excellent road safety standards, but there is no speed limit on the motorways. When you come to the built-up junctions, there is a speed limit that people observe, and it works extremely well. If you go to England, you have a speed limit that is not applied. The police do not apply the speed limit; they allow the traffic to flow perhaps at 80 mph or more, but they do not pull people in for driving at those speeds. Should we not look at speed limits in a more comprehensive way?

My constituency is both urban and rural, and many people spend an awful lot of time in their cars. If some people had their way here today, they would spend an awful lot more time in their cars rather than doing other things in life. We

do not need to punish the motorist continually. We need to ensure that if we introduce measures to reduce speed limits to apply road safety, we also look at other areas where we will not impact on road safety, but we could raise speed limits and do that in a very safe way.

Mr Wilson: The Committee might wish to consider that, as, I suspect, the Bill will go to the Committee anyhow. Are there inappropriate limits at the other end of the scale? The Member for North Down asked me what evidence I have that the legislation would not necessarily be effective. I must say that I am always wary about statistics because I know that, just as Members who have made the case for the Bill can abuse or be selective with statistics, I could be accused of doing exactly the same. For example, when Mr Ramsey was speaking about the evidence, he quoted from London. What he did not point out, though it has been pointed out to him by a number of Members since, is that the evidence from London was not based on the terms of his Bill; it was based on areas that were zoned, so there were other issues that accompanied the imposition of the 20 mph speed limit, such as traffic calming measures, narrowing of roads, chicanes and all the other things that roads agencies do. The Bill is simply about sticking up 20 mph signs when you enter those zones.

The evidence is comprehensive because it was carried out in Portsmouth a year after, so that people had time to get used to the changes in Portsmouth. The evidence that was produced there indicated that rather than speeds being reduced by a significant amount, average speeds were only changed by 0·9 mph. Rather than a reduction in the number of people who were either killed or seriously injured, that number went up by 2%. This was not some snap survey; it was carried out over a period of the year at, I think, 129 locations. It looked at the statistics for the whole area that was covered by the changes in Portsmouth. If we are looking for evidence on this, it would appear to be that where you have got only 20 mph limits being imposed and signage being put up for it, it will not be effective.

5.30 pm

You have then got to ask, first, whether you raise false hopes; secondly, whether it is worth the disruption; and, thirdly, whether it is worth the cost. Before we get into the cost of one death and that we should not tolerate one death on the roads, if that were the case, even on Mr Ramsey's own statistics, we would ban cars altogether because at 20 mph, you still have a 3% chance of being killed. Do those 3% of people not matter? Where do you draw the line? Do we go back to the point that Mr Dallat referred to, where we get people walking in front of cars with a red flag to cut down the danger of being killed? If we are going to look at this in a serious way, we have got to get behind the rhetoric and the emotion and ask ourselves some of these serious questions.

All kinds of claims have of course been made about the impact that this will have. Mr Ramsey talked about tourists happily sailing around the countryside and through the towns on pushbikes. Mr McKay talked about children playing football in the street, liberated from the fear and worry of being knocked down. Elderly people will walk with great assurance around town centres, knowing that they will not be run over. I have got to say that if that is what this is being sold on, it does not even marry up with what is in the Bill. According to the Bill, the very areas that tourists would want to go around will not be covered. They are through routes, town centres and main thoroughfares. They will be excluded.

The reason why children do not play in the street and parents do not feel that children are safe to play in the street is not just because of the through traffic. I know that when constituents come to me, it is about the number of houses that were built in housing estates, especially in the 1960s and 1970s, when car ownership was not as prevalent and off-street car parking was not available. Where houses used to have no cars, they have now got two cars. It is the danger of children playing between parked cars. If you jump out from between parked cars and somebody comes down at 20 mph as opposed to 30 mph, you still have not got a chance. Let us not pretend that this legislation will result in children's happily being able to skip around the streets of our estates. It will not do that. Let us not sell it on that particular basis.

That brings me to the point about the definition of a residential street. In the legislation, it is where you have street lamps that are placed at 185 metres apart and the road has not been classified. Maybe the Minister, when he is summing up in his speech on this, will give us some practical examples of streets which are deemed to be not classified and the extent of the roads that will be covered by this particular situation.

Let me give you a couple of examples within walking distance of where we are today. There is the primary school down the Belmont Road. There are houses on either side of the road. The residential areas are not off the road but on it. Are we saying that that road would be covered by a 20 mph limit? Or would it be regarded as a classified road and therefore the very fear that people have, namely that children in a school are at risk, would not be covered?

I think of the village of Glynn, which you and I are both familiar with. There are houses on either side of the road there. That busy road through the village carries heavy traffic from Larne port down into Belfast. Would that be regarded as a classified road or a non-classified road? A Bill like this would certainly raise expectations that, in an area where there is not even a footpath outside some of the houses, people there might feel safer after this. I suspect that that road would not be covered by the Bill, because it is part of the A2 and therefore would not fall under this, yet there is a school on it and houses facing right out onto it with no footpath. If we are really selling this as a way of making it safer for people, let us be quite clear that the Bill is doing the job that it is designed to do. I do not believe that it is, and that is one of the reasons why I am particularly critical of it.

We come to the costs. I know that the Member has dismissed the costs of this. I do not want to sound cold and calculating about this, but, with all public policy, the cost has to be measured against the benefits that are obtained from it. In the part of Portsmouth that was covered, it cost just over half a million pounds just to put the signage up. Mr Ramsey is suggesting that, in light of the discussion that we have had and some of the points that people have made, he is now thinking that we ought to do this in zones, where you do not simply have the signage but have all the infrastructure of putting in traffic calming, to ensure that the figures that he quoted from London can be met. If that is the case, the costs will become significantly

higher. Of course, there is another issue in that there might be greater resistance to it. Many constituents make representations to me in support of traffic calming measures, but many constituents say, "It was the worst thing that ever happened. We want those bumps removed because of the vibrations in my house and the noise of traffic bumping over them".

Mr Elliott: Will the Member give way?

Mr Wilson: I will, yes.

Mr Elliott: I totally understand what the Member is saying about the lobby to get traffic calming measures in place, particularly ramps, and the lobby to get them away. Will the Member accept what I said earlier in that that is why it is vital that there is community buy-in to any project, even the 20 mph limits?

Mr Wilson: You are exactly right, and that is the point that I was going to make. How can you get community buy-in if people do not even know what they are buying into? We are not clear about whether the Bill is simply about putting up signs or is about putting up signs, humps, chicanes and all the rest of the paraphernalia that goes along with traffic calming. I suspect that many people might have reservations if that is the road that you want to go down. Other people might welcome it with joy. That is why a Bill needs to be very clear. It has to have support. Mr Ramsey has talked about the widespread support for the Bill.

A Bill that, according to the explanatory note he has provided, got 41 responses — I suspect from the most vociferous of the lobby groups — does not strike me as one that has gained the imagination of the general public. We therefore need to question that.

For all those reasons — I could make other points, Mr Deputy Speaker — I do not believe that this is a good Bill. I suspect that it will go to Committee, but I hope that, when it does, the points that I have raised will be fully considered. Many motorists will be appalled at the prospect of large areas of Northern Ireland being subjected to 20 mph limits. I hope that we do not finish up with a Bill that for many people might be not a Road Traffic (Speed Limits) Bill but a horse-and-cart Bill. That would be a retrograde step.

Mr Attwood: I acknowledge, in his absence, the work of Mr Ramsey, who has incurred both personal and political obligations, and Mr Conall McDevitt, the original sponsor of this legislation. I do not intend to comment further, other than to say that sometimes Mr Wilson's need for theatre results in words coming out of his mouth that would be better kept inside his head. In any case, I also acknowledge earlier private Members' Bills passed by this House: Mr McCallister's Caravans (Northern Ireland) Act 2011 and Mr McKay's Carrier Bags Act (Northern Ireland) 2014. Both Members will confirm that it was in part the weight of the Department behind the Bill that ensured the resolution of many issues at Committee Stage and thereafter before the Bill eventually received Royal Assent and became law in Northern Ireland.

I ask the Minister to confirm that the weight of his Department will be behind this Bill, because there are only 40 weeks left of sitting time in this mandate. Therefore, the passing of the Bill into law during that period, if that is the will of the Assembly, will require — partly, but not very much, for some of the reasons articulated by Mr Wilson on the Floor this afternoon, to which I will return — the weight of the Department and not just the personal and political weight of Mr Ramsey. I ask him this question: will the resources of the Department be fully pledged to ensure that this Bill gets to the far side of Second Stage?

Once upon a time, I was the Environment Minister and, as a consequence, Minister with responsibility for road safety. Some of Mr Wilson's comments would suggest that he is in denial that he also had that responsibility at one time. I remember one occasion when officials came in to see me following a public consultation about the driver training regime. I think that 24 or 25 recommendations had been tested through the public consultation, of which they thought four or five were feasible. I went home and thought about the recommendations before deciding that I did not agree. As a consequence, we took forward probably half or slightly more than half, if my memory is correct, of the recommendations from the public consultation. My one regret in that regard is that I was not even more radical than taking up that dozen or so recommendations, because I believe that some of the recommendations that I did not take forward at that time I should have taken forward.

5.45 pm

Mr Poots: Will the Member give way?

Mr Attwood: I will in a second. I acknowledge the Member who is about to speak because I think that that consultation was initiated by Mr Poots as my predecessor. In that regard, I give way.

Mr Poots: The road safety branch of the DOE moves very slowly. I wanted to introduce a new driving test regime because the existing one is not fit for purpose. Mr Elliott, who is now absent, said that a lot of the problems on our roads relate to driver attitude, but we still have a driving test that is largely a manoeuvres test. It does not adequately deal with driver attitude and the risks on the road and it does not adequately ensure that young people are prepared for those risks. It forces young people to drive at 45 mph. I see them on the motorways, and they cause danger to themselves and other road users by driving at 45 mph and sticking rigorously to the law. Change is really needed. I encourage the Member's party to move forward more rapidly on that and to press the road safety division to bring those matters forward.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): I draw Members back to this Bill rather than some other Bills.

Mr Attwood: As Mr Poots spoke, the face of his colleague to his left, Mr Wilson, went even more beetroot red than it normally is. Very shortly, the man to the right of Mr Wilson will have an equally red face. Mr Wilson, as I will outline in a minute, tried to oppose the very thing that Mr Poots has argued for. The very thing that Mr Poots has argued for is currently before a Committee of the House.

Mr Wilson: I am still opposed to it.

Mr Attwood: I will come back to that. I hope that both Members feel suitably embarrassed, one because he has been contradicted by his colleague and the other because he did not know that a Committee is looking at some proposals that were developed during Mr Poots's time as Environment Minister.

The point of all that is this: I do not know whether Mr Poots or Mr Wilson viewed the road traffic ads when they were

produced by the DOE road safety branch in consultation with private consultants, but I did. They used to be shown in a cinema on the Dublin Road. When they were about to be put into the public domain on TV, we used to call in schools to view the new ads. Those ads, which have received multiple international awards because of their quality, tell the story about the threat to people on our roads, the reason why the Bill is before the House and why the Bill has to go before the Regional Development Committee —

Mr Clarke: Will the Member give way?

Mr Attwood: I will in a second.

They tell the story of why the Bill is before the Committee in respect of road traffic limits. That narrative, those pictures and that experience — the silence of the schoolchildren when they saw the ads — was at a time when we had declining road deaths. Over two years, there were fewer than 60 road deaths each year in Northern Ireland, which is the lowest in recorded memory. On this island, North and South, we have a spike when it comes to road traffic deaths and serious injuries. In that context, having spoken to a number of the families and victims who were brave enough to tell their story in those advertisements on TV, I think that that is why the Bill has to be given every fair wind.

In passing, I refer to the fact —

Mr Clarke: I appreciate the Member giving way on that point. I draw him back to the advertising campaign. I think that most people gave the campaign a fair wind. You recognised that, statistically, there has been an increase in deaths. Many of us know people in our constituencies who have been affected by road deaths through their family or another connection. What alarms me most about the graphic nature of those adverts is the number of people who tell us publicly that they turn over to another channel when they come on. The impact that you are trying to achieve is lost because their graphic nature has the opposite effect — people turn away.

Mr Attwood: Ask the people who produce those ads, track the audience response to them and monitor, in public attitude surveys, the response to those ads. There will be those who find the images so graphic and shocking that they turn over, but many will watch and learn. There are many reasons for the improvement in the figures for road deaths and serious injuries, and one of those is the power of adverts to drive home messages into people's minds and hearts. There may be anecdotal evidence that people do not like some of the ads, but there is empirical evidence that the vast majority of the population generally view them as making a necessary impact in their life and one that might result in a necessary change in their driving conditions.

It is reasonable to respond to what Mr Wilson said. All of this is in response to what he said, not that I want to be preoccupied by that, and I do not think that we should be. Nevertheless, I come back to the Bill by making this point: when, eventually, there was a discussion at the Executive table, at which Mr Poots and Mr Wilson were present, about the Road Traffic (Amendment) Bill currently before the Environment Committee, it was Mr Wilson — this is relevant — who made the same arguments as he made today. What was the response of the Executive? I particularly recall the contributions of the First Minister, the deputy First Minister and the Enterprise Minister. The response of the Executive was unanimously, save Mr Wilson, to endorse the policy proposals. That should be our approach today. Whilst we are right to interrogate some of the issues that Mr Wilson raised, we should hear the voice of the Executive in a similar context in order to ensure that this Bill is given the full opportunity that it needs over the next 40 weeks of sitting time.

I make the point, however, that Mr Wilson said that reducing the speed limit from 30 mph to 20 mph would not give anyone hit by a vehicle a chance. Hansard will confirm that he said, "not got a chance". That is Mr Wilson's argument on the Bill: reducing speed by 10 mph does not give anyone a chance. If you speak to any individuals who, rather than going through the courts for a speeding offence undergo retraining through the education course, they will tell you about a film shown about the consequences of reducing speed by 10 mph on the risk of death and serious injury.

I know about that because I was in the audience not so long ago. I was apprehended for speeding, and I can remember the incident very clearly. It was the day that the Hallett report came out, and I was returning to my family up on the north coast when I decided to pass a vehicle. As I did so, I knew that I was going to pass the speed limit, but I did it anyway and was caught. I opted for the course and I remember that film. I remember, Mr Wilson, the consequences of reducing your speed by 10 mph.

Mr Wilson's contribution, some of which needs to be interrogated by the Committee, was enormously revealing. I do not deny that, if there is an evidence base, you need to interrogate it to come to the right policy conclusion. Mr Ramsey will accept that point, as should we all. This is why these issues should be interrogated by the Committee. One thing that we should not let go is Mr Wilson's comment as a former road safety Minister, senior politician and Member of Parliament. *[Interruption.]* It was shocking — you know where I am going with this.

He said that he found out to his cost when he thought that a speed limit sign was for the minimum speed limit, not the maximum. If that is the case, I am going to ring the police —

Mr Wilson: Do you not do facetiousness?

Mr Attwood: I am going to ring the police before I leave here to say that they should follow Mr Wilson home, because he must be breaking the speed limit every time between here and Larne, or wherever he lives.

It may have been facetious, but it is not a serious contribution to make in a debate about a deeply serious matter, as outlined by Mr Ramsey in his opening contribution, as, no doubt, he will do again in his closing contribution. It is too serious a matter to be reduced to commentary about somebody being hit by a car at 10 mph less not having a chance of survival. It is too serious a matter to have comments made about signs being for the minimum limit not the maximum limit.

People should listen again to the contribution that Mr Ramsey made. You can challenge his evidence, but you cannot dismiss all of it. That should be the spirit in which the Bill goes back to the Committee. Remember what the Executive did: to a man and a woman, they endorsed radical proposals for a road training regime, with only one of its members — I will not name that person — saying no.

Mr Agnew: It is clear that the Bill's intention is to reduce deaths and accidents. On that basis, we should welcome it. I welcome the fact that the clear will of the Assembly today is to take action to achieve those aims. It is one thing to will it but another to do it. The options, as they have come across in the debate, are an opt-in policy or an opt-out policy and whether we go with limits only or fully integrated 20 mph zones.

We have to start with the onus being on protecting life, and particularly on protecting children. The Bill will not do everything to stop deaths on our roads. People have mentioned other ways in which we should perhaps be tackling the issues, but that is not to take away from the Bill in any way. Just because it will not do everything does not mean that it does not have merit for doing something.

As a result of development, we have seen the loss of play spaces. I can think of plenty of examples in my constituency. There are whole housing developments in which there is no green space, with cars parked on both sides of the road — in older developments, certainly — on footpaths and in cycle lanes. Many residential areas are not safe for cycling, and they are certainly not safe for play. We need a better balance between the needs of pedestrians, cyclists and motor vehicles, and we should always bear in mind the needs of children.

As I said, we have the option of opting out or opting in. There is also the targeted approach that Mr Lyttle referred to. I will look in greater detail at the evidence, but, from what I have read to date and based on where my instincts lie, I am for the Bill as it stands. I know the practicalities of getting a Bill through. You have to listen to the will of the House and, of course, to the amendments that may come forward from the Committee.

There seems to be sense in the opt-out approach. We have the evidence that 20 mph speed limits work in reducing accidents and deaths, so the principle of implementing them would be sensible. To allow for unintended consequences, however, there should be avenues for opting out.

As things stand, it appears to be very difficult to get 20 mph speed limits in place. Although there are pilot schemes, I was told when I approached the Department that, if road humps are not already in place, 20 mph speed limits are not an option. I am not aware of that policy having changed. It may have done, but, when I last raised the issue with the Department, that was the response that I was given.

6.00 pm

Whilst there is evidence that the more physical measures, the road humps etc, are very effective, there might be people who would be willing to accept a 20 mph speed limit but not the road humps. We have to have a more progressive approach in implementing 20 mph speed limits. I hope that, when the Bill comes out the other side of the Committee process, the very least it will do is make it easier to get 20 mph speed limits where, certainly, the will is there to do so. At this point, I favour an opt-out system rather than an opt-in system.

One of the reasons for this is that, if we have a demand-led approach, that could be more costly in having to assess each application or proposal individually, as opposed to what I believe would be a less onerous opt-out system. From a pragmatic point of view, if we agree that this is the direction of travel — pardon the pun — this would be a more effective way to do it across Northern Ireland. I also believe it would be a better way to do things in terms of resources. Once 20 mph speed limits are in place, if the evidence — as it has elsewhere — shows that they are effective, demand will increase, and the Department will find itself responding to many requests, including those from Members of the Assembly representing their constituents.

In terms of a targeted approach, I worry about how we would do the targeting. Would we be targeting accident hotspots? In that case, I come back to Mr McKay's point of waiting until an accident happens and then taking action. If we look at where there are more children, and I think there is merit in that approach, would there be resource issues in trying to identify those areas? The opt-out approach, as I interpret the Bill as currently written, is more favourable.

I would like to hear the evidence, from the Minister and/or the proposer, for 20 mph limits versus the more physical measures. It is clear from the evidence I have looked at that, where you have both, you have better outcomes. Where there is greater resistance to road humps and other physical measures, could a 20 mph speed limit be a suitable alternative, or are we saying that we need both? This is something that can be teased out during Committee Stage.

I do not think it is a valid criticism to say that, because we are having discussions about our options, people will be unclear and that it will not be effective because people will not know what they are getting — the Bill will be clear when it is finished. It is not clear at Second Stage because the Bill has to go through Committee Stage and amendments. If those who make that criticism are suggesting we change the legislative process, that is fine. However, it is perfectly reasonable that we still have questions at Second Stage. The principles are there, the evidence is there to back those principles, and I think that we should go forward on that basis. We should get the Bill right, rather than saying that it must be absolutely complete and clear at Second Stage. That is a weak argument and does a disservice to the Bill.

The issue of cost is inevitable. Mr Lyttle, through extrapolation from the Portsmouth model, suggested a figure of £6 million. Whilst there is no doubt that this is a significant sum, if we look at the many hundreds of millions of pounds we are spending, or are proposing to spend, on new roads to make traffic go faster, I think that £6 million is a modest sum to slow traffic down in residential areas with the intent of saving lives and reducing the number of accidents.

The evidence shows that these measures can make our residential areas better places to live. They will not address all the problems, including those that I raised, such as cars parked along our footpaths etc. There is no doubt that we need to look at our infrastructure. The acceleration in the use of the car has been so much that our infrastructure has been unable to cope.

However, this is a sensible measure that could tackle a very serious issue, which has been pointed out. It deals with deaths on our roads and on our residential streets, and the safety of our children. For that reason, I believe that 20 is plenty. I support the Bill.

Mr Kennedy: I thank the sponsor of this private Member's Bill and, indeed, all the Members who contributed to what

was an interesting debate, even if passions were raised at times. I was impressed with the debate's overall quality and the desire to look at the issue in some detail and to attempt to get it right. That is when the House is at its best, and I thank all the Members who contributed. Some did so with passion, and very few contributed negatively. Robust scrutiny has been the order of the day, which is very welcome. Most people approached the issue positively. There were moments of either irony or black humour. Mr Attwood wants the police to follow Mr Wilson home to check on his speed, yet it was Mr Attwood who had to undergo the course on speeding. I was interested in that prospect.

However, I am more interested in the overall debate and what it means for this private Member's Bill. I pay tribute to Mr Ramsey for his commitment to keep momentum and a profile going for the case for 20 mph limits. It is incredibly important that the arguments behind the Bill did not fall with the original sponsor, Conall McDevitt, when he stood down from the Assembly in 2013. I fully support the Bill's principal objective, which is to reduce the number of collisions and fatalities on our roads and to create a safer environment for all road users in Northern Ireland.

That said, the debate has highlighted significant flaws in the Bill's construction, and I think that we will all welcome the opportunity for it to go to its next stage for proper scrutiny, amendment, change and further reflection. Mr Ramsey outlined that clearly. Considering that my Department is a primary stakeholder in Northern Ireland's road safety strategy, along with the Department of the Environment and the PSNI and other emergency services, it comes as little surprise to learn that there is clear evidence that a reduction in the speed of traffic leads to a reduction in the number of collisions and casualties. Not only is the frequency of collisions reduced at lower speeds but, where they occur, there is a lower risk of fatal injury. Research shows that, on urban roads with low traffic speeds, a reduction of 1 mph in average speeds can reduce the collision frequency by around 6%.

Of course, many in the House will have heard my persistent promotion of cycling for reasons of quality of life and broader community benefits. Mr McKay does not yet believe that the cycling revolution is under way, but let me assure him that it is absolutely under way and continues to be.

Like a greater uptake in cycling, lower vehicle speeds can make a positive contribution to quality of life, retail and greater pedestrian activity. All of that sits very comfortably with healthier and more sustainable transport modes.

Over a number of years, my Department has invested some £230 million in local transport and safety measures schemes. Those schemes included the introduction of almost 500 20 mph zones, each designed to maximise safety benefits. As has been said, the Department has the power to bring forward those changes. Reviews of their impact have shown that those 20 mph zones have proven to be very effective at reducing vehicle speeds, as well as the number and severity of collisions. For me, it has been important to focus efforts on the reduction of vehicle speeds not just in urban and residential areas, where high levels of pedestrian and cycling activity occur, but near our schools, where our young people can sometimes be at heightened risk. As it stands, my Department has legislative powers to implement 20 mph speed limits on roads in Northern Ireland.

The current speed management policy, 'Setting Local Speed Limits in Northern Ireland', is based on a similar policy document produced by the Department for Transport for use in England. The policy encourages and supports 20 mph limits and zones in situations where there is a particular risk to vulnerable road users. When assessing the potential to introduce a 20 mph speed limit on a road, many factors have to be taken into account, such as average vehicle speeds, collision history, streetscape, community support and population mix.

Members might find it helpful if I provide, as Mr Wilson requested, a little background on the classification of roads. That plays an important role in how we proceed with the private Member's Bill. Roads are defined in the Roads (Northern Ireland) Order 1993 as motorways, A-class roads, B-class roads or C-class roads. The remainder are unclassified. The Road Traffic Regulation (Northern Ireland) Order 1997, in applying speed limits, defines certain roads as "restricted roads". Restricted roads have a system of street lighting installed, and the speed limit applying to those roads is not the national speed limit but a restricted speed limit of 30 mph. The Bill proposes to insert a new article 37B into the 1997 order, which would introduce "residential roads". In layman's terms, "residential roads" would be those roads that are presently known as restricted roads and are also unclassified. You will have a potential situation where, although most roads in town centres and housing developments will fall into the proposed category of residential roads, in a rural situation, where there is a linear development of, say, 10 houses, there will often be a system of street lighting installed. Consequently, you will find that a motorist could be expected to drop immediately from the national speed limit to a 20 mph limit, and then potentially have to quickly increase speed to 30 mph or other maximum limits. Those issues need careful further consideration. I know that the sponsor of the Bill realises that and is prepared to take that on board.

One of the most crucial features that was highlighted in the debate and one of the most crucial issues in relation to the whole issue is the need to ensure community support — local support — and the willingness of local populations to submit themselves to a reduced limit, not just in principle and on the good days when they leave home in good time but on the bad days when there may be temptation to go a little quicker. It is important that the Bill gets to grips with that issue and does not simply seek to impose reduced limits against resistance from those who live or attend school in an area.

6.15 pm

Mr Lyttle: I thank the Minister for giving way and for his contribution so far. Just in case he is not going to return to it: he helpfully set out that reviews are showing that the 500 20 mph zones in existence are effective at reducing speed and collisions. Will he touch on the potential outcomes being achieved by the five pilot 20 mph sign-only speed limit streets?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his intervention. The Member will know that pilot studies are in existence, and I will address that point presently.

Our policy for road safety at schools builds on the success of demonstration projects at schools involving the installation of a package of measures, including

part-time enforceable 20 mph limits. We are, as I just indicated, at an advanced stage of piloting some purely 20 mph speed limits without traffic calming measures, as envisaged by the Bill. Members will be aware that pilot schemes have been proposed and are envisaged for five sites: Belfast city centre; Merville Garden Village; Ballymena; Ballycastle; and Ballynahinch. The Ballycastle scheme, which was referred to in the debate by Mr McKay, has already been put in place, and work on the remaining schemes is progressing, including attempting to build local support. I have to say that there have been objections. There is a process for dealing with that, and my officials will continue to work their way through it. It is not straightforward. It is not a system that we can simply impose. That has to be the approach as we consider this legislation. There is no point having a one-size-fits-all approach. We need to bring communities with us and convince them that we should move by agreement as we seek to go forward.

I am encouraged by the current Environment Minister, Mr Durkan's, assessment of the impact of the Bill on road safety. Those views are broadly similar to my own on the issue. Minister Durkan has stated:

> *"we should actively consider introducing 20mph limits more broadly to where people live, particularly where vehicles come into close proximity to vulnerable road users such as children, pedestrians and cyclists."*

He added:

> *"It would of course be vital to ensure that any such speed limits are suitable for the roads or areas for which they are proposed and, in particular, that they have the support of the local community, that any necessary or appropriate signage and/or other infrastructure is in place, and that limits are properly enforced." — [Official Report, Bound Volume 90, pWA249].*

I largely agree with Minister Durkan in making those points.

I support building in a mechanism for community engagement and support, as has happened in many of the successful schemes in Great Britain; a bottom-up approach. On that, I am happy to offer assistance to the sponsor, Mr Ramsey. Mr Attwood sought assurance that my Department would fully cooperate or effectively take on, almost, the legislation. I am not saying that I am opposed to that, but it is not what I think is required. However, I say clearly that we will extend to Mr Ramsey the offer and opportunity to engage with my officials to see how we can strengthen this legislation.

The Chairman of the Regional Development Committee, Mr Clarke, and others raised the issue of resources. As presently drafted, the Bill would have very large resource implications for my Department. Members will know the very significant pressure that my budget is under. I could entertain you with that for a considerable period, but the hour is late. I will have to return to that on another occasion. Areas where the 20 mph limit would apply would need to be signed with 20 mph roundels. Similarly, leaving a 20 mph street and re-entering a 30 mph zone would require signage of 30 mph. Of course, estimating the number of signs that would need to be erected would be a very time-consuming exercise, not to mention the cost of providing those signs.

I want to look at the cost per kilometre. A scheme implemented in Edinburgh was, I think, mentioned earlier, and I think members of the Regional Development Committee, maybe not current but previous members, paid a visit to Edinburgh at some stage. The scheme there incorporated something like 40 kilometres of street at a cost of £214,000. The scheme implemented in Portsmouth, extending to 410 kilometres, cost £573,000. It has been said, and I confirm, that Northern Ireland has approximately 4,300 kilometres of unclassified urban streets. Therefore, if the costs of the Edinburgh and Portsmouth schemes are used as a benchmark, the estimated cost to introduce the speed limits in the Bill would range between £6 million and £26 million. Therefore, there are cost implications that cannot be overlooked, and we need to be aware of that.

Mr Lyttle expressed concern about the blanket approach; namely, that all residential roads would be covered and subject to the new limit. At this stage, it is not possible to estimate what roads or lengths of road are likely to be exempt. Of course, I have explained the dilemma that we would face, particularly in rural areas, on stretches of road which the Bill in its present form would appear to cover yet not do so in a cost-effective way or even in a proper traffic management way. We will need to continue to look at the outcome of the results from the pilot sites. However, not all of those have yet been implemented, of course, so the costs are something that we cannot be absolutely certain of at this stage. Our best estimate is that it will cost a considerable amount — many millions of pounds, which, frankly, the Department does not have.

I want to end on a positive note for the sponsor, because he has a lot to respond to; in fact, he is about to do that. It is important that we look at this. I can see the Bill, potentially, making a contribution to urban, residential and local areas for many years to come, not just through road safety but through a more active use of public space. My Department has polices in place to implement a range of speed-reduction measures at schools and in other areas where there are vulnerable road users present. However, I want to enable the introduction of speed-reduction measures in areas where there is local support for them and to do it with consensus, with a bottom-up approach, so that it is not felt that it is being handed down or mandatory in that sense. On that basis, I am content to support the Bill moving to the next stage.

Mr Ramsey: I commend, acknowledge and thank Members who took the time to participate in and make very useful contributions to the debate. Others, may I add, were not so useful.

Trevor Clarke, the Chair of the Regional Development Committee, quoted a range of areas that have introduced this scheme. The Committee clearly saw public support for it during its visit to Edinburgh. He was very keen to explore issues in rural areas, and, given that he is the Chair, I am sure that the Committee will explore that during Committee Stage. The Committee thought that the principal objective of the Bill was worthy and was content to move it forward. He talked about traffic calming measures in his area. I take his point and Alex Easton's that mixed messages were coming from the police.

I reiterate that I had a phone call with an assistant chief constable, and I had previously been in contact with a former assistant chief constable on those issues, and I stand by what I said — I will share the contents of a letter — that I was pushing an open door about taking the Bill forward. The Minister's latter point is a point that I myself made, as did the police: it is a bottom-up approach in bringing forward any legislation, and you bring people along with you. I always envisaged that as we progressed. Mr Clarke finally said that one death is one too many, and he is absolutely right. For me, the purpose and objective of the Bill is to save lives and to save the lives of so many children.

Unfortunately, Sammy Wilson has left the Chamber after his devilment during the debate, but we expect that from Sammy and can take it.

There were five deaths in 30 mph zones last year in Northern Ireland. That was clear from a question for written answer that I put to Minister Durkan only three weeks ago. The evidence is there that people across Northern Ireland drive with excessive speed and cause injury. In fact, one of the deaths not so long ago was on a one-way street, where excessive speed at over 30 mph killed someone. There were six deaths in 2012 on a single carriageway in a 30 mph zone, there were five in 2011 and five in 2013. There is consistency.

Mr Clarke: I appreciate the Member giving way. It is a very important subject, and, hopefully, no one is dismissing that. You quoted statistics from 30 mph zones. Do you have the figures to show the speed of the drivers who caused those accidents and how much over 30 mph they were doing? Some of us are concerned that, regardless of the speed limit — I know that your colleague referred to my colleague when he talked about the minimum — the difficulty is that a lot of those accidents happened because people were driving above the limit, so reducing the limit does not necessarily mean that it will address the issue. However, if the Member has statistics, it would be good to have them on record.

Mr Ramsey: I do not have them, but I am sure that the Committee, during its scrutiny of the Bill, will be able to determine that. I think that the police hold those records rather than any Department.

Daithí McKay acknowledged the contribution of Assembly staff in helping Members to bring forward a private Member's Bill, and that was important. We acknowledge their help and contribution. He used the word "compromise", and I have also used that word to try to ensure that we reach consensus on the Bill for the key stakeholders: the communities where people live. The police are vital. I said previously, and I will say it again, that the community and public safety partnerships across Northern Ireland, along with the new councils, clearly have a role in representing their constituents.

Many Members referred to the cost of deaths and also the cost of introducing the legislation, which we cannot ignore. Daithí cited a figure of £1·7 million. The new figure from Transport NI is that the estimated cost to the economy of a loss of life is £1·9 million in Northern Ireland. I met Daithí a few times to have this discussion. He is very supportive of the Bill and wants it to pass. It is a good extra point in favour of trying to reduce deaths and injuries on the road.

6.30 pm

Chris Lyttle has just come back into the Chamber. He acknowledged the role of Conall McDevitt, who initiated the Bill prior to his untimely resignation from the House. I wanted to carry on his work. I supported Conall through the initial stages of the Bill, so it was not a huge difficulty for me to take it on. Chris talked about reducing deaths and injuries, which is important. He also referred, a few times, to the importance of improving Committee scrutiny and looking at the best and most cost-efficient way of doing this. Many roads will be exempt from the Bill, for example, and all these questions will be teased out at Committee Stage. Chris talked about the positive aspects of the Bill. He mentioned the differential in estimates, ranging from £6 million to over £20 million, given by the Finance Minister and to the Committee. Come Consideration Stage, that topic will be exhausted.

Tom Elliott, who is no longer in the Chamber, was responsible in making his comments. He said that the Bill must be seen as positive — he is absolutely right — and that there must be significant scrutiny of the Bill, which is important. He made the point — it is quite right — that he would be surprised if any Member of the House did not want legislation that could save lives. He made a point that I reflected on, though we did not use the same language, about changing attitudes. A cultural change is necessary throughout. I talked earlier about a generational change, but it will not take a generational change with education programmes in schools, youth clubs and communities to help. There has to be buy-in and stakeholder partnership.

Alex Easton talked about taking the Bill seriously and being responsible. He spoke of the loss of lives and said that enforcement was an issue. He talked, as Trevor did, about the mixed messages from the police. He also referred to the differential in costings that Chris Lyttle talked about. We have to find a definitive benchmark of the costings for signage alone and when work on that can be incorporated into routine work. As I said in my contribution, during planned maintenance, the signage would be changed anyway. We have to look at those elements as well.

John Dallat, as ever, spoke with conviction and passion about how important the Bill was. He gave a short testimony of his career as a teacher, and he talked about the loss of life of two children in Donegal, which is important to place on the record. Most Members will accept the difficulty that families face. John talked of the need to show more respect on the road, and I think that the need for that is obvious. We have all seen incidents of road rage, irrespective of where we live. John made the point that this is one small step and that we need to invest in road safety. He said that this was a most serious subject, and I would not be standing here unless I felt that it was so. I have a particular personal interest in this.

Sammy Wilson said that we should not judge legislation by the passion or the sincerity of the proposer. He said that the Bill was incompetent. I find it strange, I have to say, that Sammy, as a former Minister for road safety in Northern Ireland, is not in the Chamber. He was dismissive of the arguments made in the Chamber. In his own language, he was very "cold and calculating". He showed a level of arrogance in the Chamber that I have not seen in a while when we have been debating such a serious issue as this.

Alex Attwood talked about the importance of the Minister's role. He said that the Minister could bring the weight of the Department in behind the Bill. I am very content that the Minister has given me an assurance that he will work with me. I also want to work with your Committee, Trevor, to progress the Bill as best we can to ensure that we have, in the future, in Northern Ireland, a much safer environment, so that the next generation coming through — our grandchildren — will have much safer streets, and we will have saved the lives of young people. Alex conceded that, when he held the portfolio of roads Minister, he should have been more radical.

The advertising campaign came up. I must say that, from my constituency, the family of a young girl who had been seriously injured participated in the programme and got a lot out of it. I think that it did have an impact on people's lives. I think that, because of the drama in it, it had an impact on the way in which people are driving in Northern Ireland. It was real-life stuff. It talked about a consultant having to tell bad news to a family and about a mother and father losing a son. We need to see more of that. The Environment Minister has said that he may not be able to do it any more.

Alex was one Member who said that we need to interrogate the Bill, and he is absolutely right. It is my private Member's Bill, but I am very content that it be interrogated to the fullest to get the best out of it. The people who would see the advantage of the Bill are the next generation.

Steven Agnew made the important point that the onus has to be on protecting life, in particular saving the lives of young children and young people in Northern Ireland. I think that that is the will of the Assembly and that Sammy Wilson did a solo run, as he does on many other environmental issues. Indeed, within his own party, he probably did a solo run. Steven talked about being able to opt in or opt out, and we have to examine those options. I am on the same page as the Minister, in that we are getting to a time in which people want the legislation, have a desire for it and can see the benefits of it. I have absolutely no doubt that the evidence from Britain, particularly that presented by Daithí McKay, Chris Lyttle, Steven Agnew, John Dallat and me, is clear and obvious.

I was not going to go back over it, but I think that people should reflect on the debate. It was a good debate, and it leaves us well placed. There is a short period available, Minister, and I hope to engage with you and the Department and with any other Member. Some Members approached me before now to try to get another discussion on the best way forward. That is what I want. I am not for dismissing the important contributions that every Member in the Chamber has made. Some I may not have liked, but I respect what was said because of the importance of democracy and of standing here and having your point of view heard.

I have a few more points to make. Opinion research carried out in south Edinburgh on the 20 mph pilot found that residents felt that the new speed limit had a range of positive impacts. The most often mentioned was improved safety for children walking and cycling. The 20 mph speed limit encouraged more considerate driving, leading to safer streets for all road users, including motorists, cyclists and pedestrians. The lower speeds reduced the risk and severity of road collisions.

Reducing traffic speed helps make people more confident about being in their local streets and helps children and older people travel independently. That is the point that I want to finish with, because I missed it out in my opening comments. We have an increasingly older population, and those older people feel safe in their communities and want to walk to the shops themselves. If the Bill became law, we would see increased footfall in our communities. There would be increased financial transactions and increased health benefits to young and old alike.

To conclude, I thank all Members for their contributions. I look forward to a challenging period when the Bill is being discussed in Committee. I look forward to many amendments, some of which I will consider tabling myself. I thank everyone for their support.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

> *That the Second Stage of the Road Traffic (Speed Limits) Bill [NIA Bill 30/11-15] be agreed.*

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): I ask Members to take their ease for a few moments while we change the Table.

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

Motion made:

That the Assembly do now adjourn. —
[Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat).]

Adjournment

Dromore Central Primary School

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): The proposer of the topic will have 15 minutes. All other Members who wish to speak will have approximately five minutes.

Mrs Hale: I rise to speak, yet again, on behalf of Dromore Central Primary School and, indeed, the wider Dromore community. The Minister will be au fait with the school's persistent campaign for 28 classrooms, and no one in this Chamber will contest that Dromore has an outstanding reputation for excellent education from preschool to sixth form. Mrs Sharon Beattie's commitment to her children is matched only by Mrs Allen and her staff and Mr Wilkinson's passion for his pupils. I have been privileged to share part of the journey with all three and count it an honour to be sought out for helping each school. You, Minister, have been and are pivotal in the life of every pupil and family in my constituency.

It has been a long and tumultuous journey for Dromore Central Primary School. Decision-making has been changeable and stormy, with periods of false calm and hope. Back in March 2007, Maria Eagle announced a new build for the primary school. That heralded the beginning of a new journey filled with hope and vision for the pupils, staff and families of the Dromore area.

On 7 February 2008, the Southern Education and Library Board carried out an updated economic appraisal with the Department of Education and revised the long-term enrolment (LTE) from 760 pupils with a 26 class base to 800 pupils with a 28 class base. That was based on looking at future projections. However, by February 2013, the decision had been overturned in favour of a 25 class base school based on the current pupil intake figures. Why is there no room for optimism bias in relation to future housing? Why is there no vision and foresight for future growth? Why is there no room for common sense in relation to financial and economic projections?

In England, newly planned schools are built with a 10% leeway allowing for any upward trends in the future. That obviously does not exist in Northern Ireland. When you consider the original business plan for Dromore Central, you realise that great weighting was given to the potential future development and projected increased numbers. That was why, on 13 June 2014, the senior principal architect of the Southern Board wrote to the director of investment, Mr Philip Irwin, to request additional expenditure of £64,320 to provide piling and ground beams for an additional two-classroom extension. Not only would that save time, but, importantly, it would save finances, as there would no longer be the need for heavy plant machinery, which would come at a great cost at a much later date.

Unfortunately, the request was turned down by the Department on the basis that it felt that the long-term enrolment of Dromore Central was 730 pupils. Senior personnel in the Department have acknowledged and, indeed, stated that, as the population grows in Dromore, they are happy to facilitate the growth with mobile buildings, which cost in the region of £200,000 each, with additional costs for heating, grounding and health and safety.

This will not be the first time that the board has failed to anticipate and plan for growth. When building Fairhill Primary School at Kinallen, potential growth in the local area was underestimated, and no sooner had the board financed a new build than further moneys had to be spent on mobile classrooms to meet the demand in pupil numbers. A similar set of circumstances unfolded with the new build at Donacloney Primary School and Bronte Primary School. Money was spent on a new build and additional moneys had to be found to be spent on mobile classrooms. Likewise, St Colman's in Lisburn, having undergone a £3·4 million spend, was given a new 12 class base school, yet it needed 14 classrooms. That saw the loss of the new school library and the state-of-the-art multipurpose suite to accommodate the two additional classrooms that were needed.

It is clear that, if consideration had been given to the projected figures in relation to growth and expansion, with leeway built in for future development, additional moneys would not have needed to have been squandered on mobile classrooms and should have been put into creating a brand new school that was fit for purpose.

It must make greater economic sense to ensure that, when building new schools, weighting is given and money spent to ensure that a new school can meet the growing demands placed on it by the local community. Frankly, it is an indictment of the Department and the relevant education boards that, soon after a new school is built, hundreds of thousands of pounds have to be found to put up temporary accommodation when a rigorous development plan would have ensured that the school was built a little bigger to accommodate the growth in pupil numbers.

6.45 pm

It is clear that, since the new school was planned in 2007, there has been utter confusion in relation to economies of scale, financing, projected LTE and a lack of understanding of the future demographics and expansion of the Dromore area and its strategic importance on the A1 Belfast to Dublin corridor. Earlier figures had projected that Dromore Central would increase to somewhere in the region of 884 pupils in line with the proposed additional housing developments and economic growth. That was reviewed a number of times. In February 2013, the Department announced that a 25 base school would be built in line with current enrolment numbers. That is somewhat confusing, as a proposed new build was based on future, not current, projections. Earlier correspondence between the Department, the board and the board of governors clearly shows that the school was to be built to allow for the future expansion of Dromore and the surrounding areas. Are you confused by all this? I am sure that you are, but there is more.

Subsequent meetings with the chief executive, Mr Boyd, have added to the confusion. At a meeting on 16 May 2014, the chief executive expressed his support for the 28 base school to be reinstated. At a further meeting on 27 June, having been presented with the information to show the development of a further 341 dwellings, the same chief executive expressed his willingness to request that the

foundation should be put in place in order to accommodate possible future expansion, thus equipping the school for future growth at minimal cost to the public purse: a job well done, you may think. On 28 October, the Minister agreed that he would reconsider the decision if the board came forward with a development proposal. To date, I am not aware of any further consultation with the school or its governors by the board on such a development proposal, something that I believe the Minister is still waiting on.

The confusion and contradictions do not stop there. One of the biggest reasons put forward by the board for not developing the school in line with projected growth is the adverse impact that it would have on the surrounding primary schools. Frankly, I have never heard such balderdash, since, when you consider the surrounding schools, a clear picture begins to emerge of something that all the local schools have in common: they are bulging at the seams. At Fair Hill Primary School in Kinallen, there were 41 applications for 39 places. At Maralin Village Primary School, there were 45 applications for 41 places. At Donacloney Primary School, there were 40 applications for 30 places. What is the best thing that the Department and the board can do? Yes: cap the enrolment figures for the only school in the area that can meet that demand in numbers.

On 24 September 2014, the Department of Education wrote to the principal of Dromore Central to advise her that the numbers had been capped at 104 pupils, with the enrolment number of the school becoming 710 pupils. Last year, there were 109 applications for a total enrolment of 104. The principal managed to take in 106. Based on the data, it would be fair to say that the school would have approximately 116 applications this year for 104 places. Where does the Minister propose to send those children? Surely not to the same surrounding schools that are already full to capacity and which are turning pupils away?

This was not pure coincidence. Correspondence between representatives from the Department and the board clearly show that the reason for capping numbers was:

> *"We will review the phasing in of the admission and enrolment numbers to reflect the change in class base."*

The school for Dromore Central has been reduced from a 28 class base to a 25 class base. Consequently, the phasing-in of the admission and enrolment numbers should be reviewed. In layman's terms, in order to justify the irrational decision on reducing the number of classrooms, the board is capping pupil numbers to fit the school rather than the school being fit to meet the pupils' needs. Perhaps the Minister or Mr Boyd could explain to the pupils, parents and local community the rationale behind capping the numbers at a time when the surrounding schools are filled to bursting. Unfortunately, that leads me to question the decision-making capabilities of the Southern Board when it comes to making sound economic and financial assessments on projected growth, creating the capacity to meet growth and giving due consideration to the needs of the local and surrounding communities.

Ensuring that we build a school that provides foolproof educational help for children well into the future is key. As I said, Dromore is a key commuter town on the A1 Belfast-to-Dublin corridor. It is continuing to expand, and will continue to grow in line with future trends. Indeed, I am sure that the Minister for Regional Development will concur that one of the busiest routes for public transport and commuting is the A1 corridor.

In recent months, the draft master plan for Dromore has been released. It looked at key areas of economic development to ensure long-term financial viability for the local economy. That is matched by the additional 341 new houses that have recently been passed for planning in Dromore and the surrounding areas. Interestingly, it has been made clear by the board that these are irrelevant figures, and it appears that the attitude is akin to dealing with growth as and when it happens and illogical solutions such as mobile classrooms. It brings me to question what will happen when the old primary school and high school sites are sold. What is the business plan for the board? It is likely that both those sites will be used for further housing developments, which, in turn, will again increase dramatically the number of children wishing to attend Dromore Central Primary School. You may think that it is fairly logical and simple maths, and I assure you that I agree.

When I bring all those points together, it is clear that the board has disengaged when it comes to long-term planning and meeting the needs of the pupils at the school. How can I be so sure? It is very simple. In July 2014, the board released a set of statistics that indicated that it would be the only education and library board that would see a dramatic rise in the need for primary-school places over the next 12 years. Approximately 6,000 additional places are required to meet that growing demand over that period, which causes me to question why it is the policy of the Department, the board and Mr Boyd to limit the development of Dromore Central at a time when it is abundantly clear that there is a serious need for additional places in the Southern Board region. How do the Department and the board believe that they will meet that need for additional primary-school places? I am left perplexed and confused, with no viable or future-proof solutions.

Let us talk compromise. From day one, Dromore Central has made it clear that 28 classrooms at this stage may not be needed in the short term. The sensible suggestion has been to save money now by putting in the additional pilings that would allow for future building works and extensions as and when the school has the required numbers to facilitate the additional classrooms. Minister, it is very apparent that your officials and senior representatives from the board have been so busy saying, "No, no, no" that they have not even looked for a way to say yes. I understand that the school finances were due to finish in the red for this financial year, but I am hopeful that the school and the principal have managed this issue and will finish the financial year in surplus. I am sure that the board and the Minister will be watching to see how prudent and responsible Mrs Allen has been in managing her inherited financial projection. Minister, it is time for you to step in and make the correct decision that meets the long-term needs of Dromore Central Primary School. The best way that makes long-term financial sense is to order the piling to be done while the present construction is under way and to save moneys in the long term to the public purse. Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker and, hopefully, thank you, Minister.

Mrs D Kelly: I want to lend our party's support to the campaign for Dromore Central Primary School. Mrs Hale very passionately outlined and displayed some of the frustration that the parents and school staff have experienced over the last number of years. I can relate

to some of that in my own constituency, where the sod was supposed to be cut on new school buildings in 2010. Some of it is done now and some does not have a hope of starting in the near future at all. I looked up some of the information available on the web in relation to the school. I have to say it is a very impressive school. The inspectorate talks about the community-building, the whole pastoral care and the extensive outreach work that is provided by what is described as a hard-working principal and her staff team. They have to be commended for the efforts that they have made over the last number of years. I know that a petition was lodged in the Assembly only last month.

I understand the Minister's difficulties in relation to the budget but, nonetheless, commitments had been given, and, as Mrs Hale said, this does not appear to have been based upon good, sound financial sense.

It neither addresses nor even takes into account the new build planned for the Dromore area. It seems to me that a lot of the agencies are not working together in a collaborative way to plan for the future in any sense that is strategic. Of course, it is very clear from the number of applicants that the school enjoys the admiration and support of many parents, who want their child to go to the school. Mr Deputy Speaker, I lend our party's support to the campaign. It is my hope that the voices of representatives of the area, in particular, are heard by the Minister and that he intervenes.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I planned another meeting for this evening, as I had not expected the Adjournment debate to take place so late. My colleague and I are both attending: apologies.

Mr Lunn: I listened with great interest to Mrs Hale, who made virtually all the points that other Members for that constituency would have liked to make. I will add what I can.

It seems to me that when the Department has to make these decisions, the calculation is relatively simple, but getting it right is not so simple. That seems to be what happened here, as it did in another case that I will refer to before I sit down. Surely enrolment of 104 in P1 has to mean four classes — either four of 26 or three of 35. It does not relate to the figure of 29. You can make an assumption that Dromore Central Primary School has an enrolment of 730, which is seven times 104. On the face of it, the case for 28 classrooms is pretty clear and obvious. But the Department's way of doing it brings the total back to 25. That is against the background, which Brenda has laid out, of Dromore's dramatic increase in size. It has the highest growth in the whole area, if not in Northern Ireland. Look at anticipated enrolment, demographics and the situation in other schools, all of which the proposer has laid out. It is hard not to come to the conclusion that the right figure would have been 28. That is before you look at the model again. I keep repeating what Brenda has said. In some areas of the UK there is a 10% leeway, which seems eminently sensible to me.

We have been here before, no doubt in various areas of the country. The case that is worthy of comment in Lagan Valley is St Colman's in Derriaghy, which the Minister is very familiar with, having been directly involved — in fact, I think he may have opened the new school; I just cannot remember. We had a delegation including the headmaster in this Building to speak to him about exactly the same problem. St Colman's had 350 pupils, so it seemed to qualify for 12 classrooms. From the day it opened, they had to give up the library and the multi-purpose unit to accommodate the 14 classes that they actually need. During construction, the builders — I hope, by agreement with the Department — put in the foundations for two more classrooms, which is at least forward looking, and now we await a decision from the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) on whether it will allow the addition of one more classroom, which half solves, instead of really solving, a problem that should never have arisen in the first place. It is surely easier in financial terms to get these things right at the start. I do not dismiss the cost, in the case of Dromore, of three extra classrooms, but if you are going to need them anyway — you are going to need potentially more than that — it is worthwhile doing it correctly at the start.

I do not have a whole lot more to say. I look forward to hearing how the Minister justifies this kind of decision. I do not say that he has an easy job or that every development proposal is a matter of a simple equation, because it is not; but I do think that the case for Dromore Central Primary School is unanswerable. The construction is going on, so it is not too late to change the decision and do something about it. I know that money is tight and all the rest of it, but the money would be well spent in the longer term. I hope that, between us, we can persuade the Minister to have a real good hard look at that and perhaps bring us some more sensible news before too long.

7.00 pm

Mr Craig: I support my colleague in looking for 28 classrooms in the new Dromore Central Primary School. Like my colleague Trevor Lunn, this is not the first time that I have come across this issue. St Colman's was a prime example of where that seemed to have occurred. This is part of the difficulty with predicting movements in population. I think that we all know that a reasonably straightforward way of predicting population trends is to follow the birth rate etc in different geographical areas. What we cannot predict, because we live in a democracy and people have the right to move to whatever area they choose, is changes in the demographics as the children grow up. This is part of the difficulty that we are seeing in Dromore.

I spoke to the chief executive of the Southern Board. Its prediction was that the birth rate in the Dromore area would go down. When I checked with the preschools — they all have their intake figures for this year — they are well and truly oversubscribed this year, as they were last year and the previous year. That tends to indicate that, despite the actual figures that the Department holds around birth rates in the locality, we are seeing a general population movement into Dromore.

I hate to say this, but some of the figures that this is based on may not be entirely accurate. There is plenty of anecdotal evidence in Dromore to suggest that that may well be the case. There is still housing growth in the Dromore area. It is bucking the trend, in many ways, with regard to what we see in housing elsewhere. It is a good area to live in. It is close to the A1. It is predominantly a commuter town. There is a projected growth in housing of almost 300 or 400 new homes to be built in the Dromore area over the next few years. There is a change in the demographics, with people and their children moving into the Dromore area. That is where the figures are getting

skewed, because what the board is telling me, what the Department is saying and, ultimately, what I am seeing in reality on the ground does not match up. I appeal to the Minister to look at that and to verify with the preschools that there is that growth in the population in the area. That is the best trigger of all with regard to not only the primary school in Dromore but primary schools around it. In my experience, they are all full. That is the difficulty that I have with the decision. If they are all full, where do those children go?

Trevor and I were invited to the opening of the new St Colman's school because both of us helped to get that new school developed. It was not the Minister who opened it; it was the deputy First Minister. I am sure that the Minister will be amused to hear that we were all regaled in Irish for quite a bit of the opening ceremony. I have to be honest: I did not understand it, but it was nice to hear it. That said, while I sat through that ceremony for that new school opening, it was not lost on me that the school had had to convert its library and another room to accommodate the children who were already at the school. That was an opportunity lost for us to get it right with regard to a new build.

Unfortunately, Minister, whatever is going on with the system that we use to predict numbers in geographical areas, I do not know whether it takes into account parental choice, but I see that being repeated in Dromore. I appeal to the Minister to go to the preschools, verify those figures and see whether there is a case, even at this late stage, for making economic sense by adding a few additional classrooms onto a build that is already under way. In the long term, that makes more economic sense.

Mr B McCrea: You caught me slightly by surprise, Mr Deputy Speaker. I thought that I was last to speak; I am usually last but Mr Kinahan will, no doubt, come back in.

There are a couple of points to make here. As Mr Lunn said, when Mrs Hale has time to put all the facts and figures out, all you can do is say that those are the facts and figures. My purpose for being here at this late hour is simply to add support for somebody who is trying to do something in the constituency. I am not in any way trying to take anything away from the excellent campaign that Mrs Hale has been running.

Mr Craig referred to the fact that the figures, the birth rate and different things seemed to be running counter to experience. It will be interesting to hear from the Minister because I understand the issue. Other primary schools were built, such as Ballycarrickmaddy Primary School, where it was expected that more housing would be built. Planning permission was granted, but no building happened for reasons that we all understand, and that puts a bit of pressure on.

That does not seem to be the case in Dromore. It has been argued by Mrs Hale and others that there genuinely seems to be a shortage of spaces and that there is an integrity about the place, that Dromore is an entity that thrives and succeeds, and there is a sense of community about it. You could, therefore, look at this in the round and say that, rather than be reactive, we should take a stand and plan for the future. What I see happening — maybe this is what the Minister is going to explain — is that a cap is definitely used on numbers to try to manage the overall portfolio. There is no question about that. We have to look at that and understand that an entire estate has to be done, but, having taken that on board, there are certain areas in which we will gain greatly by using a bit of common sense.

My second question for the Minister — no doubt he will develop this in his answer — is that there is a danger for him in that, if you make exceptions in one case, you will have to make exceptions throughout Northern Ireland. Maybe that is part of the issue.

At this stage, it is not for me to rehash or regurgitate the very fine arguments that have been put forward but merely to say that this place would get a lot more support if there were a positive response to what is felt in the community, which is that this is nonsensical and is not the right way to go about it. Common sense would tell you to do something else. Perhaps the Minister will explain why it is that we have to do something that, to the average member of the community, does not look like the right decision, and what are the arguments that we should make to them. My preference, of course, is that he responds in a more positive way to Mrs Hale's proposition.

Mr Kinahan: I am pleased to support the Adjournment topic not just as an Ulster Unionist but as a member of the Education Committee. I am really here to listen. However, this is not a new issue; I am intrigued to hear Mrs Hale and others talk about various schools because I have had similar issues. Kilbride Central Primary School is looking for a change in use at the moment and is already using its classroom as a dining room. When Templepatrick Primary School was being built, it ended up using a storeroom as a classroom because it was not allowed to expand. We also had a situation at St Colman's Primary School.

So it is not a new issue. What we are all asking for, really, is flexibility and for people to look ahead to how the numbers might change and prepare for that.

Going back to the big debates on area planning, I think that we need some strategic linkage between what is happening everywhere in Northern Ireland and what is happening in each patch, and how one has knock-on effects on the other. I know that, after Drumragh, the Minister said that there would be a slight change in order to look at the effect on other schools. So I go back to the point that we need the whole jigsaw, the whole picture, and everything has to fit into it.

When we were discussing area planning, I remember looking at the numbers and seeing that, in almost every area, the numbers for 2025, which is in 10 years' time, will return to what they are today. So surely it is worth building classrooms that we will use not just today but in the future. When I asked what the variation was on the figures, having once had to do statistics with standard deviation, I was told that it was within 10% each year — 10% over 15 years is an enormous variation.

As was touched on, there is always a lot of change, and maybe we need to find a more accurate way to look at the figures. One way suggested to me was looking at council birth registrations, which gives two or three years' leeway before nursery school and a couple more before primary school so that we could check what we were doing and set some things in place.

It seems logical always to build for expansion rather than just for what we have today, and it is certainly logical to build for the children already there. Other changes, such as shared education, are coming to the education system. Surely there

are uses for any extra rooms not being used now to help sharing with other schools, whether that is a room for music, woodwork, metalwork or whatever the new terminologies are. There are so many other ways of using a room. We should always build schools with a little extra space.

Think of what industry and technology are demanding from schools. There are changes coming in the next five or 10 years, so there will always be demand for more and different uses, which comes back to the better use of rooms and the creation of extra space.

I am really here just to support the motion and am glad to have been here to do so. However, the logic is that we ask for flexibility as we build for the future.

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): I welcome the opportunity to discuss the capital project for Dromore Central Primary School and respond to a number of points raised by Members.

It is worth pointing out that we are building a new school, the price of which is £16 million. Many schools would, quite literally, chew your arm off for that, so let us keep focused on that. I will elaborate on why I believe the school is the correct size as I go through my response.

The project will deliver a state-of-the-art building that will benefit children in the area for many years to come. Everyone will be aware that this school build, like many others, was some years in the planning. There was disappointment in the past when funding was not made available for the build.

I was delighted to announce this project in June 2012, and site works commenced in March 2014, with completion due in October this year. It is an exciting new build for staff and pupils, and it will replace the existing school, which was opened in 1938. The tender was awarded in March 2014, and site works commenced following approval by the Department of Finance and Personnel of the business case for a new school.

This recent business case was prepared by the Southern Education and Library Board and recommended that the new school be constructed to accommodate 730 pupils. That equates to a primary school with a 25-class base. The size of the school was not raised as an issue by the school at the time of the 2012 announcement, during preparation of the recent business case or during the design process.

It is only since work commenced on the site that the school started a campaign to increase the size of the provision to a 28-class base. I met the school principal and Mrs Hale MLA in July 2014 to discuss the issue. I have had letters from parents and pupils, and a public petition was laid in the Assembly only last month, also by Mrs Hale.

Why have we decided that it should be a 25-class base? Some Members set out the context, but it is imperative that area planning informs every development proposal and business case.

7.15 pm

The Southern Education and Library Board (SELB) area plan, published in June 2014, noted that the new build for Dromore Central Primary School had been approved and that the SELB proposed no action at that time. It stated:

> *"The school is currently considered to be sustainable within the local area context in relation to enrolment and financial viability."*

Neighbouring primary schools — namely, Donacloney Primary School and Fairhill Primary School — had development proposals approved in February 2014 and March 2013 respectively to permit an increase in enrolment at both schools. The size of the new build for Dromore took account of the increase in enrolments envisaged as a consequence of those development proposals. In addition, in bringing forward the development proposal, the SELB took into account the existing provision, planned increases in provision and the projected school-age population in the area. However, I note the comments from Mr Craig and will ask the SELB to verify the figures again, taking account of the information that he has provided tonight.

The business case for the new build did not suggest that any expansion in enrolment was likely to be required in the foreseeable future. Additional housing developments are planned for Dromore, but many of them were planned prior to the 2008 banking crisis, and it is unclear how quickly, or indeed whether, they will materialise. On houses being built beside the school, I suggest that it is a matter for the school to look at how its entrance criteria for children gaining access are drawn up. It has as much to do with the entrance criteria as it has to do with the number of pupils getting into the school.

The school was advised by the Department on 16 October 2014 that the admissions for 2015-16 were set at 104 and that the enrolment number was 710, as a phased step towards a capacity of 730 for the new 25-class base. The school appealed that, but the Department rejected the appeal.

These are the important figures. This year, 2014-15, Dromore Central Primary School had an intake of 105 pupils and a total enrolment of 700 pupils. That total is a reduction from 704 last year. The enrolment is still within the pupil limit for a 25-class-based school. Let me remind you again what a 25-class-based school is: it has 730 pupils. The school had an enrolment this year of 700 pupils, so it is well within its capacity.

The school currently operates as a 28-class-based school, as is its prerogative. However, it has an enrolment that equates to only a 25-class-based school. How the school uses its local management of schools (LMS) budget is a matter for it. I am of the view that, as we are entering a very difficult financial period for all schools, it is going to prove quite challenging for any school that has numbers equating to a 25-class base to operate a 28-class base. However, that is a decision that the board of governors is going to have to take. Crucially, any school has to live within its budget. It has to have an agreed plan, as the school does, with the SELB. It is working off a one-year plan because of the changeover to the new school.

Mr Lunn: Will the Minister give way?

Mr O'Dowd: I will, yes.

Mr Lunn: To clarify, is the Minister indirectly advocating that a school such as Dromore — a brand new school that is waiting to be occupied — should be looking at combined classes from day one?

Mr O'Dowd: No. It will not require combined classes. It is well within the figure to have classes in a 25-class-based school that will not be combined.

Standing here as Minister, I would like to be able to provide more accommodation to new schools, and Mr Kinahan referred to changes in teaching practices, changes in demands on schools, changes in the economy and changes in what is required. I would like to be able to do that. However, I am also standing here knowing that I have a list on my table of around 100 schools that require being newly built. Every time that I add a hundred thousand pounds here or several hundred thousand pounds there to another school, that all adds up to one more school that is not being built. I have to be fair to everyone involved.

I believe that Dromore Central Primary School has a very good deal. It is moving into state-of-the-art accommodation that meets the needs of its current and future enrolment. It is part of an area-based solution that allows all the schools in the area to operate fairly. Mr McCrea said that local people want to see common-sense solutions. When local people are not dealing with the detail of the subject, I understand that some of them could quite rightly say, "Why won't you put pilings in for three more for the school?" If we did that, I think that we would be being unfair to all the other schools in the area and to other schools that are seeking new builds. We have to have a working rule book that allows us to carry out the building programme in a way that is fair and reasonable to all schools in the area.

Mrs Hale: I thank the Minister for giving way. You just mentioned the figures and talked about how the other new schools had to have additional classrooms. However, given that a mobile classroom costs £200,000 and the pilings will cost just under £65,000 at this stage, do you not think that it makes more sense to put the pilings in now and save £140,000?

Mr O'Dowd: I do not see any argument for requiring mobiles. This is a decision that the board of governors will have to make, but if the school wishes to continue with a 28-class base, I do not see why the rest of the Department of Education's budget should pay for it. It would be unfair to other schools. We are building a facility that meets the needs of the number of pupils who are going into it now. In fact, in future, there is capacity for at least 30 more. Why would I plan to put in mobiles? Why would I plan to put pilings into the area, whether it costs £50,000, £60,000 or £100,000?

I believe that the business case for Dromore Central Primary School is robust, and I believe that the area planning process for that area is robust. I also believe that Dromore Central Primary School has got a very good deal. In fairness, Dromore has got a very good deal in this last while, because I agreed only recently to purchase land to rebuild Dromore High School.

Mr Craig: Will the Minister give way?

Mr O'Dowd: I will, yes.

Mr Craig: I thank the Minister for reminding us of the Dromore High School situation. If we are fortunate — I say that in the context of the current financial programme — to have money to build a new high school, it strikes me that there is a development site that is well within the boundaries of the old Dromore High School site. Its use would inevitably lead to growth in the youth population.

I want to clarify something with the Minister. I am doing the sums only in my head, but I think that the first year intake will have class sizes of roughly 25, 26 or 27 — you simply divide it by four. Is the Minister advocating that that drop to three, meaning that we could be looking at class sizes of 35? Is that the future of primary-school education in Northern Ireland? I was under the impression that, to improve results, we were trying to gear towards having optimally smaller classes.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Minister, whatever about adding on a classroom, I will add on some time if you wish to very briefly respond.

Mr O'Dowd: The Dromore High School project will move forward when we have the finances to move it forward. I am not advocating larger primary school classes at Key Stage. However, the most important factor in any school is not necessarily the number of children in the classroom; it is the quality of the teacher standing in the classroom.

Adjourned at 7.24 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 23 February 2015

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Assembly Business

Mr Speaker: There seems to be some interference. I ask Members to check whether their phones are not on silent or whatever.

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. You will recall that I answered questions for oral answer last Tuesday and, in particular, one question from Mr Agnew on the issue of the abortion consultation. In the course of that answer and in the context of discussing the diagnosis of fatal foetal abnormality, I said:

> *"Mr Agnew's question was brought about by a comment from Dr McDonnell that 'doctors always get it wrong'" — [Official Report, this Bound Volume, p82, col 1].*

Dr McDonnell challenged that on a point of order, and I apologised if it was an inaccurate quotation. I have since reviewed the radio programme in question, and Dr McDonnell actually said:

> *"The predictions in these circumstances are never accurate".*

In that sense, my purported quotation was inaccurate, and I apologise to you, Dr McDonnell, and the House. I leave it to the House to judge whether it was an accurate paraphrase.

Mr Speaker: Rather than raising a point of order, you have taken the opportunity to put that on the record. Thank you very much.

Public Petition: Mental Health and Well-being Education in the School Curriculum

Mr Speaker: Mr Roy Beggs has sought leave to present a public petition in accordance with Standing Order 22. The Member will have up to three minutes to speak.

Mr Beggs: I wish to present the petition on behalf of Sara Patterson, who is a year-14 pupil at Carrickfergus Grammar School and is seeking to make mental health and well-being a compulsory and more significant part of the Northern Ireland school curriculum. With the support of her friends, Sara has collected signatures by going door to door. She has also organised an online petition using the change.org website. Some 605 signatures have been collected, and I wish to put on record my admiration for Sara's vision and efforts to increase the awareness of mental health issues and to make students at our schools more knowledgeable about how to improve their mental health and well-being.

Whilst there is a topic of emotional well-being in the curriculum, it is not compulsory, and I understand that many schools choose not to teach it. In a recent NUS-Rethink Northern Ireland study, it was found that some 27% of college and university students in Northern Ireland suffer from mental health difficulties. The Open Your Mind campaign was launched recently to raise awareness of that significant figure.

It is important to empower our young people and to increase their awareness of mental health and the importance of well-being when at school and in later life.

The pressures on our young people today are different from those of previous generations. There is increased pressure on achieving academic results; fewer young people are active in sport; less time is being spent in the outdoor and natural environment; the Internet, computer gaming, social media etc can create problems with isolation; Internet bullying can lead to a loss of self-esteem and poor mental health; and, of course, the smartphone has brought the intensity of social media pressures to a new level.

In a survey, the Mental Health Foundation found that helping others can reduce stress, improve emotional well-being, bring a sense of belonging, reduce isolation and get rid of negative feelings.

Sara is proposing that the emotional well-being module becomes compulsory for every young person at school. That would be helpful in reducing the current stigma attached to mental health issues, and it may encourage those who are suffering to seek help. That

would be particularly useful during the pressures of adolescence. How many of our young people are aware of the importance of regular exercise, the outdoor green environment and volunteering in improving physical and mental health? Furthermore, how many of them know where they can go to get help when it is needed?

I am pleased to present to you the petition, which seeks to increase the awareness of the importance of mental health and well-being as part of the school curriculum, on behalf of my constituent Sara Patterson.

Mr Beggs moved forward and laid the petition on the Table.

Mr Speaker: Thank you very much, Mr Beggs. I will forward this petition to the Minister of Education and a copy to the Committee for Education.

Executive Committee Business

Budget Bill: Further Consideration Stage

Mr Speaker: I call the Minister of Finance and Personnel, Mr Simon Hamilton, to move the Further Consideration Stage of the Budget Bill.

Moved. — [Mr Hamilton (The Minister of Finance and Personnel).]

Mr Speaker: As no amendments have been tabled, there is no opportunity to discuss the Budget Bill today. Members will, of course, be able to have a full debate at Final Stage. The Further Consideration Stage of the Bill is, therefore, concluded, and the Bill stands referred to the Speaker.

Public Service (Civil Servants and Others) Pensions (Consequential Provisions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015

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

> *That the draft Public Service (Civil Servants and Others) Pensions (Consequential Provisions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 be approved.*

The regulations that are before us make consequential modifications to the Pension Schemes (Northern Ireland) Act 1993 and the Finance Act 2004 to ensure the 2015 alpha pension scheme, which was created under the Public Service Pensions Act (Northern Ireland) 2014, operates as intended.

The proposed regulations make minor technical modifications to the law governing the new 2015 alpha pension scheme. I remind Members that the Public Service Pensions Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 provides framework-enabling legislation for the reform of public-service pensions in Northern Ireland. The Act gives effect to the recommendations from the Independent Public Service Pensions Commission led by Lord Hutton. That review considered what reforms should be introduced in order to have sustainable public-service pensions, given the increases in longevity and the associated costs. Those reforms were much needed to balance the legitimate concerns of taxpayers about the cost of public-service pensions with the need to ensure decent levels of retirement income for millions of people who have devoted their working lives to the service of the public. I am pleased to say that those reforms received the support of the Assembly during the legislative passage of the Act.

The reforms will apply to all public-service schemes in Northern Ireland, including the new 2015 alpha pension scheme. The design of the new 2015 alpha pension scheme has been settled, and the scheme will come into operation on 1 April 2015. The regulations before us today are simply the means to ensure that the scheme design for the alpha pension scheme, which was widely consulted upon with members and unions, works properly within the wider framework of pensions and tax law. It will make sure that members of the alpha pension scheme get the pensions that they expect and do not lose out as a result of any tension between scheme design and the wider law.

First, these regulations, which will modify the Pension Schemes (Northern Ireland) Act 1993, will ensure that transitional members will not be treated as deferred members.

The effect of this is that members moving from their existing scheme to the new scheme also remain non-accruing members of the old scheme. Therefore, their old scheme service will only terminate when they leave the new scheme. That will ensure the following three things: that the benefits that they have accrued in their existing scheme are not revaluated as if they were deferred members; that their right to a cash equivalent transfer value or refund of contributions or to a cash transfer sum applies only when they leave the new scheme; and anti-franking provisions do not apply as if they were deferred members on 1 April 2015.

The proposed modifications mean that for those purposes, such members do not cease to be active members of their existing scheme until they also leave their new scheme. In addition, modifications to the regulations that govern contracting out, specifically those that dictate the process a scheme must follow to be contracted out, are also contained in the regulations. For the new alpha pension scheme, the process has been simplified, ensuring that the new scheme and, therefore, its members continue to be contracted out of the additional state pension until the end of contracting out in April 2016. These regulations also include provisions to stop transitional members who take ill-health retirement being assessed twice against their annual allowance and lifetime allowance limits.

Secondly, the regulations will modify the provisions within the Finance Act 2014 to ensure that members with service in a new and existing pension scheme who retire with an ill-health pension do not face unintended tax consequences. Specifically, they ensure that parts of the ill-health pensions available to members who fall ill are not measured twice for annual allowance and lifetime allowance limits simply because of the transitional mechanics for payment of ill-health benefits. Put simply, the modifications ensure that the tax regime will apply in the way intended by government to those members who move into the new scheme and then retire because of illness.

In conclusion, these are very technical modifications to wider pensions legislation that will seek to ensure that alpha scheme members can get the pensions that they expect without any unexpected effects as a result of tensions with the wider law. Therefore, I commend these modifications to the House.

Mr McKay (The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. As the Minister has outlined, the Public Service (Civil Servants and Others) Pensions (Consequential Provisions) Regulations (NI) 2015 make consequential provision in relation to the new Civil Service pension scheme under the Public Service Pensions Act (NI) 2014. This regulation supersedes the Public Service (Civil Servants and Others) Pensions (Consequential and Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2015 — that is a mouthful — that was made incorrectly. The regulations modify the effect of other statutory provisions in their application to the Civil Service pension scheme. These amendments are necessary to ensure that the new alpha pension scheme operates as intended within the wider framework of pensions and tax legislation.

The Committee noted, in particular, that there are two changes required, which will be made by draft affirmative resolution: transitional provisions to stop transitional members being treated as deferred members of their pre-2015 scheme; and consequential modifications to the tax regime in respect of ill-health benefits. Transitional members who take ill-health retirement will be protected from being assessed against tax twice as a consequence of their having non-accruing membership of the old scheme in addition to membership in the 2015 scheme.

The policy proposals contained in the rule were formally considered by the Finance and Personnel Committee on 21 January. After consideration, the Committee confirmed that it had no comment to make on the policy proposals at that stage. Members also noted that DFP conducted a four-week consultation exercise on the draft regulations,

and that ended on 19 December. The Department advised that the shortened four-week consultation process with trades unions only was because the regulations and the Act were already subject to a full public consultation. Moreover, members were advised that trade union side did not have any objections and had indicated that it would not be submitting a formal response.

The Committee formally considered the statutory rule before the Assembly today at its meeting on 4 February, together with the accompanying report from the Assembly's Examiner of Statutory Rules. The rule was laid before the Assembly on Friday 23 January subject to draft affirmative resolution procedure.

While the Examiner raised no issues by way of technical scrutiny in relation to the rule before us, he had previously advised the Department on Monday 26 January that, as an earlier version of the rule purported to have been made subject to affirmative resolution, it would have no effect since it should have been laid in draft before making. The Department subsequently replaced the rule accordingly with the one being considered today.

That was noted by the Committee as part of its scrutiny, and the Committee therefore agreed to recommend that the Public Service (Civil Servants and Others) Pensions (Consequential Provisions) Regulations (NI) 2015 be affirmed by the Assembly. Therefore, on behalf of the Finance and Personnel Committee, I support the motion.

12.15 pm

Mr Hamilton: I welcome the support of the Chair of the Committee and the explanation of the process that the Committee went through. I do not hesitate, therefore, to commend the motion to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

> *That the draft Public Service (Civil Servants and Others) Pensions (Consequential Provisions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 be approved.*

Private Members' Business

Block Grant: Reductions

Mr Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 30 minutes for the debate. As two amendments have been selected and published on the Marshalled List, an additional 15 minutes has been added to the total time. The proposer of the motion will have 10 minutes in which to propose and 10 minutes to make a winding-up speech. The proposer of each amendment will have 10 minutes in which to propose and five minutes to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who are called to speak will have five minutes.

Before we begin, the House should note that the amendments are mutually exclusive so that, if amendment No 1 is made, the Question will not be put on amendment No 2.

Mr McKay: I beg to move

> *That this Assembly recognises that the persistent reductions to the block grant create significant challenges for the Executive in the delivery of front-line services; welcomes agreement on the Budget 2015-16; further recognises that the Executive have additional revenue-generating powers, which have not been explored fully as part of the Budget process; and calls on the Executive to collectively identify progressive options to raise local revenue and increase the local Budget.*

Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. As Members are aware, the Executive have come through a period of budgetary challenge and that challenge looks set to continue in the time ahead. To have no control over our economic destiny ensures that we are seemingly reliant on getting scraps from the table of Westminster again and again. We are blind to our economic statistics and, to some extent, to our own economic outputs as well. Fiscal balance reports are accepted without question, and there is no total economic vision of how we could do things differently or better by ourselves. We need to see greater economic growth. Economic rule from Westminster has stymied, not enhanced, economic growth, and it is in that context that we need to ensure that we get the best deal — a fair deal — on corporation tax. Tax effects that should benefit our public finances being siphoned off to Westminster is not a fair situation, especially given the recent developments in Scotland relating to the Smith commission. We should benefit from all changes in local policy.

We need fiscal levers to improve our tourism sector, manufacturing and inward investment. We also have to raise revenues, consider progressive taxation and be innovative in how we do that, if it helps to change people's behaviour in public health and well-being. We are all aware of the massive challenges ahead of us in health and health expenditure.

The carrier bag levy helped to reduce bag usage by over 200 million in its first year — 2013-14 — and generated net proceeds of over £4 million, which have been invested in community and environmental projects through the challenge fund. The levy demonstrates how a levy or taxation, whatever way you want to describe it, can be used not only to deliver a sea change in public behaviour and but to deliver real financial support to community groups and others working on the ground to educate, maintain and improve health and well-being.

Elsewhere, there is the Scottish health levy and the community infrastructure levy in England and Wales. I am not endorsing them but flagging them up as examples of some of the range of options that other Administrations have in taxation. Collectively, we need to consider what new levies we can administer that will enhance our local budgets and be built on the premise that those who can pay should pay. The onus is on us, within the context of our local budgetary restraints, to ensure that no one is asked to pay more than they can legitimately afford. Raising the maximum capital rates value, for example, would ensure that some of the more well off gave a greater contribution to society. We wish the upper limit on domestic rates to be removed so that a person with a £400,000 house, a £500,000 house or a £600,000 house will pay according to the value of that property. This will raise close to £7 million and address the inequality in the system. It is only fair that occupiers pay according to the value of their home, especially those who live in a humble abode valued at £0·5 million or £1 million. That inequality needs addressed.

If we had full economic power, we would, in the context of an economic setback or continued economic decline, arrange a compensating public expenditure stimulus to buoy up the economy. In fact, the stability of the North's public services has been key to protecting the Northern economy from further slippage. In the absence of economic power, we need to consider other options. One is to ensure that the North can fully benefit from the European Investment Bank. We believe that the Executive should establish an outside body to draw down loans from the European Investment Bank to fund major infrastructure projects.

In Scotland, the Scottish Futures Trust (SFT) has led on a diverse portfolio of projects across the country, which helps to attract more than £4 billion of additional investment over and above traditional capital budgets. We need to maximise all the funding avenues that we can to try to bring forward projects that would otherwise remain in the pipeline for years to come. Over five years, from 2009-2010 to 2013-14, the SFT in Scotland has brought cumulative savings and benefits of over £640 million. That is a proposal worth exploring at Executive level. I think that the Finance Minister should look at it in how we can move the economy forward and how we can generate more support for infrastructure projects over and above the traditional approach to such matters.

Our levels of poverty, as they stand, will not lead to economic growth, but eradicating low pay will lift people out of poverty and help us to build a more sustainable economy. People want to work, people want to participate in society, and people are better able to participate in the economy from a base of individual security. This is crucial, and it is crucial that our people are paid a living wage. Paying the living wage to workers is not just an aspirational goal, as some would say. We believe that, at the formation of the next Executive, the Programme for Government should include a commitment to delivering the living wage in the public sector. We believe that we should have the power to decide the same for the private sector. At the moment, the living wage is £7·65 an hour. Remember that this is the rate to ensure that workers have a basic — a basic — standard of living. It is not too much to ask.

In the North, about 170,000 workers, such as sales assistants, care assistants, hairdressers, bar staff etc, earn less than £7·65 an hour. More than 80% of our 18-to 21-year-olds earn less than the living wage, so there is a huge disparity between young and old. I believe that our young people are worth much, much more than that and should be treated fairly. Paying workers a better wage, a basic living wage, will increase productivity, which is better for their employer and better for them. It would also boost spending in the economy by some £124 million a year, according to Oxford Economics, and give the Exchequer a net gain of £83 million through increased tax receipts and reduced benefit payments. Belfast City Council has already ensured that all of its employees receive the living wage, and we should follow its example. Derry and Strabane District Council has followed suit. A living wage is not just aspirational.

Of course, we have been here before. There was the debate many years ago about a minimum wage, and it was said that it was too much to ask for. When it was introduced, the economy, the private sector and the public sector soon adjusted because it was the bare minimum. Now, we need to ensure that people have a basic income to ensure a basic standard of living, and, by introducing the living wage, we would introduce more money into the economy.

It would boost spending as well, and that is something that we need to do.

To conclude, we brought the motion to the Chamber today not only to put forward some of our ideas and proposals for moving the economy forward but to kick-start debate. We need to have more constructive debate on the economy and fiscal levers. We will have different views on issues such as corporation tax and air passenger duty — issues that we may have flogged to death on the Finance Committee — but I believe that, since the previous mandate, we have moved on to some interesting ground. At the moment, the Finance Committee is considering the effects of the Barnett formula and its future. The Assembly and the Executive need to push forward economic proposals and be innovative. I gave one example, which was that of the carrier bag levy. We can do much more than that. There is a train coming down the track, and that is the projected costs of the health service for the Executive. We need to meet that head-on, and we need to introduce innovative proposals, not only to raise revenue but to try to change people's behaviours when it comes to obesity and diabetes.

I hope that we can have a worthwhile debate. I look forward to the amendments being proposed by the Alliance Party and the DUP, and I look forward to the debate.

Mrs Cochrane: I beg to move amendment No 1:

> *Leave out all after "front-line services;" and insert:*
>
> *"further recognises that the Executive have additional revenue-generating powers that have not been explored fully as part of the Budget process; recognises that there has not been a consistent approach to reducing waste and pursuing public-sector reform to ensure that additional resources are available for front-line services; and calls on the Executive to identify, collectively, progressive options to raise local revenue, tackle waste and pursue public-service reform to effectively increase the local Budget.".*

I welcome the opportunity to speak on the issue today and to have moved the Alliance Party amendment. First, we should

be clear that Northern Ireland is not the only region being adversely affected by cuts. The reality is that the pressure on public finances will increase in coming years. We therefore need to have a sound strategy in place to ensure that we can continue to deliver our front-line services.

It is widely recognised that fiscal contractions are best addressed using a ratio of spending cuts:revenue-raising. However, the 2015-16 Budget was predicated on a cuts-only basis. The substantive motion today essentially acknowledges what the Alliance Party has said previously, in that there is a need for some revenue-raising. It also reiterates a key recommendation from the Committee for Finance and Personnel's report on the draft Budget; namely, calling on the Executive:

> *"to prepare and publish a consultation paper on the options across all departments for raising additional revenue",*

setting out all the benefits, risks and impacts on the economy, consumers and the most vulnerable.

The Alliance Party, however, does not believe that that should be done in isolation. Fair revenue-raising structures must go hand in hand with other reforms. That is why we seek to amend the motion. If we are going to take additional money off people, they have a right to know that that money is being well spent. With no real attempt being made to address the cost of division or to make our public services more efficient, that would be unfair on those whose money we are seeking. Furthermore, the overall amounts of money raised through most revenue-raising options would be trivial, so we must also review expenditure and be open to new ways of delivering our services to tackle waste.

The current scale of expenditure on education and health is so great that we need urgent strategies to manage the costs. I have already asked OFMDFM whether it will consider reallocating the resources associated with the junior ministerial posts in its Department to posts in, for example, the Department of Health, which would allow a much greater focus to be given to that Department's important task, but the idea has been rejected. The fact remains that, although there is a case for some degree of protection for the health and education budgets, there is significant scope for reform. There needs to be greater transparency so that the Assembly can determine whether a consistent approach to prioritising service delivery is being taken across every Department. We need to be careful not to continue simply to allocate resources to a sector that is under pressure without expecting it to pursue its efficiency agenda properly.

We do not need to start from scratch, as some useful work has already been undertaken. For example, in health, the McKinsey and Appleby reports and the Compton review have set out areas for improvement, but serious political commitment is required if we are to take those forward.

Likewise, the Alliance Party believes that a serious commitment to promoting integration in the education system would produce significant financial savings. That commitment would include addressing the cost of maintaining 70,000 empty school places and enabling funding to be directed to pupils rather than to sustaining a divided estate.

12.30 pm

The challenge of reform, of course, is not limited to the Health Department and the Department of Education. It is very clear that the deteriorating resource DEL position will necessitate proactive measures across all Departments to reduce the size of the public-sector pay bill. Figures over previous years have shown that the pay bill has continued to increase over and above inflation, despite the so-called pay freeze, and, if the system can absorb £30 million of sick pay without a noticeable reduction in output, there are clearly efficiencies to be made. Every Department should be constantly challenging how things are done to ensure that services are being delivered in the most cost-effective manner.

The proposed voluntary exit scheme is designed to reduce the number of civil servants, but if we are admitting that we have more staff than we need, we also need to consider an approach that will remove the least effective workers rather than simply the oldest. On the other hand, if many of the jobs are critical, other options will need to be explored, such as, for example, four-day weeks, pay cuts for the top earners, removing incremental rises for no extra work output etc. Those may be controversial but, to deliver front-line services on a more sustainable footing, they need to be considered.

Alliance has long advocated that the Executive must tackle division and sectarianism in Northern Ireland, not just because of our strong support for promoting integration and a shared future but because we know that a divided society costs more to run. That was recognised in the 'Together: Building a United Community' document, and the recent Stormont House Agreement stated that there should be an:

> *"audit of departmental spending to identify how divisions in society impact on the delivery of ... services, and to then consider how best to reconfigure service delivery in a manner consistent with a shared future."*

That commitment must be progressed. We simply cannot ask people to contribute additional revenue to the Executive if it is being allocated to public services that are sustaining a divided society or are not operating efficiently. It is a major challenge, but it is one that the people of Northern Ireland expect our Executive to deliver on.

What are the Alliance proposals for revenue raising? It is not the first time that I have spoken on these matters in the Chamber, and I am sure that it will not be the last time that the Minister will seek to misrepresent what I say. First, to date, there has been no attempt to reduce spending on subsidies that disproportionately affect wealthier people. We believe that those inappropriate subsidies should not be a priority for public expenditure and that they divert resources away from public services that assist the vulnerable. The subsidies that we believe can be redirected into other services are, for example, free prescriptions for those who can afford it. We need to return to a system where prescription charges are levied from people who can afford it, though with a wide range of exemptions, and we have already seen the DUP make a move to our way of thinking on that.

The removal of the rates subsidy on houses worth more than £400,000 could raise about £4 million a year, and Sinn Féin is now following our lead on that as well. Taking such

decisions would be a first step in demonstrating that the Executive are serious about tackling such subsidies for the wealthy to protect services that benefit the less wealthy.

Alliance also believes that, in the longer term, some further forms of fair revenue raising are likely to be necessary. That may be through domestic charges, either rates or water, but the key point is that any such measures should be fair, with adequate planning to ensure that they are implemented in a gradual manner. In the case of water charging, for example, there would be a reduction in rates in the first year so that people are not paying twice for a service.

Mr Weir: I thank the Member for giving way. Before you get too much into water rates, you mentioned inappropriate subsidies and gave two examples. Where does Alliance stand on free transport for the elderly?

Mrs Cochrane: We have firmly said that we are supportive of free public transport for the elderly. However, the current situation is that, as soon as you are 60, you get a free bus pass. Do you agree that — through the Speaker — people who are earning maybe £50,000 or £60,000 a year should have a free bus pass to get themselves to work? Is that what we should be protecting?

I will carry on. Our view is that revenue that is raised from those who can afford it should be spent on public services and job creation.

Finally, I will comment on the amendment proposed by the DUP. The Alliance Party has always been a supporter of greater fiscal devolution because it has the potential to increase the efficiency and responsiveness of the Government. Our motive for greater fiscal devolution is to ensure that we have the tools to deliver our policy aims. Our priority should be to seek the devolution of any powers where there is expected to be a clear benefit for the people of Northern Ireland. For example, we supported the devolution of air passenger duty (APD) on direct long-haul flights as a means of lowering the tax for flights into Northern Ireland, but we take a slightly different approach to short-haul APD powers, as the cost could be in the region of £60 million to £90 million per annum.

While there is nothing essentially wrong with the proposed amendment from the DUP, it really only summarises ongoing work. I therefore urge Members to support the Alliance amendment instead, which seeks to ensure that the Executive, collectively, live up to the challenges of the Stormont House Agreement and guarantee that all Departments, not just one or two, reduce wasteful spending by reconfiguring service delivery in a manner consistent with the shared future.

At the end of the day, the Executive's Budget, unlike those of other Governments, remains largely unrelated to the success of our economic policy, and we face no financial penalty for failing to create a shared future and stimulate our economy fully. We may not be held to account each year through our tax take, but we are accountable for tax waste, and we owe it to the people of Northern Ireland to address that and feed those savings into better public services for all.

Mr Girvan: I beg to move Amendment No 2:

Leave out all after "2015-16;" and insert:

> *"notes the success of the Executive in securing the devolution of corporation tax and air passenger duty for long-haul flights; further notes the work being conducted by the Department of Finance and Personnel on the potential for devolving specific additional fiscal powers; and calls on the Minister of Finance and Personnel to bring forward recommendations on further fiscal devolution to the Executive.".*

Our amendment deals with reductions in the block grant, and, as we have heard from the Sinn Féin proposer of the motion and the Alliance proposer of the amendment, any increase in revenue from the devolution of tax-raising powers would cause a reduction in our block grant from Westminster. As Northern Ireland is a net beneficiary from the Barnett formula and the associated process, it would indicate that, no matter what we do, we will just be reducing and tinkering around the edges.

We are in favour of fiscal responsibility, but only where it benefits our community, as is evident from what has been put forward in relation to corporation tax and APD, both of which were intended to act as economic levers to grow our private sector as well as keep our links with other areas. Long-haul APD was vital because we would have lost one of our only connecting flights to north America.

As things stand, we need to focus on a number of areas. We need an indication as to when the devolution of corporation tax is going to be implemented because that will help those who want to invest in Northern Ireland plan and schedule for locating or increasing their workforce here. It is important that we give that comfort to those who want to come and invest in Northern Ireland. They need to know the date and rate at which it will be set. Those are vital debates that need to be had.

However, we are in the dark in a number of areas because, as so much of the revenue generated in Northern Ireland goes directly back to Whitehall and is dealt with there, we do not have a handle on exactly how much is generated here. We ran into some difficulties when Treasury told us how much corporation tax was going to cost the Northern Ireland economy.

I appreciate, from ongoing work, that a 1% rise in the rates in Northern Ireland would equate to only a small increase of £5 million in the overall revenue. The regional rate is really the only tax-raising power that we have currently. I appreciate that a review of the non-domestic rate is being carried out by the Minister and the Department. I think that that will bring forward some recommendations about how that process is working and whether it is working effectively. So, I think that that review will be welcomed.

Where fiscal powers that we can or cannot have are concerned, we are dealing with the 2010 Budget, which Westminster set. That equated to a £1 billion cut in the Northern Ireland block grant, which was worked out over the next number of years. Basically, it has been managed up to now, but, looking to the future, I think that the Office for Budget Responsibility has projected that there will be as much as a 13% cut between now and 2019. I appreciate that, under the Barnett formula, a large percentage of our Budget will be protected under education and health, and that equates to around 65% of our block grant. As a consequence, there is protection, and we would probably be less affected than other regions of the United Kingdom under the current format. So, I think that it is vital that we ensure that that protection is there. Under the current

Barnett formula, we have some element of consistency and of knowing where we are for budgeting for the future.

We cannot support the Alliance Party amendment on the basis that it will equate to additional taxation. That will not necessarily be for the delivery of services, because we know that, as soon as you start to raise taxes, it automatically impacts on our block grant. We have some concern about that. We need to take on board that the Alliance Party is proposing to maybe use other avenues, and I appreciate that taxation for water is one such avenue. I cannot be sure that that would be ring-fenced and that we would be allowed to hold on to it. It is vital that what money we have in Northern Ireland is properly spent. That is where efficiencies come forward. It is important that we have those efficiencies and work our way through them.

We need to target sickness absence. This is vital, because we cannot lose 30,000 days a year from individuals in certain Departments and not feel any —

Mr Lyttle: I thank the Member for giving way. If I am not wrong, he is saying that he will not support the Alliance Party amendment because it states that the Executive should consider fair and progressive revenue-raising measures. That is exactly what the Sinn Féin motion says as well, so will the Member also be opposing the motion?

Mr Girvan: That is an interpretation of what I just said. I do not believe in the implementation of water taxing for households because I do not believe that it is a proper way forward. Where we can show economic benefit, we will support changes, and we are in favour of that when it is affordable and creates social and economic benefits for Northern Ireland. That is one area that we will support.

We support our amendment.

Mr Speaker: Before you conclude, I ask you to confirm that you are moving amendment No 2.

Mr Girvan: I am moving amendment No 2.

Mr Speaker: Thank you.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh míle maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I have not heard anything today from any of the Members who have spoken that convinces me that progressive revenue-raising options are on the table. I heard the maximum capital rates value relief mentioned on two occasions. In fact, I think that one of the parties concerned worked to maintain that. There was agreement that the people to whom it is directed are asset-rich and cash-poor and should be protected. That is my view.

12.45 pm

We have to think very carefully before we consider further taxation at a time of austerity, when many people are already struggling. As I said, some people are asset-rich and cash-poor and will not be able to afford some of the proposals being made, particularly by the Alliance Party.

There seems to be some confusion around the issue. Mr Girvan said that revenue raised in this way is then taken off the block grant; if that is the case, there is not much point in doing it in the first place. Perhaps, in his response, the Minister will explain the situation more clearly.

If we are creative, I believe that there are relatively low-cost ways in which we can boost our economy, ways that will have a long-term multiplier effect. The SDLP laid out those ideas previously in our papers. For example, increasing the social housing build is one such way. Building social housing is a well-known economic multiplier; it is capital investment in housing and infrastructure that underpins economic growth in the long term. Shovel-ready capital programmes boost employment in the construction industry and so stimulate the economy in the short to medium term. Some of the measures proposed today amount to nothing more than tinkering around the edges with relatively small sums of money.

We believe that, working on an all-island basis, the Executive could integrate long-term strategies for economic growth with the Irish Government's plans, particularly those to create the best research, innovation and commercialisation ecosystem in Europe — the innovation island. That would also help to tackle security of supply by encouraging the creation of an effective, long-term energy framework across the island and the development of renewables as Ireland's biggest economic opportunity.

By focusing on leadership in the public service, we can empower Civil Service decision-makers by providing for a portfolio approach in the assessment of success and failure, acknowledging occasional failures to ensure overall success, creativity and innovation and creating a leadership unit with a high degree of independence to identify radical solutions to reform the culture of the Senior Civil Service and to make future decision-making easier and faster.

The SDLP has called for a Calman-style commission to examine the possibilities of further tax-varying powers, and I had a discussion with the Minister across the Chamber on that. Air passenger duty has been mentioned as well, and that is one of the barriers to developing our tourism industry. That is something that we need to look at.

We believe that, through greater use of European funds, the Executive could duplicate the ideas for an ambitious European industrial policy aimed at supporting the social economy —

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

Mr D Bradley: — and small and medium-sized enterprises. I admit that the investment fund may be a start and a positive approach in that direction. There are many more points that I could make, Mr Speaker, but I thank you for your tolerance.

Mr Cree: It is good to learn from Members across the House that they are all committed to building a society and an economy of opportunity, prosperity and fairness. That was not always the case, and the damage to our economy during the 30-odd years of terrorism was not helpful. It was very much counterproductive and, to some extent, lingers on today.

This Sinn Féin motion:

> *"calls on the Executive to ... identify progressive options to raise local revenue and increase the local Budget."*

It also implies that the Executive have powers that they have not yet considered as part of the Budget process.

Michaela Boyle, in a recent debate, stated that we were at a crossroads and had a choice of remaining wedded to the Westminster austerity experiment or carving out our

own economic future. I was, therefore, looking forward to learning today how that could be achieved, even if we wanted to break the marriage with the rest of the United Kingdom.

I am disappointed that no new pearls of wisdom have emerged here today. Instead, we have had a diatribe of taking full financial powers, taking control of our welfare budget and policy, and other powers over our economy. Westminster is blamed for the situation.

There is apparently no understanding that we are emerging from a world economic crisis. We did not have to be bailed out by others. In fact, we were very much fitter than our friends in the Republic of Ireland. We did not need outside assistance to prevent bankruptcy.

It is also worth noting that the United Kingdom was able to assist with funds amounting to £7·5 billion as part the £85 billion bailout for the Irish Republic. We are part of the United Kingdom, which is a major world economy. That is a significant strength for us. Economic governance from Dublin, which the Members opposite advocate, would have been a disaster. Hopefully, we will learn from that experience.

Sinn Féin would also have us believe that austerity measures were just an experiment conducted by the Westminster Government. Why, then, did Portugal, Italy, Spain, Greece and other countries in the eurozone have the same problems? Were the Tory cuts responsible for those austerity actions? No, the Government at Westminster were taking prudent action to pay our debts following a worldwide recession.

It is not often I quote Sammy Wilson, but he summed it up in December 2010, when he said about the deal at that time:

> *"it is not a particularly good or bad deal; it is the kind of deal we would have expected to get, given the settlements that have been made for other Departments across the United Kingdom. I and my party have not joined in the siren calls to 'resist the Tory cuts' and to ignore what is a reality."*

He was right on that occasion. He is not always right, but he was right on that occasion. The Union with Britain brings us almost £10 billion a year in the form of a top-up, a subvention above and beyond what we as a region of the UK are able to raise ourselves. I trust that the proposers of the motion will be able to elucidate on their economic theories with practical, researched examples of how we could raise the £10 billion alone.

We wait with interest to hear what is the grand economic plan of Sinn Féin to use other financial powers to generate huge sums of money for the Government of Northern Ireland. It is not enough just to generalise about other sources of revenue or taxes. You have to understand how they work and the effect that they may have on the economy as a whole. Scotland, as the Chair of the Committee mentioned, has had tax-varying powers for several years and not used them. They obviously have done their homework.

There are several taxes that could be transferred, but there is a cost to all of them. Therefore, the economic benefit to be derived has to be set against the cost of the delegated tax. The Ulster Unionist Party remains keen to see corporation tax devolved because it can easily demonstrate that there will be positive returns well above the cost, employment benefits to society and further investment, to name but a few. I would imagine that there is no one here who would resist the devolution of further fiscal powers, but any proposed measures must demonstrate the economic and social benefits that make the project viable. That has not happened here this afternoon, and the Ulster Unionist Party will be voting against this theoretical motion.

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

Mr Cree: Certainly. We will support the DUP amendment on this occasion.

Mr I McCrea: I was not expecting to be called as early. Normally, whenever you are further down the list you have less to say. I will stick with the less-to-say option and, hopefully, ensure that this debate is over sooner rather than later.

In this debate, we have to give some serious consideration to the fiscal powers that we already have. We may not have corporation tax powers yet, but that time is not too far away. As I have done before, I commend the Finance Minister for working with his Executive colleagues to ensure that we get the devolution of corporation tax powers to Northern Ireland.

We may have agreement on devolving corporation tax powers, but the one thing that is still outstanding, is very important and needs to be dealt with if we want to be taken seriously in respect of our ability to utilise our fiscal powers is the setting of the rate of corporation tax and the date for its implementation. The rate is important to ensuring that we can compete with our neighbours, the Republic of Ireland. There is some debate around whether the rate should be 12·5% or 10%, but the fact that we are getting the power ensures that we have urgency around deciding the rate.

That is important in the context of the Enterprise, Trade and Investment Minister — I declare an interest as the Minister's APS — having within her responsibility the economy and the importance of growing the private sector. If we cannot get early agreement on the rate and date, we lessen Invest NI's ability to go across the world and sell our rate of corporation tax to companies to try to encourage them to invest in Northern Ireland and benefit from our lower level of corporation tax. So, it is important that we give Invest NI the earliest opportunities to present Northern Ireland as a place to invest and a place to come and set up business and benefit from our lower level of corporation tax. It is incumbent upon Members across the Chamber to sit down with the Finance Minister and other Executive Ministers to get agreement on the rate that we are going to set and the time frame for doing it.

At least Sinn Féin are consistent in their call for more fiscal powers. They do not necessarily tell us what they are, how much they will cost or any of those things, but they are consistent nonetheless in saying that we should devolve more fiscal powers to Northern Ireland. It is important, when we look at the powers we have and how good we are at utilising them, that we realise that that does not necessarily mean that we should devolve more.

Looking at the Alliance Party's amendment, it is important that people out there realise the Alliance Party is really about increasing the rates that people pay for their water. It

is also happy to end free transport for the elderly and many other things that will hurt the people of Northern Ireland. As for free transport for the elderly, I know many people in my constituency who do not have high salaries and benefit daily from going out, meeting other people and going on day trips, which gives them an opportunity to spend some time together. The Alliance Party's amendment is a disgrace and is something that we certainly will not be supporting.

1.00 pm

Ms Boyle: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. There is no doubt that securing economic recovery, prosperity and equality is at the heart of our approach to the Budget and the provision of public services. Economic recovery is self-evidently critical to our success and is the route to improving the lives of our people. What we want is economic success through well-paid jobs for our people. Capital investment, improving access to finance and restoring business and consumer confidence are all central to attracting new businesses to the North and, indeed, the island, and supporting the business that we already have here, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises. That is why we need to ensure that we prioritise infrastructure investment by ensuring that, in the context of fiscal accountability, we consider the best ways to ensure that we can benefit from the European Investment Bank, can find new, innovative ways to invest in social housing and can find sustainable measures to increase our local revenue base by exploring the potential for new levies, which would have a positive impact on society.

It must be said that, at a time when the Westminster Government have cut our resources by £1·5 billion, it is essential that we focus on delivering better outcomes from the resources that we have. We must move beyond bookkeeping to drive economic growth. That means working collectively to exploit every avenue that we have to build a progressive, strong revenue base that does not harm but strengthens our people, our competitiveness, our economic security and, indeed, our economic growth.

We want to build a society in which income and wealth inequality are low and social cohesion is high, pay is higher, poverty is very low and the local tax take is higher and enables strong public services without endemic debt and deficit; and a strong welfare state in which public services are extensive, well funded and generally universally available and in which finance is seen as a means to sustain industry and provide financial security for individuals, not as a speculative means of profit maximisation.

We want a diverse economy with a balanced portfolio of industry sectors, with much more emphasis on product innovation, a much larger medium-sized industry sector with a more diverse ownership profile, including more extensive public and community ownership and cooperatives, and in which a more mutual and coordinated approach to economic development is taken.

At present, we make decisions that improve the local economy through, for example, job creation. The receipts go to the British Exchequer and do not enter our local Budget, yet it is our actions and local decisions that lead to the increase in the receipts. Through the Smith commission, Scotland will stand to benefit from policy decisions taken in Scotland. Why should we be any different? Collectively, we need to demand similar provisions for our local economy from the British Government. Imagine the benefits to our local Budget if we eradicated low pay through the provision of the living wage. Not only would we lift the 173,000 workers earning below the living wage out of the struggle of in-work poverty but we would generate £88 million in direct taxes and reduce benefit and tax credit payments, which would be returned to the British Exchequer. If that finance was repatriated locally, it would substantially boost our local budgets. It would, for example, pay for more than 3,500 nurses or teachers, or we could use the finance to pay for universal childcare and open up the labour market fully to parents.

Universities offer another illustration. Increased investment in research and development, along with tailored support for entrepreneurship, could lead to an increase in innovative small and medium-sized enterprises, which are important to creating high-skilled jobs, reversing the brain drain and boosting the economy.

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

Ms Boyle: It is important that the Northern Executive and the people of the North receive the full return on their investment through increased income tax, National Insurance or corporation tax revenue. Members, I urge you to support our proposals to move our economy forward.

Mr McQuillan: I oppose the motion and support the amendment in my name and the name of my three colleagues. I begin by questioning the timing of the motion. As Sinn Féin will be only too well aware, the Stormont House Agreement paves the way for further income-generating powers, namely the devolution of corporation tax powers by 2017. Members will also be aware that Northern Ireland benefits significantly from the Barnett formula, gaining significantly more expenditure than we generate in revenue alone. These are benefits of our membership of the United Kingdom and factors that Sinn Féin perhaps wants to dismiss and ignore. Rather than being grateful and appreciative, it wishes to complain.

That aside, Sinn Féin and other Members will be only too well aware that any means of revenue-generating powers will cost the Province financially, with alterations made to our annual block grant. This will result in cuts. Before we explore any further income-generating powers, it is important and, in fact, responsible to assess whether the actual costs outweigh the benefits and the costs would significantly impact on the people of Northern Ireland, including those in west Belfast, south Armagh and beyond.

We know, looking to the future, that the Northern Ireland Executive have air passenger duty powers, which I believe will take vital routes to and from the Province. The Executive also have rates powers, and I am pleased that the DUP, holding the Ministry of Finance portfolio, has kept rates frozen for seven consecutive years, protecting domestic customers from soaring rates amid price increases in electric and heating bills, which I am pleased to hear will drop from 1 April. We are aware that the Department of Finance is to conduct a review of the non-domestic rates as a means of identifying possible additional revenue to ensure fairness, as well as to paint a picture of reality in these slightly more stable yet fragile economic times.

Some parties, like the Alliance Party, might like to introduce water charges or higher rates. However, to secure additional revenue from the rates increase, it would be necessary to apply a significant increase of

1% to the regional rate. A 1% increase would provide us with an additional £5 million per annum. This sounds like a lot of money, but, in reality, it would not do a lot for the people of Northern Ireland. It would cut their disposable income and reduce spending in shops and local high street businesses. I am not in favour of that, as we know only too well how fragile the high street is.

My party supports investigating revenue-generating measures, as we have done with air passenger duty and corporation tax, and agree that those are viable options open to the Executive. However, the impact on the people of Northern Ireland of a significant loss of revenue from the block grant or an increase in rates would be severe and significant. It will not happen, because the DUP supports the most vulnerable. I support our amendment and the ongoing work of the Minister of Finance and the Department in assessing the potential for fiscal powers to be devolved to the Executive.

Mr McKinney: I welcome the opportunity to participate in today's debate. The negative implications of the 2015-16 Budget will be felt far and wide. The SDLP, as the only party that voted against both the draft and final Budget, recognised this. With that in mind, the impact that the Budget will have on health-care delivery is very important. The party has made it very clear that it is concerned about expenditure in the health service and worries, for example, about simply jumping to a prescription charge agenda while not addressing the wastage within that very service. I will return to that later.

First, I wish to address the motion, which is, I have to say, vague. It writes itself a blank cheque by listing or endorsing revenue-raising options that may be proposed in the future. I do not understand where Sinn Féin is coming from. Does it mean that the party is for water charges? Does it mean that it is for rates increases? What does it refer to when it talks of "local revenue" and the "local budget"? Is it proposing to increase whatever tax it is possible to increase in the Assembly and whatever tax it can think of at council level? If there is an answer, it is not in the motion. For that and other reasons, we will, of course, oppose the motion. The homework has to be done first.

What Sinn Féin is saying is that —

Mr Lyttle: I thank the Member for giving way. Will the Member not acknowledge that the direction of the Sinn Féin motion and the Alliance Party amendment is that the homework should be done and options explored? Why would he seek to reject that approach?

Mr Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr McKinney: Thank you very much. I accept that homework has to be done, but I am not sure that the motion articulates that just as much. It is more open than that. I will get to that point in a second.

The motion refers to the need to:

> *"identify progressive options to raise local revenue".*

What does "progressive options" mean? Perhaps Sinn Féin could have spelt that out in the text of the motion. It can be summed up in two words: "more" and "tax". I take on board what Mr Bradley and Mr Girvan said, which is that, if we go down that route, it will come off the main Budget anyway. That question also has to be answered. Northern Ireland is in an equally —

Mr Lyttle: Will the Member give way?

Mr McKinney: Very briefly, please.

Mr Lyttle: I thank the Member for giving way. Will he not acknowledge that taxation policy that redistributes wealth from those who can afford it to the most vulnerable in our society is progressive, in and of itself? Perhaps he can speak to that.

Mr McKinney: That may be part of it, but the motion opens the door much more widely than that.

After six years of post-recession hardship, the economy is on its knees. We need proper answers, but not pro-austerity answers such as those Sinn Féin is advocating.

Last week, I understood the Chairperson of the Health Committee to be opposing what the Health Minister was saying about prescriptions charges, yet the motion, potentially at least, would allow for prescription charges. Is that a progressive tax? Perhaps we can hear from Sinn Féin on that.

Instead of this hokey-cokey approach to politics, we need an open, honest and transparent debate on revenue generation. Nothing exemplifies that more than the issue of prescription charges that was brought to the House last week. After many months of campaigning, vulnerable cancer patients thought that they were getting an answer. Instead, however, the Health Minister linked their issue to a prescription charge.

I will read out what Mr Wells said in the Chamber last week. When talking about the pharmaceutical price regulation scheme (PPRS) money, which is additional money that is coming into the system, he said:

> *"I cannot be definitive about the scale of the payments Northern Ireland is likely to receive through PPRS." — [Official Report, this Bound Volume, p56, col 1].*

The context in which he said that was one in which we would get perhaps less or around the figure of £14 million that we were already getting this year. There was certainly a threat to the money, which was sufficient for us all to say that the Minister is right and that we should put our hand in our pocket and endorse prescription charges, in the way in which the motion describes them, in its widest sense, as a progressive tax. What did the Committee learn last week from the companies that are linked to the PPRS scheme? We learned that £30 million will be available in 2015 for specific drugs for conditions beyond just cancer. Therefore, in reality, we could have a specialist drugs fund in Northern Ireland tomorrow without there being any implications. Let us have the progressive prescription charges debate in that context.

I am aware that the Speaker may be about to say that I am straying off the motion, but I do not believe that I am. The context here is — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Do not tempt me.

Mr McKinney: Sorry, Mr Speaker.

Let us have honest debate and transparency. The Health Minister went on to say:

> *"There has to be absolute openness and transparency, because we are going to ask people to make a small*

contribution for their prescriptions." — [Official Report, this Bound Volume, p57, col 2].

I ask whether the motion simply opens up the door to anything — whatever you are having yourself — as long as it is pro-austerity and is forcing people to pay more tax, which will ultimately come off the block grant.

Mr Speaker: Thank you for not challenging the Chair.

Mr Nesbitt: I support the amendment proposed by Members to my left. Mr McKay opened the debate by saying that we should kick-start a debate. Why not? Could we kick-start a debate that would effect a change in political culture? The culture that we have on this estate is one of dependency, whether that be on welfare reform or the subvention that is part of the block grant.

Let me be clear, Mr Speaker: the Ulster Unionist Party supports both. We believe in a welfare state to protect the vulnerable, and we believe in the redistribution of wealth around the United Kingdom which allows us to get more out of London than what we put into the Treasury. Let us look at the subvention that is part of the block grant. Currently, it stands at over £10 billion, yet, just 10 years ago, it was only £6 billion, and, 30 years ago, it was only £1·5 billion. It is a speed and direction of travel that is not healthy.

1.15 pm

Can we change our political culture from dependency and start talking about serious wealth generation for our people? Can we remember that, 100 years ago, we were net contributors to the Treasury, and that, down the road, Queen's Island was the Silicon Valley of its day? We were incredibly innovative in engineering, particularly in shipbuilding; we had a global reputation for linen; we had the biggest rope works on planet Earth; and we had a very sturdy agriculture sector, as we do today in agrifood. I doubt we will ever get to the point of being net contributors again, because of pensions, the health service and everything else, but, surely, even the aspiration is a game changer in terms of political culture and a drive to generate serious prosperity for our people.

There are policy levers, such as corporation tax. Let us remember, Mr Speaker, it was an Ulster Unionist idea —

Mr McKinney: Will the Member give way?

Mr Nesbitt: I will give way to the Member for South Belfast.

Mr McKinney: Does the Member agree that the scenario he was painting was one against the backdrop that existed before partition?

Mr Nesbitt: I have no doubt that the Member is accurate in a factual sense. What on earth it has to do with the debate is beyond me. Corporation tax —

Mr F McCann: Will the Member give way?

Mr Nesbitt: Yes.

Mr F McCann: It existed before partition and after partition. You are holding up Queen's Island and the rope works as a symbol of job provision and wealth, yet they were the biggest discriminators of our community in the state.

Mr Speaker: I forgot to say that the Member has an extra minute.

Mr Nesbitt: I thank the Member for his intervention. I am glad that we are so forward focused in this part of the debate.

Corporation tax, obviously, is a key lever. It is a shame that people have suffered because the DUP and Sinn Féin, given the choice between recognising that it was, ultimately, a political decision and going to try to get the power devolved from 10 Downing Street, chose instead to go to the Treasury and engage in a debate about the potential cost, which was always a moveable feast as Mr Osborne was bringing down the UK-wide rate of corporation tax, which, obviously, impacted on the change.

I notice that some Members are talking about 10% and some are talking about 12·5% to match the rate coming out of Dublin. Surely, the issue for people considering investment in Northern Ireland is to make the differential between our rate and the Republic's rate no longer an issue. Our focus should go, instead, on skills and on another area which is, perhaps, the Achilles heel for our economy: the lack of A-grade office accommodation. Let us be clear that the majority of foreign direct investment is going to be in portable services. So, people will not be looking for factories; they will be bringing in legal services, where the quality of the office accommodation will be absolutely key.

Will we tackle issues like the rate of corporation tax, skills and office accommodation? Or, will we get stuck with the kind of stale rhetoric that we have in the motion, which talks of:

"the persistent reductions to the block grant"?

It is the case that whoever ends up in Downing Street on 8 May this year, whether it is one, two or three, or regardless of what combination it is between Labour, the Liberal Democrats and the Conservatives, will be committed to reducing debt. What is the debt? The debt is a legacy to our children. We spend more, UK-wide, servicing debt than we spend on public services here in Northern Ireland and in Wales combined. In the course of an hour-and-a-half debate in the Chamber, the national debt, UK-wide, rises by £55,836,000. Surely, that has to be tackled. Otherwise, we leave an unacceptable legacy to our children.

So, we can go ahead and bash London governments, or we can focus on our people who need our help. Think of the tens of thousands who woke up this morning without a job, without a sense of purpose in their lives, and without the drive that brought all the Members into the Chamber for this debate. Think of the people who will go to bed tonight without a sense of achievement or frustration — the things that keep us motivated. Let us put a focus on our people and on generating real prosperity.

Mr Allister: There is a certain unreality to the debate. The motion talks about lamenting the persistent reductions in the block grant and each of the successive amendments retains that, and yet the very parties that lament about that are those that want to further diminish the available spend within the block grant. They want to do it, of course, by diminishing the block grant in itself by £300 million or £400 million a year — who cares — for the sake of the vanity project that is called corporation tax reduction with no guarantee of any return; the only certainty being the reduction in the block grant.

They then want to further diminish that which comes in terms of available spend by ring-fencing £565 million of it over the next six years to sustain benefits at an artificially high level above the rest of the United Kingdom; not thinking, of course, that, at the end of those six years, that will probably have to be sustained even further as the gap will be such that, no doubt, there would be an outcry from those wholly dependent on it if anyone dared to suggest that they might have to live within the means that others live in the United Kingdom. So, the whole idea of the block grant and the lamenting of its reduction, when so much of that reduction in future years will be self-inflicted, really is a pretty hollow cry, and that is before we come to some of the suggestions being made.

I see nothing in the motion or the amendments about tackling the squandering to any significant degree: £5 million a year on spin doctors; £5 million a year on wining and dining; and half a million pounds on photographers so that we can have good quality snaps of our Ministers. If the House were serious about setting out the future stability of our finances, we would be looking at issues like that, instead of sweeping them so readily under the carpet.

Mr McCallister: At the outset, a lot of the context behind Sinn Féin moving a motion like this is in its great rhetoric about standing shoulder to shoulder with its Greek friends. I suspect that the Greeks would be happy to be in the position that Northern Ireland is in, with a fiscal union — a political union — that does a huge physical transfer every year to poorer and less-well-off parts of that union, Northern Ireland being one of them.

So, when we talk about the block grant, we have to set the context for that. We spend £2,000 more per head of population than England does. We have been largely shielded from some of the effects of the austerity measures of the coalition Government because health and education have been ring-fenced by them, and we have the Barnett consequentials. The Greeks would love to be in an economic union that physically transferred money from one part of that union to the less well off part. Rather than standing shoulder to shoulder, Sinn Féin should be thankful that it is here and is having to manage a £10 billion subvention.

Mr Nesbitt gave some of the figures on the levels of UK debt, and when people talk about being against austerity, it is worth reminding Sinn Féin that Ireland has reduced its public spending by a sum that is equivalent to 18% of its GDP. That is the equivalent of €30 billion. If you set that in a UK-wide context, you would find that it would be the equivalent of having taken out some £500 billion in spending between 2008 and 2014. The Government have, effectively, taken about £20 billion per year out of this Parliament. So, that is the context in which you compare the two when you set aside the block grant and talk about austerity. They are two different levels of austerity.

The price of being in the Union is that there is a huge benefit to it. It has meant that this Finance Minister or his predecessors have not had to grapple with or match huge cuts in public spending and public services. Rather than talking about the cost and the price of the Union, the Executive should be asking this: how do we maximise the benefits of being in the Union? There are huge benefits to us as an economic region that will never match the economic power of London and the south-east of England. Yes, we need to do much more to lift our productivity. We need to have real debates in here. One of the reasons why I support things like looking at revenue-raising measures or at transferring tax-raising powers is because it brings that level of responsibility in here. You could not do it, as I have repeatedly warned, without this Assembly and Executive being reformed, because no one could devolve anything extra to here if we continued to work the way that we do. You would only do that and look at it. Others have given this warning: what if the block grant gets cut? There are no Barnett consequentials for water charging, for example. That is taken entirely out of the block grant. We may well decide, as an Executive and an Assembly, that we want to continue not having domestic water charges, but we are not even having that debate.

I listened to colleagues talk about what I thought was Minister Jim Wells's very responsible statement last week on prescriptions and how we might raise some money with them. You should listen to some of the kickback on that. That is how and why the Executive need to be reformed. They need to get a common purpose and vision, because these two bits of their economic policy are not adding up. We are firing £70 million a year into welfare, yet we are continuing to talk about how we need more money from Westminster and on the block grant and about cutting corporation tax. None of those measures, taken by this Executive, add up to a common identity and purpose. That is why I will support the Alliance amendment.

Mr Hamilton (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): I thank the Members who tabled the motion. I also thank the various parties and Members that tabled amendments, and I thank them for their contributions. I do so because I think that it has been a useful, if not very enlightening, debate. I will return to that point later. It has been a useful debate if for no other reason than that it allows me the opportunity to remind the House of the difficulties that the Assembly and our Executive have faced in dealing with public-spending reductions over the last number of years. Some Members made very useful contributions about why that has been the case, including the Member who spoke previously.

The policy of austerity, or the Tory cuts — whatever one wants to call them — have been introduced by the current Conservative and Liberal Democrat Government in London. They mirror those that have had to be made in the Irish Republic for similar, but different, reasons, and, indeed, they reflect those made right across Europe and the Western World. It is worth reminding ourselves of the extent of the impact that there has been on our block grant since 2010. The impact on non-ring-fenced departmental expenditure limits (DEL), which is the day-to-day resource expenditure that pays for the running of hospitals and schools and so on and so forth, has meant that it has been down 8·1% since the beginning of the current Parliament in real terms. It is up in cash terms by 1·2%, so we have more money in cash terms but less spending power. That is why, over the last number of months, I have been reiterating the point that our spending power as an Executive has been down by over £1 billion even though the actual amount of cash available to us has risen modestly over that period. If we cast our minds back to 2010, we will recall that my predecessor, when he was in office, was more concerned about the impact, certainly in the early years, of the cuts on the capital budget. Our capital budget went down by 6% in cash terms and by 15·4% in real terms, so there

have been significant reductions in our ability to spend on infrastructure since 2010.

1.30 pm

As some Members, including the proposer of the motion, mentioned, the future does not look particularly rosy or bright for public spending. We can go over why that is the case. I think that a lot of us, including the current Government and the current Chancellor, perhaps believed that the economy would have recovered sufficiently and that tax yields would have risen over the first years of the Parliament so that we would now be in a position where all the objectives of paying off debt would have been made and the deficit would have been reduced or diminished completely and that the proceeds of growth could be applied to public spending. That clearly is not the case, and austerity and cutbacks to public spending will be there for the next number of years.

The Office for Budget Responsibility, which was set up by the current Government, is projecting that, by 2019-20, at a UK level, not a Northern Ireland level, for which the granular detail is not available, resource expenditure will be down by £20 million — sorry, £20 billion — across the UK. I am sure that the Government would settle for £20 million. Capital expenditure, interestingly, will be up by some £8 billion over that period, so there is a noticeable and deliberate switch between current resource expenditure and capital expenditure.

Mr Allister: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Hamilton: Yes, I will.

Mr Allister: Are we not moving in the opposite direction? Did the recent agreement not anticipate moving money from capital into resource? Is that not a negative when building and expanding the economy?

Mr Hamilton: That is a conventional capital position. That is increasing, and Northern Ireland will benefit from that increase over the next number of years. That is one of the reasons why, given the need to do workforce restructuring and using our borrowing powers, which, of course, have been enhanced and increased by virtue of the Storm House Agreement, to assist us, we will see our capital position continue to rise over the next number of years towards the end of the decade, irrespective of what we do by using reinvestment and reform initiative (FRI) borrowing to pay for workforce restructuring.

One of the things that interests me greatly at this time is the pre-election pledges arms race between the Conservative Party and the Labour Party about what they would do with various areas of public expenditure. Both are making promises about protecting or increasing — certainly, protecting — health expenditure either in cash or real terms and education expenditure either in cash or real terms. Both of them are trading this off almost daily, and certainly, a number of weeks ago, it was very much daily. Since health and education make up 65% of our spending, and there are comparability issues with the Barnett formula, that is good news for Northern Ireland. It does not mean that we will be immune to reductions in public expenditure; there will be reductions in public expenditure.

Who knows what might happen after the election, but the most benign scenario is that you could have cash-terms protection for health and education. That would mean that, running from the first year of the comprehensive spending review, 2016-17, towards the end of the decade, resource expenditure in Northern Ireland will still go down, but the reduction could be around 1% in the first year, falling to as low as 0·1% in the final year. Obviously, that is contingent on who wins, what they do and what deals are done as a result of the election, but it is perhaps a very good argument to the people of Northern Ireland to ensure that there is a strong and united team representing them at Westminster after the next general election in some weeks' time.

In this debate, a lot of discussion is about tax-varying powers and local revenue raising. I always ask Members to bear in mind that the underlying principle of revenue raising or tax varying is that someone, ultimately, has to pay.

There is no such thing as easy money to be got through local revenue-raising or tax-varying powers. I and my party have shown that we are not against additional tax-varying powers. We have successfully supported securing the power to devolve and reduce corporation tax here in Northern Ireland. In the past, we have secured the power to reduce and, ultimately, eliminate long-haul air passenger duty to secure our only direct route into North America.

Looking at local revenue raising is not a new thing. This is not the first time that we have had this discussion. It is not the first time that it has been called for or asked for. I recall Members and, particularly, Mr Bradley talking on several occasions to me and my predecessor in debates about discussions that were being had by the Executive through the Budget review group about other additional revenue-raising streams. Those powers or revenue-raising measures were considered in great detail by the Budget review group as far back as 2011 when it started its work, and it looked at proposals made by the likes of Sinn Féin around a tax on mobile phone masts, the sale of the government art collection and a wide range of weird and wonderful propositions that were put forward. It is significant that very few, if any, of those proposals actually saw the light of day, which shows the problem. There will be a range of reasons, such as impracticality, illegality, lack of political support, lack of political will, the wrong thing at the wrong time or just outright broad opposition. We can have these sorts of discussions, but product coming out of them is thin and few and far between.

I think that it is not wrong to have a debate, perhaps it was a debate that we had in advance of the Budget, but given that we are facing a three or four-year Budget due to the comprehensive spending review, it is not an inopportune time to continue to have the discussion. Given that Mr McKay, in his opening remarks, mentioned particularly the pressures on the health service, I think that it is an opportune time to have the discussion, irrespective of what is decided, around prescription charges. Whilst lambasting the Minister, as he does, for a range of different things, it was significant that Mr McKinney said that he was willing at least to have a debate about prescription charges moving forward. The proposals put forward by the Minister last week of a small but universal charge is something that I am very open to, and I have said that before in this House.

I will turn now to the Alliance Party's amendment. I have said to Mrs Cochrane before that I agree with her point that we should not be raising revenue to plough into an inefficient system. We are in good company on that. The current Chancellor, Mr Osborne, said before Christmas:

"I think that politicians should solve the debt problems by delivering services more efficiently - not take the easy way out and dump the problem on families".

I agree with that. It begs this question: why does the Alliance Party continue to call for the introduction of water charges and a huge hike in our rates bill? I think that it was Mr Girvan and Mr McQuillan who made the point that, to get a significant volume of cash coming from the rate system — a 1% increase raises around £5 million, which is not an insignificant amount of money, but, in the grand scheme of the Budget, it is not going to shift the needle significantly — we would need a significant hike over years, which is something that our Ministers have argued for in various meetings, as, indeed, they have argued for an end to concessionary fares. I have said in the House, and I welcome the opportunity to say it again, that I am proud of the fact that we have maintained local household bills in Northern Ireland at the lowest levels in the UK.

I also agree that we need to reform our public sector. I am glad that public-sector reform is now at the top of our agenda. With workforce restructuring, the OECD review and a digitisation in the e-government agenda, which my Department is progressing, I am very pleased that public-sector reform is now something that everybody is talking about.

The Alliance amendment, though, talks of there not being a consistent approach to public-service reform. That is code for the decision by the Executive not to allow the Minister for Employment and Learning to proceed with taking away the premia from St Mary's University College and Stranmillis University College, which is something that the Alliance Party was resoundingly defeated on in this House.

Mrs Cochrane: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Hamilton: No, I will not. I have limited time. Very few actual proposals were made in the debate. Whether they were progressive or otherwise about revenue raising, at least the Alliance is honest about being a high-tax party. In many respects, whilst a lot of the proposals that were put forward would raise revenue, they were messing about around the edges; no substantial economic change would come from them and no substantial revenue —

Mr Lyttle: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Hamilton: No, I am running out of time. I have made it pretty clear that I will not.

The rates cap was mentioned by Sinn Féin, and the point made by Mr Bradley was right in that, while eliminating it may be superficially attractive, that would not deal with those who are asset-rich but income-poor. I have made it clear in the House before to Members from Sinn Féin that we cannot do what they are asking us to do in terms of borrowing from the European Investment Bank (EIB) to invest in infrastructure such as roads, hospitals or schools. That is why I have come up with the novel proposal of an investment fund, which will be at least £1 billion, to leverage in finance from EIB and, hopefully, grow by leveraging in finance from elsewhere.

The SDLP record on revenue-raising proposals is chequered; it famously proposed that we sell an airport that we did not own. At that time, it also proposed that we tax ATMs. The reverse is worth considering. Since introducing a relief on rural ATMs a number of years ago, the number of rural ATMs in Northern Ireland has more than doubled, so having a rate relief has assisted rural communities in particular.

I think that we all agree that we want to boost, grow and improve our economy. Northern Ireland is doing better. Unemployment has fallen for 25 months in a row. Property prices have stabilised and are starting to grow. We have record levels of foreign direct investment, and we have economic growth of around 2%. However, we could do even better, and that is why we, as a party, have supported the devolution of corporation tax powers. The latest research shows that it would create 37,500 net new jobs and that our economy would be 10% larger within 10 years. However, I am mindful at all times of our immature tax base and that our economy is not as strong as Scotland's. Many will look to Scotland and say that, if Scotland is getting it, so should we, but we are not Scotland in economic terms. There is a legacy of the Troubles, as highlighted by Mr Cree, and we have a fiscal deficit of £9·6 billion. Whilst some question the methodology, there is a fiscal deficit and we have to deal with that reality. There is also the issue of volatility in the tax take and sometimes dubious or no benefit in devolving some of those taxes.

In conclusion, I am always content to consider local revenue raising. I have talked about prescription charges. I am also open to looking at a modest increase in tuition fees. We have had modest increases in the regional rate, although pegged to inflation, over the last number of years. We need to bear in mind the principle that someone always has to pay. I have said that I will review the non-domestic rate system, but that will produce different sets of winners and losers depending on the changes that are made. I think that the Budget review group (BRG) is the platform to take forward further discussion, but, given that no serious proposals worth considering have been made today, it is difficult to support the substantial motion that is before us. On further fiscal powers, I think we have shown a willingness to devolve those where they pass the test of being affordable and having a social and/or economic benefit, and we will continue to pursue an examination of all those through the work flowing from the economic pact that was agreed last year.

I support my party's amendment — surprise, surprise — and oppose the Alliance Party's amendment, which would see substantial increases in household taxes for people in Northern Ireland.

Mr Weir: I support the amendment in my name and that of my colleagues. As the Minister said, we have had quite a wide-ranging debate. At times, I was a little bit taken aback by some of the issues that were raised, which seemed to stretch the elasticity of the debate and go a little bit beyond what is down in black and white. For instance, the proposer spent a reasonable amount of time talking about a living wage, which, while worthy of debate, seems to be a little bit tangential to the wording of the motion.

In the spirit of generosity, I will highlight something that the proposer said, which I think is true. It is a good opportunity. As we look ahead beyond 2016, there will have to be a considerable amount of consideration as to how we take things forward, and, if today is the first salvo in a wider debate on how we can deal with a range of issues, perhaps the width of discussion that we saw in today's debate was not a bad thing in starting to open up a thinking process in that regard.

I very much agree with the Minister that, despite the wide range of issues raised, there was a lack of concrete, plausible suggestions as to how we could move forward on particular revenue-raising proposals.

1.45 pm

A number of Members mentioned that the block grant has been under greater levels of pressure, which I think is a truism. No doubt we, like other regions of the United Kingdom, are in a tougher financial position, although, as a number of Members, including Mr McCallister, said, despite the pressures that we have been under, we are not in the situation of the Republic of Ireland and certainly not of Greece, which seems, in economic terms, to move from tragedy to farce at a galloping pace. Nevertheless, the existence of these pressures means that we need to give careful consideration to the way forward. We need to be innovative and imaginative as we look forward to the financial position of Northern Ireland while remaining grounded in a sense of realism. The Minister mentioned a range of presumably well-meaning suggestions, which, when examined close up, or, indeed, in the case of the airport that we were to sell, despite the fact that we did not own it, even at a distance, did not stand up.

We are certainly approaching additional revenue raising with an open mind. The key test for fiscal devolution is whether it is beneficial to Northern Ireland and evidence-based, hence our position on corporation tax and the fact that we have kept an open mind — I appreciate that this is a particular interest of the proposer of the motion — on APD. Clearly, the indications on long-haul flights have been accepted, but the balance on shorter-haul flights is more difficult to determine. We do not have a doctrinaire position. We are prepared to look, and the Minister referred to a range of issues whereby there could be some additional benefit, but we do not believe that the solution is to tax, tax and tax again. That is where, in particular, I have a problem with the Alliance amendment.

I certainly agree that, when waste can be cut, it should be cut, but the Alliance amendment is clearly code for a number of its ideas for additional revenue, which, perhaps in the grand scheme of things, may not add a great deal to the public purse but would create a great deal of strain for individuals. I wondered whether Alliance was going to mention water charges; it came towards the end of the speech. For a while, it seemed to be the love that dare not speak its name, but mixed in there with rate rises —

Mr Lyttle: Will the Member give way?

Mr Weir: I have only a few seconds left, much to the chagrin of the Member. It is clear — to be fair, the Alliance Party has been fairly consistent on this — that it wants major levels of taxation through water charges, which would be an additional pressure. The Minister mentioned that every 1% increase in rates would raise only £5 million, but it would create an environment in which there is much greater pressure. A range of points, which, again, were not gone into in any great detail —

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

Mr Weir: — were made about what were described as inappropriate subsidies. That is not the route that I believe we should be going down. I support amendment No 2.

Mr Lyttle: I welcome the opportunity to discuss budgetary matters and, indeed, to see the Executive and Assembly give a commitment to consider and explore fair, progressive revenue raising. The Alliance amendment supports this commitment, and it also goes further by calling for the Executive not only to explore fair, progressive revenue raising but to get real about the need to tackle the cost of division and waste. I welcome Sinn Féin's realisation, albeit delayed, that the Alliance Party approach to fair, progressive revenue raising in the Budget is one that should be given due consideration. We must emphasise and note — let it be recorded today — that the DUP and the Ulster Unionist Party have rejected the Assembly and the Executive reaffirming their commitment to tackle waste and division in our society. That is the real disgrace today.

The Alliance Party opposed the Budget at the Executive and in the Assembly because of what it believes is the lack of a long-term strategic approach to serious social and economic challenges. The Finance Minister said that the Budget was about tough choices, but he has deferred numerous difficult decisions on many issues. He has chosen to shirk fair revenue-raising consideration and redistribution, which has resulted in a failure adequately to invest in many essential public services that are critical to the health, economic development and environmental well-being of our community.

My colleague Judith Cochrane MLA set out extremely capably the sound budgetary strategy that the Alliance Party would take. It balances reduction, efficiencies and fair revenue raising. She also set out the commitment that the Assembly and Executive need to have to address waste and the cost of division, which is estimated to be in the region of over £1 billion a year. Mrs Cochrane said that the Stormont House Agreement and Together: Building a United Community, which is now almost two years old, set out clear commitments for every Department to audit all its policies to consider how it supports sharing over separation rather than division and waste. It is interesting that the Finance Minister today chose to dismiss the need to tackle that waste and division; he said that it was a proposal that tinkers around the edge. It is a disgrace to say that tackling the £1 billion cost of division is tinkering around the edge. Indeed, it is a failure of leadership on the part of the Minister and his party not to identify the need to tackle that challenge.

Mrs Cochrane also set out the need for us to approach education in a much more integrated manner. The Minister raised the issue of teacher training in Northern Ireland. We have four teacher training colleges for around 1·8 million people. Some people have referred to the system as one that trains Catholic and Protestant teachers separately, trains too many teachers and sacrifices economic value to fund itself. We need to get real in the Assembly and tackle that undue cost of separation and duplication.

The Alliance Party has set out the need to redirect subsidies that support people who can afford to pay for services rather than helping the most vulnerable. We have also supported other fiscal devolution, such as corporation tax, providing that we make the adequate investment in skills. Of course, there are other policy tools that we can use to achieve those aims.

In closing, it is essential that leadership is shown by the Executive and Assembly through exploring those fair and

progressive revenue-raising measures. They need to get real about tackling the cost of division. As Mrs Cochrane said, we are not accountable for our tax take, but we are accountable for our tax waste. I fear that, in the DUP and the Finance Minister, we are seeing a party of high tax waste. It is essential that we, as an Assembly and Executive, move to address that and to ensure that we invest in our public services and support our private sector so that it has the platform it needs —

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

Mr Lyttle: — to make Northern Ireland the best regional economy in Europe.

Mr Speaker: As Question Time begins at 2.00 pm, I suggest that the House take its ease until then. The debate will continue after Question Time, when the next Member to speak will be Máirtín Ó Muilleoir.

The debate stood suspended.

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

2.00 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Regional Development

Translink: Chief Executive

1. **Mrs McKevitt** asked the Minister for Regional Development when he intends to begin the recruitment process for a new chief executive of Translink.
(AQO 7618/11-15)

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): I have been very impressed by the dedication and enthusiasm that David Strahan brought to the post of chief executive of Translink. I respect fully his decision to leave to take a new direction in his life. I am pleased that he will remain as chief executive until the end of September, beyond his contractual commitments, to allow time for a new appointment to be made. I wish him well for the future.

The recruitment process for the new Translink chief executive is a matter for the Translink board. I expect it to take that forward as a matter of urgency. I will expect also to be kept fully informed. Under the Transport Act (Northern Ireland) 1967, I am expected to endorse any appointment by allowing a new CEO to become a member of the Translink board.

I am confident that Translink will continue to be led effectively during a period of significant budgetary pressure.

Mrs McKevitt: On this occasion, is it the Minister's intention to ensure that the successful candidate is legally committed to staying with the company for a reasonable period?

Mr Kennedy: I thank the Member for her question. The decision by the current chief executive, Mr Strahan, was highly personal, which I completely respect. As I indicated, the appointment process is a matter to be handled by the board, and I outlined my involvement in it.

I hope that we can look forward to a degree of stability for Translink because there are challenging financial issues to be addressed. It is important not only that the appointment is made at the earliest possible time but that we get some stability for the future.

Mr Lynch: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Does the Minister envisage additional remuneration to attract a qualified and suitable person for the post?

Mr Kennedy: I thank the Member for his question. It is hard to speculate on that, particularly for me. It would probably be unwise for me to speculate on that given that it is a matter for the Translink board. I would expect it to be within the agreed parameters of the most recent recruitment process and, therefore, similar to the current chief executive's salary. Of course, that would have to be negotiated.

Mr Spratt: I, too, wish David Strahan well in his new calling. Will the Minister ensure that, when a new chief executive is appointed, he will continue with the drive of

change within the hierarchy of Translink that David Strahan started, and that that change will not be obstructed in any way by the present board?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. I am sure that he will accept that he may have said “he or she”, whoever the new chief executive may be, would drive forward the necessary changes. David Strahan was addressing a great many of those issues in a highly professional way. I expect and want to see the continuation of that so that the changes that are necessary will be carried forward to the benefit of not only Translink but the travelling public.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Minister for that update. Will being without a chief executive officer for a period of time affect any of Translink’s projects, such as the Londonderry rail phase 2 and the Londonderry transport hub?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his question. He raises a couple of important projects, the carrying forward of which is important regardless of the process of appointing a new chief executive. The procurement process for the signalling works is well under way. It is hoped that a contract can then be awarded to allow the signalling work to start on site around the end of May 2015.

Officials in my Department are preparing an application for European funding to support the delivery of the Coleraine to Londonderry rail upgrade project. The application is due for submission to the European Commission by 26 February, and the final date with regard to funding approval is expected approximately six months thereafter.

The Member also asked for an update on the proposed new station and transport hub in Londonderry — sorry, it was not the Londonderry hub, it was the Belfast hub. Officials in my Department, together with officials from Scotland and the Republic of Ireland, engaged extensively with the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) to successfully secure the inclusion of a sustainable transport thematic objective in the INTERREG VA territorial cooperation programme for 2014-2020. The programme is in the latter stages of securing formal European Commission approval, and the SEUPB has indicated that it will be opening the first calls for applications this year following completion of the approvals process. Officials in my Department intend to submit an application for funding in relation to the Waterside multimodal hub project in this or subsequent calls.

A6: Dungiven Bypass

2. **Mr Dallat** asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the upgrade of the A6, including the bypass at Dungiven. *(AQO 7619/11-15)*

Mr Kennedy: There are proposals to dual two sections of the A6, from Randalstown to Castledawson and from Londonderry to Dungiven. The Randalstown to Castledawson scheme is being advanced to a shovel-ready stage to facilitate commencement of construction — I do not know why they put words like that in, but anyway — at short notice, should the necessary funding become available. I am pleased to be able to confirm that the process to select a contractor commenced on 7 January 2015.

The A6 Londonderry to Dungiven scheme, which includes a bypass of Dungiven, is well advanced in its development. A public inquiry was held in 2012, and the inspector produced a report containing several recommendations. One of those was to examine a suggested alternative route for the Dungiven bypass. That was put forward by a third party on the final day of the public inquiry, and we are, therefore, quality assuring the route. That work is nearing completion, and when I am satisfied that all the issues have been appropriately reviewed, I will issue a departmental statement.

Mr Dallat: Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, with your permission and I am sure that of the entire House, I offer my deepest sympathy to the family of the child who lost her young life on the A6 yesterday and extend our good wishes to her older sister, who is fighting for her life in a Belfast hospital.

The Minister inherited this legacy, so we do not blame him for all of it. When will he be able to state the day and the hour when Dungiven will have a bypass and the north-west will be able to link with the rest of the world in transport terms?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful for the supplementary. Let me add my sympathies to the family of the road fatality on the A6 and all the friends and family of those involved.

The Member heard in my answer my determined efforts to continue advancing the A6 scheme. That means not just the Castledawson section but the Dungiven bypass element. Of course, we are seeking to bring it to a shovel-ready stage, and we will continue to do that. We are optimistic that that can be done, and then it will be down to finance. Of course, it is an important and long-awaited scheme. I know that there is considerable community support and, indeed, widespread political support for it. I look forward to getting that political support when it comes to the Executive allocating the necessary finance to allow me to proceed with it.

Mr Campbell: I also join in the condolences to the family affected. Hopefully, the Minister will be able to respond to the written question I tabled today regarding the Glenshane Pass. In covering it over 30 years, I have never experienced delays like those that thousands of motorists faced this morning, even though we have had much worse weather in the past.

Will the Minister be able to give us an indication within the next two months of whether the alternative route that he is considering is a viable runner, or are we back to plan A?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member, and I will await with interest his Assembly question on problems on the Glenshane Pass this morning. My sympathy goes to anyone affected by any such problems.

I also take the opportunity to say something about the winter services that my Department provides from the early onset of winter in October right through until March or April. They are a very dedicated bunch of staff who at all times attempt to alleviate journey difficulties. I pay tribute to them, because it is they who drive the gritters, man the salt barns and seek to give assistance in very poor conditions, particularly in the wee small hours of the morning.

The Minister — sorry, the Member; the former Minister — asked about timescale. We are seeking to work through the resulting issues that were presented to us in the final stages of the public inquiry. We will seek to give our view on all those when the appropriate advice has been provided. I hope that that will be within weeks, rather than months, but we will work through those as quickly as we can.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I also extend my sympathies to the family of the young girl killed on the A6, the latest of many scores of deaths on that road. Like Mr Campbell and others from Derry, I spent an hour on the Dungiven to Maghera section this morning and met one small snowplough, despite the fact that there was an orange snow warning yesterday evening.

The public inquiry finished in October 2012, and we are now sitting in February, almost March, of 2015. When, in real terms, can we expect the announcement on that inquiry and the results thereof?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. Obviously, he too experienced some delays this morning. Let me say absolutely that Transport NI and the other agencies were all out on the ground seeking to alleviate conditions. As the Member well knows, conditions can change in a matter of moments or minutes. They can change in a very short period of time indeed. I thank all my staff who dedicate themselves to trying to ease journeys for everyone all over Northern Ireland.

I get a sense of the frustration in the Member's question, but all those issues have to be properly explored.

They were presented at a very late stage of the public inquiry. However, it is important that they be properly assessed because experience, even in other schemes, has shown that attempts to circumvent or shorten procedures can bring their own problems and lead to further delays. We want to avoid that. We will continue to work through these issues and report back at the earliest possible time.

2.15 pm

Mr Kinahan: We have heard media reports about a potential top-up compensation scheme for landowners affected by vesting. With Randalstown and Toome both being in my patch, will the Minister provide an update on these plans and on whether we are going to bring Northern Ireland into line with GB?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question and, indeed, for his abiding interest in his South Antrim constituency, which I am sure will prove beneficial as we move forward into the year.

I can confirm that I have brought proposals to the Executive to ensure that landowners, whether farmers, business owners or private landowners, are properly compensated when government steps in to vest their land. This proposal is in line with the current position in GB. I am demanding not that any change slavishly follow the detail of the GB position but that it makes our approach equally fair. It will not have a significant uplift in cost against the overall costs of any given road project but will, in my view, leave landowners feeling more valued. For me, this is an issue about fairness. I am working hard to secure Executive support for my proposals so that we can bring legislation to the Floor for debate.

Concessionary Fares: Belfast

3. **Mr Sheehan** asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the provision of concessionary fares by all public transport providers in Belfast. *(AQO 7620/11-15)*

Mr Kennedy: I support fully the Northern Ireland concessionary fares scheme. Since taking office, I have ensured that the funding required for the scheme is to the fore of my Executive colleagues' minds when budget allocations have been considered.

There are two bus operators based in Belfast that provide concessionary fares on behalf of the Department, namely Metro Translink and the Belfast Bus Company. There is also a small element of concessionary travel provided by Northern Ireland Railways for journeys that begin and end in Belfast. There are other bus operators based outside Belfast that have services to the city that provide concessionary fares. Of the approximately 35 million concessionary fare journeys last year, we estimate that those in Belfast account for approximately 7 million. In the Belfast area, the cost of concessions in 2013-14 is estimated at just over £11 million out of a total spend of over £40 million. That figure does not take account of journeys into and out of Belfast.

Historically, the concessionary fares scheme has been underfunded, and my Department had to secure additional funds during this financial year to cover the cost of it. I appreciate and welcome the fact that extra resource of £9·5 million has been allocated for concessionary fares in 2015-16. However, that was based on existing passenger numbers and fares. If there is a growth in passenger numbers, as current trends indicate, there is likely to be pressure on the budget, and, as such, it is likely that my Department will have to bid for additional budget if the Executive wish the scheme to expand. Entry into the scheme of new operators, whether in or outside Belfast, will increase this financial pressure.

Given that the scheme attracts support from all sections of the community and across all parties, I encourage all Members to show their support for it by canvassing their colleagues in the Executive to ensure that appropriate funding is allocated to my Department to cover all existing and future commitments with the concessionary fares scheme in place.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Before I call Mr Sheehan, I remind the Minister of the two-minute rule.

Mr Sheehan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht a fhreagra. I thank the Minister for his answer. Can he tell us whether he has met the Belfast Taxis Community Interest Company to discuss concessionary fares in the taxis that it operates?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. I am certainly aware that, over the past number of years, representatives from the West Belfast Taxi Association have met officials to discuss the concessionary fares scheme. The last such meeting was over a year ago, in February 2014. There have been discussions in relation to an appropriate ticketing system that could be used and other such issues. I also have to say to the Member — he will probably know — that the audit requirements for the concessionary fares scheme are fairly explicit and would have to be adhered to. Since then, there have been no further discussions with the organisation. However, I understand that a recent request has been received. Officials will pursue that.

Mr Beggs: The concessionary fares scheme provides the means by which a single pass can enable someone to

travel by bus or rail. That is a form of integrated ticketing, and the Minister has mentioned that. Will he give us an update on his plans for integrated ticketing for public-sector transport — bus and rail?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his interest and his question. Translink is finalising an economic appraisal to examine the costs and benefits of various replacement options for a new ticketing system. The Department will require that any new ticketing system is compatible with the Belfast rapid transit project and offers the best possible value for money for passengers and the Department. The new system will be designed so that it can also be used by other public transport operators. When the economic appraisal has been finalised, it will need approval from my Department and the Department of Finance and Personnel. The concessionary fares scheme will apply to the Belfast rapid transit scheme as it does to other public transport services in Northern Ireland.

Mr Lyttle: I welcome the work that the Minister has done to maintain concessionary fares. I take the opportunity to put it on record that, despite the best efforts of the DUP to suggest otherwise, the Alliance Party has at no time proposed the withdrawal of free public travel for older people. I ask the Minister whether any assessment has been undertaken on what percentage of free public transport is used by people in employment.

Mr Kennedy: The Member has raised an issue that has garnered some debate at particular times. There is an anomaly within the system that, technically, allows a percentage of users of the concessionary scheme to benefit by travelling to work.

I am not minded to amend the scheme at present. I am satisfied that that issue only affects a reasonably small minority of users, and any such attempt to tamper with the scheme would give the wrong impression. I am a very strong believer in the concessionary fares scheme. It has created great opportunities for people to get out and about, to travel and to use it for social reasons, as well as bringing retail benefits to local towns, Belfast and other cities. The perception might be to tinker with it because of one perceived flaw, but that would be the wrong message to send out. I believe in concessionary fares, and I will defend, support and argue for that at all times.

Public Transport: Passengers

4. **Mr Hussey** asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of recent growth in passenger numbers on public transport. *(AQO 7621/11-15)*

Mr Kennedy: I am pleased to provide some positive feedback on public transport usage in Northern Ireland and report that passenger numbers are increasing year on year. In the 2011-12 financial year, the number of passenger journeys was over 77 million, and, in the current financial year, Translink is on target to achieve 80·5 million passenger journeys, an increase of over 4·5%. That growth is most significant on the railways but, in overall terms, compares very well with trends in other parts of the UK and the Republic of Ireland. That success reflects my Department's investment in modernising the bus fleet and the introduction of new trains. In conjunction with Translink, I have sought to improve passenger facilities and infrastructure, provided more park-and-ride opportunities to encourage car users to access public transport for at least part of their journey and, where possible, introduced road priority measures for buses to speed up services that would otherwise be held up by traffic congestion.

Mr Hussey: I thank the Minister for his response so far. Given the clear growth in public transport usage that has been overseen by him, will he undertake not to sanction any Translink proposals to reduce the frequency of local bus services without public consultation on them? Will he take cognisance of the outcome of any consultation?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question; he raises a very important point. In the context of where we are with budgets etc, it is important to set out my position. I take the view that any change in frequency to public transport services is of such importance that it should be and must be consulted on publicly. In particular, the views of passengers must be properly taken into account. I make clear my expectation that such an exercise will be undertaken with any proposals. Of course, any decisions taken after consultation would have to take full account of and give proper weight to responses received to the consultation process. I am proud of the progress that we have made on public transport over the past few years and am determined that, in spite of an incredibly challenging financial position, the progress we have made is not put in reverse in any way.

Mr G Robinson: Does the Minister agree that free travel for the over-60s and the partial upgrade of our rail network has contributed to the growth of numbers on public transport?

Mr Kennedy: I am very pleased to agree with the Member; I take that as a compliment to my handling of the Department. *[Laughter.]* I know that the Oscars were on last night. We did not get nominated.

The Member raises an important point. Work on that is one of the few things for which people give genuine credit to the Executive and to the Department in particular. As Minister, I am very pleased that public transport continues to expand. Into the future, I want that to continue and to be built on. That is why I say to the Member that I urge him to use his considerable influence, particularly with the Finance Minister and his party Executive colleagues, to ensure that the Department is properly funded for concessionary fares and the running of public transport.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Leading on from that point, what analysis will the Department or the Minister do on the effects that the recent fare increases announced by Translink will have on keeping people in their cars rather than encouraging them to use the public transport system?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. Although fare increases are unwelcome at any stage, I assure the Member that they have been kept to a minimum. It remains the case that Translink fares compare favourably with those in the rest of the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. Since 2011, fare increases in GB have been more than two to three times higher than those in Northern Ireland. Fare increases here have been about half the rate of inflation during my term as Minister. In that time, passengers have seen a cut in fares in real terms. That has benefited passengers and helped to ensure that passenger numbers increased to over 80 million last year. I had been able

to maintain a freeze on fares since mid-2013, but, in the light of the current budgetary situation and the cuts in the Translink budget this year and next year, a fare increase was required, but I very much hope that the current growth can continue.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Order. That ends the period for listed questions. We move on to 15 minutes of topical questions.

2.30 pm

Londonderry Rail Fiasco

T1. **Mr Spratt** asked the Minister for Regional Development what he has done to initiate an inquiry into how his departmental officials and Translink have handled the Londonderry rail fiasco, given the original cost of some £22 million, which we were told would not increase, and to confirm that three of the four firms that have tendered for the new process have pulled out. *(AQT 2141/11-15)*

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his question. Of course, when he was Chair of the Regional Development Committee, he had much more hands-on involvement with the issue. He may know that I have had discussions with the Regional Development Committee. Yes, there was a setback, in that the original estimate was clearly incorrect. That has been addressed. I took steps to instigate what is called a power review, and we have accepted its recommendations. The work of the power committee, which was independent completely of Translink and the Department, has sought to make changes to future contracts. We are very clear that there are lessons to be learned, and I am content that progress is being made. Lessons have also been learned in the Department and Translink, and I am considering the outcome of those reports.

As I outlined in answer to a question from Mr Elliott, we continue to make progress on the contract and the project, and I very much hope that that will continue so that we can successfully bring the project to a conclusion that will satisfy everyone.

Mr Spratt: The Minister described the issue as a setback — a setback of £20 million to the public purse. Given the cosy relationship between Translink and officials in the Department, which is, I think, quite well established now, will the Minister ensure that heads will roll as a result? If he is not prepared to sack folks in his Department or Translink, will he consider his position?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member. I am sorry that it is not possible to nominate anyone for an Oscar so soon after the event. The Member well knows that I have expressed my displeasure to Translink at the sequence of events that led to this. However, we are moving forward on the scheme, not least through the actions that I have taken. I have made it clear that there will be no hiding place for anyone as far as learning lessons is concerned. I am particularly interested in moving forward to see the project successfully completed. That is the task that I have set myself, and I believe that that is what people in the area and in the north-west region want. We can do the redding up later.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Question 2 has been withdrawn within the permitted time frame.

Craigantlet Roads Project

T3. **Mr Cree** asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the Craigantlet roads project. *(AQT 2143/11-15)*

Mr Kennedy: I thank the Member for his question and for his interest in the scheme. As the Member will be aware, my Department proposes to implement a scheme to improve the road infrastructure at Craigantlet. Three options put forward for public consultation early last year generated much discussion on which should be taken forward. Having considered all the relevant information available, we decided on a single roundabout with a new link road as the preferred option. However, that scheme could have an impact on the local environment, and I can therefore confirm that my officials are continuing to discuss it, and in particular the potential impact on the local environment, with colleagues from the Department of the Environment and Planning NI. Once that process has been concluded, an announcement will be made on the most appropriate way forward.

Mr Cree: I thank the Minister for that. Can he give us a likely timescale, bearing in mind that the project has been going for some time? Are there any particular safety factors that may need to be considered?

Mr Kennedy: I am not in a position to specify a timeline, because working with other Departments has to be taken into consideration. The Member will know that work is being undertaken close to the area involved at Craigantlet. My Department is implementing a collision remedial scheme for the existing road layout. That will comprise high-friction surfacing and additional signs. The new surfacing has already been laid, and the signs should be erected within the next four weeks, but that work has not been undertaken to delay or detract from the main scheme in any way.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Question 4 was withdrawn within the permitted time frame, and Mr Alastair Ross is not in his seat to ask question 5.

Mobuoy Road: Vesting Order

T6. **Mr Agnew** asked the Minister for Regional Development, in light of the many questions that he has received from me about the possibility of vesting land at Mobuoy Road, which has been contaminated by illegal landfill, and given that, in one answer, he referred to a cost-effective engineering solution to dealing with the contaminated waste, what the cost of that cost-effective solution would be and how effective it would be. *(AQT 2146/11-15)*

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his interest, which clearly extends beyond north Down to Dungiven and other parts.

I can update him as follows: I have not yet confirmed any of the statutory orders for the Londonderry to Dungiven dual carriageway. If, in due course, I confirm the direction or order to complete planning for the scheme, the vesting order will continue to remain in draft form until funding has been confirmed. The draft vesting order, as presented at the public inquiry into the scheme, has not been amended at Mobuoy. It has not been necessary for my Department to undertake any additional assessment work at Mobuoy, as the environmental considerations into the chosen road

alignment took into account existing conditions known at the time. The environmental statement is still appropriate and relevant, and it clearly deals with any discovery of potentially contaminated land and outlines appropriate actions that should be taken. The land being vested at that location, which forms part of the illegal landfill site, is still required for flood compensation measures. Additional environmental assessments have been undertaken by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency, and that information has been used to inform potential solutions to the contamination that may be required should remediation still be necessary.

Should the contamination issue remain unresolved when the road is being built, I am content that cost-effective measures can be deployed to remedy the undesirable effects of the buried waste.

Mr Agnew: I thank the Minister for his answer. I assure him that, when my interest takes me outside north Down, I try to use public transport where possible, as I am sure that he knows.

I want to ask about the possible cost-effective solution. Will that require the Minister to engage with Europe to ensure that any such solution does not result in EU infraction proceedings?

Mr Kennedy: I never doubted that the Member would use public transport for his other journeys. I encourage him to do so increasingly. Let me say to him that, if further measures have to be considered, we will take the advice of other Departments or agencies. Whether or not it would be necessary to include Europe at that stage, we will certainly be mindful, I think, of any potential proceedings that could be taken that we would be open to or liable for. I think that it will be sensible to collaborate with other agencies and Departments as necessary.

Twaddell Avenue: Parking/Pedestrian Access

T7. **Mr Humphrey** asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the consultation on parking for the residents of the Twaddell Avenue area and pedestrian access on each side of the road, which was discussed when he visited Twaddell Avenue a number of months ago. *(AQT 2147/11-15)*

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member. I well remember the visit. My officials sent a preliminary design drawing detailing a proposed alternative traffic calming scheme along Twaddell Avenue to you in October 2014. The Member is shaking his head to indicate that he has not received that. An accompanying letter also detailed the advantages and disadvantages of the proposals and asked that you would undertake to discuss this with the local residents' association and any other interested parties in the locality and provide a response. To date, my officials have no record of receiving a response, either from you or further representations, so I will be interested in your supplementary.

Mr Humphrey: I appreciate that. Obviously, there has been no follow up from me because I did not get the letter or the drawings. I do not know what happened there, but perhaps, if the officials could forward those on, I will be happy to respond. Very clearly, the people who live there and pedestrians need to have this issue addressed. The Minister has seen at first hand that, very clearly, there is a problem. We are keen to have that problem addressed and alleviated as soon as possible, so I welcome that and the Minister's interest in it.

Mr Kennedy: I thank the Member for his supplementary question, and I will endeavour to ensure that he is in early receipt of the necessary details. Hopefully, progress can be made.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Mr Dominic Bradley is not in his place for question 8, and Mr Sammy Wilson is not in his place for question 9.

Millennium Way, Lurgan: Extension

T10. **Mr Moutray** asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the proposed extension to Millennium Way, Lurgan. *(AQT 2150/11-15)*

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his question. I am so sorry that other Members are not in their place for me to be able to respond to them. The Member will know that this is a scheme that has been on the go for a very long time. The planning permission for the scheme was granted on 24 March 2014. The notice of intention to make a vesting order for the scheme was published during the weeks ending 7 November and 14 November, with the closure date for receipt of objections being 16 December 2014. Two objections were received, and Transport NI officials met both objectors in January to discuss the content of the objections. Follow-up letters, summarising the content of the meetings, were sent to each objector. Each letter included a request from them to confirm whether they intended to withdraw their objections.

Mr Moutray: I thank the Minister for the update. This indeed has been a long and protracted issue. This is a relatively small scheme, Minister. Will you go down in history, Minister, as the Minister who delivered nothing for Lurgan or will you go down as the Minister who delivered Lurgan's own Kennedy Way? The choice is yours, Minister, and I would like an answer.

Mr Kennedy: Thank you very much indeed. I am not sure about Kennedy Way; that may have been done somewhere else. I view it as a debt of honour to people like the late Harold McCusker, Sam Gardiner MLA, who is party colleague of Jo-Anne Dobson MLA, and other local representatives who have consistently lobbied for this important scheme. I recently had the opportunity to travel in the Lurgan area, and I need no persuasion about the benefits that this scheme would bring to Lurgan.

I think that the Member will find that when things are being delivered to Lurgan, it will be the Ulster Unionist Party that will best deliver them.

2.45 pm

Social Development

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Questions 2, 5, 9 and 10 have been withdrawn.

Homelessness

1. **Mr McCartney** asked the Minister for Social Development how he plans to help protect people who lose their homes as a result of the ongoing financial crisis. *(AQO 7632/11-15)*

Mr Storey (The Minister for Social Development): The final report of the housing repossession task force was published on 12 February and outlines a range of recommendations on how existing systems of support can be improved and how people in difficulty can be encouraged to come forward for help earlier. This is an incredibly important area of work, and I am considering how the task force recommendations can be used to make a positive impact for many households affected by this very serious issue.

I plan to publish a formal response to the report shortly, but there are a number of proactive recommendations that I am keen to support. They include continued funding of support for mortgage interest, which assists homeowners on certain benefits with mortgage interest payments, allowing them to remain in their own homes; timely assistance from the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, including a homelessness assessment for vulnerable households; and increasing the availability of voluntary exit schemes such as assisted voluntary sales.

Across the United Kingdom, there are signs that the situation is improving, with the number of mortgage approvals increasing and the number of mortgages in arrears decreasing. The task force recommendations aim to improve the situation in Northern Ireland further and help gather the numbers of households that engage proactively with their lenders at an earlier stage.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a Phriomh LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. I thank the Minister for that answer and for the information he has supplied. I know that he has dealt with a number of issues, but is there a contingency if there is an increase in the interest rate? Will the plan be rigorous enough to offset that as well?

Mr Storey: Given the nature of this issue, we cannot just allow it to be set in a number of recommendations in a document that does not have the flexibility to be able to respond to what may be the changing circumstances as a result of an issue he mentioned regarding a rise in interest. This is something that we need to keep under review. I assure the Member that the issue in regard to how we would respond will be given consideration so that we are left as flexible as possible. No one should underestimate the seriousness of the situation for families affected by this matter. It is something that has been highlighted by the task force and it is something that we need to keep constantly under review so that we have every eventuality covered to be as proactive as possible given the challenges we face.

Ms P Bradley: I thank the Member for tabling the question. Recently, the Committee for Social Development had a briefing from the task force, and it highlighted, as you have, that early intervention is one of the key priorities that needs to be addressed. What is your Department doing to encourage homeowners in distress to seek advice early?

Mr Storey: This is an issue, as it is in most of these cases, where relevant, appropriate information at the right time could be of great benefit and help. My Department is working with the behavioural insights team, which is known as the nudge unit, which is appropriate, to examine how behavioural economics can provide an innovative stimulus to borrower engagement. My Department will soon implement the recommendations, as we discussed in the original question, of the housing repossession task force, which includes the establishment of one of the recommendations in regard to a mortgage options hub for the delivery of specialist mortgage debt advice at an early stage and the harmonisation of debt advice services.

I think that, if that is implemented, it will encourage people to come forward a lot earlier in the process when the indications are pointing to a serious situation developing. I trust that, as a result, we could and should avert some of the more disastrous outcomes that come about as a result of the repossession of one's home.

Mrs Overend: Can the Minister outline why he has not brought in a mortgage relief scheme such as the mortgage to shared equity scheme, which is in place in Scotland?

Mr Storey: We can look at what has happened in other jurisdictions, but we always need to ensure that we have put in place the right and appropriate mechanisms to deal with issues in Northern Ireland. We could be asked why we are not implementing the mortgage rescue scheme immediately. Mortgage rescue is a complex policy, with a range of stakeholders needed to deliver a successful scheme. The key lesson from the English experience is that, to achieve value for money, the policy development phase cannot be rushed. To ensure that we secure buy-in from all the key sectors and to determine whether the scheme, if viable, will deliver value for money, we have asked the Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations to complete a feasibility study.

I never take the view that there is nothing that we can learn from other schemes, but I always take the view that we must ensure that the schemes that we introduce in Northern Ireland are bespoke and address the specific needs and problems in Northern Ireland. That is one of the reasons why we will not rule anything out but will be cautious about what we implement over the next number of years.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Thanks very much, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. Agus mo bhuíochas leis an Aire chomh maith. I thank the Minister too. I heard the Minister refer to the fact that some support with payments may be introduced for people who are on benefits. Will the Minister accept that there is an intervening gap between somebody going on benefits to their getting their actual mortgage interest pay? Will he also accept that there are consequentials in the payment of mortgages for the lace-curtain poor, which is those people who are not on benefits but who are on very low income and therefore fall into the debt trap?

Mr Storey: The Member raises a valid point on that. There are households where there is an issue with negative equity. The lenders are acknowledging that house-price inflation alone will not alleviate the drag of negative equity on market mobility, and, consequently, we can increasingly expect products for customers in negative equity, such as mortgage porting, to become available. That also points to the responsibility on the banks and lenders to ensure that the products that they provide are for not only those who are in receipt of benefits but working families that have pressures and problems, that struggle in many of those circumstances and that sometimes find it difficult to find a friend in the system who can be of assistance to them.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Mr Chris Hazzard is not in his place for question 3.

Lanyon Tunnels/Sandy Row

4. **Mr Ó Muilleoir** asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of the benefits the Lanyon tunnels development and the Sandy Row community enterprise hub will bring to their local communities. *(AQO 7635/11-15)*

Mr Storey: The Lanyon tunnels has been identified as a regeneration project that has the potential to provide commercial and regeneration activity in the Markets area of Belfast. Working in conjunction with the private-sector-led regeneration of the Stewart Street lands, the project also offers the Markets area community the benefit of greater connectivity to the city centre. An application to the social investment fund has been made to OFMDFM and is being assessed. Belfast City Council carried out a contamination study on the site in November 2014, and its findings are being analysed.

The south Belfast social enterprise hub contract was awarded in May 2014 to the consortium of Belfast South Community Resources, CM Marketing and Community Training Research Services. A hub manager and a team of associates provide support such as mentoring, training and ideas generation to new and existing social enterprises to develop new business ideas. The hub also provides free facilities for hot-desking and test trading to new social enterprises. The retail unit available for test trading as part of the hub at 86 Sandy Row opened on a test-trading basis on 3 November, with Made in Belfast with Love, a social enterprise craft collective, being the first to occupy the space.

To December 30 2014, 131 individuals and groups have engaged with the south Belfast hub on Sandy Row to consider options for starting up new social enterprises in that area. That activity will bring significant value to the area in skills development, community group development and potential new business starts, with associated job creation.

Mr Ó Muilleoir: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Thank you, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, and thanks also to the Minister for his comprehensive answer. This is not all in your bailiwick, and I appreciate your work on both projects. As they reach the finishing line — they are very close to getting full grant aid — will the Minister pledge his continuing support for the projects, in Sandy Row, which I visited, and the Lanyon tunnels in the Markets, on their journey towards full funding?

Mr Storey: I thank the Member for his supplementary. This is the challenge set by many of these projects. When you get something up and running and have an end goal in sight, it would be very disappointing for all those involved if we were not able to see it brought to fruition. I mentioned the contamination survey that has been carried out, as we all need to be cognisant of it. I want to ensure that, as the information is brought to the fore, it does not become a reason for not reaching the finishing line and realising the project, which I believe could have huge significance, as I outlined in my original answer, through linking another part of the city with the city centre and giving opportunity to a community that may feel disconnected from the rest of the city because of the road layout. Nothing could be further from the truth. A project on-site like this can dispel that, and I will certainly give the assurance that my Department and I will continue to do what we can to bring this over the line.

Mr Spratt: I thank the Minister for his answers so far, his interest in south Belfast and his recent visit to Sandy Row. What is the Minister's assessment of the success to date of the enterprise hubs in all areas?

Mr Storey: I thank the Member. I also thank him for his continued work in representing South Belfast and for the issues that he has already brought to my attention. Social enterprise hubs are not specific to south Belfast; they cover a wide range of locations. It would be right to say that it is almost too early at this stage to state whether the pilot phase has been successful. However, early indications continue to be positive. The initial task of securing and fitting out premises for the hubs has been completed in all areas, and stakeholder and client feedback on the quality of the facilities has been universally positive. The enterprise activity is now ramping up across the hubs, and I am optimistic that we will see an increase in social enterprise start-ups and the socio-economic benefits as a result of this pilot phase.

Looking at other locations, what we can say about this approach is that it has been the catalyst for others. I made reference to one business that has now started up as a result of the south Belfast hub, and it is when more of that takes place that we generate in the community and the wider area that entrepreneurial spirit and determination to ensure that economic regeneration is in the hands of the community, as well as in the hands of larger organisations.

3.00 pm

Mr McKinney: I thank the Minister. How can the generation proposals take account of best practice in building a shared future? Is that one of the defined objectives?

Mr Storey: I thank the Member for his question. All that we do in the Assembly should be about trying to ensure that we continue to recognise that, while we still have many differences as a society, we can do many things in a shared way to the benefit of all communities. We always run the risk in Northern Ireland of believing that, somehow, it is about only two communities and that "shared" is about only two communities. Northern Ireland is becoming very diverse, with many varying interests and elements of community right across the country. We need to ensure that, whatever we do in regard to this project or any others, we take into consideration the community and communities that we are working with and in. We need to recognise that, sometimes, there will be sensitivities that we have to recognise, but that should not deflect us from the overall objective of the scheme, which is to enhance communities generally. By doing that, we all benefit.

Affordable Warmth Scheme

6. **Mr D Bradley** asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the affordable warmth scheme. *(AQO 7637/11-15)*

11. **Mr Kinahan** asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the affordable warmth scheme. *(AQO 7642/11-15)*

Mr Storey: I thank the Member for his question. With the Principal Deputy Speaker's permission, I will answer

questions 6 and 11 together, as both are in reference to the affordable warmth scheme.

Following two successful pilots in 2012 and 2013, my Department introduced the new affordable warmth scheme on 14 September 2014. The warm homes scheme will end on 31 March 2015, and, from 1 April, it will be replaced by the affordable warmth scheme as the Department's primary tool to address fuel poverty. The scheme is a new area-based approach that will find and assist households in severe or extreme fuel poverty by using a targeting tool that has been developed by Ulster University and successfully tested in the pilots. It differs significantly from the warm homes scheme, targeting specific low-income households that are likely to be subject to fuel poverty. Over 33,000 households in Northern Ireland are in severe or extreme fuel poverty; that is, they need to spend more than a quarter of their household income on energy costs. Those are the households that the affordable warmth scheme will find and help as a priority. All the energy efficiency measures available under the warm homes scheme will be retained under the affordable warmth scheme, with some new measures added.

The scheme is administered in partnership with local councils and the Housing Executive. It gives householders control over their choice of installer and when they get the work carried out. All local councils across Northern Ireland are targeting households identified as being most at risk of fuel poverty. The areas identified as being most in need of energy efficiency measures will be contacted first. To qualify for the scheme, the householder's gross annual household income must be less than £20,000. Householders will be free to choose a provider to install the approved measures. All work completed will be subject to inspection by building control officers.

Mr D Bradley: I apologise to you, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, for being absent during the previous Question Time when you called me.

I ask the Minister how the scheme will be monitored and reviewed.

Mr Storey: There will be an ongoing process of monitoring and evaluation. Obviously, when we come to the end of the scheme, as has been the case with the previous scheme, there will be an evaluation. Over recent days, representations have been made to us by the Member's colleague Mrs Kelly in relation to the practical outworkings of the scheme. I had a meeting just last week with a charitable organisation that expressed concerns about how the scheme was being rolled out. Since that meeting, we have reinforced with councils the importance of making sure that people are aware of the scheme and of the criteria to access it. An evaluation is ongoing, and it is relevant and pertinent to the 33,000 households in Northern Ireland that want a better outcome in addressing fuel poverty.

Mr Devenney: I thank the Minister for his answers so far. Can households self-refer to the affordable warmth scheme as they did to the old warm homes scheme?

Mr Storey: I thank my colleague for his question. The affordable warmth scheme is primarily a targeted scheme, and I expect that the vast majority of homes assisted will be in the target group, which came about as a result of an Ulster University identification process — I think it was called an algorithm. That was difficult for me to say; do not ask me to spell it or you really will have difficulties.

I accept that there will be householders who meet the criteria for the scheme but are not in the area being targeted by the council. Councils have the discretion to accept non-targeted referrals from a range of sources, including health professionals, social workers and environmental health officers.

Mr Beggs: It will take some time for the new affordable warmth scheme to get up and running, and the Minister mentioned that it would replace the warm homes scheme. Will he assure me that all those who applied under the warm homes scheme before the deadline date will, despite there perhaps being a late surge, receive payment for any work that has been carried out?

Mr Storey: Yes. I am confident that we will be able to bring the old scheme to an end and that, when it comes to an end, the other will be in place. Obviously, you face a challenge when you move from one scheme to another to make sure that the funding and the referral elements are brought to an end in a timely and efficient way. I assure the Member that that is important to the Department. We want to make sure that, when one scheme comes to an end, all is done and dusted before we move on to the new scheme.

Local Government: Devolved Functions

7. **Mr Elliott** asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the progress made in devolving departmental functions to the new local government structures. *(AQO 7638/11-15)*

Mr Storey: I thank the Member for his question. The Regeneration Bill is the mechanism to allow the conferral of powers and functions by my Department on councils. I introduced the Regeneration Bill to the Assembly on 8 December 2014. The Second Stage debate took place on 20 January 2015, and the Bill was passed to the Social Development Committee for detailed scrutiny. Although the powers will not be conferred until 2016, my officials and I are working closely with councils to ensure that my Department's regeneration and community development activities fit with locally developed plans in the intervening period. In the coming months, I will meet representatives of each of the new councils to discuss a range of issues and to ensure a smooth transfer of powers to the new councils from April 2016. I will commence that process after Question Time today when I meet the first of the councils to discuss the issue.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Minister for that update. I wonder whether he and his Department have yet refined how much money will follow from his Department to local government for those devolved functions, particularly in neighbourhood renewal.

Mr Storey: I thank the Member for his supplementary. When distributing a budget, it is interesting that, all of a sudden, Members realise the importance of making sure that they get their question in or get a piece on 'Good Morning Ulster' or some other programme so that I hear all the concerns.

I am still engaged in the process, and I would have preferred to be in a better position in terms of time. I have met officials over the last 10 days to discuss the budget. I have asked for refinement and further information to

ensure that, within the budgetary challenges that I face, councils do not perceive that, somehow, we are reducing their budget just because it is easy to do so. I want to work with councils. Yes, the amount that we transfer will not be the same envelope as we originally envisaged, but I am doing everything I can to minimise the difference in a practical way and, where I can, to introduce another way whereby councils would have access to some other element of funding. I am having discussions about how that would be done, what it would look like and how we can deliver it practically for councils so that, when it comes to the transfer date in April 2016, they are in possession of not only the finance but the policy and process that give them some sense of continuity

I do not want to be in the position of imposing my will on local authorities. That is neither the role nor the vision of the transfer of powers and functions. I want to continue to work with councils to minimise the impact of a challenging budgetary outcome.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I remind the Minister of the two-minute rule.

Mr G Robinson: What impact is the delay having on community planning?

Mr Storey: I thank the Member for his supplementary. I wrote to councils last December, giving my Department's commitment to fully engage with the community planning process, on which councils have the lead. My Department established a community planning steering group with the remit of providing a single point of contact for all business areas of my Department. My officials also play a full role in the DOE-led interdepartmental community planning group.

The Member has asked about what is, for me, one of the most important elements of the transfer of functions to councils. I am proud that I came into politics in 2001 as a member of Ballymoney Borough Council. We have heard a lot about double-jobbing and gone through that process in the House, but I still believe that Members who have come to the House from local government have made an invaluable contribution through bringing to the debates and the issues experience that is to be had only if you have come through the councils. However, there is a huge challenge. I had a conversation with my colleague the Minister of the Environment about how we could best ensure that community planning really works. It should not be just a policy or something that rolls off the tongue; it should be real, joined-up and meaningful. When you look at an area, you should be able to identify a community plan that gives enhanced services to a community in a way that is beneficial to the financial position but, more importantly, beneficial to people in the community because it is led by them and is for them. That is a vital element of the reform of local government.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I call Mr Alban Maginness, and I ask him to be brief. *[Laughter.]*

3.15 pm

Mr A Maginness: Thank you very much, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. I was not going to be brief.

This is a very exciting opportunity for local councils, and I affirm my support for the Minister in his desire to get it right. What about staffing transfers? Will staff be in place? Will they be able to exploit the new opportunities?

Mr Storey: I will be as brief in my reply. Yes, we have done the piece of work on the implications for staff, who will be in place. If the delay has given us any benefit, it is that we will be in a better position to work with councils so that we have, when it comes into effect in April 2016, staff, finance and processes in place in a way that is to the benefit of local authorities.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: That ends the period for listed questions. We now move on to topical questions.

Housing: Fermanagh

T1. **Mr Lynch** asked the Minister for Social Development what is being done to address unfit housing in the rural Fermanagh area. *(AQT 2151/11-15)*

Mr Storey: I thank the Member for the question. We have a situation with the condition of homes in Northern Ireland, particularly Housing Executive homes, that is beginning to cause me grave concern. If I want to achieve anything in my time as a public representative, surely it is to enhance the lives of people: the people who come to our constituency offices; the people whom we represent; and the people whom we claim are at the heart of all that we do.

A huge challenge for me since coming to the Department has been to address the level of repairs needed. The Member will be aware that the Housing Executive has appointed Savills to do a stock condition survey, and its initial findings will indicate to us the state of what will be needed and the amount of money that will be needed to address the problem, whether in Fermanagh or any other part of Northern Ireland. That will be a huge challenge, not only for me as Minister but for the Assembly, because of the amount of money that will be needed to address something that is a serious problem, despite all the efforts and progress made. I assure the Member that the rural community will not be left out of that analysis and will not be left out of addressing the need.

Mr Lynch: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. I thank the Minister for that answer. I share his concerns about the unfitness of housing in rural areas. I am also aware that he is not long in the Department. Will he explain what his Department will be doing to rectify the issue?

Mr Storey: The Member will be aware that the Housing Executive carries out extensive work with rural communities, and I have seen some of that work. I attended an event in Cookstown not that long ago, at which it was abundantly clear that the Housing Executive has a grasp of, and a handle on, how it has a responsibility, not only in its role as a landlord but in a number of other areas, which have become known as its regional functions.

You can have a debate on whether the focus should be on the landlord functions or on the other elements of its business, but the Housing Executive has made progress on separating the two. I, along with the Housing Executive, will continue to ensure that, whether in rural communities or in an urban situation, the needs of those who are in the properties are addressed in a way that enhances the properties. When we have good-quality and affordable housing in Northern Ireland, we will have given to our community something of immense value and profit.

Housing: Strabane and Omagh

T2. **Mr Byrne** asked the Minister for Social Development for his Department's assessment of crisis housing need in Strabane and in some parts of Omagh, given the overall social housing and housing stress needs in west Tyrone. *(AQT 2152/11-15)*

Mr Storey: I do not have the actual figures for the need, but I am quite happy to supply those to the Member. However, I think it goes back to the point that I made to the Member who asked the previous question. There is a huge challenge for the House. I have said it to members of the Social Development Committee and others since coming into post. We run the risk of taking our eye off the ball in terms of the importance that we place on housing. Regrettably, housing has always been seen as a divisive issue in the past, particularly in an urban situation. Members are well aware that I have said in the House in the past that I find it difficult to come to the House to answer questions when I am specifically asked how many houses have been built for one particular community or the other.

I think that, if we get the language right and the financial structure for the Housing Executive right, there will be a huge opportunity, whether in Strabane, Omagh or any other part of Northern Ireland, for us to inject quality housing into those communities. I repeat the comment, because I believe it passionately: if we give quality, affordable housing to those communities, we give them something that is invaluable.

I visited the Limestone Road in Belfast — in my colleague's constituency — just last week. What I saw was something that is to be admired. It has been challenging and has not been without difficulties, but I believe that the quality of homes that have been provided has given to that community a sense of hope rather than a sense of hopelessness. I would like to replicate that in Strabane or Omagh.

Mr Byrne: I welcome the Minister's comments and his views on the situation. Does he accept that, in some areas, housing stress is created because people who were homeowners have had to vacate their homes because they could not meet the mortgage? Many of them are now looking for affordable or adequate social housing. Is he able to use his good influence to make sure that housing associations will be able to meet those social housing needs in certain parts of Northern Ireland?

Mr Storey: I thank the Member for his supplementary question. Again, what he highlights is that, when we come to look at the mix of how we provide housing in Northern Ireland, it will not be down to one particular provider. Over the last number of years, we have benefited from ensuring that there is a mix of providers. I have had conversations with the housing associations. We have had individual conversations with some of them, we have met the federation and, as the Member will be well aware, I meet the Housing Executive on a regular basis.

In those conversations with the Federation of Housing Associations, the Housing Executive, organisations that are responsible for co-ownership and with the private sector, we need to get, as a bottom line for them all, their commitment to ensuring that they will build quality, affordable homes so that people in Northern Ireland will have that opportunity and that choice, because sometimes they are forced into making different choices. If they are limited in the choices that they can make, I think we are limited in the outcomes that we will have. I can give the Member an assurance that those conversations will continue and that, whether it is the housing associations, the Housing Executive or whatever other elements are in the market for the provision of housing, I will make every effort and continue to work with them to encourage them in the best possible way.

Volunteering Small Grants Fund

T3. **Mr Anderson** asked the Minister for Social Development what support has been provided to volunteering organisations through his Department's volunteering small grants fund. *(AQT 2153/11-15)*

Mr Storey: I thank the Member for his question. We owe a huge debt of gratitude to the many volunteers across Northern Ireland who, on a day and daily basis, give service to our community in a way that is exemplary and that contributes to the community.

He has highlighted a particular issue in regard to the volunteering small grants programme. I am pleased to be able to say that, since 2013, we have provided approximately £1·4 million in support through the programme. The programme targets small front-line volunteering organisations that may not normally receive support through other sources. Front-line organisations can receive grants of up to £1,500. It is of huge benefit to them to receive that amount of money. Unfortunately, it can sometimes determine whether they continue to do the work they do.

Since coming into office, I have attended a considerable number of events. Many activities, whether in the sporting field or other community-led activities, would not be delivered if it were not for the actions, activities and enthusiasm of our volunteers.

Mr Anderson: I thank the Minister for that response. As he quite rightly said, this funding is the lifeline for a lot of our small volunteering organisations. How many organisations have benefited from this support?

Mr Storey: I thank the Member for his supplementary. In 2013-14, a total of 658 volunteering organisations received support from my Department. In 2014-15, support was provided to 660 organisations. The grants that these organisations apply for can be used to purchase equipment, they can be for training, or they can meet the running costs of the organisation. I repeat, because it bears repeating, that volunteering is a lifeline for many communities. When you think of Northern Ireland as a small geographical entity compared to the rest of the United Kingdom, to have 660 organisations that have all benefited from, and been in receipt of, the small grants fund is an indication of how pivotal and important the voluntary sector is in Northern Ireland.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Mr Attwood is not in his place. Topical question 5 was withdrawn within the time frame required.

Independent Living Fund: Future

T6. **Mr McCarthy** asked the Minister for Social Development to advise families and the House what will happen after 30 June 2015 to ensure that severely disabled people can be kept in their own homes and

away from institutional homes, given that he will be aware that the Department for Work and Pensions is closing the independent living fund on 30 June, which is just around the corner, and the Minister's Department, with the Health Minister, will take up where DWP is leaving off. *(AQT 2156/11-15)*

Mr Storey: I thank the Member for his question. You will be aware that this issue was raised during the Consideration Stage of the Welfare Reform Bill. I have no doubt that the Member will be present when the Bill comes back for Further Consideration Stage tomorrow. I gave an undertaking on the previous occasion that the Bill was before the House that this issue would be raised with the Health Minister. I have done that. I had a brief conversation in relation to the issue. Unfortunately, over the last couple of weeks, the Health Minister has had to deal with the situation that pertains with the health of his wife. I will hopefully have more to say about the issue when we come to the House for the Further Consideration Stage of the Welfare Reform Bill tomorrow.

Mr McCarthy: Thank you, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. The Minister knows how important and, indeed, vital it is that, come 30 June, those people have something. In fact, people want to know now what the future holds for those at home. They do not want to be looking for homes.

3.30 pm

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Question, Mr McCarthy.

Mr McCarthy: It is vital that we respond positively to the consultation now, which is up, as you know.

Mr Storey: I assure the Member that I am equally concerned that we do not find ourselves in some sort of no man's land in this. We need clarity and a clear understanding of what will take place. Given the consultation, the concerns that were expressed and the importance of the fund in how it is administered and delivered for the benefit of people in their homes and the community, those issues are not lost on me, and I do not believe that they will be lost on the Health Minister either. I reaffirm what I said and trust that I will be in a position to say something of more detail on that issue during the debate tomorrow.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Order. Time is up. That concludes Question Time. I invite Members to take their ease while we change the top Table.

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

Private Members' Business

Block Grant: Reductions

Debate resumed on amendments to motion:

> *That this Assembly recognises that the persistent reductions to the block grant create significant challenges for the Executive in the delivery of front-line services; welcomes agreement on the Budget 2015-16; further recognises that the Executive have additional revenue-generating powers, which have not been explored fully as part of the Budget process; and calls on the Executive to collectively identify progressive options to raise local revenue and increase the local Budget. — [Mr McKay.]*
>
> *Which amendments were:*
>
> *(1) Leave out all after "front-line services"; and insert:*
>
> *"further recognises that the Executive have additional revenue-generating powers that have not been explored fully as part of the Budget process; recognises that there has not been a consistent approach to reducing waste and pursuing public-sector reform to ensure that additional resources are available for front-line services; and calls on the Executive to identify, collectively, progressive options to raise local revenue, tackle waste and pursue public-service reform to effectively increase the local Budget.". — [Mrs Cochrane.]*
>
> *(2) Leave out all after "2015-16;" and insert:*
>
> *"notes the success of the Executive in securing the devolution of corporation tax and air passenger duty for long-haul flights; further notes the work being conducted by the Department of Finance and Personnel on the potential for devolving specific additional fiscal powers; and calls on the Minister of Finance and Personnel to bring forward recommendations on further fiscal devolution to the Executive.". — [Mr Girvan.]*

Mr Ó Muilleoir: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle, agus mo bhuíochas le gach duine a ghlac páirt sa díospóireacht. Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, and my thanks to everyone from all the parties who took part in the debate. The debate was on alternative or extra ways to raise revenues, but it turned into quite an existential debate on where we are in political and constitutional terms.

We should not lose sight of the fact that Daithí Mc Kay for Sinn Féin set out some areas where we think there could be changes and other areas where we think we should start an urgent debate. In particular, we have identified removing the cap on rates on homes above £400,000, and we think that we can do that without putting anyone who is asset-rich and cash-poor into added difficulties. We also looked at the Scottish model and at what we can learn from that.

Putting that to the side, there were slim pickings from the other parties on additional means to raise revenue. That said, I think that the debate was worthwhile, because it is certainly useful for the House to look at the block grant, at the subvention and at where the money is and is not. I

am a great admirer of my colleague on the Committee for Finance and Personnel Mr Girvan, who said in the kindest terms possible that the Treasury sometimes keeps us in the dark about what money is being raised here. That is undoubtedly true. There is certainly a lack of transparency and trust in the figures that the Treasury provides us with, and I think that we need to do better on that. We also need to do better when we discuss the block grant and what the Finance Minister, Mr Hamilton, refers to as the £10 billion gap. We need to look at that carefully as well.

I spent the weekend on a treasure hunt for the £10 billion, and our colleagues in the research department gave me a certain amount of help with that. When we look at what makes up the gap, we find that there are items that make little or no difference to the ordinary people and constituents we serve. In particular, £1 billion of that £10 billion is debt. Another £1 billion-plus is what the Treasury refers to as "defence", and defence and debt are, of course, closely linked in this day and age. We owe it to our constituents to drill down and to question the Treasury on what we raise and what it says is part of the subvention and block grant for this part of the world.

That goes to the core of the debate that we have in the Finance Committee weekly: the need to understand where we are today and how we can increase and enhance our firepower and spending power in the time ahead.

There have been suggestions that some of the smaller parties support water charges and the removal of free travel; both large parties are against that. We stand four-square against the introduction of water charges, and we stand against the removal of free travel. That remains our position. However, we should not be paralysed from looking at other ways of raising revenue.

One thing that surprised me was the Minister, last week in the Chamber, referring to this Parliament as a toddler and the Scottish Parliament as being in its first year at primary school or at kindergarten. I am wholly opposed to such language; it seems to be the type of language that will be music to the ears of English Ministers. In my view, we are as capable of running our affairs as those same English Ministers.

There is a very famous book by Senator Jim Webb on the fighting Irish. It is not about the fighting Irish; it is about the fighting Ulster Scots in America. When we go into negotiations with the Treasury, I would like to see not only the Ulster-Scots work ethic but the character, resilience and determination to stand up for our constituents and voters to make sure that we get a fair deal so that we can build an economy that is fair and prosperous.

I think that Mr Cree was afraid that we were going to lead him into the Republic today, because he went back to 1969 and the crossroads; Ms Boyle's crossroads, of course, but your crossroads and Mr O'Neill's crossroads as well. That encouraged your leader to go back 100 years to what might have been a golden era, but, as Mr McCann pointed out, not everyone shared in that golden era.

I think that we can look confidently to the future, but that makes it incumbent upon all of us to look critically at the links with Britain and this dependency, as it is, on a block grant.

Mr McCann alluded to this: there are two sides to this coin. Tomorrow, at the economy Committee, we will discuss underinvestment in water and sewerage and in the road network. Of course, parts of the North of Ireland have been constantly left outside of economic prosperity and development. We think of the north-west — that debate continues today — and north and west Belfast. Mr McQuillan referenced west Belfast and south Armagh, but, of course, west Belfast is more than just the Falls Road and Ballymurphy; it is also the Shankill Road, as he will appreciate. That is why I think we can do better than go by what happened heretofore: to depend absolutely and entirely on the block grant, bring no innovative thinking to that and bring no assertive or confident approach to how we can better run our own affairs. So, where some see English altruism or the altruism of English Ministers, I take a wholly different view. Often, we hear from Scotland, and others, that even as London surges ahead, the decisions taken in London are to our benefit. We are constantly assured of that. I do not think that that holds.

Minister Hamilton mentioned some possible Barnett consequentials that may derive from increased expenditure on health and education if that happens. I also read the news. The spending promises and decisions of recent days will make no difference to our constituents. Three billion pounds on a new aircraft carrier; £20 billion on a new generation of fighter jets. Where are the benefits of that spending to us? Of course, that would be part of the magic £20 billion subvention that we are told we get.

Sadly, austerity remains top of the Tory coalition's agenda. For us, austerity spells only further misery for the poor and for working people; it is not the solution to our economic progress. We need investment, not more cuts, to bring progress. The Minister told us again today that we have lost £1·5 billion from the block grant since 2010-11 and that we stand to lose another £1 billion between now and 2020. Such decisions only hold us back; they do not give us the impetus that we need to push into the future.

I move now to the Alliance amendment. My colleagues Ms Cochrane and Mr Lyttle cut out the most important statement in the Sinn Féin motion, which is that we support the 2015-16 Budget. You cannot have your cake and eat it. You are opposed to the Budget; the alternative to the Budget was the horror story that would be direct rule. When you come forward with ideas for revenue raising, and no one has a monopoly on those, we will take them on board. For now, we cannot back the Alliance amendment —

Mr D Bradley: Will the Member give way?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: Duitse, a Dhoiminic, cinnte.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Chomhalta. What specific revenue-raising proposals is the Member coming forward with? He has not mentioned any yet.

Mr Ó Muilleoir: If you had been listening, you would know that we mentioned removing the cap on rates on homes valued above £400,000. I did not mention the contributions from the SDLP that were new and interesting. Unfortunately, the pieces that were interesting were not new, and the pieces that were new were not interesting; they were basically election manifestos.

We have come up with ideas, and if you had been listening, you would know what those ideas are.

I made a visit last week to the Scottish Parliament, where I saw great exuberance, great energy and great confidence, perhaps not unrelated to the fact that just under half of the

members are women. I will finish with a quote from Nicola Sturgeon that I think is very relevant to this debate today and where we are going. She said:

> *"I believe and always will believe that the best way forward is to be in charge of our own resources, so we don't have to be subject to the kind of cuts coming at us from the UK government, but instead could be masters of our own destiny."*

I think that that is a good way to finish the debate.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Before I put the Question on amendment No 1, I remind Members that, if it is made, I will not put the Question on amendment No 2.

Question put, That amendment No 1 be made.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 11; Noes 76.

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dickson, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCallister, Mr McCarthy, Ms Sugden.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mrs Cochrane and Mr Dickson.

NOES

Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Ms P Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Buchanan, Mr Byrne, Mrs Cameron, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dallat, Mr Devenney, Mrs Dobson, Mr Dunne, Mr Durkan, Mr Easton, Mr Eastwood, Mr Elliott, Mr Flanagan, Mrs Foster, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hazzard, Mr Humphrey, Mr Hussey, Mr Irwin, Mr G Kelly, Mr Kennedy, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McCausland, Ms McCorley, Mr B McCrea, Mr I McCrea, Dr McDonnell, Ms McGahan, Mr McGimpsey, Mr McGlone, Mr M McGuinness, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McKay, Mrs McKevitt, Mr McKinney, Mr McMullan, Mr McQuillan, Mr A Maginness, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr Ó Muilleoir, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr Ramsey, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr McQuillan and Mr G Robinson.

Question accordingly negatived.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): I have been advised by the party Whips that, in accordance with Standing Order 27(1A)(b), there is agreement that we can dispense with the three minutes and move straight to the Division.

Question put, That amendment No 2 be made.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 71; Noes 16.

AYES

Mr Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms Boyle, Ms P Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Buchanan, Mrs Cameron, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Devenney, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Mr Flanagan, Mr Ford, Mrs Foster, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hazzard, Mr Humphrey, Mr Hussey, Mr Irwin, Mr G Kelly, Mr Kennedy, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyttle, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCartney, Mr McCausland, Ms McCorley, Mr I McCrea, Ms McGahan, Mr McGimpsey, Mr M McGuinness, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McKay, Mr McMullan, Mr McQuillan, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr Ó Muilleoir, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr McQuillan and Mr G Robinson.

NOES

Mr Agnew, Mr Allister, Mr D Bradley, Mr Byrne, Mr Dallat, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Mr McCallister, Mr B McCrea, Dr McDonnell, Mr McGlone, Mrs McKevitt, Mr McKinney, Mr A Maginness, Mr Ramsey, Ms Sugden.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr A Maginness and Mr McKinney.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): I have been advised by party Whips that, in accordance with Standing Order 27(1A)(b) — *[Interruption.]* Order, Members. It is my duty to inform the House appropriately. In accordance with Standing Order 27(1A)(b), there is agreement that we can dispense with the three minutes and move straight to the Division.

Main Question, as amended, put.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 72; Noes 15.

AYES

Mr Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms Boyle, Ms P Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Buchanan, Mrs Cameron, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Devenney, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Mr Flanagan, Mr Ford, Mrs Foster, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hazzard, Mr Humphrey, Mr Hussey, Mr Irwin, Mr G Kelly, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCartney, Mr McCausland, Ms McCorley, Mr I McCrea, Ms McGahan, Mr McGimpsey, Mr M McGuinness, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McKay, Mr McMullan, Mr McQuillan, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr Ó Muilleoir, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr McKay and Mr G Robinson.

NOES

Mr Agnew, Mr Allister, Mr D Bradley, Mr Byrne, Mr Dallat, Mr Eastwood, Mr McCallister, Mr B McCrea, Dr McDonnell, Mr McGlone, Mrs McKevitt, Mr McKinney, Mr A Maginness, Mr Ramsey, Ms Sugden.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr A Maginness and Mr McKinney.

Main Question, as amended, accordingly agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly recognises that the persistent reductions to the block grant create significant challenges for the Executive in the delivery of front-line services; welcomes agreement on the Budget 2015-16; notes the success of the Executive in securing the devolution of corporation tax and air passenger duty for long-haul flights; further notes the work being conducted by the Department of Finance and Personnel on the potential for devolving specific additional fiscal powers; and calls on the Minister of Finance and Personnel to bring forward recommendations on further fiscal devolution to the Executive.

Magee Campus: Ulster University

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 30 minutes for the debate. The proposer of the motion will have 10 minutes to propose and 10 minutes to make a winding-up speech. One amendment has been selected and is published on the Marshalled List. The proposer of the amendment will have 10 minutes to propose and five minutes to make a winding-up speech. All other contributors shall have five minutes.

Mr Ramsey: I beg to move

That this Assembly recognises the importance of expanding higher education across Northern Ireland and particularly the importance of expansion at Ulster University's Magee campus in driving economic growth in the north-west; notes the 50th anniversary of the publication of the Lockwood committee report; affirms its commitment to the One Plan targets of expanding to 9,400 full-time equivalent students by 2020 and increasing the maximum student number by 1,000 by 2015; and calls on the First Minister and deputy First Minister, as chairs of the north-west ministerial subgroup, to liaise directly with Ulster University and the Minister for Employment and Learning to prioritise the expansion at the Magee campus to ensure its full delivery.

Before I commence, allow me to say for the benefit of any young person who may be listening that, if you want an education, you will get one. Your desire to learn and the success of your desire to achieve is your biggest and best resource. Never stop learning inside or outside university and keep up your studies. The reward will be yours.

Allow me to take this opportunity to say that the situation with our local university will hold you back only if you allow it to do so. Securing work and study is more difficult in the north-west, but it is not impossible. While it may be harder to access full-time undergraduate courses in Derry, it is important to state that failing to secure a place in your hometown is not the end of your academic career. Do not allow the historical situation at Magee to deter you from your dreams.

It is very important that we have this debate within a positive framework, lest another Derryman or -woman accuse me or my party colleagues of whinging about the university. The purpose of this debate, however, is to ensure that our young people have the facility that they deserve. We need to support them to structure their learning within the parameters that have earned the University of Ulster its global reputation for excellence.

I have spoken before in the Chamber about the hurt in the heart of the city of Derry. The hurt caused by the university decision 50 years ago is still unreal. No one is whinging: we have brought forward this motion in an attempt to effect positive change. That is exactly what we want this House to assist us with: effecting positive change for Derry and the north-west, a positive move for the young people of the north-west and a positive move for the north-west's economy and that of the island of Ireland. It is important that we frame this, as I said, as positively as we can.

The motion notes the hurt that was visited upon the city of Derry 50 years ago. There is not much use in constantly revisiting the sins of the past when we are trying to improve the situation for many in the future. We know what those

sins are: they were as clear then as they are now. The important aspect is that they are not allowed to be repeated. Magee's development cannot and should not be shelved.

The merits of developing and advancing a higher education campus anywhere would be obvious. However, it would seem not so in Northern Ireland. This Assembly needs constant reminding of the academic, cultural and economic rewards and the returns that we get from higher education. That is what I and the SDLP are here to do.

For my entire political career, I have been assisting the development of the Magee campus. I have worked on that issue as an activist, as a councillor, as mayor of the city in 2000 and as an MLA. I assisted in negotiations to secure lands on the Northland Road for the university. A strong educational facility is in the interests of the entire north-west, if not the entire North and the island of Ireland. I recall many meetings with Jim Allen, the former provost, now deceased, Jack Magill, the former head of Foyle and Londonderry College, and Bishop Séamus Hegarty of the Catholic Church to safeguard the lands for the betterment of the student population. Allow me to state that the basis for expansion exists, the will for it exists, and the need for it exists.

We have worked long and hard. All parties in the Chamber that represent the constituency of Foyle have worked hard, along with many stakeholders from the community sector, the business community, the chamber of commerce and across organisations in the city. However, we need to do things better, and we need to do things smarter.

I assure you that this issue has been very close to my heart and to that of many of my party colleagues and colleagues from other parties for a long time. I have always been convinced that the development of the Magee campus will have a massive positive outcome for the future of all our young people.

The time for talking is long gone; it is time for the Assembly to put its money where its mouth is. If you are serious about addressing issues of economic imbalance, this is the best move. The development of the Magee campus is the most clear and obvious investment in the future of lives of people in the north-west. In truth, that has been clear for decades.

I recall signing a letter, as many Members have done, that called for the Magee development to be brought into line with stated objectives in the One Plan. It did take a bit of work to bring everybody to together, including the University for Derry campaign and all the sectors, but we achieved that goal a number of years back. The letter was sent to Dr Stephen Farry and signed by a number of key stakeholders in a sense of unity of purpose. The letter also recognised:

> *"the University of Ulster has submitted a Strategic Outline Case and that only the University of Ulster has submitted a detailed formal proposal seeking the additional student numbers. The University's Strategic Outline Case has already been approved by the Department for Employment and Learning and is supported by robust economic analysis to prove the sustainable economic and employment benefits",*

not only to my constituency but to the entirety of the north-west and the region of Northern Ireland:

> *"as envisaged by the Executive in its package of measures to stimulate, grow and sustain the economy."*

That letter was dated November 2011. I could read other, older letters, but, in the interests of staying positive, I ask this: what has happened in the intervening four years, given the number of Adjournment debates that we have had in the House, questions for oral answer to the Minister or meetings with the Ministers? We have an additional 600-plus places, but, only last month, to the detriment of the expansion of Magee, several undergraduate courses at Magee were cancelled. Is that moving forward?

One progressive movement is the establishment of the north-west ministerial subgroup, which we all welcome. Perhaps it can assist, support and identify the funding mechanisms for the Minister for Employment and Learning. Perhaps it will address a 50-year-old injustice that has never been corrected. I do not wish to be overly negative, and I welcome the fact that Minister Farry states publicly, time and time again, that he is very sympathetic and supportive of the development at Magee, but, Minister, we do not need sympathy. We need debates, and we need action.

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): And money.

Mr Ramsey: We need the submitted business case to be actioned.

Mr Dallat: Will the Member give way?

Mr Ramsey: Yes.

Mr Dallat: I just happened to pick up the Minister saying that we need money. Does the Member agree with me that the historical injustice in the north-west deserves special treatment? Not only do the people in the north-west — I include many people beyond Derry city — need more than sympathy, they are fed up with the blarney as well. They want an end to it, and they want the serious issues addressed. If money is one of them, let the British Government cough up the historical deficit they owe to this place.

Mr Ramsey: I welcome the intervention from John Dallat. Even though he represents a constituency where the University of Ulster is well-based, he has always been a great champion and advocate for the Magee campus debate, and I welcome that, John. He makes a good point. Continually, certainly over the past nine months, I have repeatedly heard the First Minister and deputy First Minister, on the announcement of jobs in the east of Northern Ireland and Belfast, making the comment that we need to address the imbalance in the north-west. The Member is right. There is one way they can do it — by ensuring, along with our own Minister, Mark Durkan, as well as Stephen Farry and Arlene Foster, that something very positive can come out if it, and that is identifying priorities and budget lines, albeit that it might only be a short space of time. There is nothing more important to Derry at present. It was identified within the One Plan. The most important regeneration project that could ever — ever — take place in Derry is the expansion of Magee. Everybody has said it. Every political party in the Chamber has said it, but there were never any indicative lines either in the Programme for Government or the comprehensive spending review.

I think the challenge is now —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Will the Member bring his remarks to a close?

Mr Ramsey: I thank the DUP for the amendment, but it is something that, on this occasion, we will not support. It is a well-watered-down version that we could go back five or six years and debate on. I appeal in good faith to all Members in the Chamber to support the motion today.

Mr Buchanan: I beg to move the following amendment:

Leave out all after "report;" and insert:

> *"notes the commitment within the One Plan to an expansion to 9,400 full-time equivalent students by 2020 and increasing the maximum student number by 1,000 by 2015; and calls on the Minister for Employment and Learning to examine the options for supporting the One Plan target.".*

I welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate and move the amendment to the motion. The reason for the amendment is simply that the original motion is full of aspiration that can only be delivered through significant investment from the public purse. Under the economic conditions that we find ourselves in, all Departments are restricted by their available resources.

It is with that economic backdrop in mind that I believe that the best way to drive and expand economic growth in the north-west region of Northern Ireland is to incorporate a multi-agency approach whereby the Minister for Employment and Learning examines all the options for supporting the One Plan target.

4.30 pm

The north-west of Northern Ireland has suffered decades of neglect right across the board in infrastructure and skills. On behalf of my constituency of West Tyrone, I join the call for the Executive to support the collaborative efforts of balanced regional growth across the Province, looking objectively at the underlying core issues that mean that the north-west area of Northern Ireland consistently sits at the bottom of league tables for economic fundamentals. I suggest that these are engrained, long-standing issues that cannot be resolved overnight.

The One Plan is an ambitious project that seeks to address these problems. I agree with the core areas behind the One Plan commitment. It is good to see clearly identified aims and objectives that seek to redress the imbalance that has been out of sync with the rest of Northern Ireland for far too long. Ulster University at Magee has an increasing and commendable track record of placing graduates in employment. In line with the DEL HE strategy, all undergraduates need work experience as part of their course. Ulster University is in the process of implementing compulsory work placements and work-based learning in all its courses. These proactive measures, which are advantageous in improving a student's chance of employment in the future, are welcome. Any student will tell us that they will choose a programme of study that reflects a good return on the investment of time, energy and financial aspects during their study at university. Increasingly, Ulster University has reflected current economic and employment needs in its portfolio of courses. It has worked with local employers to reflect the changing needs in the local economic area. This is one of the recommendations of the One Plan that is in process in the university. Collaboration potential between academia and business is a core element of the plan. For the future landscape of HE, traditional academic and cultural boundaries need to be transcended to improve access for people from across the community. In conjunction with that, links with FE and schools must always be strengthened.

On closer examination of the figures, we see that unemployment is constantly higher in the west of Northern Ireland. It is imperative that we tackle this unacceptably high level of unemployment. Short-term measures needed to upskill this section of our society are addressed in the One Plan for Londonderry in the core area of education to the higher education sector. The skills agenda is core to the One Plan, which will help people, especially disadvantaged and unemployed people, to get into work and remain in the workplace. Higher education, however, is only one strand of an interconnected band of issues that can contribute to driving economic growth in the north-west. The One Plan highlights key areas that are necessary for renewal in the north-west and incorporates economic, social and physical elements within its boundaries. The key focus is on building a stronger and more vibrant economy. We can all aspire to that for this area.

For long-term sustainability and to act as a catalyst for economic growth across the north-west, I call on the Assembly to look further than simply addressing the immediate issue. The expansion of Magee college will not be the answer to all the problems in the region; no one in the House is naive enough to believe that. To effect change in the long term, it is necessary to adopt a longer-term focus. The One Plan project is extremely ambitious. While I agree that it raises clear underlying issues, the amendment not only addresses the commitment of the One Plan ultimately to expand the Magee campus by 2020 but calls on the Minister for Employment and Learning to examine all the options available to him to ensure that the core elements of the plan are addressed within the remit of his Department.

It seems to me that this is where we must start to tackle the long-standing problems that previous generations have encountered. It is not too late to start to motivate, teach and enable children to understand that everything that they need to get out of the vicious cycle of social deprivation and neglect comes through change. They must change to bring about the long-term sustainability that is required. Within the ambitious aspirations and answers to the critical questions that the One Plan seeks to address, we need to examine the sources of funding for the project. Public finances will be the main driver behind implementing those changes.

The north-west of Northern Ireland has always been known for negative reasons. It is known as an economic black spot and recognised for having the highest level of economic inactivity and poor infrastructure. We could go on and on. It is my belief that, if we, as an Assembly, are truly serious —

Mr Dallat: Will the Member give way?

Mr Buchanan: Yes.

Mr Dallat: Does the Member agree with me that the historical issues that he outlined, such as the poor transport infrastructure and the lack of investment in the university, are major reasons why it is difficult to attract new inward investment? Will he not suggest to the House that there is a special need for the north-west that is based on historical indifference and, perhaps, even worse?

Mr Buchanan: I do not disagree with the Member at all.

It is my belief that, if we, as an Assembly, are truly serious about redressing the imbalance in our country, we have to have the foresight and vision to strategically address the spectrum of issues in the long term. Right across Northern Ireland, there appears to be an apathetic acceptance that the north-west is an area of deprivation and will continue to be so. It is up to us, as political representatives, to change our outlook and begin to believe that we do not have to accept the status quo and that, step by step, that must and will change. Sometimes the negativity is brought about by public representatives who present a poor image of the area rather than coming forward and spelling out the good work that has been done.

The One Plan seeks to address the underlying issues that have contributed to the vicious circle of negativity. Core problem elements are emphasised and clearly identified aims are outlined in the plan. It is now the responsibility of the Minister for Employment and Learning to examine all the options for supporting the One Plan target that are at his disposal. Despite the aims and objectives clearly outlined in the One Plan, the reality is that, without funding and investment, none of it can be implemented. Most of the funding for that ambitious plan will come from the public purse. With that in mind, a more flexible format of higher education in the north-west is necessary, and its design and delivery must move towards a more community-focused partnership. The traditional roles of separate, autonomous institutions will have to merge ideas and strategies to change the educational landscape. In a rapidly changing world, collaboration is key to success in the educational spectrum.

Forging links with industry and business is fundamental to the Ulster University. Its portfolios of courses are vocationally applied to match industrial needs. For the duration of courses, employability is always in mind. All the university programmes are continuously re-evaluated, and professional practice is a core part of university degrees, with designated hours of work-based learning as component modules. Businesses are encouraged to work alongside the university to develop their work-based learning programmes, which, in turn, meet the needs of local employers through their input into the courses. Ulster University has a reputation for work-based access, and I believe that that is the route to the future for our children, who will come out of university equipped with all the necessary tools to gain meaningful employment in the area. If we want to address all the difficulties in the north-west, we must work together to bring about —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Will the Member bring his remarks to a close?

Mr Buchanan: — the change that is required for the economy and for the young people in that area.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Beidh mé ag labhairt i bhfabhar an rúin agus in éadan an leasaithe. I will speak in favour of the motion, and I certainly have a few comments to make on the amendment.

Sinn Féin will support the motion, as we feel that it truly reflects the current debate on the issue. The inclusion of the One Plan in the Programme for Government leads us to believe that the use of the word "affirm" in the motion is more appropriate than the use of the word "note" in the amendment. It is important to point that out. I say to everyone involved in the debate today that the case for expansion, particularly of Magee university, has always received its best impetus when we seek a united approach. Therefore, I would like to see a situation in which the Assembly did not divide on the issue.

I welcome the debate on the expansion. As Pat Ramsey said, this is the latest in a number of similar debates in the Assembly and elsewhere. It is fair and appropriate to say that all of us who represent Derry city in particular and the constituencies across the north-west appreciate and fully understand the need for a vibrant university at the Magee campus, with the envisaged 9,400 full-time places. I welcome the fact that my party colleagues from East Derry and West Tyrone will speak in the debate.

Beyond the obvious educational impact, the wider social and economic circumstances of the north-west would receive a welcome and dynamic boost. When people talk about expansion and the need for it as a game changer, it is not a cliché; rather, it reflects the reality. One has only to look at Galway and Cork to see the impact that a vibrant university, assisted by government policy, has on the economy of the wider region. You can include other indicators, but that always has a massive input, and you can see it in those instances.

The need for the university to be situated in Derry has its roots in the Lockwood report. That has been an ongoing theme of the campaign, and a sense of grievance and injustice still resonates today. All of us from Derry who worked on the One Plan did so to ensure that, in putting the report together, it would be seen as Derry putting forward a united platform. There was no room for dissenting voices. There was a very strong, single-minded, single-focused way forward on a range of issues, particularly social and economic issues, and it was our mission statement for the future. Any sense of disunity or of people trying to speak about it not in the right terms was put to bed. Its inclusion in the Programme for Government is validation of the position taken.

Central to the One Plan was the need for job creation and skills, and the expansion of Magee university is very much key to that. Indeed, I think that, if asked, most people in the city and its surrounds would say that their number one preference for progress is the expansion of the university. The expansion is firmly on the political agenda now, and it is in that very advanced position by virtue of a number of factors. Speaking with one voice for Magee, with the One Plan as our reference point, was one of the initial factors. All of us in the city accepted that there was a need for a robust and strong business case, which was prompted, at the time, by the Department and the Minister. That was delivered in November 2014. With that in place, it will be our reference point as we go forward.

The initiative by the deputy First Minister that brought about the establishment of the ministerial subgroup for the north-west, with the expansion of Magee as its central plank, is another key factor. The inclusion of the Minister for Employment and Learning on that subgroup highlights the fact that there will be direct conversations across the meeting table rather than an opportunity "to liaise directly", as the motion proposes.

In fairness to the Minister, he is on record as stating that the Department's initial analysis of the business case is

that it is robust and strong. Only last week, in response to a question from Maeve McLaughlin, he said that he would be prepared to make a bid in the next CSR period. I am sure that he will find support right across the public representation in the city and further afield. We welcome that. That is where our focus will be as we take this forward.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Will the Member draw his remarks to a close?

Mr McCartney: We want to be part of a united approach and to show positive leadership to bring about meaningful change.

Mr Hussey: It is a pleasure to speak again on another motion relating to the north-west, in particular on Londonderry and the expansion of the Ulster University at Magee. It may be 150 years since the establishment of Magee college and 50 years since the Lockwood report, but it seems that about 50 minutes have passed since we last discussed Magee. One could nearly suggest that there is an election coming up.

I am tempted to repeat what I said about Magee in the debate that we had on 19 January. However, to save time, I simply invite Members to consult Hansard from that date, Hansard from 16 September 2014, when I spoke in an Adjournment debate on the Magee expansion, and Hansard from 17 September 2013, when my colleague Sandra Overend spoke for my party on the issue.

Suffice to say that the Ulster Unionist Party has been consistent in wishing to see higher education expansion in the north-west but, at the same time, that has to be done in a planned and fully costed way. That is particularly so in light of the reality of the budgetary constraints that many in the Chamber were content to support in the voting Lobbies.

4.45 pm

It might be instructive for Members to be reminded of some history. The Ulster University at Magee, formerly known as Magee College, is the campus of the Ulster University located in Londonderry, which first opened 150 years ago as a Presbyterian Christian arts and theological college. It took its name from Martha Magee, the widow of a Presbyterian minister who, in 1845, bequeathed £20,000 to the Presbyterian Church of Ireland to found the college for theology and the arts. It opened in 1865, primarily as a theological college, but accepted students from all denominations to study a variety of subjects. As a Presbyterian, I am delighted to point out how generous that church has been in establishing seats of learning and handing them over to the state to benefit the wider society. Perhaps others should take note.

Since 1953, Magee has had no denominational affiliation and provides a broad range of undergraduate and postgraduate academic degree programmes. In the 1960s, it was hoped by many that that university college would become Northern Ireland's second university. However, as we all know, a committee under Sir John Lockwood, an English academic, published a report on 10 February that recommended a greenfield site at Coleraine for a new university and for Magee College to be closed down. Clearly, that recommendation was not fully accepted or implemented, because Magee was not closed down by the Stormont Government. Instead, it was incorporated into the two-campus New University of Ulster in 1969. I remind Members of that because some of the rhetoric used by nationalists in previous debates involved stating, as if it were a historical fact, that the establishment of UUC was a sectarian decision.

One of the most iconic pictures of that era is that of the Lord Mayor of Londonderry leading a protest parade to this Building in favour of the siting of the new university in Londonderry. That mayor, flanked by nationalist leader Eddie McAteer and the future SDLP leader John Hume, was Commander Albert Anderson, an Ulster Unionist. Plenty of unionists were in favour of expanding Magee into Northern Ireland's second university in the 1960s, but the matter is, to coin a phrase, somewhat academic now.

However, for those Members who are interested in the detail of what happened in the 1960s, rather than simply accepting the story of a historic wrong and unionist discrimination, I invite them to read the book by Gerard O'Brien, 'Derry and Londonderry: History & Society', chapter 26, which is entitled, "Our Magee Problem: Stormont and the Second University", and is available on the CAIN website. Page 685 states:

> *"The facts indicate that the Lockwood Committee made its decision on the location of the university on the basis of practices long accepted as sound with regard to the establishment of new British universities."*

So much for history. The question is this: where are we now and where are we going?

Magee has grown in recent years from a nadir of just 273 students in 1984 to over 4,000 undergraduates now. The Ulster University has lobbied the Executive for an additional 1,000 full-time undergraduate places with a target of 6,000 students at Magee in 2017. Then we have the One Plan published by Ilex nearly five years ago. It has a more ambitious target of 9,400 places.

However, since the debate that we had last September, we have had severe cuts to further and higher education in the draft Budget for 2015-16, ameliorated, but only partially, in the revised Budget agreed by Sinn Féin and the DUP. We have had media reports that the Ulster University is having to cut back over 50 courses in total across its campuses.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Would the Member draw his remarks to a close?

Mr Hussey: Clearly, this is a difficult time for higher education right across Northern Ireland, not just the north-west. Whilst the Ulster Unionist Party wants to see this expansion, and supports the sentiments contained in the motion, the stark reality is that the Budget that has just been agreed —

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

Mr Hussey: — by most of the Members in the Assembly simply does not allow it to be implemented at this time.

Ms Lo: I rise on behalf of the Alliance Party. During the Adjournment debate on 16 September on the expansion of the Magee campus, my party colleague, the Minister for Employment and Learning, made one point very clear: his central objective is and always has been to ensure that Northern Ireland continues to have a world-class and internationally recognised higher education sector, one that can continue to grow over the coming years. The Alliance Party recognises the great importance of

making higher education the best it can be. Giving the next generation an excellent education should always be a high priority.

As the motion notes, it is 50 years since the Lockwood Commission report was published. The report recommended the creation of the New University of Ulster in Coleraine, as opposed to Derry/Londonderry. In terms of education provision, I am grateful that we have come a long way since 1965. As I stated in previous debates, it is undeniable that the north-west has long been neglected in many areas. The expansion of the Magee campus would certainly help to drive economic growth. The motion affirms its commitment to the One Plan's target, which is to see 9,400 full-time equivalent students by 2020 and increase the maximum student number by 1,000 by 2015.

In the Programme for Government, the One Plan does not explicitly state higher education expansion in Derry/Londonderry and I note that the only reference to the expansion of higher education is actually in relation to increasing the numbers taking STEM subjects. However, that does not discount the fact that higher education expansion in Derry/Londonderry is a key transformational theme within the One Plan; but it is important to state that the Department of Employment and Learning is not measured or scrutinised in relation to the expansion of Magee.

Minister Farry has been able to expand higher education by around 1,600 places across Northern Ireland, with 1,200 being directed to our universities. The University of Ulster has received 652 of those places. In line with the stated commitment, the university has located those places to the Magee campus.

Mr Swann: Will the Member give way?

Ms Lo: Yes.

Mr Swann: The Member is reading out how many places are currently there or are going to be there. Does she know how many places could be lost due to the budget cuts in DEL, specifically from Magee campus?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): The Member has an extra minute.

Ms Lo: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I thank the Member for his contribution but, with Budget cuts, as the Member and his party says, we are under very difficult economic constraints. Does that answer your question?

The Minister had made good progress towards the interim target of 1,000 additional places by 2015 as set out in the One Plan. However, Budget cuts have focused and forced a pause in expansion plans.

The SDLP has called on the First Minister and deputy First Minister, as chairs of the north-west ministerial subgroup, to liaise directly with the university and the Minister for Employment and Learning to prioritise the expansion at the Magee campus to ensure its full delivery. As stated in the September Adjournment debate, the Minister said that he is:

> *"sympathetic to the potential further expansion of the Magee campus of the University of Ulster, but ... cannot be expected to both cut public spending and increase it at the same time within the context of higher education". [Official Report, Bound Volume 97, p165, col 1].*

The resourcing of the One Plan's student numbers would represent a significant challenge in terms of funding and would require an investment of over £30 million on a recurrent annual basis. It strikes me as strange, and somewhat removed from reality, to block Minister Farry from making reasonable cuts to teacher training only to ask that he increase funding for another institution. All Departments have been faced with serious challenges that require difficult decisions. We must put aside any desire to score political points and rise to those challenges.

Mr Devenney: As a representative of Foyle who has had extensive involvement with all the key stakeholders who are keen to see the development of Magee, I am committed to the One Plan, and I am keen to see the progress and expansion of the university and courses in Londonderry. We all know the economic value that the expansion would bring. Members who spoke previously mentioned issues to do with our infrastructure, which include the delays with the A5, the A6 and the railway line. We understand that those are vital issues.

I take this opportunity to pay tribute to all the staff in Magee, who deliver a very high standard of education. The amendment places the onus on the Minister for Employment and Learning to do all in his power to bring reality to the vision that we all have for higher education in Londonderry. We live in times of economic and financial uncertainties and pressures, and I know that there is not an unlimited amount of money in the system. I accept that Northern Ireland is a small place and that our higher education strategy must be Province-wide, but I hold the view that the north-west deserves priority. I and my predecessor, Lord Hay, have long argued that the investment in higher education in the region will help to encourage much-needed economic and social regeneration that will be good not only for the north-west but for the whole of Northern Ireland.

I believe that there is a vital role for the north-west ministerial subgroup, the Minister for Employment and Learning and all the stakeholders to work together to deliver on the expansion of Magee. In the Minister's summing up, will he tell us how many places could be lost in Magee due to budgetary constraints?

Ms Boyle: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I also welcome the opportunity to contribute to the debate. Like my colleagues, I am fully in support of the expansion of Magee. There is no doubt that the future economic development of the new Derry City and Strabane District Council is connected with the expansion of the Magee campus, so it is essential that we work together to see that expansion delivered. Sinn Féin has made it clear that it will support any bid that is brought to the Executive for Magee expansion funding. I welcome that the Minister is scrutinising the business plan for the expansion of the Magee campus. I also welcome the fact that, if it meets the expenditure appraisal and evaluation criteria, he will bid for funds for it in the next comprehensive spending review. I have no doubt that the business plan put forward to the Minister is robust and that, when he makes his decision, he will have the Sinn Féin Ministers' support for any subsequent bid.

We are now in a new era and situation, with the deputy First Minister determined to deliver on the Magee project. We have the new expanded Derry City and Strabane District Council, with increased powers coming on stream from April. The political landscape will then be reconfigured. All that allows for a new focus. Magee, as

you know, a Cheann Comhairle, is a cross-border campus, and it plays a major part in the north-west education gateway initiative through its ability to attract students. The new Derry City and Strabane District Council's integrated economic strategy will also have a clear focus on the Magee expansion, as I said. In turn, that will be complemented by the North West Regional College's ambitions to provide accreditation for its pupils in the STEM subjects to allow them to step up to degree courses at Magee.

Sinn Féin has made a commitment to do everything within its power to improve the lives of all our citizens and to redress the impact that generations of neglect have had on places like Strabane, Derry and the north-west as a whole. That is why Sinn Féin is leading the way on issues like decentralisation, with the Agriculture Minister, Michelle O'Neill, relocating an entire Department right into the heart of the north-west.

That is why Martin McGuinness initiated an Executive subgroup on regional economic disparities, which is driving a unified ministerial approach to issues such as the expansion of Magee, the A5 road project, transport infrastructure and so on. I would like to make the point that my party colleague Mr Barry McElduff is in Dublin today meeting the Taoiseach Enda Kenny on a number of issues, one of which is the A5.

5.00 pm

The establishment of the subgroup on the north-west will drive the process of change that will deliver the political authority needed in the Magee campaign. As my party colleague from Foyle said earlier, it is no accident that Mr McGuinness invited the further education Minister on to the subgroup, and I believe that the acceptance by the Minister to be part of that group demonstrates that he is at least willing to pursue the case for expansion.

He has already indicated his intention to bid within months for the £11 million required to construct the new teaching block at Magee this year. That bid will certainly be supported by my Sinn Féin colleagues on the Executive, as it would present a major investment and physical expansion at Magee. The Minister also signalled the potential for a significant increase in student numbers in the new Assembly mandate, which begins next year. In order to achieve that, we need to consolidate the political will, which the subgroup initiative has helped to generate. That is the best way to ensure that Magee is prioritised by all Executive Ministers.

Many young people from my area of Strabane and the north-west have to travel to Belfast and elsewhere due to many courses not being available locally in Magee. Indeed, the expansion of Magee would benefit the north-west, as we could retain many of our young people locally. It would save on travel expenses and other finances that they have to spend if they have to travel elsewhere, and it would almost certainly attract more students to the area.

The expansion of Magee is a crucial part of the One Plan —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Will the Member draw her remarks to a close?

Ms Boyle: — which is a Programme for Government commitment, and Sinn Féin is determined to see it delivered. The expansion of Magee is a central plank for regional economic regeneration —

Mr Dallat: Will the Member give way?

Ms Boyle: I will indeed.

Mr Dallat: If Sinn Féin is so committed to Magee, can the Member tell us why the deputy First Minister is not present this afternoon? Can she further tell us why her colleague Maeve McLaughlin has just told us on social media that she is holidaying in the sun?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): The Member has an extra minute.

Ms Boyle: I thank the Member for his intervention. Whilst I cannot speak for both my party colleagues, I am aware that the deputy First Minister is in another meeting. If my party colleague is on holiday, we are all entitled to a holiday, regardless of what time of year it is.

The expansion of Magee is a central plank for regional economic regeneration. We need a unified voice coming out of the north-west region demanding what should have been delivered 50 years ago, and, by working together, we can achieve it. Go raibh míle maith agat.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Beidh mé breá sásta labhairt sa díospóireacht inniu agus ar son an rúin. I am very happy to speak on this subject today and am very supportive of it. As someone from the wider north-west area who attended Magee during the 80s on a number of occasions, it has always had a special affinity for me personally. The hurt and offence caused by the Lockwood Commission report on its publication in 1965 was still very tenable even then. That said, as my colleague Maeve McLaughlin MLA for Foyle stated in an interview with the 'Derry Journal' a fortnight ago, the landscape is very different today. She went on to say:

> *"It's been a long campaign and we are in a very different place in my view in the fact we have consensus and a very robust business case."*

In the intervening years, the potential of Derry and the entire north-west region has been stymied by the lack of enhancement of the university status of Magee. Real opportunities for highly paid skilled and professional employment were also held up and denied. However, as Maeve McLaughlin said, there are new opportunities in the new dispensation. The opening of the new science park at the site of the former Fort George is significant in the fact that, from day one, it has had almost 100% tenancy and a very close link with Letterkenny regional college and the local student body.

As my colleague from West Tyrone pointed out, the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development has decentralised its headquarters to the former Shackleton base at Ballykelly. Indeed, last Wednesday, many representatives from right across the north-west were there to witness the commencement of some of the demolition work on that site, and we very much look forward to the significant provision of over 800 well-paid Civil Service jobs. Acting as an anchor tenant, that will encourage the 60 to 70 other prospective tenants who have expressed an interest in the site. That cumulative act of job creation could potentially mean thousands of jobs for the entire region. It may also free up a number of positions in other Civil Service jobs in areas such as

pensions and pensions credit, with many transferring to Ballykelly; therefore delivering a win-win situation for the whole region.

The single most significant action that we can take is to expand the graduate work base from Magee. For too long, our intelligent young people have left these shores, many to, in the first instance, attend courses at universities across the water, down South and elsewhere, where they then stay after receiving job offers. Many never return. The commitment to the One Plan should, as the motion suggests, receive the affirmation of the Assembly and the Executive, and the creation of the north-west ministerial subgroup should be the catalyst to the delivery of the expansion of the Magee campus. I will quote from the One Plan:

> *"a university presence in the City which transcends traditional academic and cultural boundaries, as a proven agent for equality, inclusion, regeneration and participation."*

I support the motion.

Mr Durkan: Fifty years on from the publication of the Lockwood committee report, Derry's status as a university city has still not been realised. While the Magee campus has punched above its weight in academic excellence as well as achievements in many other spheres across society, no one would or could argue that there is not a long, long way to go. Across the world, people recognise the contribution made by universities in driving cites forward, allowing them to become vibrant hubs of employment and culture, driving the economy and enriching society. People in Derry and across the north-west recognise that, too, and that is why the failure thus far to rectify that wilful decision all those years ago to deny Derry a university still causes so much hurt, anger and plain despair in our part of the world.

Even to those who do not fully understand the vital contribution that a university makes, the cavalcade to Belfast all those years ago is synonymous with the campaign for civil rights, and the fact that we are not much further on with the building of a motorway to Belfast, never mind the building of a bigger university, gives rise to the suspicion among people in the north-west that they are still being treated as second-class citizens.

Mr Hussey: Will the Member give way?

Mr Durkan: Certainly.

Mr Hussey: I am sure that the Member will accept that the city of Londonderry, Strabane, Omagh and that entire area was targeted and destroyed by the IRA over a prolonged period. A lot of the problems that we face today were caused by the IRA and its terrorist attacks in the city of Londonderry and beyond.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Durkan: I thank the Member for his intervention, but I do not believe that the abuse and suffering that all parts of the North suffered at the hands of terrorists of all hues during the conflict here should be replicated or repeated by government through neglect. Unfortunately, there are still groups that, to this day, are only too willing to exploit the feeling in Derry and those other areas that you mentioned that government is neglecting them. They can point up here and say, "What has really changed?", and that as-yet-untreated wound in Derry's psyche makes it very easy for nefarious groupings to do just that.

There is also quite a degree of confusion out there as to what is happening with Magee. It is a kind of, "Now you see it, now you don't". The expansion of Magee has been delivered; the expansion of Magee probably will not be delivered; the expansion of Magee will be delivered, and we will back any bid to expand Magee. People in Derry who are outside the loop genuinely have trouble keeping up with these developments and subsequent lack of development. Was it in the last Programme for Government? One of the reasons why the SDLP voted against the last Programme for Government was its explicit omission, although we were told at the time that a wee nod to the One Plan would suffice. Now, the very omission of Magee from that Programme for Government has been used as an excuse for not having progressed the issue with any real intent.

People need to know what is happening, and we would very much like to leave here today with a clear message for them. That is why we cannot support today's amendment, which weakens our motion. While we seek to affirm the commitment to the One Plan targets, the amendment seeks to note it — to note it. This has been an issue for 50 years. It is a time to act, not a time to note. The amendment also gives sole responsibility for driving the issue to the Minister for Employment and Learning, absolving Executive colleagues.

At the recently and probably belatedly established Executive subgroup or task force on the north-west, there was a clear recognition of the benefits to be derived from increasing and enhancing skills in that area. Better courses and qualifications will do more to attract investors than any new rate of corporation tax. That applies anywhere, but as much, if not more so, in the north-west. There is a commitment from the subgroup to develop the north-west economy, and Magee's expansion is pivotal to that. I am at a loss, therefore, as to why the DUP would attempt to dilute that commitment through its amendment.

To deliver this expansion, we will need more than the Minister for Employment and Learning's best intentions. He will need the support of the Executive, and I include myself in that. The SDLP will support any bid to secure the resources required for this vital project. I will also happily support any bid to finance the building of the new learning block, for which I granted planning permission last year. In the near future, I believe that that might at least allow the Minister to signal his intent and the Executive to signal theirs. This issue has run on for too long —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Will the Member draw his remarks to a close?

Mr Durkan: — just as I have almost run out of time. We would very much like to leave here today with a clear message for people out there on how we are driving the Magee issue forward together.

Ms Sugden: Pat Ramsey rightly began his speech by stating that this is about young people. The decision that will be taken here today will be about the future of young people; that is what we are here for. By all means, expand Magee, but only if it realistically offers opportunities for young people. Otherwise, the argument to expand Magee undermines itself. If we are talking about expanding Magee for the sake of numbers, where is the substance in that?

All I see in the motion are numbers. There is no mention of pragmatic courses that will bring jobs and employment to the north-west. To me, it very much suggests that the motion is for the sake of politics, not for the sake of young people, as we are quite at liberty to point out. As a young person and a part-time student of Ulster University, I find that quite sad.

I had a conversation in the car with my work experience student, Alexander, who is sitting in the Public Gallery, and he loves politics and has a real interest in moving forward with politics as part of his career, but not in Northern Ireland — not at all. He says that we still deal with the same unionist/nationalist issues here. What message are we giving out? I acknowledge that mistakes were made about Derry. By all means, I acknowledge that, but those decisions were made before me. I can work only in the environment that I am now presented with. Right now, we need jobs and realistic opportunities for young people.

It would be remiss of me not to speak about Coleraine, not as a unionist but as a constituency representative of East Londonderry.

The whole Magee debate is hindering Coleraine. I have been lobbying the Minister and chatting with a number of stakeholders in Coleraine about the opportunity to bring a veterinary school to the area. However, that will not happen because there will be an awful outcry from someone else, "What about Magee?" I know that we need a veterinary school at Coleraine, and I know that the local veterinary practitioners say that we need it. Therefore, I think we need to be mindful of this in the wider context.

5.15 pm

By all means, yes, Derry is the second city, and we need to look at the opportunities there, but we also need to look at what is happening outside Derry and Belfast.

Mark Durkan suggested earlier that Derry has not been fully embraced as a university city. I could say the same for Coleraine: it is a town with a university; not a university town. Both are really good campuses, and both are part of the same university, might I add, in a very small country in the world. Let us work together on this; it is not a case of one against —

Mr Dallat: Will the Member give way?

Ms Sugden: Certainly, Mr Dallat.

Mr Dallat: Does the Member agree that it is highly dangerous to have Coleraine competing with Derry, or vice versa, because, if you pursue that line of argument, you may find that both Magee and Coleraine miss out and Belfast will be the winner?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): The Member has an extra minute.

Ms Sugden: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I agree with the Member's comment. We should not be trying to pit the two against each other, but, to be quite honest, the motion tries to create a white elephant. You explicitly mentioned the Lockwood report. If this is about bringing employment to the north-west, why mention that? I respect the context, but, at the same time, there is a context in Coleraine, and that is what we should be mindful of.

I really do not know whether I will support the motion. The premise is that we need to expand Magee, but we also need to look to our other universities and see what is the best way to facilitate the young people of the future. I will go back to my earlier point, and it is one that was made at the start of the debate: this is about them; it is not about the politics that we keep finding ourselves in.

Dr Farry: I welcome the opportunity to respond to today's debate. At the outset, I want to make a number of things clear. First, in principle, I want the expansion of the Magee campus of Ulster University. I am committed to doing what I can to make that a reality, subject to the discipline of the business case and economic appraisal and, crucially, the availability and sustainability of resources.

I understand the historical hurt and the timing of the motion in relation to the Lockwood report, but any decision to expand Magee would be about much more than addressing a historical wrong; it would be about a solid investment in the future of our society and our economy. I appreciate that an expansion would bring potential economic benefits to the north-west in particular and to Northern Ireland as a whole. The benefits would be the provision of higher-level skills; an increased boost for research capacity; the consolidation of Northern Ireland, and the north-west specifically, as an inward investment location; and the additional spending power in the economy that comes from a campus.

It is also worth stressing that, while Northern Ireland as a whole has a high level of participation in higher education, the local sector is small relative to our population. That provides a further rationale for expanding higher education provision in Northern Ireland.

Having set out the opportunities, I need, however, to explain the challenges that need to be confronted in order to make the ambitions that Members have expressed a reality. First, there are considerable cost implications to any expansion. The business case puts the costs at £23 million per annum. We need to check and challenge those figures as part of our scrutiny process — they could be much higher. Moreover, those costs represent recurrent expenditure; they would not be one-offs.

We are looking at the opportunity for Magee in what was already a difficult financial context for higher education in Northern Ireland. The points that I make here predate the current round of Budget cuts. The decision to freeze tuition fees for local students at local universities was the right one. It is a recognition of the Executive's commitment to widening participation. However, we must at the same time recognise that it does curtail the universities' ability to generate additional income.

With the efficiency savings asked for across the public sector during the current Budget period, combined with a restriction on income generation, our universities have a major challenge to match the rate of growth of the leading universities across these islands. To put it in perspective, the amount invested per university place in Northern Ireland is between £1,000 and £2,500 less than in English universities, depending on the funding band. To put it another way, the universities require an investment in the region of £25 million a year to remain competitive.

We should be conscious that, in different parts of these islands, different approaches to higher education funding have been adopted. England has opted for fees of up to

£9,000 per annum. Contrary arguments are being made about increasing or decreasing those. By contrast, Scotland has provided free tuition for local students but has increased its funding of higher education from its block grant. Northern Ireland has attempted to find a middle course between the two, which is to keep fees down but without addressing the funding shortfall as fully as is necessary.

There is a structural issue regarding the funding of higher education in Northern Ireland. We need to address the funding gap first; otherwise, any expansion of Magee would be seeking to build on shaky foundations. Any failure to address the structural problems would entail a considerable dilution of quality. That is in no one's interests, and all our universities are clear on that point. We would be undermining our credibility in marketing Northern Ireland as an investment location, and we would be short-changing our students by providing an inferior form of education. If we are to expand Magee, we should do it properly.

The funding situation has been compounded by further cuts to my departmental budget. As Members will know, my budget is facing an 8·4% cut in the forthcoming financial year. Although great efforts have been made to protect key economic interventions, it is impossible to protect higher education from those cuts. For the next year, I am forced to cut the grant support to our higher education institutions by £16 million. Efforts are being made to mitigate the effect of the cuts on the front-line provision of places, but it is now inevitable that we will see a reduction in the number of university places over the coming months. Someone asked what we are expecting to see in universities and, indeed, the Magee campus. At this stage, we simply do not know what the output is going to be. However, we are looking at a situation of several hundreds of places being in jeopardy right across our universities, and across all campuses. That is an entirely counterproductive move in any situation, but it is particularly so when we are supposed to be preparing for a lower level of corporation tax.

Moreover, the position has been further compounded by the motion in the Assembly and decision in the Executive to preserve the premia payments to the teacher-training colleges. That has increased what would otherwise have been a £14 million cut to the higher education sector to a £16 million cut. That in itself places around 300 places in jeopardy. If Members are serious about the motion before us, they are, through their actions, moving in the wrong direction.

If we are to see the expansion of Magee, we are in effect seeking a recurring expenditure of almost £70 million a year.

Mr Dallat: Will the Minister give way?

Dr Farry: In a moment.

We need to find £16 million to rectify the effect of the current cuts, at least £25 million to restore the competitive position of our universities at least £23 million for the expansion of Magee itself.

Mr Dallat: I thank the Minister for giving way. Will he tell the House whether he has ever had a bid for additional university places turned down? Perhaps he might be even more generous and tell us who turned it down.

Dr Farry: I am not going into the detail of what is discussed behind closed doors. Whoever is feeding the Member rumours of that suggestion needs to be extremely careful about repeating what may or may not be said behind closed doors. I think that everyone knows what I am getting at in that regard.

It is important to bear in mind that even that pressure of potentially £17 million, which is, in itself, an enormous challenge in the best of circumstances, comes at a time when there are potential further pressures down the road.

We are likely to see a further tightening in the size of the Northern Ireland block grant over the coming years. The only real issue at stake is the scale of that tightening, subject to which parties will be in government in the UK after the general election.

We also have the further financial pressure of funding a lower level of corporation tax and preparing for its successful implementation. Of course, the logic of that situation is that we will intensify investments in skills but the danger is that, due to other pressures and in defiance of strategic sense and logic, the funding of skills gets further crowded out. If all this is to be managed, there will be a need for responsible decision-making.

I would suggest that, rather than ring-fence and protect certain areas of expenditure at present, we will need to move to address certain areas through more radical reform, including in health and education, which are the biggest areas of public expenditure. We will also need to be braver in revenue raising. Otherwise, we are simply engaging in rhetoric and building up hopes. I think that it was Mr Durkan who made an impassioned appeal for certainty around the issue, but that certainty can only come when people are prepared to be strategic and responsible on budgets. That certainty does not lie in my hands alone but with all of us, whether it is the parties in the Executive or, indeed, every party in the Assembly as a whole.

I would be particularly interested in hearing how those who tabled the motion envisage the Executive finding the resources to facilitate the expansion of Magee, particularly in the context of the current public expenditure climate. To date, I have not seen a sign that the Assembly is willing to rise to the challenge in that regard. To say simply, as Mr Dallat did at the beginning, that the British Government have a responsibility to pay for that is not a realistic answer to that question.

The people of Derry deserve much more honesty from every party as to what they are going to do differently in order to facilitate that £70 million price tag that the expansion of Magee, as part of a sustainable higher education sector, is going to involve. We have been to the UK Government in the past number of weeks looking for additional resources and we have had our answer. We have had partial success in that regard, but that is the answer that we have received. If this is to happen, it will have to be funded through choices being made locally here in Northern Ireland. People need to set out exactly what they plan to do in that regard.

Again, it is worth recalling that those who tabled the motion are members of a party that held my portfolio between 1999 and 2002 — a time when public expenditure was in a much more benign environment, but the big leap forward on the Magee campus did not happen. I would also remind those who tabled the motion that going into the last Assembly election and, indeed, into the tuition fees settlement, the higher education policy that they adopted was, in common with everyone else, to ring-

fence and freeze tuition fees at the current level. However, rather than investing additional resources to pay for the funding gap, the SDLP advocated taking money out of the reserves of the universities. If that position had been followed through, money would have come out of the universities that would have further eroded the number of university places. Again, what people are saying they want to see happening and what they have done in adopting policy positions and votes does not stack up.

I want to make it clear that our classic university model is not the only means to achieve the higher level skills that our economy requires. We are also developing higher level apprenticeships. Often, apprenticeships will be a more fruitful pathway to providing the skills that employers require and to give young people in particular the skills that will give them better prospects of securing and sustaining employment. Under our new apprenticeship strategy, there can be a link between higher level apprenticeships and degrees, and I hope that that would be a central part of any expansion of the Magee campus, again, linking in the content of degrees much more closely to the needs of the economy and employers.

Any further investment in Magee should be regarded as an investment in higher level skills for Northern Ireland as a whole. I reiterate that my central objective is to ensure that Northern Ireland continues to have a world-class and internationally recognised higher education sector and that we can build further on this platform over the coming years. Members have made reference to the investments that we have been able to make in our higher education sector over the past number of years, including well over 1,000 additional university places in STEM subjects.

5.30 pm

Mr Hazzard: I thank the Minister for giving way. Can he state whether his Department or officials have engaged with European colleagues to ascertain if any opportunities exist within Peace IV, given that education is one of the pillars, to create opportunities for border corridors and, indeed, areas of socio-economic inactivity? Go raibh maith agat.

Dr Farry: We can examine all those issues. I am not sure whether Peace IV in itself would be the best vehicle for that, but there is other potential, through European funding programmes, to consolidate the position of higher education on the island as a whole. However, any assistance we get in that regard will be, at best, marginal to the costs I have outlined. Nothing will escape Members having to find that £70 million.

I just want to highlight and make sure that, if people are serious about the expansion of Magee, they understand the scale of the financial commitment required to make it happen. I am prepared to take Members in good faith and, indeed, concur with them that it would be a good thing to do with our resources; but, given the scale and difficulties we have had in making reforms in public expenditure to date, I suggest that a lot of work and a lot of reconsideration of positions is going to be required if it is to become a reality.

We have made some good progress towards the One Plan. Unfortunately, that has now sadly come to a halt due to the budget cuts. Hopefully we will be able to maintain the current levels, but decisions will have to be made by the University of Ulster in that regard. Just because we have seen leaks of announcements around courses, that does not necessarily, in itself, translate into a reduction in places. It is about a consolidation of courses, although, obviously, there is a wider threat to places. We are yet to hear exactly how the universities are going to handle the cuts that, sadly, have to be passed on to them.

I also want to stress that we are committed to looking to develop the teaching block. I have signed off the business case in that regard and it is currently with DFP for review and approval. Once that is received we will look at the options as to how to proceed with that as quickly as we can.

I think the amendment probably downplays the issue a bit too much.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Will the Minister draw his remarks to a close?

Dr Farry: I think the motion is overly specific. It is an interesting debate and I look forward to continuing to work on the issue.

Mr Anderson: I welcome the opportunity, as a recent member of the Employment and Learning Committee, to wind on the debate. I have considerable sympathy with the overall thrust of the motion and much of what it has to say, but I feel that our amendment leads to a more pragmatic, balanced and realistic assessment of the current situation.

The timing of the debate is significant. It is no coincidence that, 50 years ago this month, a decision was taken to implement the Lockwood Commission report, which included a new university to be sited in Coleraine. We all know the fallout from that, and, 50 years on, in a very much changed Northern Ireland, it is perhaps not helpful to the current debate to dwell too much on what happened in 1965. I want to point out in passing that the report considered the proposed new city in County Armagh as a possible location, so those of us from Upper Bann could also give vent to a sense of grievance as well as those in the north-west, but, as I said, I am not going to dwell on what might have been.

What we must do today is look at the higher education needs of Northern Ireland in 2015. Lockwood said that the proposed second university should be, or would be:

"one for the whole of Northern Ireland".

That point still has relevance. Indeed, to me, and to our amendment, it is central. We support the expansion of Magee and the development of higher education in Londonderry, as proposed in the One Plan and outlined in the motion and the amendment. I know that my party colleagues from the maiden city are very keen to see such a development and I can fully understand where they are coming from.

Mr McCartney: Will the Member give way?

Mr Anderson: No, I have too much. However, any strategy must take the financial climate into account. It must also be Northern Ireland-wide. We want to see development and expansion of Magee to meet the needs of the local area, but, with respect, the whole of Northern Ireland could be classed as a local area. This is not some vast landmass like somewhere in the United States. Coleraine is 30 miles from Londonderry. Belfast is a bit further, 70 miles, but, today, that is no distance at all.

I do not want to be flippant, but, if we base our arguments purely on local needs, might we not be in danger of wanting a university in every town?

Investment in higher education is crucial to the development of Northern Ireland plc. I made that point very strongly during the debate on further and higher education on 2 February. Investment in higher education is a key component of the Programme for Government, and that vision is also set out in detail in the 'Graduating to Success' strategy document. If we are to attract inward investment that can provide us with the sort of high value-added job opportunities that we so greatly desire, our further and higher education sector has a crucial role to play. In developing such a strategy, the Minister has to encourage the colleges and universities to develop their courses in a very focused and strategic manner, taking limited resources into account. He also has to tailor his overall strategy on the basis of those limited resources. In my recent speech, I urged him to use his money wisely. I think that he would remember that one. That same advice is the basis for my reasoning this afternoon.

I support the concepts underlying the One Plan, which is the ambitious regeneration plan for Londonderry. However, even when it was launched, doubts were expressed about the extent to which the vision could be realised. Visions and plans are good and necessary, but so much then depends on the prevailing financial climate, which can mean that visions cannot always become a reality in the way that we might like. That is why our amendment rewords the nature of our commitment to the One Plan's higher education targets. We are broadly supportive of those targets, but, rather than affirm our commitment, we think it prudent simply to note it. That said, we also want the Minister to continue to explore the options open to him and to push ahead with his plans for Magee as far as possible.

The Minister is looking at the Magee campus business plan, but he is on public record as saying that he does not have the funds to contemplate any further expansion of the higher education sector.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Will the Member draw his remarks to a close?

Mr Anderson: He has been given extra money in the Budget, and our amendment urges him to look carefully at those options.

Mr Eastwood: I thank most of the Members who spoke for their contributions. I think that it has been a good debate. Unfortunately, it is a debate that we have had to have for a long time. As referred to in the motion and continually throughout the debate, it is a debate that we have been having for 50 years. We are not mentioning the Lockwood report and the 50-year anniversary just because we have some nostalgic notion about 1965. It is because that was a great wrong that was committed on the people of the north-west by this place in a different incarnation. The reason why we reference it is because it is a wrong that has never been righted, and I think that it is about time that it was.

If you look through some of the papers from 1965, you will see that the Government of the day were originally going to use the Lockwood report just to close down Magee, even in the limited way that it was operating at that time. However, it was felt that, because of some of the protests that were happening, Magee would have to remain in place. The attitude was, "Throw it the bone of a few arts courses, and that will keep the people of Derry happy." Well, it did not. It is clear that some of the attitude of, "Throw them a few courses, and they will be happy enough", still exists in some quarters. Well, we are not happy, Mr Deputy Speaker, as you have probably worked out. We believe very strongly that, unless we address the issue, Derry is never going to be able to reach its full potential and, in fact, Northern Ireland is not going to be able to reach its full potential.

If you look at all the economic league tables, you will see that Derry and the north-west in general are at the wrong end of them. It is a point that I have made before. The Derry City Council area has the lowest economic activity in the North at 55%, with the Northern Ireland average being 67%. We have the highest percentage of jobseeker's allowance claimants across Ireland or Britain. I think that we are second only to Strabane, our new council partner, in the number of long-term claimants that we have. This is not an argument about a university just for the sake of having an argument about a university; it is an argument about the economy. Every economist in the world whom I have talked to, read about or listened to understands that, without real investment in skills, you can never reach your economic potential.

We have heard a lot of discussion about corporation tax, which many people have described as a game changer. If you ask the businesspeople, the community people and the political people in Derry, the game changer for us is Magee's expansion. Corporation tax is one fiscal tool in any government's armoury. However, if you were to ask anyone who is looking to invest, they will tell you that the most important thing when they look at different cities and sites across the world is skills. Skills are the number-one thing when you are seeking to attract foreign direct investment and encourage entrepreneurs to set up companies and create jobs.

North-east Donegal has had a 12·5% rate of corporation tax for over 30 years. However, they have had no real university provision and no motorway provision, and, unlike the rest of the South, they have suffered unemployment as Derry has. The Southern Government understood that they needed to put universities into Galway, Cork and Limerick with the right kind of courses, whether pharmaceutical or IT courses, and that they needed a decent road network. They also understood that corporation tax would be beneficial, but that it would not work without those other fundamentals.

I was surprised at some of the Minister's attitude, but we agree with him that you cannot have a Budget that says that we are most in favour of creating and developing an economy but which, at the same time, cuts the skills agenda whilst protecting DETI. That is a bizarre position for any government to adopt. We support the Minister in arguing against that. However, he undermined his arguments slightly when he seemed to put up more and more obstacles to Magee's expansion, and I think that people in Derry will be asking questions about the Minister's real attitude. However, we take some of his earlier commitments at face value and have told him that we will support him in any bid that he wants to make.

The motion is about the One Plan and the Executive as a whole. We believe that this is an issue of such importance that the decision on it has to be taken by the Executive as a whole. I do not want to go back over recent history, but

it is important to point out — I think that Ms Lo did — that the One Plan was barely mentioned in the Programme for Government. There certainly was no specific commitment to the expansion of Magee to 9,400 places by 2020. That is why we do not have it yet. If you do not have a commitment in a Programme for Government or a Budget, it will not be delivered. We all know the history of that, but we now need to begin to change things for the future.

That is why we support the north-west ministerial subgroup. In fact, we supported it four years ago when we proposed it to the First Minister and the deputy First Minister in a meeting. We understood that, without a proper ministerial and Executive commitment to deliver the One Plan, it would never happen. I am glad that it has now taken shape, and we think that it is the right place for those types of discussions.

This is not just a discussion about Derry; it is a discussion about the economy and skills across the North. We send, I think, 5,400 students to Britain every year. Every year. In fact, I think that we are one of the places that sends the highest number of students to university. Our problem is that many of them have to go across the water to find a place because England abolished the MaSN cap whereas we kept it. That runs contrary to any argument about trying to develop an economy and, as other Members said, you cannot do that unless you make a real governmental and Executive commitment to fund higher education places in the North. We should not be spending fortunes on educating young people to a very high standard, then sending them off to Liverpool, Glasgow, London or Dublin to contribute to that economy. I think that fewer than 20% of them ever come home after they do that.

5.45 pm

As Mr Ramsey said, this argument is not just a case of Derry people whinging again. It is not that. It is about Derry people understanding. I was delighted to hear some of the DUP Members recognise the fact that there have been decades of underinvestment in our city and that the only way to resolve that is to have over-investment in it now and to prioritise the places like our city, Strabane and the north-west, which have not had the commitment that we had needed to see over the years.

I pay tribute to some of the people who fought this campaign 50 years ago — people like Michael Canavan, John Hume and others. It has been pointed out that this was a cross-community campaign, because the economy is not a one-sided issue. However, the same issue has still to be fought. We have seen Internet campaigns and the 'University for Derry' campaign, but we see people still having to fight the issue. It is a real disappointment and disgrace that we still have to battle along these lines. Let us do one thing to address the economic difficulties of the north-west; let us commit as an Assembly and an Executive to investing in university places in Magee, to expanding on the numbers, to doing the right type of courses, and to finally, once and for all, attracting jobs for our people, so that they do not have to go to Glasgow, London, Manchester or Australia and never come back. That is a legacy that we have been left with; it is a legacy that we have to address. If we do not do it, we will have paid a disservice to the people of our city and the people of the North in general.

Question, That the amendment be made, put and negatived.

Main Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

> *That this Assembly recognises the importance of expanding higher education across Northern Ireland and particularly the importance of expansion at Ulster University's Magee campus in driving economic growth in the north-west; notes the 50th anniversary of the publication of the Lockwood committee report; affirms its commitment to the One Plan targets of expanding to 9,400 full-time equivalent students by 2020 and increasing the maximum student number by 1,000 by 2015; and calls on the First Minister and deputy First Minister, as chairs of the north-west ministerial subgroup, to liaise directly with Ulster University and the Minister for Employment and Learning to prioritise the expansion at the Magee campus to ensure its full delivery.*

Adjourned at 5.47 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 24 February 2015

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Executive Committee Business

Local Government (Standing Orders) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015

Mr Speaker: As a valid petition of concern was presented on Monday 23 February in relation to the motion, the vote will be on a cross-community basis.

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

> *That the draft Local Government (Standing Orders) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 be approved.*

Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. The regulations are being made under section 38 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014. Section 127(3) of the Act provides that the draft regulations must be laid before and approved by a resolution of the Assembly.

I remind the House that the principles set out in the regulations are already enshrined in primary legislation. The House voted for call-in and qualified majority voting (QMV) as part of the Local Government Act 2014. Furthermore, the regulations were widely consulted on and passed through the Committee without challenge. I find it difficult, therefore, to understand why a petition of concern has been tabled at this very late stage and look forward to hearing an explanation.

The purpose of the regulations is to prescribe provisions for the governance arrangements of a council that must be incorporated by a council in the standing orders it makes for the regulation of its proceedings and business: in other words, the specification of mandatory standing orders. These add to the governance provisions in the 2014 Act.

The specification of certain mandatory standing orders for the transaction of council business will ensure that a consistent approach to the relevant matters is adopted across all 11 new councils. Whilst each council is a locally elected body answerable to its electorate, it is elected to represent all the people who reside in the relevant local government district.

The Assembly, when it agreed many of the provisions of the Local Government Act 2014, accepted the need for a legislative framework to be in place to ensure a consistent approach to the governance arrangements of the new councils.

The 2014 Act, which was passed by the Assembly on 8 April last year, introduced mechanisms to provide protections for the interests of minority communities in council decision-making as an integral aspect of the new governance arrangements. Provision is made in that Act that a council's standing orders must specify decisions that are required to be taken by a qualified majority. In relation to a decision, a qualified majority means 80% of the votes of members present and voting on the decision. The Act provides that a decision on the adoption of executive arrangements by a council, a decision to use a method other than d'Hondt for the filling of positions of responsibility on a council, and the use of droop quota rather than quota greatest remainder for appointing councillors to committees must be taken by a qualified majority.

The regulations specify decisions that must be taken by a qualified majority, in addition to those already provided for in the Act. The regulations provide that a decision on a call-in made under section 41(1)(b) of the 2014 Act — in other words, a call-in on the grounds of disproportionate adverse effect on any section of the inhabitants of the district — must be taken by a qualified majority, as must a decision to suspend a council's standing orders. A council may not, however, suspend the mandatory standing orders specified in these regulations under any circumstances. The specification of these additional decisions will provide further support for the protection of the interests of minority communities in council decision-making.

A key mechanism for providing protection for the interests of minority communities in council decision-making is the introduction of a call-in process. Importantly, this was agreed by the representatives of the five main political parties on the strategic leadership board's policy development panel on governance and relationships. Provision for this process is made in section 41 of the 2014 Act, which provides that a council's standing orders must make provision requiring reconsideration of a decision if 15% of the members of a council present to the clerk of the council a requisition on either or both of the following grounds:

> *"(a) that the decision was not arrived at after a proper consideration of the relevant facts and issues;*
>
> *(b) that the decision would disproportionately affect adversely any section of the inhabitants of the district."*

The main provision in the regulations is the prescription of the detailed process to be adopted by a council for the reconsideration of a decision in response to a request for such reconsideration being submitted to the clerk of the council. The process covers decisions taken by a council, a committee of a council and decisions taken under executive arrangements. This will ensure that a consistent approach is adopted by all councils to this important new feature of the governance arrangements for councils.

I wish to underline that the call-in of a decision is already provided for in primary legislation through the 2014 Act. It is, therefore, very important that councils are now provided with a consistent methodology for operating call-in. To do otherwise could result in processes being adopted by individual councils that may not provide appropriate or adequate protections.

The process specified in the regulations was developed with the direct input of a number of senior officers from local government and is designed to strike an appropriate balance between the administrative procedures of a council for the preparation and publication of the minutes of a meeting of a committee, and the need to ensure that the business of the council can be transacted in a timely and effective manner, allowing for the facility for members to request the reconsideration of a decision.

The regulations provide that a small number of categories of decision will not be subject to the reconsideration process.

Those include decisions where there is already statutory provision for an appeal against the council's decision; for example, the granting of an entertainments licence or, from 1 April this year, a planning application. Decisions where an undue delay would result in the breach of a statutory duty by a council, or where such a delay would be prejudicial either to the council's interest or to the public interest, are also excluded from the reconsideration process, as are decisions that simply note a report from, or the actions of, an officer. The final category of decisions that will not be subject to the reconsideration process concerns decisions that must be taken by a special resolution of the council, as such decisions are required to be approved by more than a simple majority.

The third aspect of the new governance arrangements for which provision is made in the regulations is to do with the operation of either the d'Hondt or Sainte-Laguë method for filling positions of responsibility. The regulations provide the timescales for the relevant steps in the process specified in the 2014 Act. The provisions should ensure that the process for filling positions of responsibility by one of those methods, at the first meeting of a council following a local election, is not prolonged unnecessarily. The provision of the ability of a council to extend that time frame ensures that there is the flexibility necessary to accommodate exceptional circumstances, should the need arise.

When the 2014 Act was being considered by the Assembly, Members agreed that provision should be made for the procedure for appointing councillors to committees. That is to ensure that the membership of a committee reflects the political balance of the council, and it was agreed that that should apply across all committees, if a council appoints more than one committee at the same meeting. Such an approach ensures that political parties with lower levels of representation on a council, and independents, would thereby have the opportunity to serve on a committee. Part 4 of the schedule to the regulations specifies the procedure that must operate in those circumstances. It follows closely the provisions in the Assembly's Standing Orders on the membership of Statutory Committees.

I ask the Assembly to approve the draft regulations.

Ms Lo (The Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment): I thank the Minister for his explanation of the background to and purpose of this draft affirmative statutory rule. The Committee considered the SL1 proposal at its meeting on 11 December 2014 and agreed that it was content for the Department to proceed with drafting the rule. The Department has since notified the Committee that two provisions were removed from the draft regulations after the submission of the SL1 to the Committee on that day, on the advice of the Departmental Solicitor's Office. The draft regulations included provision for a call-in to be terminated if the level of support for the request fell below the required 15% of members, after the request had been submitted. The Committee understands that no such provision may be included in the draft regulations, as the 2014 Act does not provide for the withdrawal of a call-in.

The initial draft regulations that came before the Committee also provided that only those decisions that were called in on the grounds of disproportionate adverse impact, supported by the opinion of the practising barrister or solicitor, would be taken by a qualified majority. All other decisions would be implemented or tabled for ratification by the council.

The Department has indicated that, since the relevant section of the Act makes no specific provision for obtaining a legal opinion on a request for reconsideration, the proposed provision had to be withdrawn. That means that all decisions that are subject to call-in on disproportionate adverse impact grounds must be taken by a qualified majority, taking into account the opinion of the practising barrister or solicitor.

The Committee was content that neither of these amendments impacted on the protection of the interest of minority communities in council decision-making. However, during its consideration of the Local Government Bill, the Committee raised concerns that the overuse of the call-in procedure could result in a deadlock in council decision-making. Members were reassured that the percentages required for a call-in or for a qualified majority may be revised by regulations subject to an affirmative resolution of the Assembly.

10.45 am

The Committee was also concerned that neither the Bill nor the regulations specifies the criteria to be used to determine the grounds for reconsideration under clause 41, which is that a decision would disproportionately affect adversely any section of the inhabitants of the district. The Committee believed that any lack of clarity could lead to a specious use of call-in. The Committee also remained concerned that the use of a call-in will require the opinion of a practising barrister or solicitor. The Department had indicated that the specification of a panel of lawyers, rather than an individual barrister or solicitor, would introduce an additional safeguard, but this has not been introduced in these regulations. Accordingly, the Committee therefore recommends that careful consideration should be given to ensuring that the criteria for call-in should be further defined in guidance.

After taking these concerns into account, the Environment Committee has agreed to recommend that the motion be affirmed by the Assembly.

Mr Weir: I will perhaps answer some of the questions that have been raised. Although I was not at that Committee meeting, the Chair of the Committee has probably

reached one of the key points. The reason for the petition of concern and why we are concerned is based on two grounds. First and principally, it has been mentioned that a slightly better mechanism may well need to be looked at that than purely having the opinion of a barrister, but that in itself would not be something that would block this. If that had been the only consideration, we would not be opposing this. I think that it is something that needs to be looked at. The bigger concern is the other issue that the Chair raised, which is what might be described as the filter mechanism. Mention has been made about the reasons given by the Department for why it is felt that that cannot be much of a particular issue. Indeed, there is a concern over what is there in the law.

When we were looking at this issue initially, which became part of the overall local government legislation, there was a desire — this is something that predates the legislation by quite a time — to say that adequate provisions should be put in to ensure that the only successful call-ins and the only successful use of QMV will be in very genuine cases where it leads to an adverse impact that, clearly, is detrimental to one community or another. That should be a reasonable test and something on which there should be clear levels of protections and safeguards. The issue has been ongoing for at least five or six years.

Call-in and qualified majority votes have been mentioned. We do not have problem with those as concepts, and we do not have any problem with the broad thrust of the way that this is put together. Indeed, as the Minister indicated, at the strategic leadership board and before that in discussions, the idea of a call-in was unanimously agreed by the five main parties through a policy development panel, which I was part of. That panel agreed the percentages and the idea of qualified majority vote, but it was also indicated at the very start that that should only happen where there is a clear adverse impact. When we came to discuss section 41 of the legislation, provision was made, in absence of any other suggestion, for, essentially, a qualified legal opinion to be given to act as the filter mechanism. Clearly the intention behind that — certainly, our intention — was that this would be used simply on legitimate grounds. I appreciate the point about the concern that has been raised over the way the legislation has been drafted. It has been suggested by the Department that any filter or blocking mechanism that comes from a legal opinion is effectively taken out, and what we are left with in the call-in procedure is that an application is made, justification is given and there is a lawyer's opinion. However, according to regulation 4(8), when the legal opinion is obtained, the clerk must:

> *"include the decision on the agenda for the next available meeting of the council for reconsideration, at which it must be taken by a qualified majority".*

The problem with this is that you could get the most vexatious application in the world, which would then go to the lawyer who could say, "This is absolute nonsense. This is simply grandstanding by half a dozen councillors". Yet, even though the clear-cut opinion is that there are no grounds whatsoever to proceed, according to the regulations, the decision automatically becomes one that is taken by a qualified majority vote. Under these circumstances, you are left questioning the role of the lawyer.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Member for giving way. Coming from a qualified legal background, he will well know that solicitors, lawyers and barristers give different opinions. That is what makes the courts operate, because they do have different opinions. Sometimes, a council or members on a council will not agree with that legal opinion, and some solicitors, lawyers and barristers will not agree with it either, so just because you get one opinion does not mean that that is the right one.

Mr Weir: I doubt that any lawyer and anybody who is legally qualified, including me or the more eminent lawyer Mr Allister, will claim to be entirely infallible on all occasions. I take on board the point being made. The problem is that we still have a situation in which you could line up every lawyer in the world, and they would say that this is vexatious, that it is not a proper call-in and is not something that adversely impacts, whether it is from the lifting of bins in a particular area to whatever. You can say that something is entirely vexatious. It does not meet the qualifications for it, yet, according to the legislation, it automatically becomes a qualified majority vote.

The danger with this is — and it is something that we were mindful of at the start — that, first of all, it is used legitimately. There are plenty of examples on both sides of the community where, potentially, if this is put in place and is allowed to automatically become a qualified majority vote simply by the assertion of it, where a coach and horses could be driven through it, and it could simply become tit for tat across the board.

I know that this is a debate for another day, but there has been criticism, particularly from the Minister's party, in relation to the use of petitions of concern in this place, and I hold my hands up as one of the most guilty culprits in relation to that, but the argument is — *[Interruption.]* — and I see I have found some level of agreement from at least some Members of the House in relation to that. It is clear that, as part of the Stormont House Agreement, there will be discussions on that, and we will look at that issue, so there will be a discussion for another day.

We are mindful of the situation, even five or six years ago, in that a mechanism whereby six councillors of a particular opinion effectively automatically turned any decision they wanted into a qualified majority vote was not going to be appropriate for local government. That is why there has been a discussion on whether it should be a panel, the ombudsman or a legal opinion and why, specifically, in the legislation, we put in place that legal opinion had to be sought on this.

It seems to me a nonsense that, if we put in place that legal opinion has to be sought, the import of the legislation is that, at best, it becomes entirely a tick-box exercise and, at worst, a useful device for lawyers to earn a few pounds, but that their opinion is utterly irrelevant because the decision automatically becomes subject to QMV. We believe that that element of things is wrong. If there needs to be some tweak to the legislation or, in this case, to the regulations, we are quite happy to entertain that.

In the broad level, we do not disagree with the general thrust of what is there. We are in a situation in which, as far as I am aware, all 11 councils have adopted qualified majority voting and call-ins in their standing orders.

I perhaps stand to be corrected on that. If we do have a slight delay in trying to make sure that we get this right,

from a practical point of view, that will not make a great deal of difference on the ground. However, we believe that this is a very important point.

I apologise that we have reconsidered the provision quite late in the day, and I appreciate the inconvenience to the House on that, but I think that it is important that we get this right. If we simply go ahead with a system that is entirely carte blanche and has no restriction whatsoever to a call-in mechanism, which will make it simply an automatic qualified majority vote on all occasions, I fear that, across local government, we may well be storing up trouble for ourselves. I suspect that the Department did not intend that, and I do not criticise it for that. However, we have to be careful that, if there is an unforeseen circumstance, we do not fall into that problem and regret at some later stage the decision that has been made today. For that reason, we will vote against this, and we have used the petition of concern because we believe that something better can be put in place.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom cúpla focal a rá. I would like to say a few words on this. It seems that we have been speaking a lot on statutory rules in this last wee period, but it is a pity that this has come late in the day. It has given us no opportunity to go through the process on the issue that the Member who spoke previously raised. I know that no issues were raised at the Committee on this. The SL1 came, I think, in December, and the rule came last week. That said, the Minister can maybe clarify exactly what the issue is in response to the Member who spoke previously. I apologise, Minister, that I missed the start of your contribution, so I will maybe seek clarity on that.

Mr A Maginness: I thank the Member for giving way. The Member is asking an impossible question of the Minister. Mr Weir and his colleagues in the DUP have raised this issue at the eleventh hour. They never raised it once throughout the Committee's discourse, and you are now expecting the Minister to explain what Mr Weir introduced at the eleventh hour.

Mr Boylan: I thank the Member for the intervention. If he had waited until I explained what the clarification is about, he would have found that I want the Minister to give clarification on the consultative process in all this, because all these things have gone out to consultation. I was asking the Minister to clarify the responses. That is the point that I was going to make. It was not about the lateness of the hour at which the Member brought the process forward. The Minister is well aware of the call-in in connection with the process involving the barrister and solicitor's role in all this. That is what I am looking for clarification on. The Minister may be able to respond on some of the responses and clearly outline the role of the barrister and solicitor in this matter. The Member intervened before I got to explain that point. That is what I am talking about. There has been ample opportunity to discuss these issues, and I am asking the Minister about the responses as part of the whole consultation, because this has been going on for a period of time.

In what we are trying to do and in what we are transferring to local councils, we need to give local councils the authority. They are the decision-making bodies, and we need to have confidence in them to make the decisions. I know that, at some point, there will certainly be a need for legal opinion, but I seek clarification from the Minister on that. I am aware that this issue was raised late in the day.

I am concerned about the use of the petition of concern in this case. The Member clarified that point and tried to make some apology for it, but I want the Minister to outline whether there was ample opportunity for everybody to partake in this process and to respond to any consultation. I believe that there was ample opportunity, but I seek clarification from the Minister on where we go after today's process. With that, I will bring my remarks to a close.

11.00 am

Mr Eastwood: It is kind of strange that we are here today in what is now becoming a debate. I do not think anybody in the Committee had intended to do much speaking today; they had all assumed that it was agreed and would go through as a matter of course, without any real debate. Well, we have the debate now, and it is very interesting. A lot of work had been done to ensure that power-sharing and protection for minorities were put at the centre of the new council arrangements. We spent a long time in Committee. I look at some of the worn-out officials in the Gallery who spent a long time working with us as we went back and forth, discussing all these issues. They were already discussed in the strategic leadership board, where everybody agreed. Now, at the eleventh hour, we have a petition of concern.

I accept the Member's apology, but it is not the way for the House to do business. We can have debates about petitions of concern all day, and we do, but not on an issue of legislation, when we have gone through the Committee process, public consultations and processes before that. Remember that the legislation has taken far too long to get to this stage. It has been with a number of Ministers, and thankfully Minister Durkan has been able to bring it to the House and get it across the line. Now we are at the very final hurdle with these regulations, faced with a petition of concern with no real opportunity to discuss with the officials.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Member for giving way. If the Member and his party colleagues in Newry, Mourne and Down council had had the courage to vote against the Raymond McCreesh play park being renamed or continuing with that name, we might not need legislation and regulations such as this. Does the Member agree with that?

Mr Eastwood: I thank the Member for his intervention. The point about Newry and Armagh and the McCreesh play park situation — I think our councillors should have been there and voted against it, our leader has made that very clear — is that this mechanism would stop that type of thing happening. That could have been called in, and then you would have had to have a qualified majority. That is the very reason why these mechanisms are put in. Unfortunately it does not apply in this case, but, if it did, I would be very supportive of it applying. It is about protection of minorities, whether unionist minorities in Newry or nationalist minorities in Craigavon.

I hope that, given that we have all bought into the idea of the protection of minorities and power-sharing in a real sense being finally put into legislation and local government, where people would have no real choice but to share power, people are not getting cold feet on that. I hope this is not about flags or anything else. I hope —

Mr Campbell: The names of councils.

Mr Eastwood: Sorry? Did you want to make an intervention, Mr Campbell? I cannot hear you speaking from a sedentary position, but I am glad to give way if Mr Campbell wants. You don't, OK.

I hope, as I said, that this is not about people getting cold feet about power-sharing, because it took us far too long to get to this point. Some councils have been very good at it over the years, and some not so good at it. I hope that this can be resolved, and I regret very much that the DUP has decided to petition this; bizarrely using a petition of concern to prevent a mechanism that would protect minorities. It is very strange. I look forward to the Minister's comments, and I hope that the DUP will rethink its position on this.

Mrs Overend: Section 1 of the Local Government Act was brought into operation by commencement order on 2 June 2014, albeit pretty low-key and under the radar, even of the councils. As the Minister said, the order made provision for Members to request the consideration or the call-in of a council decision in specified circumstances. Following such a request, on the grounds that a decision would disproportionately adversely affect any section of the inhabitants of a district or was not properly decided on after appropriate consideration of the facts, the clerk of the council is required to obtain the advice of a practising barrister or solicitor.

The call-in procedure is an area that my party has long had concerns about. We recognise the merits of such a safeguard, but we believe that the Department could have gone about securing it more effectively.

The concerns raised during the progression of the Bill are still valid. For instance, both the Act and the regulations talk about a disproportionate adverse impact, without giving even the slightest indication of what would constitute such an impact. Maybe the Minister could provide some long overdue clarity. With such vagaries, the Department is only exposing itself and councils to unnecessary quarrels.

The call-in procedure has, nevertheless, been available to members of a new council during its shadow period. It appears that this provision has been interpreted differently by different councils, and, I am sure, by different legal advisers. There have been a number of attempts to use the process, many on genuine grounds. However, these have all been in the absence of the regulations.

Today's regulations are the laying down of matters that councils must include in their standing orders. It is important for an even local government system across Northern Ireland that a consistent approach be adopted across the board. Departmental solicitors scrutinised the draft SL1 and removed two provisions on the reconsideration of decisions. The first related to the removal of the termination of a reconsideration if the supporting members fall below 15%. The second provision that has now been removed is the need for the advice of a qualified barrister or solicitor as to the merit of a call-in on the grounds of disproportionate adverse impact. Now all call-ins in circumstances of disproportionate adverse impact will be decided on by a qualified majority, as has been mentioned, and a barrister or solicitor's opinion will no longer preclude a decision being taken, although it can be taken into consideration. As my colleague said, various solicitors have various opinions, and I am sure that those can be taken into consideration by all present.

The regulations were noted by the Environment Committee on 12 February, as well as at the earlier SL stage. It is worth noting that all parties were content with what was proposed at those stages. It is ironic, however, that we have one safeguard being used — some would say abused — to block another. The time for the DUP to raise their concerns was in Committee; then the Department would have had at least the chance to work with them. Typically, however, they have adopted the stance of their way or no way. Of course, the Ulster Unionist Party raised many concerns during the progression of the Bill but were broadly ignored. This is just one example of what happens when bad political decisions are pushed through the Assembly, not because it is the right thing to do but because it suits one or both of the two main parties, which thrive on carving up Executive responsibilities.

Mr A Maginness: I support the regulations as tabled by the Minister. The Minister said quite rightly that the principles enshrined in the primary legislation are reflected in these regulations. It has to be said, and I emphasise the point, that there was never any challenge to those principles and never any questions in Committee — in particular, the Environment Committee.

There has, furthermore, been a massive amount of work done for many months on these regulations. Of course, a strategic leadership board was set up to consider all these provisions, and there was general agreement about the provisions on that board. That political consensus, which has quite improperly been undermined today, was wrought out of many months of political discussion and debate and was of great value in informing this House, the Environment Committee, the Minister and the Department of the Environment on how these regulations should be shaped, formed and presented in detail to this House. In my view, what has been done today is irresponsible. I do not find the arguments put forward by Mr Weir in the House to be convincing in any way.

Mr Weir: I thank the Member for giving way. We could all have a separate discussion of process issues. Obviously, as regards the principle of the issue, everybody has been, and remains, committed to call-in and the qualified majority vote for the protection of minorities. Effectively, part of those discussions have been going since day one. Will the Member actually address the merits of this? We can bandy about comments as to when particular things should have happened and what process should be used, but we are dealing with the detail of specific regulations and the import of what is there. Can the Member name a single council decision of any nature — no matter how little impact it has on the community — where, if somebody put a call-in saying, "This adversely affects my community", it would not then become part of qualified majority voting? Is that not going against the spirit of what was agreed?

Mr A Maginness: I find it peculiar that the Member reverses the onus to me, my party or the Minister. It is up to the Member to discharge to the House a serious reason why these regulations should not be adopted today. I do not accept the argument that the onus lies with the Minister or me, as a member of the Environment Committee, to disprove the points that the Member has raised in argument.

I want to go back to one other very important point in relation to process. This issue was raised yesterday evening by the DUP. It was, effectively, a political ambush and a misuse of political power to petition the regulations

here today. It is highly damaging in relation to the political consensus that has been built around protections for minorities and the way in which the new councils will operate. It is also damaging to the process of bringing the councils into full operation in a fair and proper manner. That is not good politics; it is bad politics. It is bad for the House, bad for the new councils and bad for the DUP that, at the last minute, has brought the petition of concern and objections, which, quite clearly, no Minister could have dealt with at the last minute. The Minister is quite proper to proceed today to bring these regulations and say to the House, "These are the regulations that have been agreed by everyone". No objections were raised to them in Committee or outside Committee. There needs to be an explanation from the DUP in relation to that. I am not convinced by the arguments that have been brought forward. Indeed, if you look at the regulations —

Mr McCallister: I am grateful to the Member for giving way. If Mr Weir was convinced by his arguments, he would not need the petition of concern because he would probably think that he would get enough support. I agree with the point about the abuse of the petition of concern. I constantly warned during debates about local government reform that we would almost devolve our dysfunctionality to local government. The big issue that he needs to address is this: anyone in the Chamber who has ever signed a petition of concern should look at the reason why they signed it. Quite frankly, it looks as though everybody is as bad as each other, although I put my hands up and happily admit that I have never signed one.

11.15 am

Mr A Maginness: I thank the Member for his intervention. He has a different political agenda, and he is entitled to that, but he does not seem to understand the necessity, in certain circumstances, for the genuine and proper use of a petition of concern. He would like to see the petition of concern mechanism removed completely in the House, but that runs contrary to the very nature of the House, which is to try to protect minorities on special issues.

I accept, Mr Speaker, if you indulge me, that petitions of concern have been abused in the House, but this is a most egregious example of the misuse of the petition of concern. I cannot think of any petition of concern coming so late in the day on an issue that has achieved — remarkably, in my opinion, and indeed thanks to the DUP amongst others — remarkable political unanimity in relation to these regulations. I just cannot understand why, at this particular moment, a petition of concern is being used in such a clumsy, crude and undemocratic fashion in the House.

Let us look at paragraph 3(2) of the schedule to the regulations, where it says:

> *"The following decisions shall not be subject to call-in —".*

I am trying to address the point that Mr Weir raised, which was that this could subject councils to all sorts of abuse and that, willy-nilly, decisions could be called in and all the rest. There are proper safeguards, in my opinion, in relation to this. Paragraph 3(2) says:

> *"The following decisions shall not be subject to call-in —*
>
> *(a) a decision on a regulatory or quasi-judicial function which is subject to a separate appeal mechanism;*
>
> *(b) a decision which is deemed to be a case of special urgency in accordance with regulation 24 of the Executive Arrangements Regulations;*
>
> *(c) a decision where an unreasonable delay could be prejudicial to the council's or the public's interests;*
>
> *(d) a decision taken by an officer of the council which is not a key decision;*
>
> *(e) a decision by the executive which serves only to note a report from or the actions of an officer;".*

I emphasise that point to you, Mr Speaker, and to the rest of the House, because there, in one fell swoop, you have safeguards in relation to the abuse of this particular process of call-in. There is a proper and lawful blocking mechanism there to prevent misuse.

Let us move on to paragraph 4(3) of the schedule, which deals with standing order call-in admissibility. It says:

> *"A call-in shall —*
>
> *(a) specify the reasons why a decision should be reconsidered".*

Not only can you say to the clerk or chief executive of a council that you have a problem with it, but you have to specify the reasons why a decision should be reconsidered. That is another safeguard in relation to this matter. You cannot just, willy-nilly, say that you object to something; you have to state the reasons for that.

Mr Weir: I thank the Member for giving way. The problem is that he indicates that you need to specify the reasons, but you could specify the most spurious reasons with no relevance at all to community interest. Once you have specified your reasons and once you have triggered the mechanism of the call-in on that basis, it does not matter, for example, whether the lawyer says that it is utterly vexatious and is utter nonsense, whether it is about putting 10p on the rate that you charge for swimming in the local leisure centre or lifting the bins or any of those things. No matter how utterly spurious it is, so long as you give a reason, that automatically follows through to the position of becoming a qualified majority vote according to the regulations. That is the problem.

Mr A Maginness: I go back to the point of paragraph 4(3)(a). You have to:

> *"specify the reasons why a decision should be reconsidered".*

That is unlike the petition of concern that Mr Weir has brought, whereby he has not specified why the regulations should be blocked. I emphasise that the specification of the reasons is an important safeguard in the use of the call-in mechanism.

Paragraph 4(3)(b) goes on to state:

> *"subject to sub-paragraph (6) [of the standing order] be deemed to be inadmissible if the reasons are not specified."*

Paragraph 4(4) continues:

"In the case of a call-in submitted under section 41(1)(b) of the 2014 Act, members must in the reasons specified under sub-paragraph (3)(a) specify—

(a) the [community] that would be affected by the decision; and

(b) the nature and extent of the disproportionate adverse impact."

That is another hurdle that has to be overcome. You cannot simply say, "I don't like this decision, and it might affect such-and-such a community". It is put in there so that you cannot just vexatiously or frivolously bring an application for a call-in.

There are good protections in the regulations. Of course, it has to say that it has the support of 15% of council members.

Paragraph 4(8), which Mr Weir neglected, states:

"When the legal opinion obtained in accordance with section 41(2) of the 2014 Act— "

— confirms that the call-in has merit —

"the clerk must—

(a)furnish the opinion to the members; and .

(b)include the decision on the agenda for the next available meeting of the council for reconsideration, at which it must be taken by a qualified majority."

Mr Weir referred to paragraph 4(8), which does the same in a situation in which legal opinion indicates that the call-in does not have merit, so both situations are covered. In that situation, a council again has protection. That is important, and the ultimate determinant is qualified majority voting.

That mechanism was agreed by all the parties not just in the House but outside the House by their political representatives who were elected to council and appointed by those parties to look at and thoroughly vet the issues and come to a decision on them. That was good politics. The DUP has shown bad faith about the regulations today. It has gone back on what its public representatives agreed and on what it agreed in the Assembly, in Committee and in the Executive. It has given no proper reason for going back on those decisions. It is shameful that the DUP comes to the House and makes unsubstantiated points to sabotage the regulations.

Mrs D Kelly: I served on the Environment Committee almost two years ago, and I recall these regulations being discussed at that time. It was very clear that all members were very mindful of their responsibility, as more power was devolved to local government from each of the Departments, to put in place equality provisions to ensure that there would be no abuse of power at that level. There was a necessity, which was particularly advocated by my party, to put in place regulations, such as the ones that Minister Durkan has put forward today, to ensure that no community would be adversely impacted by any decision of the new councils.

Unfortunately, some parties here in the North seek, in the Assembly and in local government, to reduce all of our decisions to nothing more than a sectarian headcount because it seems to support their clamour for power. When people are worrying about whether flags are flown, they forget about the dire circumstances in which they find themselves: the type of home that they live in; the type of job available to them, such as those with zero-hours contracts, for example; and the waiting lists that they have to endure for their health-care or domiciliary care services.

It would be much more advantageous for society as a whole if people, and the politicians who represent them, were truly engaged in the type of debate that impacts on their daily lives. Clouding the issues around some of the more emotive subjects seems to be the ambition of some parties, because a consequence of being diverted from the bread-and-butter issues is that people forget the poor representation that many of them suffer from.

As my colleagues said, the use, at this very late stage, of a petition of concern is extremely regrettable. It is also symptomatic of the fact that some parties have not got their head round their responsibility to build a shared society and build reconciliation across our communities. That was exemplified in the Stormont House Agreement, when good relations, a shared future, flags, parading and the past were kicked into the long grass by the establishment of commissions.

Mr Humphrey: I thank the Member for giving way. I assure her and the House that it is perfectly legitimate for people to protest and complain about the flag of their nation being taken down and still care about housing, the environment, jobs, security, social security and so on. That is absolutely consistent. While I am on my feet, may I ask the Member whether it was posturing by the SDLP in Newry and Mourne to put the Irish language first? Was that not political posturing before the upcoming election?

Mrs D Kelly: The Member has given the answer better than I could have: the issue is flags. In Craigavon, in my constituency, we saw electioneering in its worst form, when the DUP, in the dying embers of the council, ignored the advice of the Equality Commission and the council's legal advice in order to score points.

The very fact that the regulations are being promoted across all councils will seek to ensure that whatever community has the lead role through its representatives on a council, it cannot force issues down other people's throats, and people will start to talk about some of the real issues and put in place a proper economy strategy, for example. Quite bizarrely, we do not have such a strategy in Northern Ireland, nor do we have a childcare strategy worthy of any note.

It is very clear to me and, I am sure, to many independent observers what the real issue is for the DUP. Its abuse of power in using a petition of concern should send alarm bells ringing among all who describe themselves as democrats. I hope that other Members will prevail in their support for the regulations, which they did at Committee and, I presume, at the Executive.

We all know what this is really about.

It is right and proper that such regulations be put forward by the Minister, because it is very clear that many Members and many parties are still very immature and are not yet addressing the real issues that face our society,

particularly that of building a shared and reconciled community.

11.30 am

Mr Durkan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Committee Chair and others who contributed to the debate today. Ms Lo gave a detailed account of the Committee's consideration of and support for the regulations, albeit she raised slight concerns and asked some questions around such issues as the criteria for call-in.

I listened intently to Mr Weir and wondered what his old friends in NILGA might think about decision-making powers being taken off councillors and given to legal professionals. I am now even more intrigued as to the use of the petition of concern by the DUP today, particularly given recent decisions made by councils that have caused such outrage and hurt. Mr Elliott raised one and Mr Humphrey raised another. Those are matters that could be blocked with the support of the regulations, and people could be protected.

Mr Weir: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Durkan: Yes.

Mr Weir: At the moment, call-in and QMV are actually in the standing orders of all councils, so there is nothing to stop anybody using call-in at present. The problem is that it could be used for anything, however vexatious, with the few exceptions that Mr Maginness raised, which I acknowledge. It could be used for the most superfluous of issues, to be frank. The Minister and others in his party have complained about the use of a petition of concern, yet this is effectively putting the petition of concern into local government in all instances.

Mr Durkan: It would allow consistency across councils and not create the carte blanche system that Mr Weir fears may be created.

Mr Elliott also made the perfectly valid point that different legal professionals will inevitably have different opinions and that, occasionally, councillors may think that those opinions are wrong. It would take a brave or foolish council to disregard legal advice and plough on regardless.

Mr Eastwood queried whether there might be more to the opposition from the DUP than meets the eye, or the ear. I guess that, as we dust ourselves down after today's debate and attempt to negotiate new regulations, the real issues may come to the fore. The irony should not be lost on anyone — I know that it was certainly not lost on Mr Eastwood — that a petition of concern has been deployed today to thwart a mechanism that would protect minorities. I wonder whether today's use of a petition of concern would have got through any filter mechanism.

Call-in has not really been thwarted, though, and Mr Weir has pointed that out. Call-in and QMV are enshrined in legislation and, in the interim, before we agree on regulations, and hopefully we can, councils will be left to their own discretion — in some cases, their own devices, I fear — as to when the mechanisms should be used. That is far from satisfactory. To use Mr McCallister's term, it is a recipe for dysfunction.

The regulations would add important detail to new governance arrangements for councils provided in the 2014 Act and would ensure that a consistent approach was adopted by councils to protecting the interests of minority communities in their decision-making and to the sharing of membership of committees across political parties and independents. The failure to approve the draft regulations today will leave the councils without a clear direction on the provisions that they must include in their standing orders on those very important matters, less than six weeks before they take on their full responsibilities on 1 April. As I said already, that will also lead to different approaches being taken by different councils on the decisions that must be taken by a qualified majority and on the process to be followed when a decision is called in. The lack of a clearly specified process will result in some councils providing for all decisions, including those to do with planning and licensing applications, to be subject to the call-in process. That could prevent the council acting effectively as the local planning authority if decisions are constantly delayed because of the call-in process. There is already a well-defined mechanism for challenging planning decisions through the Planning Appeals Commission.

Equally, other councils could decide to exclude certain decisions from the call-in process, for example, around flags, council name and language policy. That would run counter to the council's responsibility to represent everyone in that local government district and to the objective of providing protections for the interests of the different communities within that district.

Mr Boylan asked what many people will be asking: where do we go after today? It seems that the House has failed to agree these regulations. As a result, it is not serving local government and communities well. The 11 new councils are still finding their feet and were looking to the Assembly to provide certainty in the mandatory elements of the standing orders. In the absence of regulations, councils will have to set their own standing orders and determine their own processes for call-in and how QMV will operate.

Meanwhile, it appears that we will have to go back to the drawing board and possibly look at changes to primary legislation if we are to achieve consensus. It has been outlined by one of my party colleagues that this is a backward step. That should not be lost on anyone here today. While we seek to get consensus, councils will still be required, as set out in the Local Government Act, to operate a call-in process and introduce qualified majority voting.

I am disappointed at the outcome today, but I thank the Chair of the Committee and other Members for their support for the motion.

Mr Speaker: I remind Members that the vote on the motion will be on a cross-community basis.

Question put.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 58; Noes 29.

AYES

Nationalist

Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mr Dallat, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Hazzard, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Dr McDonnell, Ms McGahan, Mr McGlone, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McKay, Mrs McKevitt, Mr McKinney,

Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr Ó Muilleoir, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr Ramsey, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Unionist

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

Other

Mr Agnew, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dickson, Mr Ford, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCarthy.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Eastwood and Mr A Maginness.

NOES

Unionist

Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Mr Buchanan, Mrs Cameron, Mr Campbell, Mr Craig, Mr Devenney, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mr Hamilton, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr McCausland, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr Moutray, Mr Newton, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Anderson and Mr G Robinson.

Total Votes	*87*	*Total Ayes*	*58*	*[66.7%]*
Nationalist Votes	*37*	*Nationalist Ayes*	*37*	*[100.0%]*
Unionist Votes	*42*	*Unionist Ayes*	*13*	*[31.0%]*
Other Votes	*8*	*Other Ayes*	*8*	*[100.0%]*

Question accordingly negatived (cross-community vote).

Welfare Reform Bill: Further Consideration Stage

Mr Speaker: I call the Minister for Social Development, Mr Mervyn Storey, to move the Bill.

Moved. — [Mr Storey (The Minister for Social Development).]

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

The first debate will be on amendment Nos 1 to 4, 8 to 11, 13 to 18, 20 to 23, 26 and 27, which deal with administration and entitlements. The second debate will be on amendment Nos 5 to 7, 12, 19, 24 and 25, which deal with Assembly control, reports and technical issues.

I remind Members intending to speak that, during the debates on the two groups of amendments, they should address all the amendments in each group on which they wish to comment. Once the debate on each group is completed, any further amendments in the group will be moved formally as we go through the Bill, and the Question on each will be put without further debate. I also remind Members that debate at Further Consideration Stage is restricted to further amendments to the Bill. If that is clear, we will proceed.

Clause 10 (Responsibility for children and young persons)

Mr Speaker: We now come to the first group of amendments for debate. With amendment No 1, it will be convenient to debate amendment Nos 2 to 4, 8 to 11, 13 to 18, 20 to 23, 26 and 27. These amendments relate to administration and entitlements. Members should note that amendment No 14 is consequential to amendment No 13, amendment No 17 is mutually exclusive with amendment No 23, and amendment No 26 is consequential to amendment Nos 22, 23 and 24.

I call Mr Steven Agnew to move amendment No 1 and to address the other amendments in the group.

Mr Agnew: I beg to move amendment No 1: in page 4, line 38, at end insert

> *"(3A) Where an additional amount under subsection (2) can be awarded at two different rates, the lower rate shall be no less than two thirds of the higher rate.".*

The following amendments stood on the Marshalled List:

No 2: In clause 26, page 13, line 14, at end insert

> *"(c) the production of explanatory documentation on sanctions to be given to the claimant prior to the imposition of a sanction.".— [Mr Attwood.]*

No 3: In clause 27, page 13, line 36, at end insert

> *"(c) the production of explanatory documentation on sanctions to be given to the claimant prior to the imposition of a sanction.".— [Mr Attwood.]*

No 4: In clause 30, page 15, line 20, at end insert

> *"( ) An authorised person under this section is a person exercising a function or functions of a public nature.*

( ) Section 6 of the Human Rights Act 1998 shall apply to an authorised person as defined under this section.".— [Mr Attwood.]

No 8: In clause 47, page 25, line 40, at end insert

"(c) the production of explanatory documentation on sanctions to be given to the claimant prior to the imposition of a sanction.".— [Mrs D Kelly.]

No 9: In clause 47, page 26, line 29, at end insert

"(c) the production of explanatory documentation on sanctions to be given to the claimant prior to the imposition of a sanction.".— [Mrs D Kelly.]

No 10: In clause 47, page 28, line 12, at end insert

"(c) the production of explanatory documentation on sanctions to be given to the claimant prior to the imposition of a sanction.".— [Mrs D Kelly.]

No 11: In clause 70, page 56, line 32, at end insert

"(6) Regulations may not provide for the reduction of an existing award where a claimant declines the offer of suitable alternative accommodation.".— [Mrs D Kelly.]

No 13: In clause 81, page 60, line 32, leave out subsection (3).— *[Mr Storey (The Minister for Social Development).]*

No 14: In clause 81, page 60, line 39, leave out paragraph (c) and insert

"(c) must provide for relevant medical evidence to be taken into account in assessing a person and may make provision about other matters which are, or are not, to be taken into account.".— [Mr Storey (The Minister for Social Development).]

No 15: In clause 89, page 64, line 24, at end insert

"(3A) A person entitled to personal independence payment shall receive the award no later than 16 weeks after the date on which a claim for it is made or treated as made.".— [Mr Agnew.]

No 16: After clause 103 insert

*"**Appeal in respect of sanction imposed under this Act***

***103A**.After Article 15 of the Social Security (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 there is inserted —*

*"**Appeal in connection with sanctions***

***15A**. Where the amount of an award of any social security benefit is to be reduced as a consequence of any failure by a claimant which is sanctionable under the Welfare Reform Act (Northern Ireland) 2015 —*

(a) a claimant is entitled to an appeal hearing within four weeks of the notice of sanction being issued; and

(b) the amount of any relevant award shall not be reduced before the appeal is decided.""".— [Mrs D Kelly.]

No 17: After clause 120 insert

*"**Duty to ensure access to independent advice***

***120A**.—(1) The Department shall ensure that any person making a claim under this Act shall be entitled to have access to independent confidential advice and assistance provided free of charge in relation to making a claim under this Act.*

(2) For the purposes of subsection (1) the Department must bring forward guidance on the independent confidential advice and assistance which is to be developed in consultation with the Northern Ireland Advice Services Consortium, within 3 months of the commencement of this section.".— [Mrs D Kelly.]

No 18: In clause 121, page 88, line 26, leave out "and" and insert"(aa) the standards of advice and assistance provided under section 132B of the Welfare Reform Act (Northern Ireland) 2015; and".— *[Mr Storey (The Minister for Social Development).]*

No 20: In clause 130, page 92, line 26, after "housing benefit" insert "or universal credit".— *[Mr Storey (The Minister for Social Development).]*

No 21: In clause 131, page 93, line 39, at end insert

"(6A) Regulations may not provide for the reduction of an existing award where a claimant declines the offer of alternative accommodation.".— [Mrs D Kelly.]

No 22: After clause 132 insert

"Payments to persons suffering financial disadvantage

Payments to persons suffering financial disadvantage

***132A**.—(1) The purpose of this section is to enable the Department to make payments to persons who suffer financial disadvantage as a result of the changes to social security benefits and tax credits contained in this Act and the Welfare Reform Act 2012.*

(2) The Department may by regulations make provision for the purpose mentioned in subsection (1).

(3) Regulations under this section may in particular make provision —

(a) for determining whether a person has suffered financial disadvantage as a result of the changes mentioned in subsection (1) and, if so, the amount of that disadvantage;

(b) for determining eligibility for payments, including provision for payments to be made only in prescribed circumstances or only to persons who meet prescribed conditions;

(c) for determining —

(i) the amount of payments;

(ii) the period or periods for or in respect of which payments are to be made;

(d) for claims for payments to be made in prescribed cases and in the prescribed form and manner and for the procedures to be followed in dealing with and disposing of such claims;

(e) for payments to be made in prescribed cases without any claim being made;

(f) imposing conditions on persons claiming or receiving payments, including conditions requiring them to provide to the Department such information as may be prescribed;

(g) for payments to cease to be made in prescribed circumstances;

(h) for the disclosure of information relating to payments in prescribed circumstances or to prescribed persons;

(i) for the recovery of payments by the Department in prescribed circumstances;

(j) requiring or authorising reviews (whether by the Department or by prescribed persons) of decisions made by the Department with respect to the making or recovery of payments;

(k) imposing functions on a statutory body other than the Department in connection with the administration of the regulations;

(l) for such other matters as appear to the Department to be necessary or appropriate in connection with the making of payments including provision creating criminal offences and provision amending or applying (with or without modification) any statutory provision.

(4) Payments are not to be regarded as a social security benefit; but regulations under this section may provide for any statutory provision relating to a social security benefit (or to such benefits generally) to apply with prescribed modifications in relation to payments.

(5) The Department shall, in respect of each financial year in which payments are made, prepare and lay before the Assembly a report on the payments made in that year.

(6) No regulations shall be made under this section unless a draft of the regulations has been laid before, and approved by resolution of, the Assembly.

(7) If regulations under this section impose functions on any statutory body other than the Department, the Department must consult that body before making the regulations.

(8) A power conferred by this section to make regulations includes power —

(a) to make such incidental, supplementary, consequential or transitional provision as appears to the Department to be necessary or expedient for the purposes of those regulations;

(b) to provide for the Department to exercise a discretion in dealing with any matter.

(9) In this section—

"prescribed" means prescribed by regulations under this section;

"payment" mean a payment under this section;

"statutory body" means a body established by or under a statutory provision.".— [Mr Storey (The Minister for Social Development).]

No 23: After clause 132 insert

"Duties of the Department

Duty to ensure availability of advice and assistance

***132B**.The Department must ensure that advice and assistance are made available free of charge to persons making a claim under this Act in connection with that claim.".— [Mr Storey (The Minister for Social Development).]*

No 26: In clause 135, page 95, line 37, at end insert"( ) section 132A (payments to persons suffering financial disadvantage);

( ) section 132B (duty to ensure availability of advice and assistance);

( ) section 132C (review of this Act);".— [Mr Storey (The Minister for Social Development).]

No 27: In schedule 1, page 99, leave out lines 3 to 7.— *[Mrs D Kelly.]*

Mr Agnew: At the outset of the Further Consideration Stage of the Welfare Reform Bill, I welcome the opportunity that we have to seek again amendments to the Bill to mitigate its worst effects on some of the most vulnerable people in our society. I welcome the fact that, as I understand it, no petitions of concern have as yet been lodged against any of the amendments tabled, and I hope that that remains the case. It means that we can debate the amendments on their merits and those who oppose amendments will do so for their own reasons but without the cover of a petition of concern, which, I think, at Consideration Stage, put the emphasis on the DUP, who tabled those petitions, and, to some extent, provided cover for other Members who rejected amendments that, in my view, were sound and in the best interests of many vulnerable members of our society.

Amendment No 1 is about a disability addition payment. As the Bill is currently drafted, many families with disabled children will see a loss of approximately £26 a week to the universal credit that they receive under the current tax credit system. It is estimated that that will affect 100,000 families across the UK, and, on a proportional basis, that figure equates to approximately 3,000 families in Northern Ireland, although, with our higher level of disability claims, there is the potential that that figure could be greater than 3,000.

At Consideration Stage, the Minister stated that the reduction in the lower-rate payment would enable those with more severe disabilities to receive a greater payment. For me, that does not stack up as an argument, when those on the greater payment would receive £2 per week more — which I am sure they will welcome — but I do not see how that is a justification for families to receive a reduction in payment of £26 per week, which will have a significant impact on the family income.

We need to separate out from this the issue of discretionary payments which, no doubt, will be used by some to suggest that this situation could be mitigated. What I seek from the Minister and from other parties is clarity on whether they support this cut to the lower-rate disability addition in principle, or are they supporting it in this Bill with the promise of discretionary payment being made to those families to meet the condition that some have said to date, that no one will be worse off under this Bill? There is no doubt that, as the Bill is drafted — without any discretionary payments — in the region of 3,000 families will be worse off as a result of this change.

I propose, as I did at Consideration Stage, that we change the legislation and give a commitment to those families that they will not be worse off and, therefore, we should amend the legislation accordingly to make sure of that. At the very least, I seek assurance and commitment from the Minister and other parties on the Executive that, should the Bill not be amended, those families will be compensated through the discretionary payments, and that they will benefit from the commitment made by those who said that no family will be worse off as a result of welfare reform in Northern Ireland.

12.00 noon

Amendment No 15 is a proposal to set a time limit by which PIP assessments are made and claims honoured. We have seen the shambles — I think that that is the right word to use — of the situation in England, where, after 16 months of personal independence payment (PIP) implementation, only 40% of cases had been cleared, with many claimants waiting as long as six months. Indeed, in some cases, claimants were waiting longer than that for a decision to be made on their claim. The Government in the UK have now given a commitment that they will get the time delay down to 16 weeks, and my amendment proposes that we should set a limit of 16 weeks for such decisions to be made in Northern Ireland. Let me be clear: that is still too long. Sixteen weeks to wait on a decision on a claim for people with serious disabilities and who need support is still too long, and I think that it should be a minimum commitment that we give that 16 weeks is the longest that any claimant should have to wait from their lodging of a claim until they receive a decision. That, to my mind, allows the Department the time to introduce the system and to iron out the cracks.

I hope that, going forward, no one will be waiting for 16 weeks, but it does allow the flexibility in the interim period and the transition period for the Department to get the processes in place and to deal with any backlog. I think that the amendment passed in the previous stage to allow for a pilot scheme should allow the Department the ability to test the systems on a smaller scale and to ensure that we do not have the mess that was experienced in GB, with many vulnerable people and many people with disabilities having to wait an extraordinarily long time to have their claim assessed and their decision made and to receive their payments. It is not acceptable that we expect people with disabilities to suffer to fit a change in the system. The change in the system must work for the people with disabilities and must meet their needs, not, as I say, the other way around.

Amendment No 17, which has been tabled jointly by the Green Party and the SDLP, is in relation to the independent advice duty; a duty on the Department to ensure that independent advice is freely available to those seeking to access benefits. In the previous stage, we heard about the issues facing the east Belfast advice centre, and there are advice centres across Northern Ireland that are facing increased demands, in part due to concerns and uncertainty around welfare reform. There is no doubt that, if and when this legislation passes, they will see a surge in demand for their services. However, it appears unlikely that they will see an increase in the support that they receive from government to meet that demand, which is a result of changes made by this Government.

Whilst I recognise that the Minister has his own amendment to place a statutory duty to provide free advice, and I will certainly listen to his explanation of how that will work in practice, I think that it is important that it is independent advice for a number of reasons. First, if it is simply the advice that is already given by our social security offices, every MLA in the House will know how inadequate that provision would be were it not for the support of the likes of Citizens Advice, Advice NI and other organisations.

Staff in social security offices do not have the time to sit down with individual claimants to support them through their claims and to see that process through — for example, if they have to go for appeals etc. I see that the Minister is shaking his head.

Mr Storey (The Minister for Social Development): I thank the Member for giving way. I have listened to this argument over a number of weeks, and I have to say that I do not see what the Member is painting as an issue. On the one hand, we are being told that, if we were to put all this on a statutory basis, everything would be well, but the Member has already said that it is an issue about whether we will have adequate resources in the independent sector to give advice because of the changes that are being implemented as a result of welfare reform, so what is at the heart of this? Is it about ensuring that the independent advice sector is put on a statutory basis that gives it a position in a legislative framework, or is the Member saying that he is not happy with the advice that the independent advice sector is giving, or is it all about getting more resources into the independent advice sector? I sometimes fail to see where it all fits in with what we are being asked to provide.

Mr Agnew: If I was unclear, I apologise, and I will try to be clearer. I referred to the lack of resources in our social security offices. At no time, I believe, subject to referring to Hansard, did I suggest that I was unhappy with the advice being given by the independent advice sector. It is about protecting and giving security to that sector at a time when resources are being stretched so that its place is protected. We recognise the need for those services. I am not criticising staff in social security offices. I think that there are separate roles for the independent advice sector and the statutory advice given in social security offices, but it is about recognising that role, putting it on a statutory footing and giving the security that, as we go forward, despite the pressure on resources, we will continue to have an independent advice sector that is adequately resourced to meet the demands that will inevitably rise as a result of the changes proposed in the Bill.

Another reason why I believe that it needs to be independent advice — the Minister has addressed and faced this issue many times — is to do with what has come from the UK Government, which is an agenda to cut the welfare bill. I do not believe that the same government — Mr Storey can answer whether or not it is his agenda — that seeks to reduce the welfare bill gives advice to those who are seeking to access welfare payments. Those roles need to be separated. In GB, we have seen the pressures to reduce welfare spend through some pretty odious means, including setting targets for sanctions. I know that the Minister says that that will not happen here. I believe his sincerity in saying that, but we have to be on our guard that what has happened in GB does not translate to Northern Ireland.

For those reasons, I, along with the SDLP, propose amendment No 17 and favour it to the Minister's amendment No 23. It is important not only to have a statutory duty to provide free advice but to extend that statutory duty to independent free advice.

Amendment Nos 11 and 21 relate to the bedroom tax, and they are key amendments. We will learn a lot today in how parties respond to those amendments. They propose that, even when alternative accommodation exists, nobody should be subject to what has become known as the bedroom tax.

Undoubtedly, uncertainty has been created. We have been given commitments time and again that the bedroom tax will not be implemented in Northern Ireland. The Minister said that he was not introducing the bedroom tax by the back door, but my reading of his words in the same debate is that he is introducing it by the front door. He very explicitly stated, and I quote from Hansard:

> *"The Executive have agreed to create a separate fund of £17 million per annum that will mitigate the impact of this measure by protecting existing and future tenants from any reduction in their housing benefit unless there is a significant change in their personal circumstances or they are offered suitable alternative accommodation." — [Official Report, Bound Volume 101, p489, col 2].*

That is the bedroom tax. That is exactly what the bedroom tax is. I accept that it is a phased introduction, in that it would apply only where suitable alternative accommodation exists, but where that accommodation exists or where there is a change in personal circumstances, the bedroom tax would, as outlined by the Minister, be implemented. On social media and in other places, I was accused of all sorts of things, including being misleading. I am merely going on the words of the Minister. If those words are wrong and he wishes to retract them today, I will welcome that. He is shaking his head, so I assume that he will not do that. If Sinn Féin wants to stand up and say that it did not agree to the implementation of the bedroom tax, I will welcome that and will welcome its Members going through the Lobby to support amendment Nos 11 and 21, which will ensure that the bedroom tax is not implemented and that the legislation makes it clear that it cannot be implemented as proposed by the Minister at the previous stage.

Mrs D Kelly: Will the Member give way?

Mr Agnew: I certainly will.

Mrs D Kelly: Could the Member assist me by pointing out where any consideration has been given by the Minister or others to people with disabilities who require additional accommodation in their home to meet their personal care needs or even to store the aids and equipment that they need?

Mr Agnew: I certainly cannot find it. I thank the Member for raising the point. We were given all these assurances about the flexibilities of the bedroom tax. I remember that, when the previous Minister Mr McCausland was in post, I listed the various flexibilities that would be required to protect people with disabilities, carers, parents with caring responsibilities and, potentially, people in the armed forces who have children etc. I asked the Minister what, if we gave all those exemptions, would be the point of the bedroom tax and how much we would save by implementing it. Surely it would become just an ideologically driven mechanism to punish people for being on benefits. The Bill does not have the flexibilities that we were promised. What we have is a commitment from the Minister to implement the bedroom tax where suitable alternative housing exists or personal circumstances change. At this stage, I am looking for the assurance that the bedroom tax will not be implemented, and the only way to get that solid assurance is to support amendment Nos 11 and 21.

I come now to the amendments tabled by the SDLP. Amendment Nos 2, 3, 8, 9 and 10 are on explanatory documents on sanctions. I regret that, at the last stage, the Assembly passed the maximum sanction of 18 months, but, given that, these are sound amendments from the SDLP. We have evidence that those who suffer sanctions do not always understand why or understand the nature of the sanctions, so any assistance is to be welcomed.

Amendment No 16 from the SDLP is on the continued payment of benefits while an appeal against a sanction is being heard. Again, I do not believe that people for whom, in some cases, it will be their only source of income should be punished because of mistakes by the Department. The continuation of the payment while an appeal is being heard would ensure that those who have been sanctioned incorrectly do not suffer a financial penalty, while those who have been sanctioned correctly under the rules would receive the same length of sanction and the principal sanction, to which I am opposed, under the current proposals. Therefore, as the proposals stand, those sanctions would still be applied.

Amendment No 4 requires companies in the private sector to which work is outsourced to be human rights-complaint. It is important, where a private company carries out duties that would otherwise have been carried out by a public body and that essentially pertain to its role, that it should adhere to the same standards. I support amendment No 4 for that reason.

12.15 pm

Amendment No 27 mirrors an amendment that I brought forward at Consideration Stage, which was petition-of-concerned, something that has not yet happened this time around. The amendment would ensure that workers are treated equally, regardless of whether they are UK citizens or EU workers. That is right in order to ensure fairness and equality but also to ensure that we do not implement a law that is contrary to EU regulations, thereby making us liable to significant infraction penalties.

Mr Dickson: I thank the Member for giving way. I appreciate the importance of the point about other EU nationals. Does he accept that, during the three years in which the legislation has been in place in the rest of the United Kingdom, there has been neither a legal challenge nor any research indicating that that is a problem and that the amendment is therefore unnecessary?

Mr Agnew: I thank the Member for his intervention. I do not know whether he is saying that he supports the provisions in the Bill. I expressed my disappointment that Anna Lo had taken her name off the amendment that she brought forward at Consideration Stage, leaving me as the signatory to speak to it. I do not know whether Anna Lo or the Alliance Party has changed its position on the issue. As I stated, it is an issue of fairness, and one that may have legal consequences. Of course, I do not want to see Northern Ireland subject to infraction penalties, and the best way to avoid that is to treat two workers in the same job who are made unemployed for the same reason equally and fairly and not to discriminate on the basis of nationality.

I move on to the Minister's amendments, which I will talk about briefly. Amendment Nos 13 and 14 provide for regulations to stipulate what other evidence besides

medical evidence can be taken into account. I look forward to hearing the Minister's intention in proposing them. I certainly have no objections to them at this stage. Amendment No 18 provides for a report on standards of advice and assistance, and, again, I await the Minister's explanation. Amendment No 20 would have the effect of adding universal credit to the rate relief scheme. My understanding is that that would recognise the migration of housing benefit to universal credit, and I assume that it would ensure that the same standard of rates relief applied.

Obviously, amendment No 22 is key; it concerns the power for implementing the discretionary payments, and it details how that will operate. I welcome that. I want to be clear: the budget that has been set aside to mitigate welfare reform is to be welcomed. My problem is when people say that no one will be worse off when welfare reform is implemented in Northern Ireland because the figures do not stack up.

The Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action report estimated that welfare cuts, if implemented as in GB, would see a £250 million loss to people on benefits in Northern Ireland. The then Minister Nelson McCausland, in answer to me, stated that the figure was more in the region of £115 million. We are now being told that £90 million or thereabouts a year, or £565 million over six years, is sufficient to ensure that no one is worse off. My calculations cannot equate those figures. To me, it will still mean the implementation of welfare cuts in Northern Ireland. They will be mitigated by the £565 million, but they will certainly not be negated. We are yet to see the detail of who will be worse off in Northern Ireland. That is where my concerns lie.

I have addressed amendment No 23, which concerns the Department's duty to ensure free, but not independent, advice. Amendment No 26 relates to Royal Assent for amendments should they be passed by the Assembly today.

I conclude on this group of amendments. I look forward to hearing the debate on each of the amendments. I hope that it can be a more open debate than that at Consideration Stage, which was closed from the outset because of the many petitions of concern.

Mr Speaker: Before I call the next Member to speak, I advise that the Business Committee has agreed to meet at 12.30 pm. There is then the reception for former Speaker Lord Hay. I hope that as many Members as are available will attend that. The next Member called to speak should keep an eye on the clock. You will be the first person called after Question Time to conclude your remarks.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. It is my understanding that a lot of the issues raised in these amendments were dealt with. It is also my understanding that, eventually, there was a five-party agreement to deal with them. I do not yet know whether Mrs Kelly is up to speed this week. I wonder whether she stayed away from meetings, like her fellow travellers in Newry and Mourne council did, to ensure that she did not have to make any decisions on all this.

I am a bit confused by some of the amendments. We have amendments about sanctions that state that people should be informed about sanctions. Those amendments come from a party that wanted two-year sanctions — not one-year or 18-month sanctions; it was quite happy to go with two years. I watched Mrs Kelly on 'The View' on Thursday week past, after the original debate. Mr Agnew quoted the Minister from Hansard. In relation to the so-called bedroom tax, the Minister said that there would have to be:

> *"a significant change in their personal circumstances or they are offered suitable alternative accommodation." — [Official Report, Bound Volume 101, p490, col 2].*

From what I heard, Mrs Kelly said that the Minister said that there were two options. It was almost like the common selection scheme in the Housing Executive: you were offered two choices, and, if you did not take one, you are out. She did not mention anything about the interpretation of "a significant change" in personal circumstances or "suitable alternative accommodation". I mentioned it in the last debate and I will mention it again. When the Social Development Committee was briefed by the Housing Executive on the so-called bedroom tax, we were told by Housing Executive officials that were it to be introduced, they simply could not cope with it because there was no suitable alternative accommodation. They said that it could take six years or possibly eight years before suitable accommodation would be available.

Mr Agnew: Will the Member give way?

Mr Brady: Yes.

Mr Agnew: Can the Member be clear, then, whether his position is that he does not support the bedroom tax where there is no suitable accommodation or that he does not support it at all? If it is simply that he does not support it where there is no suitable accommodation, then he is saying that people on benefits — if they become unemployed and are in a three-bedroom house and are deemed to need only one — should pay more or move to suitable alternative accommodation. Which is it?

Mr Brady: I thank the Member for his intervention but I think he missed the point. I was saying that there is no suitable alternative accommodation available. I certainly do not support the bedroom tax. In the agreement that was signed on 19 December by the five parties, we neutralised the bedroom tax and the benefit cap.

With the Assembly's indulgence, I want to draw the Member's attention to another matter. He talked about the discretionary fund but seemed to mix it up with the supplementary payment fund. It is my understanding that the discretionary fund is a completely different thing, which is to replace the social fund. I know that the Member had difficulty dealing with the discretionary fund commissioner and inspectors the last time, which indicates to me, with respect, that he did not have a lot of experience of dealing with the social fund commissioner or, indeed, the social fund inspectors.

He seems to be mixing up the two, because the discretionary social fund was giving us, in some ways, the opportunity to be innovative. It was going to include people on low incomes — the working poor, as they are termed. The supplementary payment fund is a completely different thing, which is going to ensure that people do not lose out. With respect, I would say that the Member is scaremongering and sowing seeds of doubt. As someone who has been dealing with this since I came here in 2007, I have not heard the Member shouting from the rooftops about cuts over the past four years. It seems to be a fairly

recent development in the Member's repertoire, for want of a better word.

Mr Agnew: I thank the Member for giving way. He may point out my failings and that is fine; it is certainly not the first time that I have stated my opposition to the cuts. I have done it consistently and, indeed, it was in my election manifesto and election leaflet. The Member spoke about my failings, but is he saying, then, that there are no possible circumstances whereby there will be suitable accommodation and where the bedroom tax will be implemented? Is he saying that there is nowhere in Northern Ireland where that will happen and that the Minister's words are, effectively, meaningless and that the bedroom tax will not be implemented and no one will suffer from it?

Mr Speaker: I remind Members that it is almost 12.30 pm. *[Interruption.]* I am not stopping you; I am just reminding you of the time.

Mr Brady: I thank the Member for his intervention, but the Minister quoted his own constituency last week where 32% of the people on the waiting list are looking for one-bedroom accommodation. Whatever the Minister wants or does not want, the Member would maybe need to talk to the Minister about that.

The point I was making about the sudden campaign, or crusade, against these cuts is that it has come fairly lately. The Member also mentioned the fact that debate was stifled last week, but if it was stifled it did not stop some people from talking an awful lot, because I had to sit and listen to it for six and a half hours.

If it is OK, Mr Speaker, I will continue after the break.

Mr Speaker: Thank you. The Business Committee has agreed to meet immediately after the lunchtime suspension today. I propose, therefore, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until 2.00 pm. The first item of business when we return will be Question Time and, thereafter, Mickey Brady will resume his contribution to the debate.

The debate stood suspended.

The sitting was suspended at 12.29 pm.

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

2.00 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Agriculture and Rural Development

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Question 4 has been withdrawn.

Bovine TB

1. **Mr Rogers** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what steps she is taking to further reduce the incidence of bovine tuberculosis in Northern Ireland's cattle herd. *(AQO 7647/11-15)*

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Members will know that my Department takes bovine TB very seriously. We have a robust EU Commission-approved TB eradication programme in place that is based on testing to detect infected cattle, removing infected animals and reducing the risk of disease spread through movement controls and other biosecurity measures. The same disease-control measures are applied to beef and dairy herds.

Every TB breakdown is subject to an epidemiological assessment by a DARD veterinary officer, and specific public and animal health advice is provided. In addition, disease-control measures are instigated to prevent the spread of bovine TB to and from herds. Post-mortem and laboratory test results, including strain-type information, are provided to the farmer during a confirmed TB outbreak, as are biosecurity advice and advisory leaflets.

Widely published research over the years means that the main risk factors for a herd having a TB breakdown are well known. Advice on how farmers can best protect their herd is publicised on the DARD website. However, TB is a complex and multifactorial disease, which means that it is often not possible to determine with a reasonable degree of certainty a single cause of infection for every TB breakdown.

I have made it repeatedly clear that my objective is to progressively reduce the level of TB here, with the ultimate aim of eradicating it from our cattle herds. That is why I commissioned a TB strategic partnership group to prepare an eradication strategy and implementation action plan. The group has commenced its work and recently obtained initial consultation input from industry representative organisations and interested individuals. I look forward to the group's interim report, which will be presented in June 2015.

Mr Rogers: Thank you, Minister. Will you outline how the test and vaccinate or remove (TVR) pilot study, which deals with badgers, that is taking place in parts of County Down is progressing? What results have been gleaned so far from that study? When do you hope there will be a radical reduction in the level of bovine TB, like there is in Scotland?

Mrs O'Neill: The first year of the TVR wildlife intervention research project has been successfully completed in the Banbridge area of County Down. Fieldwork is due to commence again in June 2015. Some 280 individual badgers were captured, sampled, microchipped, vaccinated and released, and there were a further 350 recaptures. Those recaptured badgers were released following identification checks.

As the Member is aware, TVR is a research project, rather than a strategy or pilot programme. Findings from the project should be able to provide us with an indication of how effective the TVR approach is and should then inform us on a longer-term strategy.

One aim of the project is to assess the feasibility of the sett side of TB testing captured badgers. Only one test is commercially available at present. Over the next few months, testing of the samples from all the captured badgers will be completed, along with the evaluation of the field data. We need to be reasonably sure that there is nothing significant to prevent the use of the test in year 2 of TVR and beyond. So, there is quite a significant body of work to do.

Alongside that, we have the TB strategic partnership group working to look at every aspect of TB eradication and at how we get to a stage when we drive out the disease. Obviously, we are all keen for that to happen. That is a significant body of work, and, as I said, I look forward to getting that group's interim report in June 2015.

Ms McCorley: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a freagraí. I thank the Minister for her answers. Is she content that the TB strategic group is on track to achieve its aims?

Mrs O'Neill: Yes. The new group has been tasked to act in the public interest to develop a long-term strategy for the eradication of TB in cattle here. As I said in the initial answer, the group is very much engaged at this stage in fact finding. It has received presentations from DARD officials and the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute on TB-related issues. It recently completed a consultation exercise. The group is considering all those responses and is meeting the responders where it feels it is appropriate. As I said, they intend to produce the report to me in June 2015 and to have a final strategy with an accompanying action plan in place by the end of this year. We need to look at lessons that have been learned. One of the lessons that has been learned in New Zealand and Australia is that the eradication strategy works best when the industry is in the lead and where government and industry share responsibilities and costs.

Our relationship with stakeholders is enhanced when there is genuine partnership between the industry and government. The work that we and the strategy group are involved in is vital in getting us into a position where we drive out the disease.

Mr Swann: The Minister said that one of the key factors is removing infected animals from herds. What is she doing to improve the time that the Department takes to remove reactors from farms?

Mrs O'Neill: The Member can write to me about any particular instances if he wants. That is not an issue that has been highlighted to me as a major concern in the industry, but if there are any delays in the Department lifting reactors and the Member wants to talk to me outside Question Time about that, I am very happy to have a discussion with him.

Rural Poverty

2. **Mr McAleer** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how rural communities and dwellers will benefit from an extension to the tackling rural poverty and social isolation framework. *(AQO 7648/11-15)*

Mrs O'Neill: I remain firmly committed to tackling issues of rural poverty and isolation, and I am delighted to have extended the tackling rural poverty and social isolation (TRPSI) programme into the 2015-16 Budget year, with an associated extension to the Programme for Government target of £4 million.

Plans are well developed to continue to assist rural transport, access to rural transport and associated health issues; to maximise access to benefits and services; to support rural community development; to support youth employment and entrepreneurship; to assist in tackling fuel poverty; and to assist on broadband issues. In addition, officials are looking at options for support to help community and voluntary groups to provide much-needed resources for their communities.

There is much focus on ensuring that all tackling rural poverty and social isolation funding is targeted at making life better for rural dwellers who are living in isolated and deprived areas and at building on the great achievements in the past number of years.

Mr McAleer: Go raibh maith agat. I thank the Minister for her answer. Can she provide details of any new initiatives that the TRPSI programme may offer in 2015-16? Go raibh maith agat.

Mrs O'Neill: The work to date and the premise around all tackling poverty work has been on three key areas: access, financial poverty and social isolation. All the initiatives that we have taken forward have been very effective in meeting the aims and targeting those key areas.

The Member is very aware of the assisted rural travel scheme, which we intend to do more of in the next year. The rural support charity provides a listening ear for farmers and rural families, and I want to support its work. On rural community development work, the networks on the ground do fantastic work to empower and lift the skills range in rural communities and rural community groups to access funding. The rural youth entrepreneurship programme helps unemployed rural young people to develop their skills and to get into new areas of work.

Alongside all that work, and other things that I have not mentioned, are some of the new initiatives that we are looking towards, particularly around the availability of transportation vehicles for rural community and voluntary groups. I have asked officials to bring together something like that, and that is something that I am keen to roll out next year. When I am out and about talking to community groups, that is something that is often requested.

Other areas that we are scoping include making a small capital grants scheme available to community and voluntary groups to allow them to purchase smaller capital items that they may require. So, we are working all that up, and I intend to roll-out a scheme of that nature in 2015-16.

I am also very keen that we work with other Departments. I have asked officials to liaise with other Departments on how we can work collectively, particularly to build on the good work that we have completed in the past with DCAL on the Health in Mind project and to address fuel poverty. We have a great opportunity with the money that I have prioritised for those initiatives to make a real difference in rural communities.

Mr McCarthy: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. How does the Minister think the proposed cuts in rural transport will affect — indeed, improve — social inclusion? Is the Minister in dialogue with Translink to overcome those problems?

Mrs O'Neill: I am not in direct dialogue with Translink, but I can assure the Member that, in the next financial year, I will continue to fund the work that I am involved in on rural transport in conjunction with DRD. I have made that clear. My officials are talking with the DRD officials about what their budget input is going to be, but I can certainly give an assurance that I am committed to making sure that I take forward the assisted rural travel scheme. That is the joint initiative that we have with DRD.

The other thing that will be very important in the future is that I am about to bring rural proofing legislation to the Floor of the House. I think that all Departments need to be mindful of rural communities when they are taking decisions on budgets. That legislation, on which I hope to have a good conversation with all Members of the House over the next wee while, is going to be necessary, particularly given the financial climate that we are in, if we are serious about making sure that there is equality for rural people and rural dwellers when it comes to making budget decisions and policy decisions for Departments.

Mr A Maginness: I thank the Minister for her detailed responses, particularly in relation to social isolation. Can she quantify the rural development programme moneys that will be specifically targeted at rural isolation and, indeed, combating rural poverty?

Mrs O'Neill: Yes, under the current Programme for Government in the current CSR period, we set out £16 million, and I have set aside £4 million for the further year that we are going to have in the CSR period. That may not, in the scale of things, sound like a significant pot of money, but it has acted as leverage funding, and we have been able to work in partnership with other Departments. I think that we have leveraged in, maybe, an additional £11 million on top of that, so there is significant investment across quite a range of issues, on everything from fuel poverty to employability for young people, to the small capital grants scheme. All the work that we are involved in is very valuable.

Mr Buchanan: One of the difficulties in some isolated rural areas is still access to broadband. How do you see this addressing that issue in areas where there is still a black spot as far as broadband is concerned?

Mrs O'Neill: I absolutely agree with the Member that broadband is a big bugbear of people in rural communities who find themselves with no access to it. It is obviously the responsibility of DETI to take forward broadband, but I feel that my Department has a role to play in trying to plug the gaps for people in rural areas who do not have a connection or who may have a connection but the speed is not worth having. I set aside funding during the last and current CSR, and I have set aside funding again under the new rural development programme.

There is a small pot of money so that we will be able to look at bespoke arrangements for small villages and small pockets of population. The Member will know well that the big providers do not go into rural areas where there may be 10 houses spread out over quite an area. I feel that it is my responsibility to try to work with DETI to try to bridge the gaps that are there. As I said, we have set out funding under the rural development programme. We have also set aside funding where we are working with DETI. We have looked at all the postcode areas that do not have a connection, and I have used deprivation stats to prioritise the areas that we touch on first. I can certainly give an assurance that I am going to do all that I can to target and plug the gaps in broadband provision.

Pig Processing: Price-fixing

3. **Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she is aware of any evidence of price-fixing in the pig processing sector. *(AQO 7649/11-15)*

Mrs O'Neill: While the price paid to producers and pricing structures in the pig processing sector are commercial matters outside of my Department's remit, I believe that all elements, the supply chain, producer and processor alike, should work together to ensure that the pig sector in the North remains profitable and sustainable.

I am not aware of any evidence of price-fixing in the pig processing sector, but if my Department was to discover or be presented with any evidence of such activity, the matter would be immediately referred to the Competition and Markets Authority for investigation, particularly in relation to any allegations of anti-competitive activity.

My Department will continue to do all that it can to improve efficiency and competitiveness, build resilience in the pig sector and help to develop new opportunities and grow markets across the EU and beyond, especially in the Far East. I recently met local pork processors to discuss access to new trade markets, including China and Australia. My officials are working to secure access to those markets, which would hopefully mean greater returns for the pig sector. My Department is hoping to host the inspections necessary to secure approval to export to those countries in the first half of this year.

Mr Allister: The Minister will be aware of the great concern among pig producers as to the huge disparity that arises between the price paid in Northern Ireland and the price paid in GB. A differential of 4p or 5p per kilo might be understandable, given the transport costs, but, when it reaches something of the order of 18p, there has to be another explanation.

The processors themselves have been far from transparent about it. What does the Minister think that the explanation is, if it is not suppression of the price for mutual benefit among processors?

2.15 pm

Mrs O'Neill: I absolutely agree. I agree with the industry about the differential. I do not think that the differential is acceptable. I do not think that it is explainable by the difference in the transport cost when you weigh it up. I know that the Agriculture Committee recently had a

presentation in which this was very much explored. Transport costs are being used as an explanation, but I do not really believe that they are reflective of the actual costs that would cause the differential.

For me, it is about trying to explore the new markets. That creates more demand, which should, in turn, create an increase in price. That is very much where I feel that my role is in being able to help and assist the industry to grow. We are very much looking forward to a visit from the Chinese inspectors before the end of March and the Australian authorities before the end of June. These are all areas where I can make a difference and can be effective in helping the industry.

Suffice to say that farmers deserve a fair price for what they produce. That goes for the pig sector or any other sector out there, and we have always said that. When the Enterprise, Trade and Investment Minister and I met the new Going for Growth group when it came into place, we made it very clear that we must have fairness across the supply chain. We can have all the wonderful plans that we want, but they will not be effective if we do not help to sustain the farmers going forward.

What can we and my Department do? It is about exploring new markets. It is about working with the sector. It is about helping them with efficiency. It is about providing grant aid to help them with all those aspects. If there is any evidence that identifies any sort of price-fixing, we need to get involved and, as I said, report that to the Competition and Markets Authority.

Mr Byrne: The Minister has talked about trying to extend to markets beyond the EU. When can the Minister hope to get an export licence via London to make sure that pork and other products can be exported from Northern Ireland? Will she be raising this issue with Commissioner Phil Hogan when he visits Northern Ireland at the end of March? He is due to meet the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee that day for a meeting and lunch, and we hope to press him on a number of issues.

Mrs O'Neill: Yes, I am very happy to raise the issue with Commissioner Hogan when he comes on 24 March. I will also be meeting him before the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee, and we will have a number of engagements throughout his visit here that day.

In terms of securing our licences, it is DARD's remit to make sure that we have everything in place for the export certificates. It is about working with the industry to make sure that it will meet the targets in the inspections of visiting officials from the different markets that we are targeting. Australia and China are particularly big markets for the pig sector at this time. I will be doing all that I can, including potentially visiting China for some political discussions on how we can make sure that we secure access into that market.

Mrs Dobson: Fairness in pricing is absolutely essential to the agricultural industry, yet the Minister has done little but express platitudes in her four years in office. In the event of price-fixing, even if it is commercial, what powers or actions can the Minister take in addition to expressing concern?

Mrs O'Neill: I have referred to it twice now, but the Competition and Markets Authority is the place that we will go. If the Member has any evidence to suggest that there is price-fixing going on, my door is always open. Bring it to me, and I will take it to the appropriate place that I need to take it. We need to make sure that the industry is supported. I can stand over way more than platitudes. I can stand over what I do to help the sector. I can stand over the work that the Department is doing around looking at efficiency through our College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE) advisers, sustainability, cash flow and all those areas of work.

Outside of that, if we are going to try to guard the industry against the fluctuations in prices, one of the areas that we are going to have to be very serious about being involved with is export growth and the markets that we are targeting. I have referred to the work that we are doing in relation to China, Australia and other markets that the industry identifies as its target markets. There is quite a lot of work going on. I reiterate that, if there is any evidence to suggest that there is any price-fixing going on, please bring it to me. At this time, I have nothing on my desk to suggest that it is.

Mr McMullan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Minister, would you agree with me that all the new trade opportunities for the pork industry that you have mentioned represent the best way forward not only for prices in the market but in installing confidence within the pork industry?

Mrs O'Neill: Yes, absolutely. I held a meeting with the pig industry back in January. They advised that being able to export to Australia and China would enable the processors to pay more for their pigs, due to the returns for these markets. Therefore securing approval to export may mitigate the impact of other market forces, however it would obviously still be a commercial issue between the processor and the producer.

It comes back to fairness in the supply chain and making sure we have markets that we are able to sell into. I am hopeful that, in the time ahead, we will be able to open up these new markets, which will be a lifeline to the pig industry and the other markets we are targeting for beef, dairy and all the other sectors.

Rural White Paper Action Plan

5. **Mr Sheehan** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on the rural White Paper action plan. *(AQO 7651/11-15)*

Mrs O'Neill: The second annual progress report on the rural White Paper action plan was published on the DARD website in December 2014. It provides details of the progress made by Departments in implementing their commitments in the action plan during the period from the launch of the initiative in June 2012 up until 30 June 2014. The report indicates that Departments continue to make good progress in implementing their commitments, with most on track to be achieved in the time frame specified. I see the rural White Paper action plan very much as a live initiative that continues to respond to the needs of rural dwellers. I have therefore asked my Executive colleagues to identify new and challenging actions to be included in a refreshed action plan, which I hope to finalise during 2015.

With budgets now set for 2015-16, my officials are engaging with members of the interdepartmental committee on rural policy to encourage Departments to identify new

actions that will make a meaningful contribution to the quality of life of our rural communities. I am pleased with the progress made by Departments in implementing the commitments in the current action plan, and I will continue to work with my Executive colleagues to ensure that this important rural initiative continues to deliver real and positive benefits for those living in our rural areas.

Mr Sheehan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht a freagra. Can the Minister detail the policy objectives of the new rural proofing Bill?

Mrs O'Neill: The proposed Bill will support the equitable treatment of rural dwellers by requiring that their needs and the impact on rural communities be appropriately addressed in the development and delivery of policy and public services. The Executive signed up to rural proofing back in 2002, and I want to strengthen that commitment by making sure that rural issues are an integral part of the development of government policy on public services and that consideration of the needs of rural dwellers is firmly embedded across government. The Bill proposes to introduce a duty on all Departments and local councils to consider the needs of people living in rural areas when they develop strategies, policies and plans. That will place the Executive's existing commitment to undertake rural proofing on a statutory footing.

The policy objectives of the proposed Bill require the effective implementation of rural proofing across government; the establishment of DARD's role in promoting and encouraging rural proofing across government and providing advice and guidance, where necessary; making information and data on rural proofing available in a transparent way in a report that will be laid before the Assembly; and the putting in place of effective arrangements for cooperation between public authorities and sharing best practice.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Mo bhuíochas leis an Aire as a freagraí go dtí seo. I thank the Minister for her answers so far. The Minister referred briefly to putting rural proofing on a statutory footing. Could I ask the Minister what she has in mind by that and how would she suggest mainstreaming that across all the other Departments that have a meaningful and significant impact on rural dwellers?

Mrs O'Neill: The Bill sets out very clearly what we are trying to achieve. The objectives, to which I have just referred, are really about putting on a statutory footing the need for rural proofing to happen during the development of policies, plans and strategies, whether that be in government Departments or, indeed, councils, where it is also important that it happens.

While there is a commitment across government Departments to rural-proof — my Department is involved in training policy people across all Departments — it is important that there is a statutory obligation on all Departments and a mechanism whereby all Departments have to lay before the Assembly for scrutiny and discussion what they have done to make sure that they protect the rights of rural dwellers. We have a real opportunity here to put in place really effective arrangements that will make a real difference to the lives of rural dwellers. It will also be an opportunity to enhance the effectiveness of cooperation across government Departments and councils.

Mr Cree: Does the Minister accept that the current annual reporting system is really a waste of time? Instead of simply asking each Department what it has done during the year, would it not be better to give Departments targets or key performance indicators that they can be measured against?

Mrs O'Neill: The Bill will be an opportunity to build on and improve what is there. What is there is a starting point; it was, I suppose, an attempt by the Executive at the time to bring rural proofing onto the stage for Departments. I am trying to make sure that it is more effective. The draft legislation that we have set out will include an obligation on Departments to lay reports that will be open to scrutiny. All Members will have an opportunity to look at those. This is necessary work, and I look forward to it being debated.

We are out consulting rural communities and rural dwellers. I encourage everybody to take part in that, particularly all elected Members, and to voice your support for the Bill going forward. I look forward, as I said, to the discussions that we will have in the House.

Fisheries Fund: South-east Area

6. **Miss M McIlveen** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what proportion of the south-east area European Fisheries Fund moneys have been distributed, or are allocated for distribution, to each of the commercial fishing communities. *(AQO 7652/11-15)*

Mrs O'Neill: To date, £1·255 million south-east area European Fisheries Fund (EFF) funding has been allocated to projects in the Kilkeel area, £0·102 million to Ardglass-based projects and £0·186 million to Portavogie. A further £0·533 million has been awarded to projects that span all three target areas, with benefits shared across all three villages.

Miss M McIlveen: My supplementary question concerns the reported situation in Portavogie, where the council has accepted a letter of offer from the South-east Area Fisheries Local Action Group (SEA-FLAG) for a 3G pitch after a lengthy and robust six-month process, including obtaining planning permission and a thorough consultation, only to be told that the offer has been withdrawn. Meanwhile, DARD officials have informed the local press that the offer might not be withdrawn but would instead be subject to an economic appraisal. Will the Minister please provide an explanation of why so many conflicting messages are being sent out and assure the people of Portavogie that they will not be short-changed in the distribution of these moneys at the expense of perhaps more politically favourable projects in south Down?

Mrs O'Neill: The Member will be very aware of how the decisions are made. I will try to make it very clear for you: it is not about favouring any project; it is about making sure that we have gone through all the concerns, objections and issues that have been raised.

I will try to make this very clear and succinct. SEA-FLAG has received an application from Ards leisure centre seeking EFF funding of £302,171 for a synthetic football pitch in Portavogie. That application was presented to my Department for approval, following a recommendation by SEA-FLAG. However, in assessing the project, concerns

have been raised about how the project meets the objectives of the funding programme, the timescales to complete the project and the benefits for the community. Those are three key issues that we need to overcome. If we are able to do that, I do not have or foresee a problem with the Department allowing the recommendation to go further.

The Department has recommended that, before any offer of grant is made, a full independent economic appraisal is required to examine critically the need for the project, the full range of options available to address that need and the preferred options that offer the best value for money. If the project benefits the local community and stands up to the scrutiny of the economic appraisal, I do not foresee a problem. For clarity, I hope that that sets out exactly the issues that we are trying to work through. The Member will also be very aware that I am keen to make sure that we spend every available penny in these communities. I am very keen to do that, so there is absolutely no barrier from DARD's point of view in trying to get that project spend on the ground.

Mrs McKevitt: On the distribution of the European Fisheries Fund moneys, will the Minister give us an idea of what onshore job creation there has been in Kilkeel and Ardglass through that much welcomed investment?

Mrs O'Neill: The investment was much welcomed. I do not have the stats with me on job creation, but the Member will be aware of some of the really worthwhile projects that have been brought forward under EFF funding. Obviously, that pot of money is now closed, but we look forward to the new pot of funding and all the opportunities that there will be for the industry and the local community that surrounds the fishing villages. I am happy to provide the Member with the job creation figures in writing.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): That ends the period for listed questions. We will now move on to topical questions.

2.30 pm

DARD HQ: Ballykelly Costs

T1. **Mr Nesbitt** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to refresh the House's memory about the projected costs of moving her Department's headquarters to Ballykelly. *(AQT 2161/11-15)*

Mrs O'Neill: I do not have the exact figures, but they are around £30 million of resource and £12 million of capital. Needless to say, it has all been well costed and clearly set out in the business case.

It will be a fantastic project for the north-west. I was in Ballykelly in the last number of weeks, and I met community groups and elected representatives who are keen to see the project on the ground. It is a big opportunity for the Executive to show their commitment to rural areas and to decentralising public-sector jobs.

The Member will be aware that I have set out not just the move to Ballykelly but for fisheries division to south Down, Forest Service to Fermanagh and Rivers Agency to Loughry. For me, this is clearly a win for those rural communities and for people who work in the public service and want to find opportunities outside the greater Belfast area. The economic benefits of the move are set out very clearly and stand up for themselves. As I have set out clearly in the past, we are on target to deliver it.

Mr Nesbitt: I thank the Minister for that answer. On the point about decentralisation, she will be aware that Coleraine has vacant government buildings. Why has she not considered those as a viable alternative?

Mrs O'Neill: The Coleraine issue arose after the fact and after decisions had been taken about the move. I have said many times in the House and I can provide it to the Member in writing, if he needs that reassurance, that we very clearly set out all the available areas that we could look at. The north-west was identified on the basis of objective criteria. It was also prudent, in that there was Executive-owned land there that we could utilise. Again, I will clearly set out the benefits of moving to the north-west: it will be a fantastic opportunity for investment in the north-west, for decentralising public sector jobs and for giving rural people an opportunity to avail themselves of public-sector jobs without having to travel to the greater Belfast area.

Single Farm Payment: Information for Farmers

T2. **Mr I McCrea** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she is content with the information that her Department has given to farmers about the new single farm payment arrangements that are being implemented this year. *(AQT 2162/11-15)*

Mrs O'Neill: It is certainly a time of big change for all farmers, given that we are going through the CAP reforms. We are working hard to provide all that information through a number of avenues, including DARD Direct offices and our website, on which we have put out a lot of information. Throughout the process, as we have received more information, we have put it out there for farmers.

A lot of queries are coming in, which we expected, particularly as we move into the 2015 single application form process for May. I encourage more farmers to go online. There are significant advantages for them and the Department in more people doing that. We are endeavouring to put as much information out there as possible, but, if the Member has picked up on something that we can improve or some means of getting more information out there, we would be happy to utilise that.

Mr I McCrea: A large number of farmers are losing their conacre land due to landowners starting to farm their land. Will the Minister issue clear guidance to give clarity on what conditions need to be met for a single farm payment to be claimed?

Mrs O'Neill: I forgot to mention that the Department is holding roadshows, which are also about trying to get the information out there. I have taken part in a number of roadshows, and the number of people coming to those shows that you are right: there is a demand for information.

One issue that continually comes up is that there may be a lack of conacre land because landowners feel that they will be able to make more money from holding on to their land. I encourage landowners to think carefully about that. I do not think that it will be as lucrative as people think, particularly as we move to a flat rate over the years. There is an online calculator on the DARD website that I encourage people to use. It will clearly show individuals what it will mean for them and the support that they might expect.

My other warning is to landowners who might try to cheat the system. This is about active farmers, and we need the money to go to active farmers. That is what the reform is about, and I am very wedded to that. Checks will be carried out to make sure that people are indeed active farmers. We are in a bit of a difficult situation, in that all of us would like to have seen Europe go further with the definition of "active farmer". However, that has not been the case. Therefore, we have to work within what we have, but we are endeavouring to get as much information as possible out to all farmers.

Single Farm Payments: Administrative System

T3. **Mr D McIlveen** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she believes that the system for administering single farm payments is much better today than it has been in previous years. *(AQT 2163/11-15)*

Mrs O'Neill: Yes, I do. You can clearly see that from the improvements that we have made year on year in our targets for making single farm payments. In 2014, we exceeded the target. I want to continue to build on that. We have done so over the past number of years, and that is something that I am very committed to, particularly given all the issues that face the farming sector. Cash flow is a major issue, so getting farmers their single farm payment on time is key. I am content that we have made vast improvements and will continue to do so.

Mr D McIlveen: I thank the Minister for her answer. In the knowledge that the system that we have at the minute is an evolving system and, as the Minister rightly said, one in which improvements have had to be made, does she believe that, where decisions have been taken erroneously by the Department or where the Department has made mistakes in calculations in what was clearly an imperfect system, it is right that farmers — not those who, to use her words, "try to cheat the system" but those who were genuine and made no mistakes — continue to be pursued for the outstanding amounts?

Mrs O'Neill: The Member will be aware that we have an appeal process in place. That is there to protect the farmer, and it is a vital service alongside the Department administering single farm payments.

Yes, you are right. I understand the frustration that anybody would feel, particularly if there has been a Department error, but, if farmers feel that they have not had a fair outcome from an inspection or have concerns about how they are being treated by the Department, I encourage them to avail themselves of the appeal process.

Beef Products: USA Market

T4. **Mr Attwood** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on where we are and Britain is in accessing the American market for the sale of beef products, given that she will be aware of Minister Simon Coveney's recent visit to America, which, in substantial part, was to promote the sale of Irish beef, now that that is available. *(AQT 2164/11-15)*

Mrs O'Neill: It is an ongoing discussion that I have with Simon Coveney. We are meeting again on Wednesday at the North/South Ministerial Council, so that will be a standing item for discussion. We have a very effective group in place comprising DARD and the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) in the Twenty-six Counties. That group comes together to work, particularly on trade. Obviously, new markets have opened up for the Twenty-six Counties, and we want to get in on some of that. Work is ongoing to allow us to follow suit and to have access to those markets.

Mr Attwood: I thank the Minister for her answer so far, but, to be more specific, where are we with export licences for relevant products for America? It is one thing to work with Simon Coveney, which is very welcome, but, if we are not able to access the same markets for some of the same products, it is hard to work with somebody in those circumstances.

Mrs O'Neill: It all comes down to export certificates. The Member knows well that, in negotiations that we have with other countries, no matter what other market we are targeting, we have to work with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) in England. We have a strong relationship with DEFRA when it comes to trying to get into those markets. We are working with it at the minute on trying to open out the Chinese market. As I said, we will have inspectors here before the end of March, and I know that they are visiting some factories in England. I am very much taking a two-pronged approach. I am working with DEFRA on trying to get access to markets, but I am also working with DAFM in the South to make sure that there are opportunities for the local industry to export and be part of the export certificates that it is able to achieve. That is something that is so beneficial for the local industry.

Rural Development Programme: Section 25 Analysis

T5. **Mrs Dobson** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she is satisfied with the findings of the section 25 analysis of the Northern Ireland rural development programme for 2007-2013, particularly the ratio of Protestant and Catholic beneficiaries. *(AQT 2165/11-15)*

Mrs O'Neill: I do not know whether the Member is trying to point to there being discrimination in the rural development programme in relation to Protestant and Catholic beneficiaries, but that is certainly not the case. All projects are considered on merit. Your party colleagues sit on groups that distribute the funding, so, if there are any questions about how decisions are taken, I would be happy to hear from you about any issues that you have about discrimination. For me, the rural community is not about targeting Catholics or Protestants or about nationalism or unionism; it is about rural communities and supporting the people in rural communities. No matter what element or what projects come forward, there is an onus on the rural development programme to support all people in those rural communities.

Mrs Dobson: I thank the Minister for her answer. Does she accept that there was much room for improvement in the last programme? How will she ensure that the new rural development programme will have increased access for the PUL community?

Mrs O'Neill: We have a very strong stakeholder group in place for the current programme, and we will be putting our new stakeholder group in place. The group very much

oversees and analyses the rural development programme, including, I am sure, any concerns about any community not having access to funding. The Member will be aware that we had in place a targeted area of work that helped the PUL community build capacity around achieving funding. She will also be very aware that we did a lot of work with faith-based groups and encouraged them to look towards funding not just from the rural development programme but EU funding and all other avenues. There is a significant body of work ongoing, and I am sure that it will continue into the new programme.

Paramyxovirus: Pigeon Vaccines

T6. **Mr Swann** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether, given the paramyxovirus problem in our homing pigeon fraternity, of which she will be well aware, she knows of any restrictions on individual breeders importing vaccines. *(AQT 2166/11-15)*

Mrs O'Neill: There has been no change in the legislation relating to breeders importing vaccines. I think that the legislation has been there since 2005, so there has been no change recently. The vaccine is bought in from England through one of three areas: the veterinary service, wholesale pharmaceutical suppliers and another area that I cannot recall — I will get the Member the details. However, if he has any concerns, I am happy for him to talk to officials about any potential issue that he has picked up.

Mr Swann: I thank the Minister for clarifying that there may be a third issue. I think that it was possibly regarding homing pigeon societies and clubs and the facility being opened out for them to import the vaccine themselves.

Mrs O'Neill: Yes, I have just found a note. The pharmacist can import it, the vet can import it and the wholesale dealer or agricultural merchant can import it. The pigeon does not have to be medically examined by any of those people. However, there are some protocols in place, and maybe that is what the Member refers to. I will get officials to contact you to have further discussion.

Animal Cruelty Legislation: Implementation Review Update

T7. **Mr Lyttle** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on the review of the implementation of animal cruelty legislation. *(AQT 2167/11-15)*

Mrs O'Neill: I have an interim report on my desk, and I will discuss it with officials in the coming days. I then hope to report to Members.

Mr Lyttle: I thank the Minister for her response and look forward to hearing the interim findings on that important report. In addition to the wider review, will the Minister join me in condemning the concerning accounts that we have received of brutal cat poisoning in the Dundonald area of east Belfast and take the opportunity to advise members of the public how best to respond and seek action against that type of crime?

Mrs O'Neill: Yes, absolutely. I concur with you in condemning all acts of animal cruelty. The horrific case that we have witnessed has been a hot topic in the media over the last number of days. Thankfully, that case has gone through the courts and been dealt with, and I welcome the outcome. I commend the DARD staff for the work that they have done in seeking that prosecution and taking that case to court.

People should look towards the DARD website to see how to report animal cruelty, and they should look towards our DARD Direct offices to get support. If they have any issues at all, they should come forward and let our vets get involved and investigate properly.

Culture, Arts and Leisure

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Questions 1 and 5 have been withdrawn.

2.45 pm

Windsor Park: Wheelchair Access

2. **Mr Frew** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline the discussions she has had with the Minister for Regional Development to ensure that people using wheelchairs will be able to access and exit Windsor Park via Adelaide Street railway station. *(AQO 7663/11-15)*

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): I thank the Member for his question. I understand that the IFA has met the Regional Development Minister on a couple of occasions regarding the creation of a pedestrian link between the Adelaide Halt train station and the stadium. A planning application has also been submitted by the IFA for the creation of a pedestrian link from Apollo Road to the stadium on behalf of DRD and Translink.

The planned pedestrian link between Apollo Road and the stadium will be fully accessible by all and will provide improved links between the redeveloped stadium and Apollo Road. It is envisaged that it will be operational for the completion of the stadia works.

Mr Frew: I thank the Minister for her answer on what is a very important issue to people who do not have the accessibility that we enjoy. There is an issue for Adelaide Street station because of the two tracks and getting from one side of the station to the other. At the minute, there is only a footbridge. That had a massive bearing at a recent cup final that Ballymena United managed to get to. A number of wheelchair-bound people found it very difficult to get from one side of the track to the other to go home. Does the Minister have any thoughts on how we can fix that problem?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I congratulate Ballymena United on getting to Windsor Park. I can see that the Member is quite chuffed with that and, hopefully, it will not be the team's last time there.

Disability access is key to all facilities in my Department and I know, through the sponsored work programmes with the IFA, Ulster Rugby and the Ulster Council of the GAA, that disability access is key to their plans. It is actually key to the planning application.

I am led to believe, and I have no reason to doubt it, that disability access, not just for one wheelchair but several, will be realised in the design of the bridge at Adelaide Halt train station and to the stadium and the Olympia Leisure Centre which is in the vicinity as well. It is important that

we have full disability access — not just some access but full access — for people. We are trying to encourage people of all abilities to use our facilities and we cannot miss this opportunity with this development.

Mr Ó Muilleoir: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle, agus buíochas fosta leis an Aire. Ba mhaith liom ceist a chur faoin tSólann Olympia. It is great to see the Windsor Park development making steady progress, and the other piece of that jigsaw, as you mentioned, Minister, is the Olympia Leisure Centre. Will you spell out your Department's involvement in that development?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question. The Department has been working very closely with Belfast City Council and the IFA, particularly looking at the opportunity to develop the Olympia Leisure Centre in conjunction with the redevelopment of Windsor Park. As the Member may be aware, the IFA received £31 million for the Windsor Park project, which involves a significant upgrade to bring it from a capacity of 14,000 to 18,000.

The project, therefore, seemed to have an opportunity, at the very early stages, to work in conjunction with Belfast City Council to develop community facilities which will be located within the east stand of the new Olympia Leisure Centre, attached to the rear west stand of Windsor Park. This is an exciting partnership between my Department, Belfast City Council and the IFA. As the Member may be aware, the Olympia Leisure Centre project contains an investment of £2,750,000 from DCAL, in partnership with Belfast City Council's £19 million contribution, to ensure that, when we have the opportunities that we have in south Belfast, we use them. I think it is money well spent.

Mr McKinney: I thank the Minister for her answers thus far. Is she in discussion with other Departments to open up access in other ways, particularly in other elements of public transport, to ensure maximum access and to link stadia to town centres?

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Member will be aware that as part of the redevelopment of Casement Park one of the issues flagged up as being problematic in the judicial review — apart from everything else that happened — was around traffic management. So, it is crucial that, in conjunction with providers such as Translink, the taxi association, private companies, and cycling as well, we improve access and provide for a better flow of traffic as a part of any new planning application that goes in. Discussions are under way with Translink and private firms about pedestrianisation, park-and-rides, making sure that there is better access to the stadia and that there is better signposting when that happens. I imagine that that will all be part of any new application that the Ulster Council of the GAA puts in.

This one for Windsor Park was included in its planning application, and, with the add-on of the Olympia Leisure Centre in south Belfast, signage will also need to be upgraded and updated.

Irish Language/Ulster Scots: Funding

3. **Mr Dunne** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what action she plans to take to address the funding inequality between the Irish language and Ulster Scots, which is at a ratio of approximately 10:1. *(AQO 7664/11-15)*

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question. The ratio of funding for Irish and Ulster Scots from my Department has been, on average, 3:1 respectively. That is reflected in funding that my Department and its arm's-length bodies have provided to programmes and projects dedicated to Irish and Ulster Scots. The Executive remain wholly committed to affording equal respect and recognition to Irish and Ulster Scots, and the funding provided to each reflects their different stages of development and ranges of programmes, projects and supported organisations. Such funding is determined on the basis of approved actions in their respective business plans. I have made it clear on several occasions in the past that I will consider and give my full support to any initiatives that the Ulster-Scots community brings forward that will help community infrastructures. That remains my position.

Mr Dunne: I thank the Minister for her answer. Does she recognise her failure to comply with her own policies in her equality scheme, which states that DCAL:

> *"seeks to eliminate any inequalities which exist in the areas of its operations."?*

What is the Minister doing to address the inequalities that exist between the promotion of the Irish language and Ulster Scots?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I find it a constant source of frustration that the Member and other Members on the Benches opposite make allegations that are particularly about my responsibility for creating inequalities. The Member has yet to write a letter and has yet to knock my door to ask for meetings with me or my officials. If this issue is of such concern to him, let me say that he has done very little between one Question Time and another. If I felt that there was inequality towards my community, I would take action to ensure that that was addressed, so I suggest that the Member is just using Question Time —

Mr Dunne: It is for you to address it.

Ms Ní Chuilín: — to score political points, and there certainly is no —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Order, please. The Minister will resume her seat. I take it very seriously, especially when a Minister is answering a particular Member, when that Member insists on shouting from a sedentary position. It had better not happen again.

Carry on, Minister.

Ms Ní Chuilín: Thank you.

Mr Cree: I also thank the Minister for her response. Minister, you had a very high-profile launch of the consultation on the Irish language Act in the Senate recently. Can you share with us some of the early responses to and the likely cost of that launch?

Ms Ní Chuilín: The launch happened this day fortnight ago, and it probably cost £100 or £200 or whatever the cost of transport and of hiring out here, which is minimal, to be fair.

On the early stages of the response, I can tell the Member that I intend to talk with as many people as possible, and I look forward to talking to him and other Members about their views on the consultation on the Irish language Act. Needless to say, I have been encouraged, albeit that it is 14 days later, that many people from civic society are

coming forward with their own views, and even though they do not necessarily understand the need for an Irish language Act, they have expressed that in a very respectful way. I am pleased that that has set the tone, and, hopefully, it will set the tone for the remainder of the consultation.

Mr Sheehan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle, agus mo bhuíochas leis an Aire as ucht a freagra. How much funding has been spent on the Ulster-Scots ministerial advisory group and the Ulster-Scots Agency since 2011?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question. I may need to write back to him with specific details. In the last completed tax year, the total amount of money spent on Ulster-Scots initiatives has been probably around £4,357,350. I need to break it down into the money spent on the Ulster-Scots Agency and on the ministerial advisory group for the Ulster-Scots Academy (MAGUS), and I know that there have been other initiatives. Over £2 million has been spent on the agency, and over £1 million has been spent on the MAGUS. I know that the Arts Council, libraries and NI Screen, through the Ulster-Scots Broadcast Fund, have also spent money. I will happily write to the Member with specific details of all spending on Ulster Scots, but, as the Member can see, it is certainly significant.

Culture: Rural Communities

4. **Ms Fearon** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how her departmental arm's-length bodies will ensure that there is improved provision of and access to their services in rural communities. *(AQO 7665/11-15)*

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for her question. The Arts Council's five-year plan aims to increase the proportion of arts activities in rural areas by creating greater opportunities for marginalised rural communities to engage in the arts. That includes the development of a draft community arts strategy, which includes a commitment to working with rural stakeholders to promote greater access to, and take-up of, funding programmes. The activities of NI Screen, creative learning centres, after-school clubs, digital film archives and the work of the exhibition sector have given priority to disadvantaged and marginalised groups, particularly in rural areas.

Sport NI works closely with district councils through the Chief Leisure Officers Association and sports governing bodies to deliver sports and leisure opportunities for all communities, including those based in rural areas. As the Member will be aware, libraries have a statutory duty to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service, including to communities in rural constituencies. Libraries NI and DARD have entered into a memorandum of understanding to encourage cooperation and to work and support each other's customers and clients in rural areas through the provision of high-speed broadband in the 28 rural libraries and information on well-being and support programmes.

Ms Fearon: Go raibh maith agat a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her answer. Will the Minister outline how young people in rural communities can benefit from creative learning centres (CLCs)?

Ms Ní Chuilín: As I said in my primary response, NI Screen has worked in partnership with three creative learning centres. One, in the Nerve Centre in Derry city, works throughout the north-west, including in rural areas. The second is the Southern Education and Library Board's AmmA centre in Armagh. The CLCs' activity gives priority to young people, particularly those living in poverty in disadvantaged and marginalised areas.

At the heart of the creative learning centres is work on alternative education programmes, which target areas of disadvantage in each community. The creative learning centres received additional funding to extend programme activities, particularly in hard-to-reach rural areas that were previously not covered. That was achieved by the creative learning centres actively pursuing areas of social exclusion and deprivation. So, the creative learning centres deliver programmes for schoolchildren and young people, specialising in the use of new and creative digital technologies.

Mrs McKevitt: Will the Minister assure the House that the proposed savings plan delivery for the Department's budget spend for 2015-16 will not disproportionately impact on the services of our rural communities?

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Member previously asked me about equality impact assessments. The delivery savings plans are quite detailed because we asked for an overarching equality impact assessment rather than a high-level impact assessment. DCAL has 11 ALBs, and we wanted to make sure that rural communities were not disadvantaged, so when we get the outcome of those, we will be able to compare and contrast. I will happily share those with the Member and with other members of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure. We were keen to ensure that people living in rural communities were not disproportionately disadvantaged or even experienced further disadvantage as a result of Budget cuts to the block grant.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Minister so far. Has the Minister carried out any assessment of the distribution of funding from Sport NI between urban and rural areas?

Ms Ní Chuilín: Not in comparing urban with rural; it is primarily around programmes. In those programmes, it has to be on the basis of need, so it is not a percentage split between urban and rural. The Member may be aware that concerns were raised previously around the fact that rural communities and constituencies were not benefiting from the support of the creative industries innovation fund. As a result of that, I questioned the assertion that that was the case. It was down to the councils in those areas that had to put forward the application.

So, in response to Mrs McKevitt's question, we are looking at spending plans around the Budget. We want to make sure that the budgets that we have are spent by being directed at need, and those needs are in rural as well as urban communities.

3.00 pm

Mr B McCrea: Can the Minister explain why she argued for NI Screen to get an extra £800,000 but did not make the argument for the Arts Council or Sport NI, both of which have reported that this will have detrimental effect on rural provision?

Ms Ní Chuilín: First of all, NI Screen had a deficit of almost £1 million going into the 2011 mandate. The impact of the 11·2% cut on some of the programmes, particularly

for NI Screen in working in hard-to-reach communities, would have been at the level of a 50% cut rather than 11·2%. On the basis that it was always working at a disadvantage in comparison with the other arm's-length bodies, we felt that it was fair to try to bring it up to a level through the bid in January. I made the argument to try to get additional funding and will do so again.

The Arts Council, which received money for the Ulster Orchestra and works very closely with NI Screen, will have an awareness, if not a strong appreciation, of that deficit and what it means to have it slightly closed. It is still running at a disadvantage of a couple of hundred thousand pounds in its budget, and it will, I am sure, make bids in future monitoring rounds, as will the Arts Council, libraries and museums. It is really important that, when the NI Screen programmes were under threat of closure — not limiting resource but closure — we acted decisively. I make no apologies for that.

Irish Passport: Sport Eligibility

6. **Mrs Dobson** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what discussions she has had with the governing bodies of sports that are organised on an all-island basis, to establish how many require an Irish passport as part of their eligibility criteria. *(AQO 7667/11-15)*

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for her question. Sport NI is talking to sports councils in Britain and Ireland about providing guidance for sports governing bodies on their responsibility under the Good Friday Agreement and, in particular, the rights of citizens from the North to choose to hold either an Irish or British passport or both. I am committed to the principle in the Good Friday Agreement to:

> *"recognise the birthright of all the people of Northern Ireland to identify themselves and be accepted as Irish or British, or both, as they may so choose".*

On that basis, I am happy to meet or make representation to any sports governing body that may be operating contrary to the spirit of the agreement and to encourage them to support its principles and review their eligibility criteria.

Mrs Dobson: The Minister has partially answered my supplementary. I was going to ask whether the Minister agrees with me that, if the governing body of any sport were to require an Irish passport as a prerequisite for a team representing the island of Ireland, it would be contrary to the Belfast Agreement, which entitles citizens of Northern Ireland to define themselves as British, Irish or both.

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for her question. As she said, part of my answer has covered some of her concerns. That has been the case. In fairness, the governing bodies and the sports councils here and in Britain all recognise the Good Friday Agreement and are happily working together to try to ensure that they support the athletes as well as possible. The important thing is to make sure that athletes are supported as well as possible. They do not need politics or concerns around citizenship, their identity, their background or their culture to get in the way of their performance.

Mr McAleer: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Could the Minister provide details of any discussions that Sport NI has had with its counterparts in the South and, indeed, in Britain about providing guidance for sports governing bodies?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question. As I said in my primary answer to Mrs Dobson, he will know that the Good Friday Agreement ensures that citizens here can have one or both passports regardless of how they perceive themselves. The governing bodies have acknowledged that. The good thing about it is that the British and Irish sports councils have also accepted that, and the sports councils and governing bodies are working alongside that principle, too.

As a result not just of recent competitions but of the recommendations in the report on boxing, Sport NI is looking at routes and ways to look at representations at Olympic, Paralympic and Commonwealth Games to see if there are any barriers and, if those are identified, to have them removed. I am certainly happy with the way in which the governing body, Sport NI and the British and Irish councils are working to support the athletes.

Mr Humphrey: The Minister will know that the Irish Football Association has a superb programme for the development of youth football. Does the Minister agree with me that the poaching of young players by the Football Association of Ireland is not just wrong, but damaging and detrimental to community relations in Northern Ireland?

Ms Ní Chuilín: No, I do not agree with the Member at all.

Mr Allister: Does the Minister welcome the formation of the Northern Ireland Boxing Federation and its application to Sport NI for recognition as a governing body, and does she agree that it would be an excellent vehicle to enable young boxers from Northern Ireland to fight for their own country?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I have not been informed of any application by Sport NI. I have heard a lot of speculation in the media. Any attempt to break up a sport on the basis of geography, politicking and point scoring is unfortunate for athletes. Boxing has set a very good example for decades, when those from other backgrounds and communities felt it difficult to participate in other sports. Boxing has led the way and led by example, and I think that it is regrettable if boxing goes down this route.

Arts Council: Disability Action Plan

7. **Mr McGlone** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for her assessment of the Arts Council NI's recently published disability action plan 2015-18. *(AQO 7668/11-15)*

Ms Ní Chuilín: All arm's-length bodies have a statutory duty to publish disability action plans and to increase access and participation for people with disabilities. The Arts Council, as a designated public authority, has a statutory duty to publish a disability action plan setting out its commitment to promote positive attitudes towards people with disabilities and encourage participation in all aspects of the arts. As Minister, although I have no official role in approving the plan, I am confident in and welcome the efforts of the Arts Council to increase access and participation opportunities in the arts for people with disabilities.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat as an fhreagra sin, a Aire. Thanks very much indeed, Minister, for that response. Of those appointed to the board of the Arts Council, how many are registered disabled?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I do not have that information to hand, but I am happy to ask for that information and to write to the Member. If the Member has any particular concerns, he can knock on the door of the private office and give me a shout.

Ms Lo: I am very supportive of the plan, but how realistic is its implementation, given the budget cuts the Minister faces and also the fact that Northern Ireland has lower arts funding per head than anywhere else in the UK and Republic of Ireland?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am not suggesting that the Member is saying otherwise, but consideration of equality — disability has equality implications — has to be put first and foremost. You cannot skimp on a project because you cannot afford to have disability access and participation; that is not where we are coming from. The Arts Council will have to ensure, within the budget it received, that all outcomes for section 75 groups are adhered to. In addition to what I have provided to the Arts Council for arts and creativity for people with disabilities, my Department has funded disability programmes for accessing the arts. It is crucial that we ensure that everyone has an opportunity to avail themselves of the programmes and participate where possible.

Ms McCorley: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a freagraí go dtí seo. Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, and I thank the Minister for her answers thus far. An dtig liom fiafraí den Aire cad é an tacaíocht atá ar fáil do dhaoine faoi mhíchumas a bhfuil suim acu páirt a ghlacadh sna healaíona? What support is available for disabled people who are interested in participating in the arts?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for her supplementary. As I said to Ms Lo, it is important that the affordability of disability access, any more than a decreasing budget, is not used to limit access for people with disabilities. The work of the arts and disability equality charter, which was brought to the Arts Council through the disability forum, along with Adapt NI and Open Arts, has been crucial not only in raising awareness but in raising awareness of some of the venues, thus ensuring that there are as many opportunities as possible for participation.

I take this opportunity to commend the work of the Arts and Disability Forum, which is also funded by the Arts Council. It has been an absolute catalyst for empowering people with disabilities who have an interest in the arts. The Arts and Disability Forum is crucial to ensuring that the Arts Council provides opportunities for people with disabilities and that the funding is at the level that it should be at. It is through the work of the Arts and Disability Forum and its lobbying of DCAL and other Departments that it received additional funding. It is very much the advocates, the spokespeople and the representatives of those who want to engage in all sectors of society but particularly the arts and creativity. It is there to make sure that people like me put the funding where it is needed.

Libraries NI

8. **Mr Devenney** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on the plans her Department has in place for Libraries NI. *(AQO 7669/11-15)*

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question. In line with 'Delivering Tomorrow's Libraries', I am determined to provide a library service that, within available resources, is centred on people and relevant to their current needs; is responsive to local communities, particularly those experiencing poverty and social exclusion; is sufficiently flexible in its core activities to reflect new demands; and provides space, stock and expertise to enable people to develop themselves, their families and their communities.

Library services are under considerable pressure due to the annual decreases in the block grant. However, I am working with the libraries board and the chief executive to ensure that no branch libraries will be required to close permanently. Public libraries play an essential role in our communities, especially in socially deprived areas, so they need to be protected as far as possible. The responses that DCAL received following the publication of the consultation on the draft budget last autumn indicated that there was strong public support for our library services.

Mr Devenney: I thank the Minister for her response. Does she agree that libraries across Northern Ireland deliver a much-needed and valued service to our community? Will she give an assurance that there will be no further cuts to hours, which could lead to closures of our libraries?

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Member may be aware that there is a consultation at the minute about the reduction in opening hours. That started on, I think, 18 February, and will end on 17 or 18 April. I encourage the Member and others to feed into that consultation, because consultation responses have been crucial in shaping the future delivery of libraries.

Libraries are very good; they work out their usage in terms of hours, staff and resources. The last consultation was on the draft budget, but previous consultations on library services ensured that they were protected. If a library service goes, particularly in a rural community, it is really difficult, if not impossible, to get it back.

Mrs Overend: I speak for libraries in mid-Ulster, and they certainly do not want to implement restricted hours. Has the Minister agreed with Libraries NI the restricted opening hours that will be implemented as a result of the budget?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I appreciate that the Member may have had her question worked out before I gave the answer to Mr Devenney, but the consultation opened in February and will close in April. I will wait for the Libraries NI response to the outcome of that consultation. It has proposed reductions in hours for each of the libraries based on different bands, but, as part of a robust consultation, that may change, depending on the feedback that the libraries get. The libraries have certainly gone about it in the right way; they have shown that the bands are delivered on the basis mainly of usage but also of hours and membership. They worked it out on that basis, which is a fair and transparent way to do it. The consultation is open, and I encourage the Member and others to feed into it.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): That ends the period for listed questions. We now move on to topical questions.

Sports Pitches: 3G/4G

T1. **Mr Kinahan** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she is aware of any plans from the Irish Football Association or other bodies to replace all community playing surfaces with 3G or 4G pitches. *(AQT 2171/11-15)*

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am aware that every club, regardless of whether it is soccer, rugby, Gaelic or hockey, wants to look at better facilities, and 3G and 4G pitches are on the long list of things that groups need. I am certainly not aware of the IFA per se replacing 3G and 4G pitches at the minute. The Member will be aware of the subregional funding, but that is not about the replacement of pitches but is looking at subregional facilities.

3.15 pm

Mr Kinahan: I thank the Minister for her answer. I raise the issue not so much to ask about the Irish Football Association but because there seems to be a trend towards having 3G and 4G pitches everywhere, with the danger being that we will no longer have any grass facilities for, among others, those who want to play football or rugby on them. Will she use all her influence and, indeed, resources to make sure that we keep enough grass pitches so that we can still compete at the highest level and give people in towns and villages a chance to learn on that surface?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am sympathetic to what the Member says. I recently met cricket representatives who were concerned about grass facilities. I also met representatives of some smaller soccer clubs who have concerns. They had met their local councils, which are under a lot of financial pressure because they have to provide multi-sport facilities, and that is where the 3G and 4G pitches come in. We are still working with the governing bodies through the Sport Matters implementation group. This issue was raised previously, but we will look at it again. It is up to the governing bodies to identify grounds on which they want their sport to be performed. We will try to work in partnership with them, Sport NI and local government, but I hear what the Member is saying.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Mr Paul Givan is not in his place. I call Mr Mickey Brady.

Boxing Investment Strategy

T3. **Mr Brady** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on the boxing investment strategy, particularly in the Newry and Armagh constituency. *(AQT 2173/11-15)*

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question. The boxing investment programme, which came from Sport NI through Lottery funds, has been very successful. The Member will be aware, because I was in the constituency with him and other representatives, that there is not enough money at the moment to meet the demand. However, Sport NI did an exercise with the governing bodies and some of the clubs to get a facilities plan to look at the state of boxing clubs. They will prioritise those with the worst facilities and look at when funding can go to them. That process is under way. I am not sure whether some of the clubs in the Member's constituency will get funding, but I will happily write to him about that.

Mr Brady: I thank the Minister for her answer and ask her to ensure that boxing clubs in my constituency, such as St Brigid's, St John Bosco, Sacred Heart at Cuan Mhuire, and clubs such as the Sean Doran Boxing Club in Keady are not forgotten when it comes to investment. Boxing is a sport that, until relatively recently, was not getting the investment that it so deserves.

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his supplementary, and I agree with his last point. Over decades, boxing has delivered an awful lot to our community. It has given us a great spectacle of sport and produces more medals than any other sport the length and breadth of this island, yet its facilities are not fit for purpose. It is important that we get investment into the boxing clubs and that it is spread throughout communities as much as possible. As I said, I will try to find out about the clubs in his constituency that he mentioned and write to him with any details.

Public Bodies: Disabled People's Representation

T4. **Mr Ramsey** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, following a meeting with the Northwest Forum of People with Disabilities that he attended along with other Members, at which one of the main questions was why so few people with disabilities are appointed to public bodies, to assure the House that she will look at best practice to ensure that public bodies are made up of people with disabilities alongside people who represent those who have disabilities. *(AQT 2174/11-15)*

Ms Ní Chuilín: I will happily take the Member's concern back to my Department so that I can check with all the arm's-length bodies. His colleague Patsy McGlone asked similar questions about the disability action plan and about disability access and participation. I will raise that query and write to the Member.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Mrs Pam Cameron is not in her place. *[Interruption.]* My apologies, Mr Ramsey. You have a supplementary.

Mr Ramsey: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I thank the Minister for her response. For the record, I chair the all-party group on disability, which had a meeting with the Commissioner for Public Appointments, John Keanie, who has expressed deep worry and concern about the lack of appointments of people with disabilities. Would the Minister be favourably disposed to meeting me and representatives of disabled groups?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I would be absolutely delighted to. I was delighted to meet the all-party group on disability action. I also met the Commissioner for Public Appointments to look at gaps in female representation, gender imbalance, disability imbalance, political imbalance where people are coming forward from the Catholic or Protestant community, and ethnic minority imbalance. It is important that we get the best possible balance. I will happily have a meeting with the Member on that.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Mrs Pam Cameron is not in her place.

Art and Artefacts: Storage

T6. **Mr Beggs** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she has any plans to shine a light, by way of permanent or temporary exhibitions, on the many works of art and artefacts that are stored in the bowels of the Ulster Museum, about which concern has been expressed. *(AQT 2176/11-15)*

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for raising that query, because a concern that I have had since I came into the Department is that, year on year, a lot of public money is

being spent on preserving works of art that are in storage. My questions are these: why have they been in storage for so long and why have they remained in storage? I am working with museums, libraries and the Arts Council on bringing exhibitions out to communities and am looking at the practical implications of doing that. If I am picking up the Member correctly, I agree with him that it is a shame that we have collections that are stored away where no one can see them.

Mr Beggs: I thank the Minister for her answer and her support on the issue. Can she advise whether a detailed archive list is available to councils so that they can perhaps identify items of local interest? Local people could see them, and the items would enhance important tourist facilities looked after by the Department of the Environment, such as Carrickfergus Castle.

Ms Ní Chuilín: I know that the inventory of what is stored away and by whom was done quite some time ago. The issue has been raised before, but I will certainly raise it again and look at where we could hold exhibitions. We could bring artwork out to school assembly halls, council buildings and community facilities, and bring school groups, community groups and residents to the exhibitions. The exhibitions could almost travel around.

I will happily raise the Member's concerns with museums and the Arts Council. Primarily, however, this is about museums. I will see what is in the latest catalogue and whether art can be displayed by local government. I will then write to the Member with the details.

Musical Instruments: Budget Cuts

T7. **Mr Moutray** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to acknowledge the substantial cut that was made last year to the budget for musical instruments and to confirm that any cut this year will be made to the original budget rather than the already reduced budget. *(AQT 2177/11-15)*

Ms Ní Chuilín: I take exception to the Member talking about substantial cuts. All facilities that the Arts Council and even the Ulster-Scots Agency have have been based on budget availability. That primarily applies to the Arts Council as the Ulster-Scots Agency receives greater protection. The Member's assertion that there have been significant cuts is not the case.

Mr Moutray: One of the priorities of the Minister's Department is to promote equality and to tackle poverty and social exclusion. Will she therefore accept that many bands draw members from areas of social deprivation and acknowledge that funding for musical instruments helps to address that priority?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I appreciate the work that the marching bands do, particularly around music acquisition and passing on those skills. It is important. We need to ensure that, in promoting equality and tackling isolation and exclusion, we use every opportunity that is available. To that end, money has remained and continues to be invested in this programme. It is certainly not a programme that yields as many figures as I would like it to. It is certainly not a programme that is as inclusive as it should be. I aim to change that. With those changes, I will aim to try to upgrade it to ensure that all bands can have access to the fund.

Arts Facilities: Funding

T8. **Mr I McCrea** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what funding, if any, is available to councils to support arts facilities, such as the Burnavon in Cookstown. *(AQT 2178/11-15)*

Ms Ní Chuilín: All politics is local. The Member will be aware that, in Strabane, Limavady and mid-Ulster, some of the investment that was put in has helped not only council offices but arts venues and venues such as theatres where people can participate. That is important.

I have not made any funding available to local government for arts venues thus far, but I have received a number of requests, including from the new chief executive officers of the new super-councils. They are coming to meet me about a range of issues, including the arts, theatres, creativity, sport and the creative industries, so I imagine they will come with a long shopping list.

Mr I McCrea: The Minister mentioned the contacts she had had with the new chief executives of councils. Will she be willing to meet the new councils when they are operational to discuss what opportunities may be available so that they can tap into the areas she referred to, whether the arts or any of the creative industries, to ensure that local councils can play their part?

Ms Ní Chuilín: Absolutely. That is key to sustaining and maintaining the relationships that were developed with, for want of a better term, the older councils, when you are bringing those relationships into new councils. It is also important to work with elected representatives from all over and across council areas because they, by and large, are at the coalface and the interface with community and residents' groups.

I will continue to work well with local government. We have delivered, particularly in partnership with local government. That is the direction of travel we should go, not as the only option but as an option. I am happy to meet anyone from the new super-councils, be it officers, existing elected representatives or newly elected representatives to the shadow councils, to see how we can take forward their plans.

Cultural and Artistic Output

T9. **Mr Dickson** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she agrees that a strong cultural and artistic output, including, for example, films that end up at the Oscars, presents a positive image of Northern Ireland. *(AQT 2179/11-15)*

Ms Ní Chuilín: I totally agree with the Member. That is important. A number of films that were supported by NI Screen ended up at the BAFTAs, the Oscars or other award ceremonies, and there is a sense of civic pride in all of them, particularly when some are nominated. It also helps others who are thinking about going into the creative industries, so it is important that they continue to receive our support.

Mr Dickson: I thank the Minister for her answer. The reality is that, in having the lowest per capita arts funding in the United Kingdom, you are failing to deliver that positive image for Northern Ireland through the opportunities given by culture, the arts and other mediums.

Ms Ní Chuilín: With respect to the Member, he needs to look at his figures because that is not true. That has been peddled and is not true.

I also want to take the opportunity to congratulate the makers of 'Boogaloo and Graham', even though they did not receive an Oscar. Being nominated and cheering everybody up late on Sunday evening was quite good.

I will continue to argue for money for the arts. That includes film, television and radio production. It also includes trying to have a career path for young people or even not-so-young people to make the creative industries their career choice. It is important that we maintain or even increase that funding.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Time is up. Members will take their ease while we change the Table.

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

Executive Committee Business

Welfare Reform Bill: Further Consideration Stage

Clause 10 (Responsibility for children and young persons)

Debate resumed on amendment Nos 1, 2, 3, 4, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 22, 23, 26 and 27, which amendments were:

No 1: In page 4, line 38, at end insert

"(3A) Where an additional amount under subsection (2) can be awarded at two different rates, the lower rate shall be no less than two thirds of the higher rate.".— [Mr Agnew.]

No 2: In clause 26, page 13, line 14, at end insert"(c) the production of explanatory documentation on sanctions to be given to the claimant prior to the imposition of a sanction.".— *[Mr Attwood.]*

No 3: In clause 27, page 13, line 36, at end insert

"(c) the production of explanatory documentation on sanctions to be given to the claimant prior to the imposition of a sanction.".— [Mr Attwood.]

No 4: In clause 30, page 15, line 20, at end insert

"( ) An authorised person under this section is a person exercising a function or functions of a public nature.

( ) Section 6 of the Human Rights Act 1998 shall apply to an authorised person as defined under this section.".— [Mr Attwood.]

No 8: In clause 47, page 25, line 40, at end insert

"(c) the production of explanatory documentation on sanctions to be given to the claimant prior to the imposition of a sanction.".— [Mrs D Kelly.]

No 9: In clause 47, page 26, line 29, at end insert

"(c) the production of explanatory documentation on sanctions to be given to the claimant prior to the imposition of a sanction.".— [Mrs D Kelly.]

No 10: In clause 47, page 28, line 12, at end insert

"(c) the production of explanatory documentation on sanctions to be given to the claimant prior to the imposition of a sanction.".— [Mrs D Kelly.]

No 11: In clause 70, page 56, line 32, at end insert

"(6) Regulations may not provide for the reduction of an existing award where a claimant declines the offer of suitable alternative accommodation.".— [Mrs D Kelly.]

No 13: In clause 81, page 60, line 32, leave out subsection (3).— *[Mr Storey (The Minister for Social Development).]*

No 14: In clause 81, page 60, line 39, leave out paragraph (c) and insert

"(c) must provide for relevant medical evidence to be taken into account in assessing a person and may make provision about other matters which are,

or are not, to be taken into account.".— [Mr Storey (The Minister for Social Development).]

No 15: In clause 89, page 64, line 24, at end insert

"(3A) A person entitled to personal independence payment shall receive the award no later than 16 weeks after the date on which a claim for it is made or treated as made.".— [Mr Agnew.]

No 16: After clause 103 insert

*"**Appeal in respect of sanction imposed under this Act***

***103A**.After Article 15 of the Social Security (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 there is inserted—*

*"**Appeal in connection with sanctions***

***15A**. Where the amount of an award of any social security benefit is to be reduced as a consequence of any failure by a claimant which is sanctionable under the Welfare Reform Act (Northern Ireland) 2015—*

(a) a claimant is entitled to an appeal hearing within four weeks of the notice of sanction being issued; and

(b) the amount of any relevant award shall not be reduced before the appeal is decided."".— [Mrs D Kelly.]

No 17: After clause 120 insert

*"**Duty to ensure access to independent advice***

***120A**.—(1) The Department shall ensure that any person making a claim under this Act shall be entitled to have access to independent confidential advice and assistance provided free of charge in relation to making a claim under this Act.*

(2) For the purposes of subsection (1) the Department must bring forward guidance on the independent confidential advice and assistance which is to be developed in consultation with the Northern Ireland Advice Services Consortium, within 3 months of the commencement of this section.".— [Mrs D Kelly.]

No 18: In clause 121, page 88, line 26, leave out "and" and insert

"(aa) the standards of advice and assistance provided under section 132B of the Welfare Reform Act (Northern Ireland) 2015; and".— [Mr Storey (The Minister for Social Development).]

No 20: In clause 130, page 92, line 26, after "housing benefit" insert "or universal credit".— *[Mr Storey (The Minister for Social Development).]*

No 21: In clause 131, page 93, line 39, at end insert

"(6A) Regulations may not provide for the reduction of an existing award where a claimant declines the offer of alternative accommodation.".— [Mrs D Kelly.]

No 22: After clause 132 insert

"Payments to persons suffering financial disadvantage

Payments to persons suffering financial disadvantage

***132A**.—(1) The purpose of this section is to enable the Department to make payments to persons who suffer financial disadvantage as a result of the changes to social security benefits and tax credits contained in this Act and the Welfare Reform Act 2012.*

(2) The Department may by regulations make provision for the purpose mentioned in subsection (1).

(3) Regulations under this section may in particular make provision—

(a) for determining whether a person has suffered financial disadvantage as a result of the changes mentioned in subsection (1) and, if so, the amount of that disadvantage;

(b) for determining eligibility for payments, including provision for payments to be made only in prescribed circumstances or only to persons who meet prescribed conditions;

(c) for determining—

(i) the amount of payments;

(ii) the period or periods for or in respect of which payments are to be made;

(d) for claims for payments to be made in prescribed cases and in the prescribed form and manner and for the procedures to be followed in dealing with and disposing of such claims;

(e) for payments to be made in prescribed cases without any claim being made;

(f) imposing conditions on persons claiming or receiving payments, including conditions requiring them to provide to the Department such information as may be prescribed;

(g) for payments to cease to be made in prescribed circumstances;

(h) for the disclosure of information relating to payments in prescribed circumstances or to prescribed persons;

(i) for the recovery of payments by the Department in prescribed circumstances;

(j) requiring or authorising reviews (whether by the Department or by prescribed persons) of decisions made by the Department with respect to the making or recovery of payments;

(k) imposing functions on a statutory body other than the Department in connection with the administration of the regulations;

(l) for such other matters as appear to the Department to be necessary or appropriate in connection with the making of payments including provision creating criminal offences and provision amending or applying (with or without modification) any statutory provision.

(4) Payments are not to be regarded as a social security benefit; but regulations under this section may provide for any statutory provision relating to a social security benefit (or to such benefits generally) to apply with prescribed modifications in relation to payments.

(5) The Department shall, in respect of each financial year in which payments are made, prepare and lay before the Assembly a report on the payments made in that year.

(6) No regulations shall be made under this section unless a draft of the regulations has been laid before, and approved by resolution of, the Assembly.

(7) If regulations under this section impose functions on any statutory body other than the Department, the

Department must consult that body before making the regulations.

(8) A power conferred by this section to make regulations includes power—

(a) to make such incidental, supplementary, consequential or transitional provision as appears to the Department to be necessary or expedient for the purposes of those regulations;

(b) to provide for the Department to exercise a discretion in dealing with any matter.

(9) In this section—

"prescribed" means prescribed by regulations under this section;

"payment" mean a payment under this section;

"statutory body" means a body established by or under a statutory provision.".— [Mr Storey (The Minister for Social Development).]

No 23: After clause 132 insert

"Duties of the Department

Duty to ensure availability of advice and assistance

***132B**.The Department must ensure that advice and assistance are made available free of charge to persons making a claim under this Act in connection with that claim.".— [Mr Storey (The Minister for Social Development).]*

No 26: In clause 135, page 95, line 37, at end insert

"( ) section 132A (payments to persons suffering financial disadvantage);

( ) section 132B (duty to ensure availability of advice and assistance);

( ) section 132C (review of this Act);".— [Mr Storey (The Minister for Social Development).]

No 27: In schedule 1, page 99, leave out lines 3 to 7.— *[Mrs D Kelly.]*

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I reiterate the point I was making before lunch that it is my understanding — I think most people in the Assembly agree — that there was a five-party agreement on 19 December.

3.30 pm

Again, it was my understanding that there was to be an implementation group that would take that forward. Obviously, some people have broken ranks. Maybe they are the slow learners; I am not too sure about that, but we will presume that that is the case. Possibly, there is just a lack of communication between certain elements of certain parties. One would have to draw that conclusion from what I have listened to in previous debates. We were told that debate was stifled; I would hate to see if it was not stifled, because it might last three days next time. I will try to be as short and to the point as I can be.

There was some misunderstanding with Mr Agnew this morning about the different funds. Amendment No 22 from the Social Development Minister deals with the supplementary payment fund. The purpose of that fund is to ensure that nobody loses out, including those who might have lost out under the unchanged Welfare Reform Bill, which was endorsed by some other parties. The supplementary payment fund will ensure that people get help and will not lose out.

Amendment No 14 from the Minister makes reference to relevant medical evidence. That is a very important issue, because, as someone who for many years did appeals, appropriate medical evidence was often not obtained until the day of the appeal. The provision of relevant medical evidence, as proposed in the amendment, will give decision makers the opportunity to make informed decisions, cut down the number of appeals, and ensure that people who are entitled to benefits get them. That is a very important issue.

One other amendment that I make reference to is amendment No 4. I find it strange, if not bizarre, that we have a party on my left that is talking about protecting the public from privatisation: that is what the amendment is about. Yet, back in 2007-08, when Margaret Ritchie was the Minister for Social Development, she rushed — and I mean rushed — the initial stages of welfare reform through the Assembly under accelerated passage.

We had asked for clause 16 to be deleted at the time, because it dealt with privatisation. We were told, "Oh no, it doesn't need to be deleted. It is not going to happen." Well, if it was not going to happen, why did you need it? A very short time afterwards, medical support services were privatised, and we have all seen the results of that. Mr Attwood, in one of his last acts as Minister, signed the contract that inflicted — and I use that word advisedly — Atos upon us in terms of the work capability assessment. So, it ill-behoves people to lecture us on what we have or have not achieved when they were the ones who introduced these kinds of issues.

Mr Attwood: Will the Member give way?

Mr Brady: Yes, the Member will give way.

Mr Attwood: I will come back more substantially to the point that you made, but is the logic of your argument not to ensure that, if there are private contractors appointed, arising from welfare reform, they comply with the Human Rights Act (HRA)? That is what amendment No 4 does. So, taking the point you have made about ensuring that private contractors live up to the best standards, if they are going to be involved, should you not now conclude by supporting amendment No 4, which ensures that they will have to comply with the HRA?

Mr Brady: I thank the Member for his intervention. Would Atos not have been subjected to that before you signed the contract? I would have assumed that to have been the case. Did you not check that with Atos beforehand? The argument we have, and continue to have, is why you need companies like Atos to come in. In four years, it got something like £300 billion from the British Government and shuffled off, and someone else has to do the job. We are yet to see what Capita may or may not be capable of.

Mr Attwood: Will the Member give way?

Mr Brady: No, I will not. I am trying to finish off here.

I think we should send out a positive message. A lot of negativity and misinformation have been sent out to the public, and there has been a lot of scaremongering. There are people out there who are vulnerable, suffer

from disability, are unemployed or are working poor. Unfortunately, the message that some parties are sending out is that it is negative and a total mess. It is not. Obviously, the agreement is not everything that people wanted. We have done what we feel is the best deal that could have been done in the circumstances. It is much better than anything that was put forward over the last couple of years, I have to say. So, I think we should go forward with that positive message.

As a republican and member of Sinn Féin, my core value has been to protect the vulnerable. I have been doing it all my working life, and I will continue to do it. We as a party do that as part of our core values. That message needs to go out to the public. We need to put that message forward. This agreement is something that we fought long and hard for. Parties eventually agreed to it. There will be mitigation. We have neutralised the benefit cap. People go on about the bedroom tax, but we have neutralised those. We have ensured that people here do not suffer. If you talk to groups in England, in the voluntary sector or otherwise, you will know that they are extremely envious of what we have here. Disability groups are the same. People can pontificate, to use Mrs Kelly's phrase, all they want, but at the end of the day, as far as we are concerned, it is a good deal for the people that we represent, and we will continue to fight that corner for them.

Mrs D Kelly: Mr Brady seems to be a wee bit agitated today. Perhaps it is to cover his blushes somewhat, because he stated publicly, as did Martin McGuinness, that Sinn Féin would "deploy a petition of concern" against the bedroom tax. He can girn all he likes here, but the fact is that it is in the Bill. Sinn Féin did not sign the petition of concern against the bedroom tax, and as yet, we have not seen all the regulations and accompanying mitigation flexibilities, which the Executive have yet to agree, in support of the Welfare Reform Bill going through —

Mr Maskey: Will the Member give way?

Mrs D Kelly: I will give way in just a second. There are just a couple of points that I do not want to forget. I am interested in hearing today from the Minister a commitment that affirmative approval from the Assembly will be required for the regulations, that he will ensure that there is a process for reviewing and monitoring the implications of the Welfare Reform Bill, and that he will ensure their compliance with the human rights legislation. I will give way to the Member.

Mr Maskey: I thank the Member for giving way. I know that she has a lot of ground to cover, but I will ask her this again. Is it not rather inconsistent, to say the least, particularly in the context of the Member's party agreeing this, that since last week the Member has been levelling criticism against the package that all the parties agreed on 19 December? I appreciate that the Member was not there, but her party leader was and other colleagues who are sitting in the Chamber now were with him when the party endorsed a four-party agreement. That made no reference whatsoever to a supplementary payment scheme or to a specific mechanism to address the issues on disabilities. They then signed on for a two-year sanction regime.

Is it not rather inconsistent for the Member to come forward now with amendments criticising the deal that was reached and that her party leader endorsed on 19 December, having endorsed a further, weaker deal on 17 December? I confirm, from Mickey Brady's point of view, that the Welfare Reform Bill is addressed through a range of mitigation mechanisms, which all the parties agreed in one shape or form to have in place. Those are being put in place, and I look forward to listening to the Minister this afternoon when he addresses all those amendments. I am confident that the Minister's message will be positive and will put further meat on the bones of the deal that was reached. I urge Mrs Kelly, even at this late stage, to go back to the drawing board with the five party leaders, who, it was agreed, formed the implementation group for the Stormont House Agreement. You cannot have your cake and eat it, which, unfortunately, that party is actually doing.

Mr Speaker: Neither can you. You cannot have too long an intervention.

Mrs D Kelly: Mr Speaker, I welcome your assessment of whether that was an intervention or a speech.

In the last debate, Mr Allister asked all the parties to commit to publishing the signed Stormont Castle agreement. We have yet to see it. For all I know, John O'Dowd was waving about his wife's shopping list on 'The View' the other week. I have yet to see the Stormont Castle agreement.

Mr Humphrey: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I distinctly remember the First Minister making a contribution to the debate last week and saying that he had placed a copy of it in the Library. Perhaps the Member was not listening.

Mrs D Kelly: Far be it from me not to listen to every word that comes from the mouth of the First Minister. I am afraid that I missed that particular point on that occasion.

The fact is that there is no signed Stormont Castle agreement; there is a Stormont House Agreement. Mickey Brady spent the last few minutes talking about parties being negative and scaremongering. Which party went on a Northern Ireland-wide roadshow of "Stop the Tory Cuts"? None other than Sinn Féin. Who scaremongered right across the North? Indeed, many of them still have "Stop the Tory Cuts" posters in their constituency office windows, whilst their four Executive Ministers energetically endorse and implement the Tory cuts agenda.

Mr Allister: Will the Member give way?

Mrs D Kelly: I will give way, Mr Allister.

Mr Allister: I was not party to any of these discussions, which some seem more willing to associate themselves with than others. The Member said that there is no Stormont Castle agreement subscribed to by all the parties, but the document placed in the Library opens with this sentence:

> *"This paper sets out the Executive party leaders' proposals to the UK Government".*

Does that not include all five Executive parties?

Mrs D Kelly: Thank you for that, Mr Allister. That is certainly how I interpret it, because there was no caveat read out in relation to that. That is where some people are very confused about the matter. The fact is that the bedroom tax is in the Bill. Sinn Féin will have to explain to its constituents why it did not live up to its manifesto commitments and to the commitments that it gave at its ard-fheis only last year; if it was in 2013, I stand to be corrected.

I move on to address the group 1 amendments that we have proposed, many of which deal with the issue of independent advice. I know that the Minister has given a commitment. The Minister well knows the value of agencies such as CAB and Advice NI and the many small independent advice clinics that we use routinely and regularly to help our constituents to make an application or to assist them in their appeal. There are, of course, very good and able staff in the Social Security Agency who give advice on pensions and on all types of benefit entitlement, but I believe that there is a particular role for the independent voluntary sector to play in the provision of such advice. I ask the Minister to consider that carefully. He well knows the policy intent behind our amendments, so we are interested in hearing from him if he can expand on that.

Some in the Social Security Agency are concerned that, if this were in the Bill, it would give an almost blank chequebook to the community and voluntary sector. I do not believe that that would be their rationale for supporting the call for an independent service provision. Many people have difficulties in accepting the independent advice of an agency and its ability to scrutinise itself. That is sometimes borne out by stories that we hear from England in particular, where targets have been set by the Department for Work and Pensions and sanctions have been imposed. As you know, there are horrendous stories of people being driven to the point of suicide as a consequence of having to deal with the social security system and benefit entitlement. We want to put in as many safety nets as possible for people seeking the right to independent advice.

3.45 pm

It is not only about assisting them in completing their forms, advocating on their behalf and navigating their way through the maze; it is about helping people to be real advocates, with no axe to grind other than a person's self-interest and personal interest. From our point of view, it will be interesting to hear the Minister's commitment to that.

The other issue that we are concerned about is sanctions, and people's understanding of their nature, extent and type. Good, clear information must be provided. I know that in recent days, Mr Speaker — I think that it was processed through your office — there has been advice from the Human Rights Commission in relation to aspects of the Welfare Reform Bill. It is a matter of regret that, here and in GB, opportunities were not provided to the Human Rights Commission to ensure full compliance with best practice in international law.

There are concerns that, when a sanction is imposed, it is reasonable and proportionate and will not cause hardship to other family members. There is a necessity for anyone who is determining the nature of sanctions to ensure that the interests of the child are paramount. In other words, a sanction on a person in a household must not impact adversely on children. It is still a fact that, in the majority of households, men are regarded as the main earners. Therefore, under the auspices of universal credit, if most of the money is directed through men, and sanctions are imposed, how does that impact on the rights of women and children? I will be interested to hear how the Minister is going to ensure that all those points are taken care of: the regulations around the imposition of sanctions; the clarifications given; and good, upfront advice before the imposition of sanctions.

Mr Agnew, in his contribution, referred to timescales. There are also concerns around the timescales for hardship payments, the possibility of a big gap between the imposition of a sanction and an appeal, and what happens in the intervening period. There are concerns about whether a hardship payment will perhaps come three weeks too late for many people after their initial application.

Mr Agnew also referred to the concerns that were raised around the bedroom tax and the availability, as others mentioned, of suitable alternative accommodation here in Northern Ireland. I think that it is also recognised that, in Northern Ireland, we tend to have larger households and homes. I think that England, in terms of the square footage of a family home, is among the worst across Europe when it comes to the type of house or apartment that people are allowed to build. There has to be some local flexibilities and acceptance of local customs and practice.

Mr Speaker, it will come as no shock to you and many in the House that we are opposed to the bedroom tax. Mr Agnew tried to draw the Minister — I am sure that the Minister will reply — on his comments in the last debate about two alternative and reasonable offers. Our amendment refers to that, although Mr Brady and others were not that inclined to accept that as a concern and said that they had fully mitigated that. We know that the mitigation currently, I believe, lasts for six years. We want to know what happens beyond that.

The Minister will be very well aware of the necessity to build adequate alternative housing. None of this stands in isolation. We need to hear the Minister's holistic plans not only for the introduction of welfare reform but for meeting people's needs. There is also some concern about the types of job interview and work experience that some will be asked for. I think that it is already the practice that people with some disabilities are being placed in DWP offices because they cannot get employers to provide suitable work-based experience. I know that the Minister is not responsible for all that and that he will require assistance from the Minister for Employment and Learning, for example, in looking for vocational training. When we set that against the backdrop of the cuts to the DEL budget, you can see why we are raising concerns about a number of these matters.

I hope that that deals with a number of our amendments. The only new clause that we have proposed is in amendment No 16. That new clause deals with the appeals mechanism and seeks to have appeal hearings for claimants within four weeks. Again, that is based on what we are hearing about the experience in England, where some people are having to wait months for their appeals to be heard.

I would hope that the Minister has adequate resources at his disposal when he brings forward and implements the regulations to ensure that people do not find themselves in unnecessary hardship or humiliation. As we said before, it is, after all, people whom we are talking about. I would hope that all the rights of persons are protected and that we will not find situations in which people are subjected to degrading treatment.

Mr Beggs: Thank you, Mr Speaker, for the opportunity to comment at this stage of the Bill.

Amendment No 1 was previously discussed at Consideration Stage. It must be acknowledged that some local families with a disabled child will see a reduction in their support. Importantly, however, as has been said, some households will see an increase through the higher rate of child addition, as the new rate payable to severely disabled children will be very slightly higher than the current child tax credit equivalent. I understand that those who will receive a lower disability rate for universal credit could be significantly worse off. However, I trust that existing claimants will be supported through the transitional protections that are being built in.

As I have said previously, such an amendment will not only incur significant extra costs through increased benefits but could potentially require a new administration system. Does the proposer of the amendment know whether that is possible and what it would cost? Those are real issues, and you cannot make amendments without knowing the answers. We are setting legislation. I certainly believe that change is necessary and should be pursued at a Westminster level. I encourage all our MPs to pursue the matter there.

Amendment Nos 2, 3, 8 and 9 that have been tabled by the SDLP relate to the production of explanatory documents for sanctions. That sounds like a reasonable proposition. It makes sense to have such explanations in writing, not only to better inform claimants but as supporting evidence for the benefits advisers. It would also ensure that they would have to have clarity about the decisions that they were making and would have to stand over. That seems logical. I would be surprised, however, if the Social Security Agency was not already doing that. I ask the Minister to detail what the process is. However, we are minded to support that batch of amendments if we do not hear something significant.

Amendment No 4 seeks to ensure that section 6 of the Human Rights Act applies to persons who are carrying out the work that is delegated by the Department. I would be concerned that putting that requirement so explicitly into the Bill could potentially lead to all sorts of problems like delays and additional bureaucracy and administration costs. I will listen carefully to what others have to say.

We will not support amendment Nos 21 and 11. Whilst I understand what the SDLP is seeking to do and I have sympathy for some of its position, considering the smoke and mirrors that are being played out by some parties in the Chamber, the position of the Ulster Unionist Party is that people should live in accommodation that broadly matches their requirements. Reducing household running costs by simply reducing the space and the heating requirements would be another benefit that would follow on from that provision and more citizens would be able to be assisted through social housing support.

Much of our opposition to the proposed bedroom tax was based on the fact that suitable alternative accommodation was simply not available in Northern Ireland, so it is right that protection is being built in against a bedroom tax. We simply do not have the right number or right types of homes. All levels of social housing are oversubscribed, but, once this penalty comes into effect, I believe that smaller one- and two-bedroom homes will become even more difficult to acquire. To address that, we need more than platitudes from the Minister. We need the social housing development programme to be changed and rebalanced so that it matches the pressures on our housing stock.

We are not building anywhere near the required number of new homes. Our target of 2,000 new properties already falls well short of actual need. It is of concern that it looks as if we will not be able to build that number. We are told that budget pressures are to blame. There are budget pressures, but there are also budget choices. Look at what the Finance Minister has done: he sat back and watched feebly as Sinn Féin pressed ahead with its pet projects, such as the proposed relocation of DARD headquarters, without an independent Department of Finance and Personnel assessment of DARD's business case. Costs are already escalating for that. When you spend our limited capital funding in one area, money is not available in others. Look at the accommodation that is available in the East Londonderry constituency. Only 15 miles away —

Mr Speaker: I remind the Member to come back to today's debate.

Mr Beggs: OK. Essentially, when we choose not to make money available for social houses and we choose to put money into other projects, we can build fewer homes. Why not use existing vacant office accommodation, spend less money on new builds for office accommodation and put more money into social housing? Choices are made when we spend public money. Much of the information on the bedroom tax and the Executive's mitigation package will come to light only through regulations. Nevertheless, we trust that the offers of alternative accommodation will be genuine and that someone might be faced with a reduction to their housing benefit only after the proper process has been followed. Of course, pensioners will be protected, and rightly so.

In future, if reasonable alternative accommodation is available, why should there not be other adjustments? By including this amendment, future options cannot be considered without new primary legislation. Why should others be forced to live in overcrowded conditions if suitable accommodation were to exist to meet the needs of all?

On first reading, I saw amendment Nos 13 and 14 as a tidying-up, technical issue, but when I reflected on them, I saw that something more significant could be afoot. I want the Minister to come back on this. At this time, the Ulster Unionist Party is unable to support the Minister's amendment Nos 13 and 14. I can see what the Department is trying to do, which is to move the duty to ensure medical evidence from primary legislation to the regulations. The problem is, of course — I have made this point on a number of occasions during these debates — that the Department has greater control of that and greater powers over the regulations, and the Assembly would have a lesser role. I have not heard a convincing argument as to why that change is needed. When the Minister is summing up, I would welcome his explanation, because I cannot see any reason why it cannot stay in the Bill.

I note the Minister's previous comments that departmental officials were working with colleagues in the Department of Health to review the GP contract. If that change is secured, I believe that the current wording in clause 81 should be no impediment to it.

I listened carefully to Mr Agnew on amendment No 15. Considering the fallout in Great Britain, where successful

claimants have had to wait months on end — a ridiculous amount of time — the proposal for 16 weeks — almost four months — has some merit.

Surely our system can get the necessary information together after four months so that claimants can have a decision. I would like the Minister to comment on that, too.

4.00 pm

We will not support amendment No 16. I agree that claimants should have the right to challenge sanctions but am totally opposed to the idea that they should continue to receive a full claim for up to a further four weeks. That money would also have to come out of our block grant, because we are deviating from the legislation applicable in other parts of the United Kingdom. I note that the amendment talks about:

"any failure ... which is sanctionable".

I assume that this might include major and deliberate fraud, which I would have thought would be sanctionable. How can it be justified for a claimant who has committed such an obvious act of deception to continue to receive up to another month's benefit?

We will support the duty for independent advice outlined in amendment Nos 17 and 23. I welcome the related assurance from the Minister on a more general duty. Still, it is important that there is good advice available to ensure that claimants maximise the benefits that they are entitled to.

Amendment No 22 is one of the most important amendments to the whole Bill, and it is disappointing on two fronts. First, it is regrettable that it has been tabled only at Further Consideration Stage rather than at an earlier stage, which means that we have no further opportunity for consideration and amendment. However, even more important is the lack of detail. We have what was agreed in the Stormont House talks, but, considering the games played in those, it is difficult to be reassured by anything that the DUP or Sinn Féin might say at present without first seeing it in black and white. Where are the draft regulations? It would have been helpful to publish them before now.

Previously, there were widely different estimates of the cost of the mitigation package, not least the changes to the administration of the universal credit system. Unfortunately, there was a lot of scaremongering and misinformation from the former, rather than the present, Minister in the run-up to these decisions finally being made, and that has hindered progress. The amendment has a number of very important aspects. On the whole, the original package of mitigation measures, whether it was for underoccupancy or changes to the administration of universal credit, has been fairly well discussed in public over the past 12 months. We reiterate, however, that unless there is a genuine effort to review our social housing stock, the projected decline in the cost of the underoccupancy penalty is unlikely, and the cost could well continue into the future.

We know that the Minister believes that the overall cost of the measures, including discretionary support, will reach a maximum of £134 million in 2018-19. We are told that it will begin to fall rapidly over the following years. Unfortunately, the Department has failed to detail exactly how and why it will fall, which must be a concern for us all. At £134 million for a single year, the cost will be greater than each of the yearly budgets for DCAL, the DOE and OFMDFM, and it will restrict the funding available for health, education, etc. There are choices to be made when spending money: when you spend it in one area, you are not able to spend it in another.

Much of the extra cost, contrary to what some in the Chamber or in the media would claim, does not equate to higher benefits in Northern Ireland. Much of it allows, for instance, for the additional administrative schemes. There is, for example, the personal independence payment (PIP) medical evidence package, and rightly so, as I think that it would be a good investment. Nevertheless, it will cost several million pounds in each of the next five years. However, it will not mean a higher rate of benefit for individual claimants. It will instead mean that some of the particular circumstances — such as our epidemic rates of poor mental health — are properly considered in the assessment process.

Mr Storey (The Minister for Social Development): I thank the Member for giving way. I have listened to what he has said. Is it not the case that, at some point, you have to make a decision? On the one hand, the Member says that it is a good investment to deal with the issue of medical reports, yet, on the other hand, he says that the money would be better spent on doing other things. I refer to what a number of Members have said, not only in this debate but in previous ones, which is that there was a five-party, five-leader agreement. Had the Member spoken to him, his party leader would have been able to tell him that considerable time was spent on this.

The Member has also asked why we do not see the regulations. My staff have spent hours and hours of work on what happened prior to, during and after the Stormont House discussions. In fact, when those discussions were going on, a huge amount of time was spent on getting figures and looking at different scenarios. Included in those discussions was his party leader. We then came to an agreement. At what point does the Member recognise that we either have a deal and so move on or we unpick that deal, say, "No, we did a bad deal" and do something else?

Mr Beggs: The Minister misses the point that I have been making. I have been supportive of some of the expenditure that is occurring, but other Members are over-egging the pudding by saying that there will be almost no benefit changes and that everybody will be protected. There will be changes, and, ultimately, in the new benefit system, some people will not be as well off. Therefore, all this money — the £134 million in 2018-19 — will not go directly on additional benefit. It will go, and, in my opinion, correctly, towards some of the supportive measures that are being built in to try to protect people. However, that money may well go on administrative costs rather than on benefits. That is the reasoning behind some of my comments.

I return to the medical evidence package. Ideally, there should be sharing of medical evidence. It should be the norm among medical professionals that they are willing to share evidence as part of their basic contract so that there will be no additional cost to the public purse. At some point in the future, it would be good if we did not have to pay that and that it was deemed to be part of a GP or consultant's contract of employment. I hope that that will be the case, but we will have to wait.

I acknowledge that the compensation approach to the personal independence payment will have a significant extra cost. However, we should recognise this at least: the costs will not be open-ended. What is proposed is the so-called option A, meaning that the Department will have an even greater incentive to ensure that appeals are carried out in a timely manner.

Another important element is the supplementary payment fund, which is £125 million over a five-year period. I believe that that was thought up within a couple of hours. Some parties in the Chamber now claim that it will cover each and every reduction, and not just existing claimants but new ones. That is quite a claim to make for a fund that will average £25 million a year. I do not think that the figures add up for those making such a claim. I assume that much of the fund will go to supporting people who are impacted on by the limitations on contribution-based employment support allowance (ESA).

I ask the Minister to address, once and for all, those claims from Sinn Féin and to give us some feedback. Who will be eligible for support under this fund, and, specifically, can he confirm whether he will offer total protection to new claimants so that they will not be worse off than they currently would be if they were to apply, as some are claiming?

Finally, we will be opposing amendment No 27 for the reasons that we spelt out at Consideration Stage. If we in Northern Ireland were the only part of the UK to remove the ability to apply the residence test, we could face significant additional costs. We alone in the UK could become a magnet for those willing to travel within the EU because of an enhanced Northern Ireland benefits system, and regulations would not be restricted on residency grounds. We would see our block grant, which would affect our health budget and our education budget, cut to pay for this suggested deviation from the legislation applying in the rest of the UK. No one knows what the costs for such an alteration to this primary legislation would be. There are already huge pressures in the National Health Service in Northern Ireland, and schools are facing budget cuts, although some of the final figures have yet to emerge. I will go as far as to say that it would be irresponsible to make the changes that are proposed in amendment No 27 and that that would adversely affect the citizens of Northern Ireland.

Mr Dickson: Once again, I start by recognising the concerns raised by Mr Agnew earlier today in the debate. It is understandable that he did so, because he was not party to that five-party agreement. Indeed, the Minister has explained to us, at least in part, that it was worked through in exceptional detail and costed. I think that that is the challenge to Mr Agnew and the amendments that he is proposing. They remain not costed, and, therefore, they have to, in my view, fall outside today's consideration.

Mr Agnew: I appreciate the Member giving way. Does that apply to all the amendments? For example, does it apply to the amendment that proposes having draft affirmative instead of confirmatory? In my opinion, that would not have costs, nor even would the 16-week time limit on giving the decision on a PIP claim, presuming that the systems are in place.

Mr Dickson: We await to hear what the Minister has to say about the cost effects of all the proposals that have been made today, either by Mr Agnew or by the SDLP. Certainly, I am prepared to give and accept a degree of latitude in terms of what Mr Agnew is saying by comparison with those who, whether or not they made a signature on a piece of paper, can well be described as being signed up to a five-leader agreement.

I think that we do have to support the passage of this Bill through Further Consideration Stage and support the agreed amendments tabled by the Department. It is important to see that progress has been made in the past few weeks after what can only be described as two and a half years of deadlock, meaning that we can finally move towards the passing of legislation that will deliver the mitigation and move forward with that Stormont House Agreement. It is an agreement that was hard-won after negotiations between five parties, whether at Stormont Castle or at Stormont House. It is an agreement that meant serious compromise between those who have signs saying "No Tory Tax Cuts" in their widows and those who have tea and buns in the back garden of 10 Downing Street. That is the reality. That is where the compromise is, and that is where we have moved in relation to this Bill. The agreement has also meant that Northern Ireland has been able to secure welfare reform with mitigating measures that Wales or Scotland have not.

We must also remember that the agreement was not just about welfare reform but included other issues that have been stalling progress, many that are still to be worked through and resolved. We are moving to deal with issues like the legacy of the Troubles, flags and corporation tax.

4.15 pm

To undermine the mitigated welfare reform agreement is to undermine the process and the progress that is being made in Northern Ireland as a whole. Therefore, throughout this difficult process, my party has kept its discipline and kept its word to the spirit of those agreements because we know that it is the responsible thing to do. It causes me a great deal of dismay to see the opposite from the SDLP; a party that seems to be melting like snow off a ditch in front of our eyes, with dispute after dispute. It is a party with a leader who is incapable of exercising authority, whether it is over local councillors or those who sign up to agreements and then seem to want to amend them, and amend them, and amend them, and amend them.

This is the same party that, today, has brought forward another raft of amendments upon which they will build an electioneering platform, but one on which the foundation is very shaky indeed. Meanwhile, other more responsible parties such as ours must do, and have done, the heavy lifting in what is neither a popular nor a thankful task but a necessary one to move things forward not only in relation to welfare reform mitigated but also to move Northern Ireland forward.

Bit by bit, the SDLP and others are seeking to add cost and weight to the Bill, which they know cannot be afforded, and make promises that cannot be kept. The SDLP U-turn is further accompanied by its own congratulatory fanfare in which it is a party that is protecting the vulnerable against a supposed heartless Executive. This question has to be asked: if it cannot make agreements with other parties, what chances are there for it keeping promises to the electorate?

Turning to the amendments that the Department has put forward, I am pleased to see that further mitigation measures are being brought forward on the basis on which the Executive have agreed. Amendment No 22 will allow for payments to those suffering disadvantage as a result of the reforms. Furthermore, without being over-prescriptive, the amendment provides the means for regulations in an area, as well as safeguards, to ensure that the spirit of protection for the most vulnerable is upheld in the final product.

I welcome amendment No 23, which will ensure that advice and assistance is made available free of charge to prospective claimants in connection with their claim. That has also come about as a result of compromise and consultation on the basis set forward by the Stormont House and Stormont Castle agreements. It is in stark contrast to the methods of others.

In many regards, the Department has a mammoth task in front of it to implement the reforms. We must now move towards bringing the regulations forward. That is where the real meat will be in how we can actually deliver on the agreement. We have agreed to that. We have got mitigating measures. It is now time to stop the grandstanding and move on.

Mr F McCann: Go raibh míle maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I support the amendments put forward by the Minister, and I oppose those in the names of Steven Agnew and the SDLP. I am sure you will be glad to hear that I do not intend to speak for long, as I believe that all that needs to be said was said when the five party leaders signed an agreement on 19 December, which, I believe, protects the most vulnerable in our society from benefit loss. That was a far different agreement from the one agreed two days before. It was an agreement —

Mr Speaker: Can you speak into the microphone?

Mr F McCann: I am just coming to the amendments. Sorry.

It was an agreement that excluded much of what was achieved on 19 December. You have to ask yourself what is it that the SDLP wants to achieve through its amendments. Is it to make things better for people? The answer must be no, given that it signed up for much less on 17 December, which is something that it still refuses to admit to people.

Let us take the amendments and clauses on sanctions. Had it been from any other party, I might have said, "Well, they are sincere on this matter", but the Attwood sanctions brought in during the last mandate, have, from 2011, seen over 80,000 people being reported for sanctions and 28,000 people actually sanctioned. Why did they not ask for people who fell foul of those sanctions to receive documentation? I would prefer it if sanctions were not being implemented. In fact, this party is on record as having that position when we argued against the Attwood sanctions, but we were part of a five-party agreement, which we have stood by. Did we get everything we wanted? No, we did not. Would I have liked to have got more in the agreement? Yes, I would.

What we got was an agreement that mitigates the worst excesses of welfare reform. We argued against the three-year sanction and were able to get it reduced to 18 months. What makes this debate difficult is that the SDLP agreed to a two-year sanction and then thought that it could pull the wool over people's eyes by supporting the six-month proposal from Steven Agnew.

Let us look at the proposed amendments. Amendment No 2, which is to clause 26, page 13, line 14, is on the provision of explanatory documentation and sanctions. Amendment No 3 is to clause 27, page 13, line 36, and it is my understanding that claimants will be made aware in writing of when sanctions will be applied. Through amendment No 3, the SDLP has again sought to amend clause 26, again seeking documentation. It is my understanding that, if someone is sanctioned, they will be given notification of the sanction. The same goes for amendment No 8, which is to clause 47, page 25, line 40; amendment No 9, which is to clause 47, page 26, line 29; and amendment No 10, which is to clause 47, page 28, line 12. Notification will be supplied to people of the sanctions that they face.

Amendment No 4 is to clause 30, which is under the heading "Delegation and contracting out". Sinn Féin has always been opposed to the privatisation of public services. I am again surprised that the SDLP raised that matter, given its record in the last mandate of privatising medical services, which saw Atos arrive on the scene and saw the hated work capability assessment being put in place. That has led to tens of thousands of people losing their incapacity benefit and employment and support allowance. We have also seen the SDLP implement the local housing allowance, which, on its watch, led to thousands of the most vulnerable losing out on housing benefit in the first stages of welfare reform.

My colleague Mickey Brady touched on Steven Agnew's amendments. I think that he echoed what I would have said, so I will not bore people by repeating his words, but I will stress again that Mr Agnew has had many opportunities to raise those issues and has not. It is his right to try to amend what he likes, but it is our right to highlight his inconsistencies as we see them.

I support the amendments in the name of the Minister and oppose the other amendments.

Mr Attwood: First of all, Mr Speaker, I apologise that I was not here when I was called during topical questions yesterday. I was on my way to the Hart inquiry in Banbridge, where Margaret McGuckian, one of the group's leaders, was giving her evidence. I realised that at 12.03 pm yesterday, but that was after the 12.00 noon deadline. So, apologies for missing that question. That is the background to all that.

I said at Consideration Stage:

> *"there is a new broom in DSD".— [Official Report, Bound Volume 101, p475, col 2].*

Mr Beggs, I think, was probably acknowledging that early in his contribution, before the Minister replied to him. I am not sure whether he will be of the same view following that last exchange. The issue today is this: if there is a new broom in DSD, will there be new thinking?

Mr Storey: Is it "if" now?

Mr Attwood: I think there is a new broom, but the consequence of a new broom is that there should be new thinking, or will we just have more of the old dust thrown up in people's eyes?

Mr Allister: Is that what happened in DOE?

Mr Attwood: Far from it. I say to all Ministers that you have to demonstrate sooner or later whether you are just in government or are in power. I think that there is an opportunity today, despite some of the chat across the Chamber, which I will respond to in due course.

I was struck by the Member from East Antrim's comment that the SDLP amendments are about adding "cost and weight" to welfare reform. I say to the Member that the weight is not from us. The weight that we are relying upon is the statutory advice of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission. Perhaps you want to dismiss the SDLP today, but you are under a legal obligation to listen to the Human Rights Commission's statutory advice. Our thinking on many of these amendments relies on that of the Human Rights Commission, which, Mr Speaker, sent you a paper that you then — I point out to the Member for East Antrim — circulated to the parties after Consideration Stage.

What is the Human Rights Commission? It was set up by the Good Friday Agreement — let us remember that — because of the law, order and justice issues around which our conflict revolved. The wisdom of the Good Friday Agreement consisted in resolving the issues of law, order and justice, which is what the Patten report, the criminal justice review, the Human Rights Commission and the Equality Commission were meant to do. It created an architecture that ensured that issues of law, justice and rights were properly managed, unlike in the past.

We established the Human Rights Commission, which, in its briefing in advance of Further Consideration Stage, said:

> *"The following statutory advice is submitted to members of the Assembly on the issue of the Welfare Reform Bill."*

This is not made up by the SDLP; this is statutory advice given to the House. If there is weight to what we say, it is the weight of the Human Rights Commission, and Members should acknowledge that rather than play games with good advice given to each party in this House, which, clearly, people to my left will ignore during the debate.

The Commission goes further and says that it bases its position on the full range of internationally accepted human rights standards, including the European Convention on Human Rights, as incorporated by the Human Rights Act 1998, something that Mr Brady may wish to reflect on, given that he did not accept an intervention from me earlier on the very point that we should build into the Welfare Reform Bill certainty that private contractors will comply with the Human Rights Act 1998. The commission then details eight or nine other conventions that inform the advice of the Human Rights Commission. The irony is this: the amendments proposed by Mr Agnew and by the SDLP at Consideration Stage are consistent with that advice, even though we did not then have the value of the statutory advice of the Human Rights Commission. It also informs many of those amendments now.

The question that falls to Members has not been fully answered by the other parties. It has been answered by Mr Stewart Dickson, who said that he is not going down the road of adding extra weight to this Bill, even though it is the advice of the Human Rights Commission. The issue for the Chamber, whatever the claims and counterclaims over Stormont House, and I will come back to that, is this: are we are going to hear the advice of the Human Rights Commission? *[Interruption.]* I will give way to the Member if he has something to say. He said something from a sedentary position that he is not prepared to say on his feet. Putting that aside, the question is whether we heed and pass into law the statutory advice of the Human Rights Commission, which all of us established in 1998 through the Good Friday Agreement and the Northern Ireland Act.

The other amendments, Mr Speaker, come from the advice sector. Two that relate to advice, assistance and information are a matter of taking their advice and trying to pass it into law. Are we or are we not, Mr Speaker, and, through you, Minister, going to have a new broom or old dust? We have to make that call over the next period. In my view, if people could extricate themselves from the straitjacket, which is how they seem to view Stormont House, many of these amendments might be acceptable. I think that it was Mr Brady who said that.

Mr Brady: Will the Member give way?

Mr Attwood: I will shortly. If he could get out of the straitjacket of Stormont House, he might wear a different suit when it comes to contributing and voting on these amendments.

Mr Brady: I thank the Member for giving way. You mentioned human rights. There was an Ad Hoc Committee on Conformity with Equality Requirements, as you may or may not remember, of which I was a member; it was the first time that it had been invoked in the Assembly. Your concern about human rights is laudable, but when your leader and you were participating in those negotiations, were you not accepting that the agreements that were reached were not human rights-proofed, or are you saying that you signed up to an agreement that you were not happy with and that you now want to bring in amendments to ensure that it is human rights-proofed? It seems to be a peculiar way of doing things; it is kind of putting the cart before the horse.

4.30 pm

Mr Attwood: In any piece of legislation that goes before the Assembly, the Minister has to declare that it is human rights-compliant. I had to do it, Mr Storey has to do it and all Sinn Féin's Ministers have to do it; they have to declare that it is human rights-compliant. I would have expected Mr Brady, as somebody who has been involved in the passage of many Bills through the House, to have read, I think, the back page of any Bill that he might have been involved in to satisfy himself that the answer to his question is in the Bill.

My point is —

Mr Brady: What is your point?

Mr Attwood: I do not want to repeat my point, but the point is that the Human Rights Commission is saying, "Here are additional mechanisms to build into the legislation", based on its right to give us statutory advice. It believes that that is completely consistent with human rights standards and can enhance protections. That is the point. I would like to think that, if people freed themselves from the constraints of the normal debate in this place, they would, based on what the advice sector or the human rights sector is saying, endorse amendments from the SDLP or Mr Agnew.

I will respond to other points that have been made by other Members when I go through the various amendments. The Minister might want to correct me on this; I may well be speaking out of turn. At Consideration Stage, we did not move the amendments that were on the Marshalled List at the time in respect of advice and assistance; I think that they are now amendment Nos 17 and 23. As the Minister knows, as I, as a previous Minister, know, and as other people in the House know, one of the devices of making good law is not to move in order to have some further conversations with other parties or the Minister to come to a better outcome. That is why we did not move the amendment in respect of advice and assistance at Consideration Stage. I got a sense that the Minister's mind was more open than might have been anticipated in that regard. Consequently, there have been useful conversations with the Minister, and they have made some advance. It is for the Minister to talk about the advance in his thinking, but, in anticipation of it, he has tabled an amendment in respect of advice to claimants.

Maybe I am breaching confidence here; if the Minister indicates that I am on the wrong side, I will restrain myself. When the Minister said to me and Mrs Kelly that he was minded to bring forward an amendment in the terms that are on the Marshalled List today, my immediate reply was that the word "independent" was missing. Whilst people can take advice from the advice sector, the word "independent" being missing is a major deficit. I know that it is not the intention of the Minister, but it could lead to the potential, especially in a situation where there could be more austerity from London over the next number of years, for the statutory right to give advice to fall to the Department. In that moment, in order to ensure that it lives up to the statutory right to give advice, the independent sector is diminished and diluted. That is at the core of the discussion and the decision that the House has to make in respect of the amendments regarding independent advice and assistance or advice as set out in the amendment from the Minister.

I urge the House, given the need to protect the independent advice sector, to accept the SDLP amendment. In doing so, I rely on a number of arguments. First, if you look at the evidence that the Social Development Committee took from the independent advice sector in 2013 and check the Hansard record of a debate in the Chamber in 2013, you can see that it was unanimously viewed that the independent advice sector was highly valued and very important in ensuring that those who sought advice were given all the advice that they required. Given that that was the very strong view of the Social Development Committee and the unanimous view of the Chamber when a motion on advice-giving was tabled, I think that the Chamber, its Members from all constituencies and all its parties know the value of independent advice. We have said it to ourselves and to that sector about the role that it plays. The background to our amendment is what the Chamber has endorsed and what the Committee acknowledged when it took evidence from the independent advice sector.

I make the point that the law should, in particular, refer to independent advice and assistance because of some of the experience that we have had in recent times when it has come to the Department working with other agencies in order to give advice. As the Minister will be aware, the Social Security Agency has conducted a financial support service trial that involved the agency, the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Public Health Agency. It was an effort to build up the advice being given to people from a certain client background. I have read that report over the last number of days, and I would rely on it when it comes to why we believe that the independent advice amendment should be supported.

The Minister will be aware of what the trial concluded. On the subject of measurement of success criteria, the FSS evaluation report and letter states:

> *"The analysis against the success criteria show that the first two criteria were not met, with no claimants taking up the signposting opportunity to speak to the advice sector on generalist advice and only minimal taking up of specialist advice".*

The Minister's own report says that. Even though there was a pilot being run across DARD, the Social Security Agency and others, whereby enhanced advice was being given to claimants, what did they have to do? They had to signpost those claimants to go off to the independent sector because they did not have the in-house capacity to give them all the advice that they needed when it came to managing all their affairs. What was the consequence when people were signposted to speak to the advice sector on generalist advice? It was that no claimants — not one — took up the opportunity. At the same time, there was only minimal take-up of specialist advice.

I put it to the Minister that, when it comes to the issue of a statutory right, if it ends up that the statutory right concentrates its focus in respect of the life of the Social Security Agency, then you might replicate the hard experience of this pilot, where it is clear that the SSA, for all its capacity, was not able to give all the advice to a claimant that was necessary and that the claimant therefore had to be signposted to generalist and specialist independent advice-giving agencies. What happened? The claimant did not go there.

The argument that I make to the Minister is that, if we are to recognise — I think that he recognises this — that there is a need to give advice to claimants, given the general circumstances and the particular context of welfare reform and universal credit and the hard experience of that pilot — the report is from May 2014, so it is very recent experience — it is the independent sector that needs to be in the Bill. That by no means precludes in-house advice, but advice on the basis of that evidence must, in my view, be in law, referencing the independent sector as well as in-house sectors. I urge the Minister to consider those points over the next couple of hours before a vote is taken.

The Minister will be aware that the report outlines all the signposting of claimants across the range of their needs. I cannot fully recall the figures, but a very significant portion of those who were being given advice under the pilot — I think that it was 46% — and then had to be signposted to generalist and specialist advice agencies did not go there. I also have to say that there was good experience in the SSA/DARD pilot, and I do not want to diminish that in any shape or form. Nonetheless, there is real evidence that the balance of the argument lies in putting access to the independent sector in the Bill. In general, I refer Members to all my comments about the advice sector at Consideration Stage.

I will conclude my point on these amendments by saying that 1,493 claimants out of 2,758 FSS interviewees — that is over 50% and is probably 56% — were signposted to generalist or specialist advice-giving agencies. The report outlines who they were in terms of personal budgeting, money management, debt advice, the Housing Rights Service, improving benefit take-up and so on, yet the experience is that virtually none of the people who were signposted to any of those agencies went there. We should learn from that by making our amendment to the Bill.

As you might have gathered, there is no particular order to this. I will move on to amendment No 27 to schedule 1. Once again, this advice comes from the Human Rights Commission. If I may, I will read into the record its statutory advice to the House for work-related requirements and schedule 1:

> *"Schedule 1, paragraph 7 provides a power to make regulations for claimants who assert a right to reside to automatically be treated as falling within the 'all work related requirements'. Based on the regulations subsequently published for the scheme in Britain this will mean most European Union migrant workers having to actively seek 35 hours a week regardless of their circumstances. In effect, for example, a Polish claimant losing work who has a child under 12 months, caring for a severely disabled person or who has health problems, will be required to seek work 35 hours while her counterpart from Northern Ireland will be placed in the no work related requirements.*
>
> *Moreover, concessions which allow people in limited work categories to seek self-employment route back to work without facing the 'minimum income floor' will also not be open to EU migrants. This concession is provided to claimants in the 'all work requirements'."*

This is the critical paragraph:

> *"These provisions are discriminatory and arguably contrary to European law which provides that EU migrant workers should be provided with the same social and tax advantages as UK workers. The issue has yet to be legally tested in Britain as the roll out of Universal credit in pilot areas has precluded EU migrant workers.*
>
> *The Commission recommends that this clause should not be enacted."*

Here we have the Human Rights Commission saying that, whilst the Minister has endorsed the human rights compliance of the Bill:

> *"These provisions are discriminatory and arguably contrary to European law"*

in respect of schedule 1, paragraph 7. Given the scale of those words and the fact that it has not been legally tested in Britain because there has been no universal credit pilot for EU migrant workers, it seems to me that a precautionary approach informed by the Human Rights Commission is the right one. For that reason, we make this recommendation in respect of schedule 1.

4.45 pm

Amendment No 4 deals with private contractors, and I will respond to the earlier comments from the Sinn Féin Benches. If it is the case, as Mr Brady outlined, that he opposes the privatisation of work in relation to welfare — I presume that he means welfare in this instance but also more generally — and if that is the point of principle, Sinn Féin should have tabled an amendment to force a vote in the Chamber on that point of principle. Mr Brady said that Sinn Féin opposed the use of private contractors, so it follows that it would table an amendment, but Sinn Féin has been silent.

I say this because I was rereading Hansard from the time when I brought welfare reform legislation through the Chamber. What I said on those occasions and say it again now is that Mr Brady is probably second to none in the Chamber in his understanding of welfare operation and practice. I do not think that anybody would dispute that. I did not dispute that in 2010 and 2011 when bringing legislation through the Chamber as Minister for Social Development, and I do not dispute it now. He has a wealth of knowledge. That, by the way, is no endorsement of Mr Brady when it comes to events that might arise in Newry and Armagh, where it is game on —

Mr Brady: Will the Member give way?

Mr Attwood: I will give way to the Member.

Mr Brady: Is that what is meant by "damned by faint praise"?

Mr Attwood: If I were to damn you, Mr Brady, you would know that it was not by faint praise. Whilst I wish every candidate well, I know that Justin McNulty will win well.

Putting that aside, I will not second-guess Mr Brady when it comes to his knowledge of welfare. Indeed, he is right to call me to account on Atos. I was the Minister, so, if, on my watch, something did not work, went belly up, was not quite right or ended up with a private contractor getting out of a contact because of the way things were done, you are right to call me to account. It should be exactly the same for every other former Minister. It will be no reassurance to Mr Brady — officials in DSD will confirm this — that I struggled with that contract being made. In my time at DSD, I looked at ways in which I could go through it, get round it or go over it, and I was not able to do so. I did not go in the direction of Atos with any enthusiasm. In fact, it was quite the contrary. I tried to find ways to deal with the issue. Did I anticipate that Atos would potentially end up in the hole that it ended up in? Yes, I did, but I was not able in the circumstances at the time to do what, left to my own devices, I might have done.

I have to say to Mr Brady that there were no petitions of concern presented to us or any other party in respect of any aspect of welfare reform legislation at that time. If Mr Brady reads the Hansard reports of debates on welfare reform in June 2010, he will see that he said that his party would not seek a Division. That was in June 2010. Mr Brady said in the Chamber that he would not seek a Division on the welfare reform legislation that I was bringing through the House at that time. You may want to criticise me over Atos or the welfare regime that was working itself through at that time, but Mr Brady and Sinn Féin on the Floor said that they were not even going to cause a Division —

Mr Maskey: Will the Member give way?

Mr Attwood: I will in a second.

They were not even going to cause a Division, never mind table a petition of concern against all of that. Therefore, if there is history around welfare reform, it is history that applies to more than one individual or one party.

As everybody in the House knows — whether they admit it or not, Hansard confirms it — I repeatedly put down markers in the Chamber about what was happening in May and June of 2010 and in November 2010 when I came back to the House to tell it about the scale of what Iain Duncan Smith, as Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, was about to deploy around universal credit and welfare reform. Members including Mr Brady and Ms Ní Chuilín said that, when it came to those issues, I, as Minister, was on the same page as them.

Mr Maskey: I thank the Member for giving way. It is unfortunate that we should end up spending half of the day talking about what happened a number of years ago, but it is important to put on record what happened. The Member referred to Sinn Féin's position in a previous mandate, when he was involved with welfare legislation, as his predecessor had been. That is fair enough. I always understand the difficulties that all Ministers will occasionally find themselves in, but, if the Member wants to quote Hansard, it is important to quote all of it. It needs to be clearly stated — I would like the former Minister to acknowledge this — that the Sinn Féin members of the Social Development Committee at the time — Fra McCann, Carál Ní Chuilín and Mickey Brady — were very vociferous in their opposition to key aspects of the welfare reform legislation that was being put through. They expressly placed their objections on the record, both in the Chamber and in Committee.

When the previous Minister put the legislation through by way of accelerated passage, we did not have the requisite numbers to table a petition of concern, as the Member knows. Hansard shows that Minister Ritchie and her party colleagues were very clear that accelerated passage was needed to make sure that the legislation was put forward in the interests of maintaining the principle of parity. If the Member wants to keep referring to Hansard, he should recall all of Hansard. We should move on to the legislation that we are currently dealing with.

Mr Attwood: I was replying to Mr Maskey's colleague, which I was entitled to do. If we are not going to talk about the past, perhaps Mr Maskey will scold Mr Brady, because he brought up the past.

Mr Speaker: There were remarks directed at you relating to your tenure as Minister. You were entitled to respond, and I gave you the space to do so. However, I invite you to bring it up to date now.

Mr Attwood: The only other point that I will make about that time is that, as Hansard will confirm, my argument was this: let us stretch parity. Those are the words that I used. I went further and said that, if we were going to look at the issue of parity, we should do so in a discerning and not a reactionary way. I recall, as Hansard will confirm, that Ms Ní Chuilín complimented me and said that my approach — to stretch parity — was the right one.

I move back to the amendment on private contractors. The Member for East Antrim has left, but this is the one part of the Human Rights Commission's submission, which runs to 20 or 30 paragraphs, in which an amendment is drafted for the consideration of Members. It gave advice in respect of many aspects of welfare reform. This is the one where it went further and drafted an amendment. We reworded that amendment because the Bill Office indicated that there might be some issues about it. What the amendment states — we tried to reflect this as faithfully as we could, consistent with the advice of the Bill Office — is:

> *"The Commission advises that, for the avoidance of any doubt, the Bill makes clear that those private contractors are subject to the jurisdiction of the Human Rights Act 1998. The Commission proposes that a new clause should be inserted after clause 30. It may read:*
>
> *31. - (1) Authorised persons under section 30 shall be taken to be exercising a function of a public nature.*
>
> *(2) In subsection 1 'functions of a public nature' has the same meaning as in section 6(3) of the Human Rights Act 1998 (acts of public authorities)."*

We have taken those words and slightly adjusted them in order to meet the approval of the Bill Office — they might even meet the approval of the House — and to probe that issue. It may be that, when the Minister replies, he will be able to say that, actually, it is taken care of in some other subsection of that clause. I cannot see it there, but I am prepared to be convinced that what is in that draft clause captures what the Human Rights Commission recommends in respect of private contractors.

The reason why it is so crucial that we have absolute certainty in respect of this is partly the point made by Mr Brady about what the private contractors do or do not do when it comes to the treatment of claimants, but it is more than that. It is that we all know that the Tory dogma on the delivery of public service is to put more and more public services in the hands of private contractors. The House will remember how private contractors were appointed to manage the DEL Steps to Work contracts in the summer or early autumn of 2009. When DEL awarded training contracts to a private contractor that happened not to be resident in Northern Ireland, that private contractor — one of the biggest private contractors in Britain — had one member of staff and one mobile telephone in Northern Ireland. Then it was given a number of weeks by DEL and DFP to satisfy DEL and DWP that it could deliver the contract. How did it do that? By subcontracting the work to Northern Ireland contractors and taking 15% or so of the overall cost.

Mr F McCann: It happened a couple of months ago.

Mr Attwood: And it is still happening, so we need to be very wise when it comes to any legislation that is generalist in its content but gives opportunities to private contractors to get business on behalf of the state. Mr McCann whispered in my ear there that it happened a number of months ago in respect of private contractors and how they conduct themselves in the delivery of public services. There is a lot of bad experience when it comes to private contractors across the delivery of public services in Britain and, increasingly, in Northern Ireland. What the Human Rights Commission is doing, as I understand it, is trying to build it into law that private contractors should be required to comply with the relevant sections of the Human Rights Act, because the private contractor is fulfilling a function of a public nature.

The Human Rights Commission has brought this to the attention of the House because of a court case back in 2002: R v Leonard Cheshire Foundation. This is what Lord Justice Woolf — Lord Woolf, as he then was — said. The case revolved around claimants who were elderly and in a nursing home:

> *"who challenged the foundation's decision to close it after they had been there more than seventeen years. The Court of Appeal held that the foundation was not a functional public authority under Human Rights Act s 6, because its contract to provide housing to residents funded by the council did not involve any public functions."*

Lord Woolf said that it was:

> *"not standing in the shoes of the local authorities",*

But he added:

> *"in their contracts with private housing providers, local authorities ought to require the providers to respect the residents' Convention rights."*

5.00 pm

What the Human Rights Commission is arguing, as I understand it, is this: let us create certainty that any contracts that the Social Security Agency enters into with private providers or government must require the providers to respect the resident's convention rights. The Minister may yet be able to convince me that this is in the clause. It is certainly not in the words of the clause. It may be there implicitly, but we need to have certainty. I urge the Minister that the best way to create certainty is to have those words in the contract.

I want to move on to the bedroom tax and amendment Nos 11 and 20. I will start by reminding the Minister what he said at Consideration Stage in respect of then clause 69. He will know what I am going to say. He was asked on the Floor:

> *"In the short term, the critical question is this: if someone decides that there is a significant change in a tenant's personal circumstances and there is suitable alternative accommodation, and the tenant says that they do not wish to move from their three-bedroom house, will they be subject to the bedroom tax?" — [Official Report, Bound Volume 101, p490, col 2].*

The Minister replied:

> *"That will be dependent on how we develop the scheme. I have heard a lot of comment in the last 24 hours that people want us to be definitive about every individual single issue." — [Official Report, Bound Volume 101, p490, col 2].*

Yes, we do want you to be definitive about every single issue.

> *"There is no doubt about what will happen. There will be those who, for their own political reasons ... will bring out examples and say, 'You said there wasn't going to be this. Well, here is the evidence.' Let us remember that we are dealing with a complex situation and with families who face a variety of challenging and complex circumstances. Not everybody's family is as unified as we would like them to be. Families today are more diverse. I say this on a personal basis ... I cannot give this House a blank cheque so that, in every set of circumstances in relation to all the issues that we are dealing with, every one of them will be dealt with in exactly the same way ... I ask the Member to give us the indulgence to ensure that we are in a position to develop the scheme. Officials are doing that, and I hope to be in a position to see the proposals relatively soon." — [Official Report, Bound Volume 101, p490, col 2].*

My question to the Minister was:

> *"if someone decides that there is a significant change in a tenant's ... circumstances and there is suitable alternative accommodation, and the tenant says that they do not wish to move from their three-bedroom house, will they be subject to the bedroom tax?" — [Official Report, Bound Volume 101, p490, col 2].*

That is the question that has to be answered today. Earlier in the debate, Mr Maskey had said:

> *"what we have at this time is an agreement for the next number of years under which no one will have to pay the burden of that bedroom tax. That, I think, is one of the most important messages that should come from this Chamber yesterday and today ... People out there who are suffering through wondering whether they are going to have to pay additional rent or move out of their house now know as a result of this five-party agreement that they will not have to suffer that." — [Official Report, Bound Volume 101, p482, col 1].*

Mr Maskey was unambiguous:

> *"People ... who are suffering through wondering whether they are going to have to pay additional rent or move out of their house now know as a result of this five-party agreement that they will not have to suffer that." — [Official Report, Bound Volume 101, p482, col 2].*

However, the Minister seemed to be somewhat more uncertain. Therefore, the amendment that we have on the Marshalled List is to probe that potential difference. This is the question that I have to ask the Minister: in the event that there is a person who somebody decides has changed personal circumstances and there is alternative suitable accommodation, will they receive the bedroom tax given that they are in an over-accommodation situation, as London might describe it, or will they not receive the bedroom tax? What is the answer?

If somebody has suitable alternative accommodation, their personal circumstances have changed and they say that they are not leaving the house, will they be subject to the bedroom tax? Will they be put in an impossible situation where, to avoid the bedroom tax, they are obliged to take up the alternative offer of accommodation? If that is the case, I say to the Minister that it appears to me that, having closed the bedroom tax through the front door, we will now have it through the back door. There will be a category of tenant who may disagree with the assessment of their personal circumstances and about suitable alternative accommodation, and because they will not receive the bedroom tax in those circumstances, they will have to pay part of the rent from their own resources or will have no alternative but to say, "I have to get out of my property". Mr Maskey is not here to speak for himself, but I do not think that that is what he understands about mitigation in the bedroom tax on a pound-for-pound basis for any person, be they a current or a future tenant. Are we saying

to people that, irrespective of the bedroom tax, there will be circumstances where they will have to vacate their properties? We need absolute clarity on that.

In the current circumstances with the bedroom tax and the lack of smaller social housing units, in the context of segregated housing in many parts of this part of Ireland, not least in Belfast, and as the new regime is rolled out and the discretionary fund and the mitigation of the bedroom tax are implemented, we believe that the policy position should be the creation of certainty for tenants now. That certainty is that they will not be required to vacate their properties, even if somebody makes the judgement that their personal circumstance have changed and that suitable alternative accommodation exists. You have to give that upfront certainty now, otherwise doubts will creep in that the Stormont House deal, which, on a pound-for-pound basis, mitigated the bedroom tax, is not all that it appears on whatever piece of paper that outcome is recorded. I urge the Minister to give that reassurance by endorsing our amendments, which have that policy consequence.

Of course, there are wider reasons why the Minister might want to adopt that policy position. It seems to me that the Tories so often look at people's accommodation as a house and not as a home. During the Consideration Stage debate, I recorded a conversation that Reg Empey and I had with Chris Grayling, who was a junior Minister in DWP when Mr Empey was the Minister for Employment and Learning, about why somebody in a social house had to vacate it. He argued that, if somebody in a privately owned property has to give up the ownership of that house because of financial difficulties, it was only fair that somebody next door, who was a social tenant and in receipt of housing support, should have to give their home up as well. That was the logic of Chris Grayling's argument, and I thought that that was a strange value that verged on the offensive.

I say to the Minister that, given the policy position of the current context, we should view where people live not as their house but their home. In viewing it as a home, we need to give every possible protection to them in their security of tenure. That will mean that, when it comes to someone living in a house, even where their personal circumstances may have changed and suitable alternative accommodation may be available, any move has to be with the tenant's consent. Where future treatment of that tenant is concerned, it cannot be imposed either through the back door or the front door through paying the bedroom tax or not. We urge the Minister to adopt that approach.

May I deal, briefly, Mr Speaker, with amendment Nos 2, 3, 8, 9, 10 and 11? This is in respect of basic information being given to sanctions. I listened to what Mr Brady said in this regard and about how he understood that all the matters that were addressed in those amendments were being catered for under the new welfare reform regime. I await the Minister's comments in that regard.

Again, this amendment was drafted by the Advice Services Consortium; it was not drafted by wise people in the SDLP. The Member for East Antrim seems to have some doubt in that regard. I will come back to his comments in a second. On this amendment, the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA), which has a view on welfare reform, as people know, and the Advice Services Consortium said:

> *"On any occasion when a decision is taken to enforce a benefit sanction on a claimant, the following steps should be followed:*
>
> *The relevant statutory agency/agencies must provide the claimant with a clear, easy-to-understand written explanation detailing why this decision has been taken*
>
> *Claimants must be given a 1-month window in which they can commence a formal challenge against the sanction, during which time any sanction will not commence and the benefit will continue as normal;*
>
> *In their written explanation, the statutory agency must inform the claimant of the availability of independent advice, and provide details of independent advice centres in their area."*

If the Minister can satisfy on those three questions, the amendment might not be moved; however, we will look for explicit reassurance in his answers to those three questions.

I will move on and ask a number of questions on the substantive amendment from the Minister in respect of the new fund. He might not be in a position to answer all these questions now, but, in the fullness of time, I ask for answers to be given one way or the other.

First, there is some discussion about making the medical advice for PIP a mandatory service, whereby GPs and consultants, in their contractual arrangements with government, would be under a mandatory requirement to provide medical advice. That is a good advance, and it is a good outcome that money is being provided to enable claimants to get independent medical advice. However, to harden that outcome, will the Minister advise whether there is any proposal or thinking in respect of making it a mandatory requirement on GPs and consultants, in their contract with services with the state?

Secondly —

Mr Brady: Will the Member give way?

Mr Attwood: Yes.

Mr Brady: It is my understanding that the IB113, which is the form that the Department sends out to a GP, is part of a contractual arrangement. It is different if somebody goes to a doctor and says, "I need a note". The IB113 is a form, issued by the Department, that doctors fill in. That is the case, as far as I am aware. I have checked it in the past, and that is what I have been told. It is part of the contractual agreement, but that is the only form that they have to fill in. What we are talking about in respect of medical evidence having primacy may well be a different thing from a consultant. So, I think that you might have difficulty in getting consultants to agree that as part of their contractual arrangement. Some other financial arrangement may have to be addressed.

Mr Attwood: As I indicated earlier, I will certainly defer to the Member's knowledge of the operation of this, but he will also confirm, from his knowledge as a political representative and as a welfare worker in the Newry area, that the written evidence that comes from doctors and consultants can be of a very mixed pedigree. Some

will write a short, indecipherable note; others will write a substantial report. So, I think that there is probably a need to standardise. There is, I think, somewhere in the system, thinking that you can create systems whereby GP or consultant medical evidence can be part of a contract, but it should also be done in a standardised way.

What is the point in government allocating whatever tens of millions of pounds each year to provide medical evidence if you end up with some indecipherable note from a GP or consultant. I say that without criticising doctors, because we have to be very careful not to criticise doctors these days. Also, my writing is indecipherable; you only have to go and speak to the staff in my office to understand that. The point is this: is there some thinking about how to standardise and build into the architecture of the relationship at a contractual level between the state and doctors?

5.15 pm

Secondly, going back to the amendment that the SDLP tabled at Consideration Stage in respect of people who have a condition that arises from an incident involving a state agency or a terror organisation — what is known as a conflict-related event — is there any fresh thinking about how to manage people who move from DLA to PIP in those circumstances? I think that there was a very strong view at Stormont House and in the Chamber that we should deal with that.

Thirdly, the Minister indicated previously that there would be some further work done on the welfare cap commission. There is some indication that there have been discussions with DWP and Treasury in that regard. Can you indicate where we are with that piece of work, the draft terms of reference and when it might be taken forward? As you know from our previous submissions, we think that the welfare cap and the benefits cap will become harder issues over the next period of time, and very quickly if the Tories get elected. I think that you will see, as they did in June 2011, that they will move very quickly to make further interventions in the overall benefit spend and the overall individual benefit entitlement. Yesterday, the commentary from London was on the back of the Prime Minister's commitments to our senior citizens — proper commitments in many incidences — to give them guarantees on benefits and other assistance. The immediate question and implication was that the strain was going to fall further on the welfare budget and welfare claimants, because, as the Tories move to protect one sector of our society, there is an equal and opposite effect and impact on another sector of our society. The commentary in London yesterday was that, on the far side of those guarantees, there will be more pain for those on welfare. That is why we think that the proposals for a welfare cap commission will be very important.

I conclude by making these points. I checked with the leadership of the Alliance Party and the leadership of the Ulster Unionist Party. There were a lot of conversations in Stormont House and Stormont Castle about the Budget, welfare and all the other matters. However, checking with the leadership of the other parties, what is claimed did or did not happen on 17 December is not consistent with what they say happened on 17 December. If I am going to rely on people, I would rely on those people. Could I also say that —

Mr Durkan: I thank the Member for giving way. I was listening intently to the Member and wondering whether he was saying that there is a three-party agreement that there was no four-party agreement? *[Laughter.]*

Mr Attwood: The Durkans always have a turn of phrase, and that is certainly another example of it.

The real issue is whether there was a two-party deal. That is the issue. You can take this whatever way you want, and you can rely on it, or you may not want to rely on it. Of course, Mr Robinson made claims long before Stormont House, long before Stormont Castle and long before these negotiations. In fact, in April 2014, he claimed that there was agreement in 2013, not between five, four or three parties but at OFMDFM level. Mr Robinson said:

> *"After a long period of negotiation – and I was directly involved in those negotiations because it ended up, as most of the problems do, on Martin's desk and on mine – we agreed a package with Sinn Fein at OFMDFM level ...*
>
> *I think it was about May 8 [2013]; Sinn Fein held their meeting of party colleagues in what they hoped would be an endorsement of that negotiated package.*
>
> *I was called in on a Saturday afternoon by Martin who had come down to tell me that he had been unable to get the package through their party organisation."*

That package had no supplementary payment fund or any money to go off and get medical evidence, and it did not even have guarantees about the bedroom tax, which may or may not be unravelling, for future tenants; it had cover only for current tenants. To be fully accurate: Mr McGuinness is furious about Mr Robinson's claims:

> *"I think it was a big mistake for him to [do that]. Quite clearly some of the things that he said in relation to the discussions that took place between himself and myself ... on the issue of welfare cuts bear no reality to what happened at the time."*

Let us park everything that happened in May 2013, to take up Mr Maskey's point, and what the parties were and were not prepared to sign up to. We should take some strength from the fact that, whilst we differed on it at times, the package that came out did so because people held the line on welfare. They held the line in the first instance when petitions of concern were tabled in respect of the bedroom tax and the overall Bill, some of which were endorsed by one but not all the parties. It was then taken through the Ad Hoc Committee, which was, Mr Brady, an SDLP proposal. Mr Durkan MP proposed to the SDLP that we should use that mechanism to interrogate the legislation, and it served the Assembly well.

I also welcome the journey that the DUP and other parties went on to work up a bigger and better package, one that I would like other jurisdictions in these islands to remodel in their own image and for their own needs. If there is strength in what came out of the five-party agreement, it will hopefully have application for welfare claimants wherever they may be on these islands.

I ask the Minister to confirm what Mr Maskey said or did not say: is the bedroom tax neutralised? On the basis of what you said the last day, some doubt and uncertainty hang over the Chamber this afternoon.

Mr Lyttle: I start by saying that Mr Attwood and Mr Durkan might want to reflect on the accusations that they have made about the validity of multiparty agreements on this issue, given the SDLP's inability to get one-party agreement on any issue at this time.

My Alliance Party colleague Stewart Dickson set out the general Alliance Party position at this stage of the Welfare Reform Bill and the rationale for opposing amendments.

A Member: Will the Member give way?

Mr Lyttle: I want to make some progress.

I take the opportunity to return to the amendments concerned with ensuring access to independent advice services. At Consideration Stage, I sought assurances from the Minister as to how he would ensure adequate access and resourcing for independent advice services in lieu of a statutory duty to ensure access to them. I was grateful for his response in his winding-up speech. He set out the current provision for independent advice services through the DSD advice services strategy, Opening Doors, and confirmed a budget of around £4·5 million for advice services in Northern Ireland.

I have a few additional questions for the Minister, and I hope that he will be able to respond. Will he go into more detail as to how exactly that £4·5 million budget is being distributed and what outcomes are being achieved through it? He knows that, at the previous stage, I raised my concern that the East Belfast Independent Advice Centre, which receives, as far as I am aware, a mere £40,000 from DSD, achieves significant outcomes for that investment. In the overall scheme of £4·5 million, that seems a very small investment. It would be good to know how the greater part of that £4·5 million is being distributed and what type of outcomes are being achieved as a result.

The Minister also spoke of how responsibility for independent advice services would transfer to councils. I would be grateful if he would go into more detail on how councils will be able to distribute and maximise these resources in an even better way than is the case currently. He gave a commitment and an assurance that work with independent advice services would be intensified, and he acknowledged the case that I made for the excellent work of the East Belfast Independent Advice Centre. He commended its work, which I am grateful for, and he referred to the huge amounts that it is able to draw down on behalf of some of the most vulnerable. Indeed, he said that this efficiency was a model that could be transferred to the rest of Northern Ireland.

I remind the Minister that the East Belfast Independent Advice Centre, and many other advice centres of its kind, achieve these outcomes on a relative shoestring, and it appears that that shoestring could be getting shorter. I mentioned that the centre gets a mere £40,000 from DSD, and my understanding is that gets only £30,000 from the council, yet it returns millions of pounds in benefit entitlement and assistance to the people of Northern Ireland. I ask him again to be more specific about how exactly the work to support those important services will be intensified and improved.

Mr Agnew: I thank the Member for giving way. He will be aware that two amendments are tabled: amendment No 17 was tabled by the SDLP and countersigned by the Green Party, and there is an amendment from the Minister. For me, the essential difference between the two is that the Minister's amendment does not cite independent advice, which the Member has mentioned a number of times in his contribution. Is he concerned about the Minister's amendment?

Mr Lyttle: I thank the Member for his intervention. I agree with the spirit of the concern that he raises, and I hope that the Minister will be able to clarify why his assurances to intensify support for independent advice services mean that his amendment should be supported in lieu of the amendment that clearly states the duty on independent services.

The Minister, in his response to the debate on the Bill's previous stage, raised a concern that placing a statutory duty on independent advice services might hamper their independent nature. I am not sure that I agree with that, and perhaps the Minister would care to elaborate. Regardless of a duty or otherwise, it is essential that we get firm and clear assurances from the Minister that his Department and the Executive will adequately resource independent advice services so that they can continue to achieve excellent outcomes for our community. I have asked for assurances on how he believes the transfer to councils of the responsibility for independent advice services will be a more efficient and more helpful way to support and deliver those services.

I welcome the Minister's assurances, but I would be grateful for greater clarity on the key question of how that £4·5 million is being distributed and utilised. Perhaps the Minister can go into more detail on how the Social Security Agency is performing against its existing targets for benefit uptake, given that, as Mr Agnew stated today, the Minister proposes an amendment that makes no specific reference to independent advice services. There are concerns that the support would go not to independent advice services but to statutory advice services. It would be good if the Minister could speak to how statutory services such as the Social Security Agency are performing against their targets for benefit uptake.

I also ask the Minister what specific plans he has for that intensification of support and work in conjunction with the independent advice services. Can he confirm again that adequate resources will be given to the successful, efficient and essential independent advice centres that exist in our community, such as the East Belfast Independent Advice Centre?

5.30 pm

Mr Allister: Whereas my contribution, content-wise, is unlikely to be like that of either of the previous two Members to speak, I assure the House that its duration is more likely to be akin to Mr Lyttle's than Mr Attwood's.

Mr McCallister: Give us an hour, Jim.

Mr Allister: Do not tempt me.

I want to focus primarily on amendment No 22, which the Minister has tabled. Its opening words unveil that it is all about making payments:

> *"to persons who suffer financial disadvantage as a result of the changes to social security benefits and tax credits contained in this Act and the Welfare Reform Act 2012."*

There we have it. The clause, with akin clauses, is about effectively nullifying the import of welfare reform in Northern Ireland. The spin-off of that is the cost that will flow from it. Strangely, in the House today, we have hardly heard a word about how that will be funded and what it will cost. It seems that tonight, on BBC's 'Spotlight', that question may be asked, but it has not really been asked in the House, and this is a House that is supposed to have control over and an interest in the public finances of Northern Ireland. The reason that it is not asked is the embarrassing answer, which is that the cost will be £564 million over the next six years. That is not money that will drop like pennies from heaven, nor is it money that is coming on some white charger; that is money that is coming out of the very heart of essential expenditure in Northern Ireland. It is coming out of the block grant. No one is giving us any extra money. The money is coming out of the money that currently is spread over our schools, hospitals, roads and other vital services.

To fund amendment No 22 and others, we are going to diminish that vital coterie of money, and we will do it in a way that will have inevitable adverse consequences for the people who pay their taxes, go out to work, get out of their bed in the morning and make a contribution to society. We are going to use the money that pays for the hospitals for us all, the schools for us all and all the other vital services to deliver the deal that was done between the DUP and Sinn Féin on welfare reform in order to nullify the effective impact of welfare reform.

Welfare reform, whatever one thinks about it, had certain component parts, one of which was incentivising work. At the stroke of a pen, we are going to liquidate that idea in Northern Ireland through the supplementary funding and through making sure that no one gets less. It is not just, I beg to suggest, for six years. Think the matter through. Over those six years, take the benefit cap, for example, for which some of the money will be used. At present, 6,600 families in Northern Ireland receive more than £26,000 net in benefits a year, which equates to earnings of £33,000 or £34,000. On average, those 6,600 families receive £30,700, equating to earnings of over £40,000 a year. It may be, depending on what happens in the general election, that the benefit cap in GB will fall to £23,000. Think of the differential that will exist in six years' time, even on the issue of benefit caps, between Northern Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom, and then ask yourself the question —

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

Mr Brady: Will the Member give way?

Mr Allister: In a moment.

Ask yourself whether there is any prospect of reverting to the status quo at that point. Of course there is not.

Through the amendment, the Minister is asking us to sign that blank cheque away into the future and maintain that differential, which, with an ever-widening gap, will get greater. It is not just £564 million over six years; that is but the first down payment of it. The Member I am about to give way to comes from a party that, I suspect, in six years' time, will be campaigning avidly for the retention of all the supplementary payments, and how dare anyone suggest that we might just come into line with what we can afford?

Mr Brady: I thank the Member for giving way. I did not realise that he had brought his crystal ball with him today.

You are castigating people on benefits, and I have previously heard you talk about handouts as if the Social Security Agency was some sort of charitable institution. I would like to make two points. First, a single person running a household is on £72·40 a week, which is going up to £73·10, and you suggest that people actually choose to do that. The second point is that, when we talk about the health service and various other things, there are unforeseen consequences. If vulnerable people are not protected, surely that will put more pressure on the health service and on all the other statutory agencies. That seems a reasonable point.

Mr Allister: I am not suggesting for one moment that everyone on benefits is a sponger — by no means. There are people on benefits through absolutely no fault of their own, through disability or through genuine inability to find work. In west Belfast, for example, 880 families get in excess of £26,000 a year in benefits, in contrast to constituencies like mine, where something in the order of 250 families are on that level of benefit. No one, surely, could suggest that there is not a culture of benefits and a work-shyness in some areas that feeds the mentality that the state owes them in perpetuity. That is the import of the amendment.

Mr Maskey: I thank the Member for giving way. Will he not accept that the rate of drawdown of benefits is completely commensurate with the levels of deprivation and the unemployment statistics that are available for each constituency? Rather than singling one constituency out, the converse of your argument is, in my opinion, that we should create more investment and give more jobs and support to people on benefits. The more support we can give to those communities and individuals, the less likely they are to need to avail themselves of benefits, especially if we create employment for them in those constituencies — it is not just West Belfast; it is every constituency — commensurate with the levels of deprivation and unemployment.

Mr Allister: Let me remind the Member that more jobs have been created by Invest NI in his constituency in recent years than in mine. I am sure that there are people with a benefits culture in my constituency, but I also know that there is a very definite attachment to a work ethic that gets people out of their bed in the morning to go out and work. If you remove any incentive to work then, of course, you will perpetuate that situation.

Northern Ireland has the highest level of economic inactivity in the whole of the United Kingdom. These amendments will do nothing to address that. And so, when the House hears the Enterprise Minister and the Minister for Employment and Learning lauding their determination to build a better, brighter economic future, which is all very desirable, and at the same time does nothing to incentivise people into work — indeed, quite the opposite — one has to ask why the House is pulling in two utterly contradictory directions. That is the problem here.

Of course, this is the product of the fact that a deal had to be done, because there was something far more important than incentivising people into work and far more important than building a prosperous economic future. It was about keeping these precious institutions going. That was the

compulsion of the moment that drove the Stormont Castle agreement. Now, whether in truth it is an agreement between two parties or five parties and whether some are forgetful and unsure about what they agreed, I do not know. I was not there, so I cannot help the House. But I know what I read, and I have read annex A of the Stormont Castle agreement.

I will take one of the measures — and I am not picking on lone parents, by any means. There are lone parents who do a phenomenal job raising their kids and providing for them, who want to push them on and see them succeed. Yet I read in this that one of the items of agreement is that:

> *"Lone parents will not be sanctioned for refusing offers of work or training if they cite a lack of childcare provision as the sole reason".*

Could it be more lax? You do not have to prove that there is a lack of childcare provision, you just have to be cute enough to cite it as the sole reason. If you cite it as the sole reason for refusing an offer of work, that is all right, then: carry on living off the state. That causes many people who go out to work — yes, many lone parents who go out to work, who make the effort — to ask, "Why do I bother?".

That is the problem with the approach to all of this. We are effectively saying to many people, "Why do you bother? We are creating this benefits utopia where you will not be incentivised into work and you will not be punished for not doing what you would be punished for elsewhere in the United Kingdom. Instead, you will be sustained at the level of benefits hitherto applicable".

Mr Attwood: Will the Member give way?

Mr Allister: Yes.

Mr Attwood: First, many people will find your comments offensive and verging on demonisation. Secondly, it has been established practice through many welfare reform Bills, because of the very poor childcare facilities in Northern Ireland, which is worse than Britain when it comes to affordable and accessible childcare, that the lack of affordable, accessible childcare is good cause. Thirdly, will you read into the record all of the statistical profile of west Belfast — the fact that people die younger, face much greater health challenges and have bigger families? Indeed, by every criterion of social disadvantage, west Belfast is ill served by the narrow-minded comments you have just made.

Mr Allister: I am sure that we could all expound the "Poor me" philosophy, but the state does not owe any of us a living. We contribute to the state, we pay our taxes and our National Insurance and, in return, we are entitled to expect to be sustained to a level. That is the essential genius of the welfare state: throughout the state, you pay in the same and are guaranteed the same back. Not any more in Northern Ireland. We are abandoning that premise at Sinn Féin's behest to get this deal. I simply make the point that I do not think that it sits comfortably with or pulls in the same direction as rebuilding and rebalancing the economy in this part of the United Kingdom; rather, it perpetuates that which ensures that we are not going to achieve those laudable objectives.

5.45 pm

Mr McCallister: I will probably follow on from some of Mr Allister's points, and I will speak mainly to amendment No 22. A couple of issues arise, and I want to come to both of them and take up Mr Attwood's intervention at some point as well.

If we look at this in the mix, we see that £565 million is going to it over a six-year period. Are we just protecting the welfare that we have had? Are we not doing any welfare reform? In that case, we come to the point that Mr Attwood made in an intervention on Mr Allister. If he wants to read into the record some of the stats for west Belfast, I am happy to give way and let him do that. If west Belfast is as bad as that under the current welfare system, surely you would want to reform it. That would be the essence of it.

At Consideration Stage, the Minister reiterated in his reply that we want work to pay. Mr Allister made the point about 6,500 families being on in excess of the £26,000 cap and some on an average of £30,000-plus. That is more than a Sinn Féin MLA takes home in their pay packet; it is more than many families get. To give some idea of that amount of money, to get to £30,000, you would need to be on a £40,000 salary. That is a significant income. We can look at some of the people who might get trapped on welfare alongside some average private-sector wages. An average hairdresser in the UK earns £11,000, a waiter or a member of bar staff earns £8,000, a window cleaner earns £13,000 and a chef earns £18,000.

Mr Flanagan: Will the Member give way?

Mr McCallister: I will in a second.

Yet, we are seriously suggesting that we should pay people in excess of £30,000 in benefit. I do not see how you will incentivise people when the other side of the Government wants to do corporation tax and get more people into work.

I am happy to give way.

Mr Flanagan: I thank the Member for giving way. He said that the average salary for an individual was about £24,000 or £25,000, and he compared that with the small number of families with an income from the Social Security Agency of over £30,000. He is not comparing like with like; he is comparing one individual with a salary with a family that has maybe a number of children taking in benefits.

My main point is this: I fundamentally agree with you when you say that we need to incentivise people and we need to make work pay. You then cited somebody earning £8,000 a year. Are you telling me that, because one section of people who work are paid £8,000 a year, which is far less than what you need to live on, people who are unable to work due to the fact that they cannot find a job, they have a serious disability or their children have serious disabilities that require constant care should be forced to live in poverty too? Incentivising people to work or making work pay is not about cutting the dole or disability benefits; it is about making work pay by paying people a proper wage for doing a job.

Standing up and reading into the record people who are paid £8,000, £11,000 or £12,000 a year for work is not the solution. If you want to talk about making work pay, then pay people a living wage for the job that they do. Making work pay is not going to work by cutting people's benefits.

Mr McCallister: I am grateful to the Member for that intervention. I am on record here as supporting companies that can afford to pay the living wage; I would like to see

them do that. The Prime Minister is on record as saying that Britain needs a pay rise, and I agree. I have made the point before in the Chamber that in many places in our welfare system we have used the tax credit system to subsidise low pay. That is not a direction of travel that we should be on; nor should we be using public funding to do that.

I agree with the Member on that, but I disagree with him on this —

Mr Brady: Will the Member give way?

Mr McCallister: I just want to finish the point. He talked about comparing an individual's income with that of a family. I am happy to do that. A family of two partners living together, both of whom are on the Northern Ireland average wage of £19,000, have a family income of £38,000. By the time they pay their tax they are less well off than the family on benefits that receives the £30,700 that Mr Allister spoke about. That is what I am saying. That is not a system that we, as an Assembly, should be supporting. At some point, this will go down the line, whether it is next year or the year after or when the six years run out and we will be so out of kilter with the rest of the UK. Can we continue to afford it?

Mr Agnew: Will the Member give way?

Mr McCallister: Yes, certainly.

Mr Agnew: Is the family with two workers on £19,000 a year receiving child benefit or support for childcare through working tax credit or childcare vouchers?

Mr McCallister: They could well be, because I have not said whether they have a family. I am simply making the point that at that stage they are, on paper, less well off than the family on benefits. That is not a position that, I suspect, even the Minister would want to take.

Mr Brady: Will the Member give way?

Mr McCallister: Yes, I am sorry; I should have given way earlier.

Mr Brady: I did not realise that it was Mr McCallister talking; I thought that I was listening to Iain Duncan Smith. Very simply, you need to put in context this notion of people getting £30,000. Even the Tories accept that benefit is at subsistence level; it is the lowest income that you can have. It is interesting that we are talking about incentivising people to work; there is a report out today that shows that five companies here in the North were paying below the minimum wage, as were 70 companies in Britain — and those are only the ones that they found out about.

I go back to my earlier point about the Social Security Agency being some sort of benevolent fund that gives people money. The reason that families get that amount of money is because they have large numbers of children and they may also have large numbers, unfortunately for them, of disabled children. They have disability living allowance (DLA) and all of that. Freud and his ilk tried to sell it in the House of Lords by talking about £26,000 and £35,000 gross. It is all nonsense; it is subsistence level benefit, and you need to get that into your head. People are not well off on benefits.

The underlying principle of welfare reform is to get people back to work. Nobody disagrees with that; it is better to be working than on benefit. Last year, there were 64,000 people unemployed and 4,000 jobs; it does not make a very good equation.

Mr McCallister: If £30,000 is subsistence level, should we not all be contributing to Sinn Féin MLAs? Will we not need to make sure that Mickey Brady gets elected to Westminster in May to get him up to a £67,000 salary? You cannot argue that £30,000, if that is an average, is subsistence level. I entirely accept some of your points about families. The number of children that families have is a choice and a matter for them, but you cannot argue about the figure of £30,000, which will keep on rising. At what level do you suggest we or the Minister should set the cap? Should it be £30,000, £35,000 or £40,000?

Mrs D Kelly: I thank the Member for giving way. Fundamentally, we have to agree on what type of society we wish to create and whether we want to have a fair society that protects the most vulnerable and the marginalised. I do not often hear the Member criticise the amounts of money that are paid out to the farming community — many members of which, although they may well have low incomes, are asset rich but are still subsidised with public money — nor indeed the companies that get money from Invest NI grants. If the Member had tempered his remarks right across all those recipients of public-sector money, rather than attacking only those people who find themselves unable to work because of family circumstances or the lack of employment in areas where they live, I might actually have had more respect for what he has to say.

Mr McCallister: I thank Mrs Kelly for her remarks. I am not attacking any individual: I happened to say that we, this Assembly and Executive, need to decide what type of society we want. I agree entirely with her on that, but that has not been quite clear in this debate and from others in this Assembly. On one hand, we are going to fire £565 million at topping up benefits for the next six years. Your argument and those of your colleague Mr Attwood were about the state of West Belfast. This Government have been in office now for eight years. This Administration has been in office for eight years, so why is West Belfast so bad? Sinn Féin is a party that has been in control of West Belfast, with an intermittent period of the SDLP — if you add in Gerry Fitt, they have been in charge of West Belfast since 1966. We are still told that it is one of the most deprived constituencies in the United Kingdom. You have to ask why.

If we are really serious about making work pay — and, to be fair to the Minister, I believe that he probably is committed to that, but I am not sure whether he can get some of his main colleagues in Sinn Féin over the line — the last thing that we as a society want to do is trap people in poverty and on benefits. Work has to pay. Work is actually good for people. It is good for your mental health. That is why we should encourage people into work.

That is why, when we look at the commitments in amendment No 22 and why we are spending this, we have to look at and set the other context. Mr Attwood's intervention to Mr Allister was about what else we should be doing. Should we not use some of this money to look at skills in those areas and to bring investment in? Should we not look at health inequality instead? He mentioned health inequalities and life expectancies — a key issue in his constituency, which has a remarkably lower life expectancy than somewhere like South Belfast. Why then are we cutting funding to the Public Health Agency? Why then are we not addressing that? Why are we not

looking at that? You could actually find that we increase inequalities in society through this measure.

When we cut corporation tax — Sinn Féin is supportive of that, and that is fine — who are the families and people who will most benefit from that? Will they be the least-well-educated people in society? No. All the evidence suggests that if you cut corporation tax, those with the best education will benefit most. We are driving forward a bigger state of inequality in society. I do not think that that is something that we should support.

Sinn Féin seems to be advocating that we effectively turn welfare reform on its head, trapping more people in poverty, instead of looking at how we get early intervention. We have talked for years about that. How do we really make early intervention work? How do we upstream the interventions and stop families getting into difficulties and being trapped; generations of people who have never worked or held a job? That is not something that we as an Assembly, the Minister or his Executive colleagues should support.

Mr Dickson: Will the Member give way?

Mr McCallister: I will in a second. We are looking at things like pupil premiums. We had the chance to do stuff when we had Barnett consequentials from free school meals in England. It just seemed to drift into the general Budget. We could have targeted that in the areas of worst need.

I agree entirely with the point on childcare provision because, as the father of three young children, I know the cost of childcare. I know the difficulty of getting childcare. We need to address that, but the childcare strategy is in disarray, and no money is being allocated to it. I would like to have seen or heard more detail on that from the Minister.

6.00 pm

Mr Dickson: What I am hearing from Mr McCallister and Mr Allister is that they would like us to push people over the edge into the most brutal area of Tory cuts. That makes the difference between Mr Attwood and me in the debate that we had this afternoon pale into insignificance. At least we are both agreed on the sum that should be spent. The disagreement is over how it might be spent, and what we should do with it in future. We have at least flushed out two Members who simply want to push everybody over the edge into incredible poverty.

Mr McCallister referred to how we might get people into employment and the type of learning and training that we should provide. Perhaps if we are in disagreement over whether people should be pushed off the edge or encouraged into employment, would he at least agree that squandering £1 million on poor teacher training and investing that £1 million in better education that will deliver better students, better teachers and better people for jobs is a way forward?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Order, please. The Member strayed well off the debate. I ask all Members to be careful.

Mr McCallister: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I agree with the Member's point on teacher training.

I do not think that Mr Allister or I were suggesting that we push people off the edge and into poverty. If the Member is saying that that is what we are suggesting, the only difference between us is that we are talking about doing it today, and he wants to do it in six years' time when the money runs out.

Is he telling me that it is £565 million for the next six years, when we will review it, and, if we need to throw another £560 million at it to keep these amendments alive, we will do it, and another £560 million for the five or six years after that? Is that what he is saying? It comes back to the debate on whether or not the bedroom tax is being implemented.

The only reason there is a difference between me and him over the Bill is because he wants to stay in the Executive, and I am happy to be away from it. To be fair to him, he is acting like a responsible member of the Government and sticking to his agreement — unlike others — but at least he is sticking to it, and that is the only difference. He is putting off the inevitable.

If I picked the Member up correctly, the questions that Mr Allister and I are raising are quite legitimate: namely, what is the long-term plan? There is a divergence in the Chamber and the Executive on where these amendments are taking us and on economic policy.

Am I seeing a coherent, collective government at one, wanting to make work pay and with a strategy to grow the economy and build a private sector that can create jobs and wealth and get people out, or are we seeing the Sinn Féin and SDLP approach of trapping people in poverty and limiting that social mobility whereby people have to stay in poverty and trapped on welfare in constituencies like West Belfast?

We have moved away from the idea of social and physical mobility in Northern Ireland, when education was a great way out of poverty. When Sinn Féin talks about using education, driving down inequalities in education and tackling disadvantage, where does that tie in with what is in the Bill and the amendments? Does that make sense? Is that linked up? I am not seeing the joined-upness of the Executive approach. I very much regret that, because we are putting in a considerable amount of resource while cutting our skills budget and training, and taking away the very things that could create wealth and jobs and get people out of poverty.

In an intervention, Mr Maskey challenged the idea that there are 800 families in West Belfast on £30,000 compared with 250 in North Antrim. What are the differences in those constituencies? Why are we not using this money to address inequalities in education, health, training and skills and trying to break the generational cycle of people being trapped in poverty and benefit dependency? I do not see that in the amendments.

Mr Flanagan: I thank the Member for giving way. He talks about ending benefit dependency. We all agree with that: we all want people to move into work, if they are able to work. However, the Member's solution to ending benefit dependency is to take people off benefits and give them nothing. Does he have an alternative apart from cutting their dole and cutting the disability payments of people who need them? Do you just want to take them off benefits, give them nothing and forget about them?

Mr McCallister: I am happy for the Member to read Hansard. At no point have I suggested, or tabled any amendments to suggest, that we should scrap our welfare system. I recognise that there are people who need

welfare, and I recognise that there are people who have such profound disabilities that they will never be able to work. It is right, proper and good that we have a safety net that catches people, because the last thing any of us want is to go back to a situation in which the cracks in the pavement are so wide that too many people are falling through them. However, there are some who are caught between not being able to afford childcare and others who get a job but lose their benefits at such a rate that it is not worth their while working. Does he not accept that there are people trapped on welfare?

I am not convinced that the solution is to write what is, effectively, a blank cheque for £565 million at present — but who knows whether we will have to keep writing these cheques? — on the strength of a not terribly detailed amendment on how the money will be spent. Mr Beggs asked whether we would hit the highest total of £130 million in 2018-19. Why would we expect that figure to fall after that? What will change? Mr Attwood, you wanted to make an intervention. Sorry, I had to remind you there.

Mr Attwood: I am not quite sure how to reply to that. Part of me says that, clearly, you are about to run for the Conservative Party in South Down in the forthcoming election, because Chris Grayling would have been impressed by that sort of contribution. Could you deal with some of the facts? One in 10 of our people, for example, is on disability benefit, which is twice the number in Britain. That is the consequence of historical inequality working through in the lives of people in terms of their health and experience.

In north and west Belfast, where much of the conflict was concentrated, people were traumatised physically and mentally. If you were to acknowledge those points, we could have a proper discussion. Instead, you throw out grandiose claims about how people in west Belfast are trapped in poverty. Look at the profile and then draw conclusions about why people are in the situation that they are in. The best way for you to understand is to come and visit west Belfast, and I invite you to do that between now and Final Stage.

Mr McCallister: I am happy to take the Member up on his very kind invitation to visit west Belfast. The points at the start of his intervention were about the legacy of the Troubles and mental health problems. Let us face it: the largest proportion of disability we have is in mental health. His point about legacy issues was well made.

I take his point on that, but is he seriously telling me that he could not take me to anybody in west Belfast whom he thinks could not get a job? Whether there are jobs there for them to go to, I do not see where Sinn Féin and the SDLP want to create that social mobility so that people get out, get a job and work. I can also assure him that I have no intention of running for the Conservative Party in South Down.

At the very core welfare reform was making work pay. If we cannot do that, or if we have watered down welfare reform so much with this £560 million, have Sinn Féin and the SDLP managed to turn the Bill on its head? Is work now not going to pay, or are we going to keep topping up? Where will the off switch be for that £560 million? Perhaps someone like Mr Attwood will get up and say whether he sees us needing another £560 million after 2021.

Mr McGlone: Thanks very much, Mr McCallister, for giving way. I have heard the idea perpetuated ad nauseam about benefits dependency, as if people had won the lotto when they went on benefits, be it ESA or whatever. It is important to read into the record that the young people whom we need to get into meaningful, paid jobs, where there is a skills deficit et al, are not on the sick. They are claiming JSA. Just so that people know, up to the age of 24 or 25, you get £57·35 a week. If you are over 25, you get £72·40 a week. If anybody tells me that that is an incentive to stay at home, I must be living in cloud cuckoo land. It is an incentive to get a job, so the challenge is to create jobs, attract jobs here and make sure that young people are skilled up to move into those jobs. I really do not subscribe to this dependency culture thing, as if people have won the lotto when they claim JSA. They have not. I have them in my office, as I am sure other Members do. They are trying to get by week to week. That notion reflects mentality out there of the 'The Sun' and the Tories. We have to inject some degree of reality into the debate.

Mr McCallister: There are two things to say on that. If you are on £70-odd a week for 50 weeks, that is £3,500 a year. It is a long way shy of the £30,000 that 6,500 families are on. The very point that I have been making throughout is the point that Mr McGlone seems to have missed. There are people who are on jobseeker's allowance whom we want to get into work and skill up. We are not going to do that by gutting our skills budget, by having a row over St Mary's and Stranmillis or by having no idea of where the Government's economic policy is going.

If you look at the amendments, including the open-ended amendment No 22 that sets out where the policy is going, the way that you are going to change that and go where Mr McGlone wants you to go is by investing in your skills and by raising the standard of every school. You have to come back to the question of why the constituencies with the worst profiles have been the same for 30 and 40 years. What are we not doing? If our original welfare system was so good, we would not be having this debate, and we would not have constituencies that are failing the people who live in them. They have no ability to get education. The schools are not good enough. Health inequalities are there. I am simply pointing out to you that gutting budgets such as those for health, for education and for employment and learning to pay for amendment No 22 may not add up to a coherent, consistent policy for growing an economy. That is the point that I am making.

I know that we have a terrible problem with youth unemployment. Thankfully, our overall unemployment levels have dropped, but gutting those budgets to do this may not be the best way of helping people. That is something that I look forward to hearing about in the Minister's response. Throughout all of this, that has been the part that has worried me the most. Where is the joined-upness of government to create, grow and build an economy, give people skills and create jobs for them to go into and get off benefits?

6.15 pm

Mr Flanagan: I thank the Member for giving way again. He talks once more about making work pay and lauds the fact that our unemployment figures have gone down. However, if he actually drills down into the details, what he will see is that, while employment statistics may well have gone down, what are filling the gap are low-pay, part-time jobs, zero-hour contracts and complete underemployment.

People are still living in poverty. Work is not paying for the vast majority of our people. Trying to get people to come off benefits and go into a job that will further reinforce a life of poverty for them is not a sustainable alternative.

If you want radical changes to the welfare system here, you need to create jobs that pay people to come off benefits. Nobody wants to live on £72 a week. You cannot live on £72 a week. People have accepted that you cannot live on much higher wages. That is why there are benefits, such as the family tax credits and child tax credits, to top people up and subsidise them to work in low-pay jobs. What we need is the creation of jobs that pay people to come off benefits rather than forcing them off benefits through a range of punitive sanctions and taking disability payments off people who genuinely need them.

Mr McCallister: As usual, I am grateful to Mr Flanagan. In an earlier intervention, he suggested that £30,000 was the subsistence level. I accept his point that £72 a week would be a very low subsistence level if you are struggling on £30,000. In a way, I am encouraged slightly that the Member is starting to see some of the arguments that I have been making: that you need to look at welfare reform in the round of your other policies around the economy. Are you going to grow? Are you going to create skills? What about issues around the living wage and minimum wage? How do we encourage companies that can afford to pay the living wage to do so? What do we do? What about the public sector? We are entering into a phase in which we are borrowing £700 million to pay off 20,000 public-sector workers. You are in agreement with that. You have signed up for that. It is fine to sign up and agree to that, but I have simply been trying to articulate the point that those two halves are not quite adding up to a whole.

I am just not seeing where the joined-upness of the Executive is coming from. That is the problem. Your economic strategies and policies should be linking in with what you are doing on welfare. You would hope that it might be easier to start to fill the gap at a time when the economy has returned to growth, but I am not convinced that we are going to find it. Every time that I have asked Ministers, particularly the Finance Minister, about public-sector reform and welfare reform, I am told, "We are literally doing both of them only because the Tories are making us do them. We are not doing it because we think that it is the right thing to do. We are not doing it because we have a better plan".

We could have changed welfare if we had wanted to. We could have done something different. We could have tackled this a number of years ago. When Mr Attwood was Social Development Minister, he could have done something different. He could have invented something different in welfare, but there is no policy-driven agenda here. We are only doing it because we are being forced to do it due to the economic realities that we are in. You have to come back to the principle of this, which is that work should pay. You cannot have families on benefits who are significantly better off than a working family with an above average salary.

Mr Storey: I will endeavour to make progress in responding to much of what has been said in the House this afternoon. If I am not responsive to Members, I will come back to them with more information. Reference was made earlier to a new broom in the cupboard. It looks as though it may still be dusty. I have heard of Dusty Bin. I do not know whether I am Dusty Storey. Clearly, I have some work to do to convince the Member that we can make any difference and do not just accept what is given to us by others and implement it.

I want to comment on what was said by the last Member who spoke. What he has to remember, and what we all, unfortunately, have to face up to, are not just the economic realities we face but the political realities. I would like to be standing here as a Minister in a Government of which my party had absolute and total control, and that it was a party in government that was making decisions so that, on every occasion and in every policy we brought to the House, there was an opportunity to have a clear focus and no tension between any of the policies. The political reality for me and for us all is to be found in the current arrangements in Northern Ireland. I can assure the Member that if he thinks it is difficult and challenging to find agreement within NI21, he can try finding agreement between five parties in a mandatory coalition. That has been the challenge and the difficulty.

It would be easy to be populist and pick on particular statistics and certain figures, highlight them, not be completely accurate in how we highlight them and to say all of that. That is all very easy to do, but is more difficult when you have to deal with the day-to-day issues that I have been given in my responsibilities to govern and lead on the introduction of welfare reform.

I make those comments, but I want to say something else. I return to the point — we can so easily miss it; and I repeat it because I believe it — that, in all that I do and am endeavouring to do, I always, every day, keep in my mind that this is still about people. It is very easy to use statistics about this constituency and that constituency. I will not accuse those in my constituency who are in receipt of benefits above the £26,000 of doing anything less than making application to the system as it exists, because that is something they are entitled to do. However, I would also say this: let us remember that, over the last 10 years, my Department has proactively moved on the issue of benefit fraud. Let us remember that, 10 years ago, benefit fraud was running at somewhere in the region of 2% or £61 million a year, and the last figures show us that that has now been reduced to 0·3%. If anybody thinks that the Department and the welfare system are some sort of easy touches, I think that they also need to realise that this is action that we are taking as a Department in conjunction with Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs.

I want to move on to the substantive issues in front of us: the amendments and the Further Consideration Stage of the Welfare Reform Bill. Amendment No 1 deals with the responsibility for children and young persons. Clause 10 provides for an amount to be included in the calculation of a universal credit award for claimants who are responsible for children or qualifying young people. An additional amount will be paid if the dependent child or qualifying young person is disabled, which is consistent with universal credit's objectives of simplicity and affordability.

At Consideration Stage, we discussed how that element of universal credit will replace child tax credit and take over its role as the main source of extra support for children in low-income families that are in and out of work. I also explained that universal credit is a simplification of the current benefit system and will, therefore, not replicate the range of complex premiums that are currently paid to disabled adults

and children. The money saved from abolishing the three premiums will be recycled and used to target support to those disabled people with the greatest need.

The universal credit rate payable to severely disabled children will be higher than the current child tax credit equivalent, but the lower rate of universal credit disabled child element will be less than the lower rate of child tax credits. There are, however, other provisions within the universal credit that complement that policy intention. There is, for example, a higher earnings disregard for those working parents who are in receipt of a disabled child element. Any household in receipt of disability living allowance or working tax credits will be excluded from the benefit cap. We know that there is a range of exclusions from the benefit cap. So, while it is easy to quote the 6,500 who are in receipt of the benefit cap, let us remember that it equates to 470 households. That is how many are affected. We, other than those who are looking for cheap publicity and a cheap headline in the 'Belfast Telegraph', need to keep that in mind when we are dealing with this issue.

There are other provisions in the universal credit, which we outlined. Existing claimants moving on to universal credit will have their award protected by the transitional protection. That will ensure that current benefit claimants will not receive less as a result of their move to universal credit where circumstances remain the same.

The amendment on the different rates — the lower rate should be no less than two thirds of the higher rate — seeks to retain the current position under tax credits where the disabled child element equates to two thirds of the severely disabled child element. The policy intent is to create a simple, streamlined system and to realign arrangements for disabled children when they reach the age of 18 with those of disabled adults. That is not a savings exercise but a reorganisation of what is there. The money released as a result of those adjustments will be reinvested in support for the most severely disabled people. To accept that amendment would reduce the amount of money available for the more severely disabled people and would, I think, be a clear breach of parity. I think that there would be potential consequences with that. We have rehearsed those in the past as far as the breach of parity is concerned. For those reasons, I urge Members to reject amendment No 1.

I will turn now to amendment Nos 2, 3, 8, 9 and 10 to clauses 26, 27 and 47, dealing with sanctions. The proposed amendments that relate to clauses 26, 27 and 47 are to do with providing the claimant with explanatory documentation on sanctions prior to imposing those sanctions. As part of their claimant commitment, claimants will be made aware of how and when sanctions will be applied. The claimant commitment is a record of a claimant's responsibilities and sets out the conditions an individual must comply with, as well as the consequences of non-compliance. Where the consequences of non-compliance are a sanction, the claimant commitment will set out clearly what the sanction will be. Claimants will be required to sign their claimant commitment, and they will be given a copy of the signed document. The claimant, therefore, has explanatory documentation on sanctions from the outset. If a sanction becomes appropriate, the claimant will also be given notification that it is to be applied.

The benefit regime has to work with a wide range of claimants, and the documentation that is made available to them is continually under review. The Social Security Agency is committed to ensuring that claimants have as much information as possible before any sanction is applied. That is to ensure that claimants understand the reasons for the sanction and so that the claimant can provide any relevant information before the sanction is applied. We also want to ensure that the information is in a format that makes it easy for the claimant to understand.

6.30 pm

I sometimes get concerned when Members come to the House and almost paint a picture of the Social Security Agency having no heart, having no thought, being uncaring and simply wanting to follow a very dry process; that the agency is all about the system and not about the individual. I want to ensure that that is not what we have in the Social Security Agency. I do not believe that that is what we have. However, do I think that everything is perfect and that, in every situation and in every circumstance, we always get it right? No, I do not, but I do not accept, nor do I recognise, the picture being painted of the system as it currently is. I hope that I have reassured Members that amendment Nos 2, 3, 8, 9 and 10 are not necessary and, for those reasons, should be rejected.

Amendment No 4 relates to clause 30 — delegation and contracting out. This issue has exercised a number of Members and, therefore, it is right for me to spend some time dealing with it. This clause allows for the contracted providers in the private and voluntary sectors to exercise functions of the Department, or of the Department for Employment and Learning, in the area of work-related requirements. These providers should be acting as agents of the Department or of DEL. The Department, using the power to impose work preparation requirements under clause 16, may require claimants to participate in the work programmes, such as the Steps to Work or the Into Employment programmes. It is envisaged that contracted providers will be permitted to exercise such functions so as to deliver work programmes such as these.

In reliance on clause 30, the Steps to Work programme or the Into Employment programme providers will be authorised to carry out the functions of the Department or of DEL under clauses 13 to 25 that relate to work-related and connected requirements. These functions are of a public nature, and that applies whether they are exercised by the Department or by an authorised person. An authorised person would be required to provide the service in a way that is compatible with the convention rights as set out in section 6 of the Human Rights Act 1998.

I also add that, during the parliamentary debate on the passage of the Human Rights Act in 1998, statements by the then Home Secretary and the then Lord Chancellor made it clear that persons or bodies delivering privatised or contracted-out public services were intended to be brought within the scope of the Act by the "public function" provision in section 6(3)(b). It is not considered necessary to include the proposed amendment to clause 30 to specify that a person authorised under this clause is exercising the functions of a public nature and that section 6 of the Human Rights Act will apply to those persons. In a case where it is alleged that a contractor has acted contrary to the Human Rights Act, a person may bring a claim against the Department. I wish to point out that delegation and contracting-out functions do not apply to the sanctioning

and hardship payment decisions. Those decisions will be taken by staff in the Social Security Agency.

A point was made earlier about the Ad Hoc Committee. We need to remind ourselves that the Assembly established the Ad Hoc Committee specifically to examine human rights aspects of the Bill. The report of the Committee failed to identify any specific breaches of human rights with the Bill as it was then introduced. It should also be noted that, prior to the Bill's being introduced, it has to be compliant with all the other elements of legislation. I do not find it frustrating; it is part of the job, but I have to keep repeating the same thing over and over again. I am well aware of the comments in relation to human rights, and I have no intention of, in any way, trying to create a situation whereby this Bill gives some powers to contractors or people out there that would not be compliant with the Convention on Human Rights, as I have already stated.

The Member wants me to give way. I said that I was not going to do that, but I will.

Mr Attwood: You are very generous, and I appreciate you giving way. First, could you lodge in the Library the references that you have just made to comments made by the Lord Chancellor and Home Secretary in Westminster? Secondly, can you confirm whether you got legal advice on this issue or are you satisfied with the reassurances that have emanated from London? Thirdly, I do not think that this issue has actually arisen before, certainly not on the Floor of the House, so I do not think that it is a matter of repeating again and again. It is a matter of putting on record something that the Human Rights Commission thinks should be on record.

Mr Storey: In relation to the first question, yes, I am quite happy to place that in the Library. On your second question, the Member knows that the chief legal adviser to the Executive, the Attorney General, has seen the provisions of the Bill, and therefore my answer is yes, we have legal advice. Sorry, I did not get the third question that the Member asked; does he want to ask me again?

Mr Attwood: This matter has been raised by the Human Rights Commission in recent days, so it is not something that has been raised again and again or that you have had to reassure us of again and again.

Mr Storey: Yes, I am aware that is the case. I want to reassure Members on that issue. The Member is always worried that, lurking somewhere in the dark cupboard that I came out of as the new broom, is DWP, which is pulling my strings and telling me what I should do and not do. That is not the case. However, I reassure the Member that I have a good working relationship with DWP. Indeed, I was in London last week to further enhance that relationship, and I continue to work with our colleagues in DWP.

So, on the basis of what I have said, I trust that that gives some reassurance to Members in regard to my comments about amendment No 4. It is not necessary, and therefore I ask Members not to accept it.

I turn to amendment No 11, which is on clause 70. As Members are now aware, clause 70 introduces the size criteria into the calculation of the housing benefit for working-age tenants in the social housing sector. Members will also be aware that we dedicated a lot of time to this particular measure during Consideration Stage. I consider it worth repeating that I fully recognise that this measure represents a major change for social-sector tenants. However, in protecting people and communities from the worst aspects of the social size criteria, I need to ensure that we make best use of our limited social housing stock and that we do not take any action that may hinder or even discourage mobility. The Executive have already agreed to create a separate fund, which will mitigate the impact of this measure by protecting existing and future tenants from any reduction in their housing benefit, unless there is a significant change in their personal circumstances or they are offered suitable alternative accommodation. It is the same as I said before; my terminologies have not changed. The Member wanted me to clarify that. I consider this to be the best way forward for our citizens who will be impacted by the measure.

I think it should also be noted that there was also a technical necessity to have clause 69. It is so that we can make the calculation of the payments that will be made. That also has to be borne in mind. It is not just a simple matter that this brings in the bedroom tax by the front door but that it somehow brings in the bedroom tax in by the back door. Serious consideration was given to the removal of clause 69, but it was believed that that could not be done. Given that it could not be done, we have had to resort to what we have agreed is the way to deal with it.

The point that has been made that we are dealing with homes is not lost on me. There is a difference between dealing with homes and dealing with houses. We are dealing with homes, and I trust that, as we work through the scheme and the way in which it will be operated, we will ensure that it deals with homes as opposed to houses.

Mr Agnew: I thank the Minister for giving way. He has repeated his words from the previous stage, and I am grateful to him for doing so because I have quoted them. I have paraphrased what he said as being a phased introduction of the bedroom tax, which will apply only when suitable alternative accommodation is available or there is a significant change in circumstances. Will he confirm that that is an accurate paraphrasing of what is happening? Will he also speak to the exemptions that were proposed, which were supposedly negotiated under the previous Minister? Will they be included or are they now gone?

Mr Storey: Let me outline the sequencing of how it is envisaged that the mitigation scheme will be implemented. Maybe that will give Members some reassurance and a bit more information. Once the social size criteria restriction is introduced and the claimant residing in either a Housing Executive or housing association property is identified as underoccupying that property, the amount of housing benefit that has been made in payment will be reduced. The mitigation measures will, however, ensure that claimants do not see any difference in the amount of financial assistance that they receive to meet their housing costs. It will be only after that point that an offer of suitable alternative accommodation will be made and only when an appropriate-sized dwelling becomes available. Under the terms of the Stormont House Agreement, my Department is working on the detail of this mitigation measure, and the scheme details will be brought to the Executive in the very near future. I trust that that gives some reassurance to Members.

A Member mentioned the scheme regulations that will flow from the enabling clause and asked what they will be subject to in the House. They will be subject to the draft affirmative process, which means that the regulations

will be laid in draft and cannot be made unless agreed to by the Assembly: in other words, they will be subject to debate in the House. That needs to be underscored and underlined.

Mr Beggs: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Storey: I will give way.

Mr Beggs: The Minister explained the situation whereby someone who is in an existing Housing Executive property has been assessed as having excess bedrooms and so on. Will he clarify what the position will be for someone who is seeking to take up a new tenancy, particularly given the lack of one- and two-bedroom housing accommodation, which means that there may be difficulty in their finding suitable accommodation?

6.45 pm

Mr Storey: If the Member was listening to what I said earlier, he heard that we have agreed to create a separate fund that will mitigate the impact of this measure by protecting existing and future tenants from any reduction in their housing benefit. I have said that repeatedly, and it will be in Hansard.

The other difficulty that we have in all of this is this: I have no doubt that, because of the unique nature of their creation, there will be some difficult circumstances. I cannot stand here and say that it will happen in every set of circumstances, because you could bring me a raft of different circumstances. What I can say is that this is the remit that we have been given to implement the scheme, and every effort will be made to ensure that, when we bring the scheme to the Executive, we will have endeavoured to cover all those issues in a way that meets the policy intent. I have set it out and made it very clear that the policy intent is that, as far as the scheme is concerned, the fund will mitigate the impact of the measure by protecting existing and future tenants. I cannot be any clearer than that.

Mr Attwood: I thank the Minister for giving way. That is very clear. If a tenant's housing benefit is reduced because of underoccupation, the mitigation is on a pound-for-pound basis. If that tenant is then offered suitable accommodation on two or three occasions, let us say, and declines, is the mitigation withdrawn?

Mr Storey: The Member has answered his own question: it is all in the term "suitable accommodation". We will not go out to create a situation in order to find people in circumstances that enable us to justify what we are doing; we will work in a pragmatic, practical way. Let us remember that the line is "suitable accommodation". If we have not found suitable accommodation, there will be no requirement or need for us to remove the benefit.

Let me move on to amendment Nos 13 and 14, which relate to clause 81, "Ability to carry out daily living activities or mobility activities". Clause 81 was amended at Consideration Stage to ensure that relevant medical evidence was taken account of during an assessment for personal independence payment. I have now tabled amendment Nos 13 and 14, which are mainly technical, but they are required so that the clause is still workable. Let me explain the rationale. The structure of clause 81 is that all questions are to be determined in accordance with regulations. Subsection (3) requires those questions to be determined on the basis of an assessment and the matters to be taken into account in that assessment to be prescribed. The new provision that account must be taken of medical evidence in that process contradicts the general provision in subsection (1) and, more specifically, subsection (3)(c), which states that the matters to be taken into account in making the assessment will be set out in regulations.

To be consistent with the structure of that clause, I have tabled the amendments to revise the wording so that the regulations must provide for medical evidence to be taken into account in assessing a person for personal independence payment. The existing clause 81(3)(c) then needs to be restricted to prescribing matters other than medical evidence. I hope that that gives some explanation to Mr Beggs and, I think, Mr Swann. I trust that they are content that the changes are in keeping with the intention of their original amendment —

Mr Beggs: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Storey: — that relevant medical evidence will be taken into account in assessing a person for personal independence payment.

Mr Beggs: Will the Minister clarify what is wrong with clause 81(3) remaining in the Bill? That does not preclude regulations implementing the effect of it being determined elsewhere. I still do not understand why that subsection has to be removed from the Bill rather than prescribed in regulations. Will the Minister explain?

Mr Storey: As I said, the existing clause 81(3)(c) needs to be restricted to prescribing matters other than medical evidence. I am happy to give the Member a more detailed answer when I have consulted my colleagues in the Department.

There was a technical reason behind feeling that it was necessary when we amended the clause at Consideration Stage, and we felt that it was relevant for us to ensure that we got consistency in how we dealt with the regulations. I am happy to give the Member further information following today's debate, if he is content with that. I would —

Mr Beggs: Will the Member give way?

Mr Storey: Yes, I will give way.

Mr Beggs: I would much prefer to have it before the change in legislation occurs.

Mr Storey: I will endeavour to have it before I conclude. I will ask my officials to make the information available. Members will sometimes have to accept that I do not have all the answers. I am happy to say that we will get you that answer before we conclude, and that can inform how you vote when you go through the Lobby. That is probably the best way in which to deal with it.

Amendment No 15 is to clause 89, "Claims, awards and information". The amendment would set a maximum timescale for processing a claim to personal independence payment, and perhaps it will assist the House if I take a step back and reiterate what clause 89 does. Clause 89 sets out conditions for claims, awards and information for personal independence payment. The clause provides that a payment of personal independence payment cannot be backdated beyond the date on which a claim is made or treated as made; that awards of personal independence payment will normally be for a specified fixed period, after which a new claim must be made; and that information

gathered in the process of determining a claim to personal independence payment is to be treated as information relating to social security. Amendment No 15 would place a requirement on the Department to ensure that, where a person is entitled to personal independence payment, the award will be received no later than 16 weeks from the date of claim.

The amendment is unworkable for a number of reasons. Targets for benefit clearance times are an operational matter, and it would not be appropriate or practical to legislate for that in statute, given the individual nature of each case and the evidence requirements necessary to determine claims. In addition, within the personal independence payment, customer journey claimants need to be allowed time to complete the forms and/or gather evidence that they wish to submit in support of their application, and consultations may need to be rearranged at the claimant's request.

Many factors need to be taken into account to determine the individual personal independence payment journey for each claimant, such as how quickly after the initial data-gathering stage claimants return their PIP part 2 form; whether or not they need extra time for the completion of that form; and whether or not the decision-maker needs to request additional medical evidence as part of the further medical evidence flexibility, which is applicable only in Northern Ireland. Although timescales are in place for parts of that process, some flexibility has to be built in to support claimants throughout their customer journey. Therefore, it would be highly unusual to specify an operational clearance target in legislation. Such an objective is usually spelt out in the Social Security Agency's balanced scorecard. That allows a degree of flexibility to revise the target if necessary, depending on circumstances that may impact on the evidence-gathering, assessment and decision-making processes. An appropriate clearance target for processing personal independence payment claims will be set in due course. For those reasons, it would be not be appropriate to set a maximum timescale in legislation for processing a claim for personal independence payment, and I therefore urge members to reject amendment No 15.

I now turn to amendment No 16, a new clause that covers appeals in connection with sanctions. The amendment proposes to insert new clause 103A on appeal in connection with sanctions. The amendment would add article 15A to the Social Security (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 to provide for a claimant to be entitled to an appeal hearing within four weeks of the notice of a sanction being issued and for benefit not to be reduced before the appeal is decided. Should a reduction not be applied and the benefit payments continued in full, the claimant may never have reason to appeal the decision. That, in effect, would remove my Department's ability to reduce a person's benefit as a consequence of a failure on their part that would otherwise be sanctionable under the Act. The time within which an appeal is to be made is one month. A claimant could therefore appeal the decision after the expiry of the four-week period during which the amendment requires an appeal tribunal hearing to take place. Current procedures require a party to the proceedings to be given 14 days' notice of the time and place of the appeal hearing unless that person agrees otherwise. The appeal having to be lodged, scheduled for hearing and determined within four weeks would not only put immense pressure on the Appeals Service but would be detrimental to other appeals in the system and make it almost impossible for them to be dealt with. For those reasons, I urge Members to reject the amendment.

I turn to amendment Nos 17 and 23, which propose new clauses, and amendment No 18 to clause 121 and deal with the duty to ensure the availability of advice and assistance. I know that this has given rise to considerable debate. I want to work our way through this, and I trust that I will be of help to Members as to how we get to an agreed position. Members will no doubt remember the debate we had at Consideration Stage on the provision of advice to claimants on making a claim under the Act. There were several issues raised in relation to advice. I gave assurances that I would give the matter further thought in advance of today's Further Consideration Stage.

During that debate, Mr Lyttle, who, unfortunately, is not present in the Chamber, inquired what progress the Social Security Agency was making towards its targets for benefit uptake. He made reference to that again today. I am pleased to report that we are well on the way to achieving the targets. Members will know that Maximising Incomes and Outcomes is a three-year plan to improve the uptake of benefits with a high-level target to secure at least £30 million in additional benefits for a minimum of 10,000 people by 2016. The final evaluation of the year 1 programme for 2013-14 is now complete, and the high-level outcomes are very positive, with £14·2 million awarded in additional benefits and 4,266 people benefiting.

Mr McGlone: I thank the Minister for giving way. I seek assurances from him that people from minority ethnic communities in the North, who may have linguistic difficulties and the like, will be provided for in any advice that the Minister may recommend as a consequence.

Mr Storey: It is still the situation that we make information available in other languages. We make every effort to ensure that the benefit uptake programme reflects the diverse needs of our community. We can always revisit that and do more, but I think that what we do at the moment through Maximising Incomes and Outcomes is sufficient.

I bring you to a figure that I think is helpful to Members. Mr Lyttle referred to targets and where we were.

When you think of what we have done in regards to the uptake benefit programme, it equates to 47% of the three-year financial target and 43% of the three-year claimant target being met in the first year. This gives some indication of the progress being made. We need to go even further in terms of how we use that programme.

7.00 pm

During Consideration Stage, Members will recall that I was reluctant to accept the need for advice to be enshrined in legislation. I said then that I believed that the Department currently has effective mechanisms to ensure that appropriate advice is available. However, I have had time to reflect on the issues discussed during the debate and to discuss the concerns of Members opposite who spoke to me on the subject. Taking all those matters into account, I have tabled an amendment that I hope will provide additional assurance to the Assembly on reporting on advice in the context of the provisions contained in the Act.

I will take a couple of minutes to deal with amendment Nos 17, 18 and 23. I will then come back to the issue of the independent advice sector and make some comment in relation to that.

I will address amendment Nos 17, 18 and 23 together as they all relate to advice. My proposed amendment No 23 will insert new clause 132B, which creates a duty on the Department to ensure the availability of advice and assistance to anyone making a claim under the Act in connection with that claim. Clause 121 already requires the Social Security Agency to report on the standards of decision-making and payment accuracy and on the operation of sanctions for universal credit, jobseeker's allowance, income support and employment and support allowance.

My proposed amendment No 18 adds a requirement to report on the standards of advice and assistance provided under section 132B in the annual report that is endorsed by the social security joint standards committee. I have also spoken to Members about their concerns. I think Mr Swann raised the concern about young people who are more affected by the sanctions. Through the provision of advice to those young people and their active involvement in the claimant commitment process, we will endeavour to ensure that they understand the conditions for receiving benefit. Therefore, I trust that they will avoid the possibility of unwarranted and avoidable sanctions. It is only right that we place that on record in the House in response to the comments made by Mr Swann.

Amendment No 17 introduces clause 120A. That, in effect, does the same as the amendments I have tabled. However, it also requires guidance to be produced within three months, in consultation with the Northern Ireland Advice Services Consortium.

As I am sure that you are aware, the advice sector currently uses the blue volumes and the decision makers' guide in answering claimants' concerns, and it will continue to avail itself of those resources for the new benefits under the Welfare Reform Act. That information will be available in advance of the implementation of the benefits.

I value the work carried out by the advice sector. I have endeavoured, since coming into office, to continue to build on the working relationship with the consortium and all those involved in the advice sector. Members will be aware of what we said previously in relation to the use of the term "independence". I could say a whole lot about that word, but I am going to resist putting it on the record of the House — and it has nothing to do with welfare reform.

I am prepared to give serious consideration to a separate, distinct contract being developed with the independent advice sector that would continue during the implementation phase of welfare reform. I am happy to have discussions with the Members who raised this issue to flesh out what that would be in reality. It should be remembered that we work under a contract with the sector, and I think that it would be helpful if we had some further discussion on the issue. I reiterate what I am saying, which is that I am prepared to give serious consideration to a separate, distinct contract that would be developed with the independent advice sector and that would continue during the implementation phase of this round of welfare reform. I will leave that for Members to reflect on.

Before I move on to amendment No 20, I will return to the clarification on amendment Nos 13 and 14. I am glad that a relevant piece of paper has been handed to me with the answer. I will give that answer to the Member who asked the question; he will be glad that he does not have to wait any longer. The technical amendments to clause 81 were tabled in response to the discussions at Consideration Stage and on the basis of legal advice from the Office of the Legislative Counsel (OLC) to ensure that the policy intent that all relevant medical evidence is taken into account when carrying out PIP assessment is consistent throughout the legislation. So, further legal advice was sought from the Office of the Legislative Counsel.

Mr Attwood: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Storey: Yes.

Mr Attwood: I want to recognise, first of all, that the Minister has travelled some distance on advice, although, to let him down gently, I do not think that the gap will be sufficiently bridged. Beyond the comments that he made about a separate, distinct contract being developed with the independent sector and for advice giving on welfare reform, what is his general view about sustaining the independent advice sector generally?

Mr Storey: I am confident that, in the future, we will have an independent advice sector. If evidence had been brought to me over the last number of weeks and months that, somehow, it was not working the way that it was intended to, I would want to look at how we could change it. It is always an evolving situation because of the duties, requirements and pressures that are brought to bear on the sector. As we are seeing through this process, we are going through a process of change. The independent sector obviously has to adapt to that change and to accommodate how it deals with the issues.

I can genuinely say that I have not seen anything since I came into the Department that indicates to me that there is anything other than a willingness on my Department's part and from me, as the Minister now responsible for it, to continue to work in a proactive way with the independent advice sector and to enhance that relationship. That is what I want to be about. I cannot surely be accused of being mangy when it comes to funding — although I am sure that every organisation that comes through my door looking for funding would like more — because I think that the £4·5 million or £4·7 million that we give is some reflection of how we value the work that that sector carries out. I trust that that helps the Member on that issue.

I want to move on to amendment No 20, which relates to clause 130. Clause 130 amends article 30A of the Rates (Northern Ireland) Order 1977, which is an existing enabling power that allows the Department of Finance and Personnel to make whatever regulations are necessary to provide support schemes for domestic ratepayers. Clause 130 will allow that power to be extended to replace the rates element of housing benefit when it ceases.

The delayed introduction of welfare reform has enabled DFP to use the time provided to develop and consult on two options for a longer-term final rate rebate scheme for working-age claimants, both of which are, to varying extents, reliant on universal credit. The consultation period ended on 16 February 2015.

In devising the new scheme, DFP is targeting its policy towards those who are least able to pay rates, in harmony with welfare reform principles, and to make work pay,

while simplifying the rules and providing value for money. The best way to do this is to avail ourselves of the rules, information and calculations for the purposes of universal credit. On that basis, I have tabled an amendment to clause 130 that will allow DFP regulations for rates to correspond with universal credit statutory provisions in a similar way to the current provision in relation to housing benefit corresponding to income-related benefits. I therefore ask Members to accept amendment No 20.

Amendment No 21 relates to clause 131 on discretionary support. I thank the member of the Committee for Social Development Mickey Brady for very accurately picking up the issue on this particular amendment. I want to point out that clause 131 deals with discretionary support and not the discretionary housing payments, as the proposed amendment suggests. Discretionary support and clause 131 relate to the social fund replacement, and, therefore, this amendment, I contend, is technically incorrect and, for those reasons, should be rejected. That should clarify the issue in relation to amendment No 21 and clause 131 on discretionary support.

I turn now to amendment No 22 and new clause 132A on payments to persons suffering financial disadvantage. This amendment provides me with the opportunity to come to the Assembly with some further detail on the schemes that this enabling clause will allow my Department to develop, and to outline the main terms of the agreement reached at Stormont Castle and later incorporated into the Stormont House Agreement. We should remind ourselves that the Stormont Castle agreement was later incorporated into the Stormont House Agreement.

The two schemes covered by this enabling clause are the disability protection scheme and the supplementary payment scheme. The need for those schemes was agreed by the parties at Stormont Castle. My Department is developing detailed proposals on how the schemes could provide support for those who have been adversely impacted by the changes to the welfare system.

Mr Nesbitt: I thank the Minister for giving way. I just want to put it into the record that the Stormont Castle agreement, which I do not believe exists, was not read into the Stormont House Agreement.

Mr Storey: Well, Mr Deputy Speaker, here I have in my hand a copy of the Stormont Castle agreement. This paper is based on the agreement of the five parties in Stormont Castle for their submission to the Government and represents the practical outworking of the five-party agreement. Now, I think that that needs to be understood by the Members who agreed to it; I think that they need to realise what it is they have agreed to. The Member doubts my word, but I am sure that he had a copy of this the same as anybody else. It says very clearly that this paper is based on the agreement of the five parties in Stormont for their submission to the Government and represents the practical outworking of that five-party agreement.

Mr Nesbitt: Again, I thank the Minister for giving way. Would he be surprised that the copy that I have of the document that he calls the “Stormont Castle agreement” is similar to the one that he has except for three words that do not appear on my copy? Those three words are “Stormont”, “castle” and “agreement”.

7.15 pm

Mr Storey: Well, I think that we are really dancing on the head of a pin now. Is the leader of the Ulster Unionist Party really trying to tell me that there were three or four versions of the front page of this produced? I will be honest: I was not the brightest bulb in the box when I was at school. I was not the sharpest pencil, either, but I am bright enough and able enough to read the Executive approval for agreement reached in Stormont Castle. Is that not good enough to underline the issue? I leave that for whatever the Member wants to use this particular issue for.

I want to set out for Members now the reason we need the clause, which is an enabling clause to bring to fruition and reality the two schemes that are covered by it.

Over the next number of weeks, I am planning to bring these proposals to the Executive for their agreement. Following that, officials will provide a briefing to the Committee for Social Development and, later, the detailed proposals will be issued for public consultation. Whilst I am unable to provide the Assembly with the detail of the eligibility criteria and levels of payment for individual schemes because they have not yet been agreed by the Executive, I would like to say something about the overall purpose and structure of the schemes.

The disability protection scheme will provide support for those adversely impacted by the introduction of the reassessment process for existing DLA claims to the new personal independence payment benefit. That reassessment process is expected to involve up to 120,000 claimants over a four-year period. The Executive parties recognise the real difficulties that process could present for many existing DLA claimants as they make the transition to the new benefit.

The disability protection scheme will have three core elements. The first involves making a financial payment to those DLA claimants who are unsuccessful in their claim for personal independence payment and who subsequently appeal the disallowance decision to the independent appeals service. The Executive have agreed that a financial payment should be made to those claimants and continue until the appeals service has made a decision on the claimant’s appeal.

The second element provides support for those claimants who receive a lower level of payment under the personal independence payment than they had been receiving under DLA. This will involve a financial payment that will continue for a specified period depending on the date when the claimant is reassessed for personal independence payment.

The third element of the disability protection scheme is being developed to address concerns that the functional disability criteria being used to assess claimants for the personal independence payment may not take account of the specific circumstances in Northern Ireland. The Executive recognise that for the vast majority of people currently receiving high- or medium-level DLA payments, the reassessment process will not be an issue and those claimants should move to personal independence payment with little difficulty.

I wish to assure the House that my officials are working with the Victims and Survivors Service to put in place specific arrangements to ensure that the most seriously

injured victims and survivors of the Troubles are not to be retraumatised as part of the reassessment process. I have worked with and met the Victims and Survivors Service and gave the assurance that my officials will continue to work with them because this is an issue of priority and importance.

Concerns were expressed by some parties that some victims or survivors on DLA with disabilities that were Troubles-related may not qualify for personal independence payment. If there is any impact in such cases, it is likely to be on those claimants who are receiving the low-rate mobility or care of DLA. In those cases, the Executive have agreed a mechanism that should be put in place that would enable claimants whose disability is Troubles-related and who do not qualify for personal independence payment to apply to my Department for the PIP-style payment.

The Executive acknowledged arguments that there may be other disability groups for whom PIP functional disability descriptors do not apply. It was agreed, as part of the consultation exercise on the disability protection scheme, that my Department could consider the inclusion of such groups for a similar PIP-type payment. Such payments would be made only when it could be demonstrated that the mobility and care needs for their disability is Northern Ireland-specific and is not already covered by the functional disability criteria used by the assessment process.

The second scheme that the enabling clause will provide for is the supplementary payment scheme. That scheme is also being introduced to provide support for those claimants who are adversely impacted by the changes to welfare. The main claimant groups being considered for inclusion in the scheme are families with or without dependants, claimants who are long-term sick and lose their benefit and disabled people who would previously have received additional payments due to their income levels.

The Executive gave my officials specific guidance on the development of the supplementary payment scheme. An initial framework for the operation of the scheme has been developed, and I am giving consideration to those proposals and hope to bring forward a detailed scheme to the Executive in the coming weeks.

The Executive parties also reached agreement at Stormont Castle on a number of other welfare-related issues. Those were included in a paragraph within the body of the Stormont House Agreement. The detail of that agreement is set out at annex A to the document. At Stormont Castle, the five parties also agreed that a Northern Ireland-specific package of measures should be implemented to mitigate some of the most harmful impacts of the changes to the benefits system.

The package of measures included a series of payment flexibilities under universal credit; a change in the sanction regime in Northern Ireland for claimants to reduce the maximum period that someone could lose the benefits for to 18 months; a fund to ensure that medical reports are taken into account for claimants of the personal independence payment who are to receive an adverse benefit decision; a scheme to ensure tenants in social housing are not financially impacted following the introduction of the criteria to determine levels of housing benefit payments in social housing, commonly referred to as the bedroom tax; a mechanism to determine levels of housing benefit that exist for private sector tenants; and a scheme that will provide emergency financial support for people who have an emergency in their lives. The new discretionary support service is intended not only to support some of the most vulnerable groups in our society but to provide support for low income families to access when that support is needed.

The scope of the agreement on welfare at Stormont Castle shows an Executive that are committed to addressing the real challenges arising from —

Mr Maskey: I thank the Minister for giving way, because I know that he is about to finish. He has already taken an intervention from the Ulster Unionist Party leader, Mr Mike Nesbitt. I am not sure whether Mr Nesbitt was saying that he did or did not make an agreement, but you mentioned the specific reference to the welfare agreement that was reached at Stormont Castle and found its way into the Stormont House Agreement. We heard an appalling intervention that seemed to suggest something entirely different from the reality. At the round-table meeting with the Secretary of State and Minister Flanagan, Mr Nesbitt, in his winding-up remarks, made a very clear response to the final paper, which was tabled to all the parties. Mr Nesbitt made the point that the paper, which you referred to and which contained the welfare changes:

> *"proves that we have got positive momentum after 18 months. The Ulster Unionist Party executive will decide on this, but with positive wind from myself."*

Do you acknowledge that those were the comments from the leader of the Ulster Unionist Party at that meeting, which acknowledged the paper that he seems to be disabusing here?

Mr Storey: I thank the Chair of the Committee for rehearsing and reinforcing the comments that I made. He has set them in the context of accuracy, which is what is needed, and I appreciate what he said.

I want to say something else about the scope. Over the last number of weeks, I have heard much about the scope of the Stormont Castle agreement on welfare reform. What that shows is an Executive committed to addressing the real challenges arising from welfare changes. It was not about any one party rolling over or another policy winning the arguments; it was about political parties recognising the importance of reaching an agreement that was, given the available funding, deliverable and affordable.

At Stormont Castle, the parties agreed the framework for the welfare changes and some of the detail on the key measures. I now plan to bring more of the operational detail for the different schemes to the Executive for agreement. That work is nearly completed, and my plan is that the details will be out for public consultation in March, with subordinate legislation being brought to the Assembly in late spring. I hope that my comments provide the Assembly with the context for this amendment, and I ask the House to support my amendments.

In bringing my remarks to a conclusion, I want to address amendment No 26, which relates to clause 135. It adds the commencement of the new clauses tabled to those commencing on Royal Assent. The clauses are 132A, payments to persons suffering financial disadvantage; 132B, duty to ensure the availability of advice and

assistance; and 132C, the review of the Act. I urge Members to accept amendment No 26.

Amendment No 27 proposes to remove paragraph 7 from schedule 1. Paragraph 7 would give the Department the power to make regulations specifying the work-related requirements for claimants asserting a right to reside in the United Kingdom on the basis that they are EU jobseekers under EU treaties. By way of background, I should explain that people coming to the UK from EU countries do not have unrestricted access to UK social security benefits and tax credits. Since 2004, access to most benefits for EU nationals has depended on whether they have a right to reside here. For most benefits, the right to reside requirement is part of the habitual residence test.

Since 2006, all EU nationals have had the right to reside in the UK for three months without the requirement to be financially self-sufficient. However, access to benefits during that three-month period will not satisfy the right to reside test. EU nationals may also have a right to reside straightaway as a jobseeker, if they can show that they are looking for work and have a genuine chance of being engaged in work. Family members of jobseekers also have a right to reside.

To have a right to reside as a jobseeker, a person needs to be registered with a jobs and benefits office and a social security office, and signing on as an individual for and seeking work. A person with a right to reside as a jobseeker may claim income-related jobseeker's allowance, which can give entitlement to housing benefit. Although the power itself, under schedule 1, paragraph 7, is quite wide, we wish to exercise it only in relation to EU jobseekers: those who retain worker status because they become involuntarily unemployed and, therefore, need to seek employment to continue to retain that status.

EU claimants who come to the UK to seek work, and those who retain worker status because they become unemployed, will not benefit from the exemptions from conditionality clauses 19, 20 and 21, because that would prevent us verifying whether they can claim entitlement to universal credit based on a right to reside under EU law. The regulations will enable us to check that an EU jobseeker is in fact searching for work and available for work, as they would, therefore, continue to meet the right to reside test and to be eligible for universal credit. That is because it is a social assistance and not payable to EU nationals without a right to reside.

The crucial point is that we will exercise the power only to enable us to check whether an EU claimant continues to enjoy a right to reside as a jobseeker. Without the power to verify whether a claimant is seeking work, we would be unable to verify whether they continue to have a right to reside under EU law.

7.30 pm

Although we have a legal duty to provide support to people who come to Northern Ireland, in line with national and international obligations, it is also necessary to protect the taxpayer and the benefit system. There is a need to make sure that the rules that apply when people from outside come here do not allow them to take inappropriate advantage of the benefit system. Without that provision in the Bill, the Department would be unable to check whether an EU national with worker status meets the right-to-reside test. I hope that I have assured Members that we will be exercising the power only to enable us to check whether an EU claimant continues to enjoy a right to reside as a jobseeker under EU law.

To accept amendment No 27 would be a clear breach of parity. As I have stated previously, that would have implications for Northern Ireland's block grant. For those reasons, I urge Members to reject amendment No 27.

I conclude my remarks on the first group.

Mr Speaker: The Minister and many Members have patiently contributed to the debate for a number of hours. Therefore, before we move to conclude the debate, I propose that the sitting be suspended until 7.45 pm.

The sitting was suspended at 7.31 pm and resumed at 7.46 pm.

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

Mr Agnew: It has obviously been quite a long debate on this group, and I will do my best to paraphrase the debate rather than cover each individual point. I will try to do so as speedily as I can.

I will make a general point. A couple of references were made throughout the discussions about my and the Green Party's entitlement to bring forward amendments as we were not signatories to the Stormont House Agreement. There is obviously disagreement among the parties that were signatories to it, but I will let those parties fight that out and make no comment on each of the individual party statements to it, except to say that, from my party's point of view, we did not sign the Stormont House Agreement and, indeed, from the outset, we were very clear that it should have been a public process, not a private behind-closed-doors one. Had that been the case, we would have had less opportunity for the post-agreement bickering that we have seen during the debate today. I am proud to say that my party did not sign up to the Stormont House Agreement and to the commitment to cut 20,000 public-sector jobs, and we did not do so for the promise of cutting corporation tax, which will result in a further cut to public spending that, we believe, will do harm to the people of Northern Ireland and to the public services that we rely on.

The Minister spoke at length and in detail on each of the amendments. I will not comment on each of them, except to say that I feel vindicated by the Minister's response in relation to the bedroom tax. There were those who, after the last stage of the debate, called me a scaremonger and said that it was irresponsible of me to suggest that the bedroom tax would be implemented in Northern Ireland. I believe that I was responsible. I said that it would be phased. I said that there would be mitigation measures, but I put in the public domain — certainly circulated further and wider — the Minister's statement that he made under the circumstances in which the bedroom tax would be applied. I said that it would be a phased agreement, and the Minister appears to be in agreement with that. For those who said that the bedroom tax will not and would not be applied in Northern Ireland, I think that that assertion has been shown to be false.

To go back to the Stormont House Agreement, those who, despite agreeing to the phased introduction of the bedroom tax, said that they had stopped it, said that it would not be introduced and said that nobody would

be worse off under the Welfare Reform Bill, that was irresponsible, because it has no basis in fact.

There was considerable debate by Mr Allister and Mr McCallister — neither of whom is in his place — about the proposed benefit cap. They are anguished that we are not to impose a benefit cap in Northern Ireland or, at least, that those affected by it will receive the transition payments through the supplementary payments. I hope that I have used that term correctly for Mr Brady. I ask those Members: what is their objection to those who receive that level of benefit? Is it that each individual benefit is too much? Whether it is housing benefit, DLA, JSA or ESA, presumably the claimants are assessed for each of those benefits and, cumulatively, what they require for subsistence amounts to the sums mentioned. Six thousand six hundred people receive sums over the benefit cap. However, the Minister corrected those Members and said that the benefits cap would apply to a much smaller figure once we took out the exemptions. Do those Members disagree with the exemptions that have been agreed? Do they disagree with the nature of our benefits system, the assumption that people receive benefits based on their need?

Mr McCallister gave the example of a couple both of whom earn £19,000. That couple will still be entitled to child benefit if they have children and, if they have children with disabilities, they will rightly still be entitled to DLA, so it is not a fair comparison. If we compare a family in work that has children with disabilities with similar families out of work, that is a fair comparison. However, to say that two individuals working, who may not have children, will have one income; whereas people on benefits, who may have four or five children — we do not know their personal circumstances — where each child has a disability, have another income is not fair. We assess based on need; that is a fundamental principle that we should stick to. To place an artificial cap on benefits is the wrong way to go about it.

If those Members believe that our benefits system is too generous, let them tell me which benefit is too generous. Unfortunately, they are not here. However, I ask them to come back and say which benefit is too generous. Is it DLA, or PIP as it will become; jobseeker's allowance, or universal credit as it will become; or is it housing benefit? That is how they should tackle this issue. To impose an artificial cap says that, even where there is need, we will deny families subsistence because we want to implement this artificial cap that could leave families in need and existing below subsistence level. That is, if we take the avenue that those Members propose.

In his contribution, Mr Lyttle focused on the importance of free, and indeed, independent, advice, using the East Belfast Independent Advice Centre as his example. He was certainly interested to hear from the Minister whether he would be reassured by the Minister's amendment or the amendment tabled by the SDLP and countersigned by the Green Party. I am encouraged that the Minister has given his commitment to the independent advice sector, but what I did not hear in his contribution was any reason to object to amendment No 17, tabled in the name of the SDLP and the Green Party. For that reason, I certainly intend to favour it over the Minister's amendment. However, I welcome the Minister's commitment to the independent advice sector, to further conversation on how it can be sustained, and to discussion with Members who have raised concerns on how those concerns can be addressed.

Mr Attwood spoke at length about the importance of the contribution of the Human Rights Commission and its submission to the House on welfare reform. I would not hope to paraphrase his contribution. He was explicit in his support for the Human Rights Commission and, to use the term that he used, the weight that it lent to this debate and, indeed, to the amendments that were tabled by the Green Party and by the SDLP.

He also spoke on the bedroom tax and, again, teased out with the Minister the example in which someone's personal circumstances change and they are deemed to be in underoccupancy. He asked whether the bedroom tax would apply where suitable alternative accommodation was available. I think that the Minister gave a clear answer, and we are left in no doubt that, where suitable alternative accommodation exists, the bedroom tax will kick in at that stage. In my view — I cannot see how you can perceive it any differently — somebody who is required to either take a reduction in their benefits or move house to smaller accommodation is worse off under this Bill. Undoubtedly, there will be some people — we do not know how many — who will be affected by this Bill and affected by the bedroom tax in Northern Ireland who will be worse off under these proposals.

There could have been, and, arguably, there should have been, the opportunity for the parties that negotiated the £565 million mitigation to celebrate that and, indeed, for the likes of me to welcome that mitigation, but they went further and said that no one would be worse off under this Bill and said that they had stopped the bedroom tax. It is my duty, as one of the few Members on the opposition Benches and who represents a party outside of the Executive to point out the inaccuracy, at best, of those statements. I do not believe that they serve the people of Northern Ireland well. I think that they give the wrong impression as to what will be passed through the House if and when the Welfare Reform Bill passes its Final Stage.

Fra McCann said that his contribution would be short, and he spelt it out. This was a deal done on the Stormont House Agreement. He said that he believes that it should be adhered to, and, as I said, there is conflict between the signatory parties to the Stormont House Agreement. He went on to attack the SDLP. I will let those parties have that debate. I was not involved in those negotiations; I did not sign up to the agreement. I do not know who said what, who signed what or when they signed it. I know that I do not like the Stormont House Agreement, and I know that I put forward amendments to this Bill on the basis of the Welfare Reform Bill alone and the impact that I believe it will have. I ask that Members judge the amendments in their own right, but I recognise that Members will vote according to agreements that were negotiated as part of the Stormont House Agreement.

Mr F McCann: Will the Member give way?

Mr Agnew: I certainly will.

Mr F McCann: I understand, and I say again that it is your right as a Member of the House to bring amendments to the Bill. If you get support for it, that is well and good. My understanding was that Sinn Féin approached you about possibly signing up to the petition of concern to bring the Bill down. You said that you could not do it, but I think that

you said that you would do it for the bedroom tax but not all of the rest of the elements. That was my understanding. Secondly, when the Bill was being scrutinised in Committee, did you ever think of going and putting to it the Green Party position or your own opposition?

Did you try to have any input to the Ad Hoc Committee to put your concerns to it? You seem to have waited until the last minute when the glare of publicity is on it to bring these matters forward.

8.00 pm

Mr Agnew: I thank the Member for his intervention. One thing that I have learned is, if I go into a meeting with Alex Maskey, to bring a tape recorder. The simple fact is that that is an inaccurate summary, and Mr Maskey gave it before. To be fair, that is who I had the meeting with.

Mr Brady: Will the Member give way?

Mr Agnew: I will give way in a second. I agreed to sign petitions of concern on the bedroom tax. At no point did I ever refuse or was I unwilling to sign a petition of concern to bring down the Bill. The negotiations between our two parties stopped when Sinn Féin made it clear that the Welfare Reform Bill was going nowhere. I continued to work on amendments on my own, but the simple fact was that Sinn Féin gave a commitment that the Welfare Reform Bill was not going to pass through the House. The Stormont House Agreement changed that. As soon as the Stormont House Agreement was passed, and it was clear that we were coming back to the Bill, I went back to working on those amendments and sought to make the best of the Bill. I will give way to Mr Brady.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Order. I apologise; it is nothing personal. I remind Members to make their remarks through the Chair and, more importantly, to stay close to a microphone because you cannot be heard.

Mr Brady: I thank the Member for giving way. I want to make a point about the bilateral meeting. I was with Mr Maskey, so you do not need a tape recorder, because I have a fairly good recollection. One item that was discussed from your point of view was the bedroom tax — nothing else — so, with respect, I still think that I have a reasonably good memory.

Mr Agnew: We will have to agree to disagree on that one, because my recollection is that we discussed a number of amendments and, indeed, if I remember rightly, possibly nine petitions of concern. We did not progress those. As I said, the Member's party made it clear that the Bill was going nowhere.

The Member asked whether I went to the Committee. I know that I am good, I am not a bad MLA, I put in amendments, and I try my best. I am on the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment and the Standards and Privileges Committee. I am one representative for my party. My party is a voluntary-run organisation. It does not have the wealth of Sinn Féin. It does not have research companies working on its behalf. It has a single Member. It has no staff whatsoever, other than the staff whom I employ to do my work and to serve my constituents. I have sought as best I can to amend the Bill and to work on it. Indeed, my legislative team — that is, Ross Brown — has worked tirelessly throughout the Bill to bring forward our amendments. I am proud of the work that we have done. Sinn Féin is the party in power here, along with the DUP. If it can stand over what is here today, that is fine, and it is for them to do so, but to tell people that they have stopped the bedroom tax, when we hear today that it is to be phased in, is misleading at best. I think that Sinn Féin should stand over what it has done rather than what it said it was going to do, because the two things are ultimately not the same.

Mr Storey: Will the Member give way?

Mr Agnew: I will give way.

Mr Storey: The Member should not take the reason why I have not accepted his amendment as a reflection in any way of the changes to the Bill that he sought to bring about in all good faith. The Member knows that we tried to find some accommodation when that was possible. I accept the fact that, as a single Member in the House, he works hard to try to do the job of Members: to scrutinise legislation. Whatever the spat between you and the Members opposite, that is an issue for yourselves, but, as far as I am concerned, I want the Member to be assured that it is not because he happens to be in the Green Party or because he happens to be a single representative. I trust that I have endeavoured to give the rationale for why we did not accept his amendment. It is no reflection on the hard work that he and his member of staff have done on the issue.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Order, please. May I correct the Minister? This is not a spat between the pair of them; I am involved, and all remarks must be made through the Chair.

Mr Agnew: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, and I thank the Minister for his intervention. I hope that, throughout the debate, I have never challenged his sincerity. He has put his view on public record and debated the amendments, and I do not think that, at any time, he has tried to speak out of two sides of his mouth or anything like that. He has played it straight, and I respect him for that. Undoubtedly, we disagree on some of the amendments, and there will be Divisions, but we will have had an honest and open debate. I have objected when people made promises that they did not keep, in which case they should explain why, or made statements. I was attacked, albeit on social media, by Sinn Féin Members and supporters for saying that the bedroom tax would be implemented. I stand by that. Indeed, I have been vindicated today by the Minister's statement, which repeated what he said at Consideration Stage. In that regard, my truck is certainly not with the Minister. Whilst I disagree that it is at the heart of democracy, I do so with the respect and honesty that he has also shown, and with integrity.

Stewart Dickson's view is that his party is one of the parties sticking responsibly to the Stormont House Agreement. This goes back to the debate and the arguing between the signatories to that agreement. I cannot comment beyond referencing Mr Dickson's comments that he feels that the SDLP has done a U-turn. That is between those two parties and the other signatories to the agreement.

I pay tribute to Roy Beggs, in that I thought that he made an honest contribution.

Mr Swann: *[Inaudible.]*

Mr Agnew: I apologise if I offend the Member by suggesting that he would be anything other than honest. He spelt out his party's views on the bedroom tax and said

that his party's issue with it is in cases where there is no suitable accommodation. I think that people have seen that the bedroom tax is unpopular and said that it will not be implemented when, in reality, it will. He supports the agreed position that it will be phased in. I disagree with him, and, in an ideal world, we would have been debating the merits of the bedroom tax.

Mr Beggs: Will the Member give way?

Mr Agnew: Certainly.

Mr Beggs: Does the Member recognise that there will be an issue with some three-bedroom houses? From constituency work over the past number of years, I am aware of a single male who is relatively young and has been left in a three-bedroom house. Meanwhile, we have families on waiting lists. Does he think that that is appropriate and that there should be no pressure on such an individual to downsize rather than drawing additional funds from our limited budget?

Mr Agnew: I do not know the circumstances of the individual. I do not think that it would be reasonable for such a person, who could be working, to lose their job. At the previous stage, when I proposed an amendment that people be given a year to find work rather than being uprooted from their home, Mr Attwood made a point about the difference between a house and a home. I do not know whether that individual would have to move out of the community to accept suitable accommodation. The issue could be that they have lost their job. Another possible change of circumstance is a relationship break-up. If someone's partner and children leave, and they are left alone in a large house, should they be kicked further by having to move out?

I thought that a reasonable amendment at Consideration Stage would have been to give people the opportunity to get back on their feet and to find work or accommodation that they deem suitable. I disagree fundamentally with the principle of the bedroom tax. Others just disagree with the practical application, given the lack of one- and two-bedroom houses, but I disagree with uprooting people because they have become unemployed or their relationship has broken down, and I disagree that we should just look at the size of the unit that they occupy. It is a home, and ultimately the solution is better investment in public housing, not simply moving those in public housing around to fit a perceived public good.

Another interesting point raised, I think by Mr Beggs, concerned how much of the £565 million would be spent on administration. Undoubtedly, the supplementary scheme, however it is implemented and whoever receives the benefit of it, will have to be administered.

I was coming to the figures anyway, but this is a good point at which to address them. Those who have said that no one will be worse off under welfare reform have either ignored the figures or the figures have changed in ways that I cannot understand. I have not heard anything to help me understand them. Before the Stormont House Agreement, the lower estimate of the impact of the welfare cuts, which came from the Minister for Social Development, was £115 million. The higher estimate was £250 million, and that figure came from NICVA. At one point, the First Minister said that, if we did not implement welfare reform, the impact would be up to £1 billion a year. I never knew where that figure came from. That, however, was the range of figures. Now we are told to accept that £94 million a year is enough to ensure that no one is worse off, and, as Mr Beggs correctly highlighted, that is before we take into account the administration of the supplementary payment scheme. How much will that take out of the £94 million a year on average? How can we make the commitment that no one will be worse off and everyone will receive transition payments to bring them back to the level that they would have been at had we not implemented welfare reform?

That bring me — I have gone in reverse order — to Mickey Brady's contribution. This is where I got annoyed in the debate. Mr Brady and I met a group of people with disabilities, and he told them that no one would be worse off. After he left, they asked me whether I agreed; I had to tell them that I did not.

Mr Brady: Will the Member give way?

Mr Agnew: I will give way in a second. I had to tell them that I disagreed for two reasons. First, because of the transition itself, and we have seen from PIP payments in GB that delays could result in people going without during that transition. Secondly, I said that I did not believe that the £565 million over six years was enough. Sinn Féin, before the Stormont House Agreement, did not use the Minister's figure of £115 million for the cost of welfare cuts, let alone the figure of £90 million. In fact, until quite late in the day, it was using the figure of £560 million, on which Mr Maskey was challenged by Stephen Nolan.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Order. At the mention of that, I have to intervene. May I be helpful, not just to Mr Agnew, but to others who follow? We are now on to the winding-up speech and, although the Member is entitled to comment on what others have said, I ask him to focus on the amendments because of the lateness of the hour and the need to avoid opening up the debate again with interventions.

Mr Agnew: I will take the Deputy Speaker's advice. With his indulgence, I will try to finish the point. It relates to amendment No 22, which is about enabling the Department to make supplementary payments and the impact of those supplementary payments.

8.15 pm

Mr Brady: Will the Member give way?

Mr Agnew: I will give way in one second.

My argument is that I could not tell anyone that they will not be worse off under the Bill. The bedroom tax, which we have discussed, will impact on a number of people. We will see how many. I also believe that the transition mechanism and the fund for supplementary payments are insufficient to guarantee that no one will be worse off.

Mr Brady: I thank the Member for giving way. I do not really like making a habit of correcting you, but you did not quote what I actually said to the north-west disability forum. I said — if you had been listening, you probably would have heard it — that anyone on benefits under our control will not be worse off. We do not control tax credits or child benefit; HMRC does. With respect, if you are going to quote me, try to be accurate, please.

Mr Agnew: I thank the Member for his intervention. The bedroom tax is very much under our control. The Member

earlier tried to undermine me and my knowledge of the benefits system. I accept that I used an inaccurate term, but he suggested that I had a weak knowledge of the benefits system because I am not on the Committee and have not worked on it for as long as he has. Given his vast experience on the Social Development Committee and as a welfare worker prior to being an MLA, how embarrassing it must have been that someone with as little knowledge as me had to correct him and his party by restating the Minister's statement on how the bedroom tax will be implemented, despite the assurances from him and his party and his contradiction of me on that point.

I conclude simply by saying that I continue to believe in the amendments that I have tabled. The only way to stop the bedroom tax, as some have promised to do, is to support amendment Nos 11 and 21.

Question put, That amendment No 1 be made.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 13; Noes 71.

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Attwood, Mr D Bradley, Mr Byrne, Mr Eastwood, Mrs D Kelly, Dr McDonnell, Mr McGlone, Mrs McKevitt, Mr McKinney, Mr A Maginness, Mr Ramsey, Mr Rogers.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Agnew and Mr A Maginness.

NOES

Mr Anderson, Mr Beggs, Mr Bell, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Ms P Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Buchanan, Mrs Cameron, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Ford, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hazzard, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr G Kelly, Mr Kinahan, Mr Lunn, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Mr McCallister, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McCausland, Ms McCorley, Mr B McCrea, Mr I McCrea, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr M McGuinness, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McKay, Mr McMullan, Mr McQuillan, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr Ó Muilleoir, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Ms Ruane, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr McQuillan and Mr G Robinson.

Question accordingly negatived.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Order. I encourage Members please to be seated. Can I also encourage Members to put away their mobile phones?

Clause 26 (Higher-level sanctions)

Amendment No 2 not moved.

Clause 27 (Other sanctions)

Amendment No 3 not moved.

Clause 30 (Delegation and contracting out)

Amendment No 4 not moved.

8.30 pm

Clause 44 (Assembly control)

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): We now come to the second group of amendments for debate. With amendment No 5, it will be convenient to debate amendment Nos 6 and 7, 12, 19, 24 and 25. The amendments relate to Assembly control, reports and technical matters. Members should note that amendment No 7 is consequential to amendment Nos 5 and 6. Amendment No 19 is mutually exclusive with amendment No 24.

I call Mr Steven Agnew to move amendment No 5 and address the other amendments in the group. *[Interruption.]* Can I appeal to the Members leaving to leave quietly and for others to take their seats?

Mr Maskey: On a point of order, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I had to leave the Chamber a few minutes ago at the end of the last section. I heard Mr Agnew — I think that I quote him accurately — saying that the next time that we go to a meeting with Alex Maskey, we need "to bring a tape recorder". I find that deeply personally offensive. I ask the Member to reflect on that remark. It does no justice to the Member, and it certainly does no justice to me. For the record, let me make it clear that at no time have I sought to misrepresent Mr Agnew.

I made it clear on a number of occasions that, in the bilateral meetings that I conducted, I led on behalf of Sinn Féin, with Mr Agnew along with other parties. The only commitment that Mr Agnew was able to make, to his credit, was to support a POC on the bedroom tax. That remains his position, and that is fair enough. At no other point in any of the bilateral meetings that I conducted with him and Mr Ross Brown did Mr Agnew feel able to commit to any other objection to the Bill. He said that he would consider a range of matters, but at no time did he make any commitment other than the one on the bedroom tax. I have never suggested anything different. I have made it clear that that was the one commitment he made —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Order. The Member has made his point, and it is on the record.

Mr Maskey: A LeasCheann Comhairle, I want to put it on the record, and I ask the Member to reflect on it, because it is very regrettable that he made that remark. It does not represent anything that I have ever said about the Member.

Mr Agnew: I beg to move amendment No 5: In page 21, line 17, leave out sub-paragraphs (iv) to (vi).

The following amendments stood on the Marshalled List:

No 6: In page 21, line 22, leave out sub-paragraphs (ix) to (xi).— *[Mr Agnew.]*

No 7: In page 21, line 29, at end insert

"(3A) Regulations to which this subsection applies shall not be made unless a draft of the regulations has been laid before and approved by a resolution of the Assembly.

(3B) Subsection (3A) applies to regulations under any of the following alone or with other regulations—

(a) section 9(2) and (3) (standard allowance);

(b) section 10(3) and (4) (children and young persons element);

(c) section 11 (housing costs element);

(d) section 19(2)(d) (claimants subject to no work-related requirements);

(e) sections 26 and 27 (sanctions);

(f) section 28 (hardship payments).".— [Mr Agnew.]

No 12: In clause 78, page 59, line 6, leave out "making personal independence payments" and insert "personal independence payment".— *[Mr Storey (The Minister for Social Development).]*

No 19: After clause 121 insert

*"**Duty to report on operation of this Act***

***121A**.—(1) The Department must, not later than 3 years after this Act receives Royal Assent, publish an independent report on the operation of this Act.*

(2) The Department must lay the report before the Assembly.".— [Mr Agnew.]

No 24: After clause 132 insert

*"**Duty to report on operation of this Act***

***132C**.—(1) The Department must, not later than 3 years after this Act receives Royal Assent, publish a report on the operation of this Act.*

(2) The Department must lay the report before the Assembly.".— [Mr Storey (The Minister for Social Development).]

No 25: After clause 132 insert

*"**Review***

***132D**.The Northern Ireland Joint Standards Committee for the Social Security Agency and Child Maintenance Service shall monitor the standards and quality of decision making with regard to the sanctions defined under this Act and report to the Social Security Agency and Child Maintenance Service on an annual basis.".— [Mr Attwood.]*

Amendment Nos 5, 6 and 7 should be taken together, and I urge Members, if they are to support them, to do so as a whole as they rely on each other to achieve the objective. Amendment No 7 lists the regulations as they relate to universal credit: standard allowance; children and young persons element; housing cost element; claimants subject to no work-related requirements; sanctions; and hardship payments. The intention of the amendments is to ensure that, for each of those key aspects of universal credit, draft legislation is laid before the Assembly and debated before being implemented.

Collectively, the amendments would remove the current confirmatory arrangement and replace it with a draft affirmative one. As the Minister said at the previous stage, that is not the usual convention for social security payments, but, given the significant changes, it is important that the regulations come before the House before being implemented. Not only would it give the Assembly an opportunity to debate them before their introduction but it would be difficult, should they be introduced prior to confirmation by the Assembly, to remove them. My question to the Minister is this: if the Assembly did not agree to the regulations under the confirmatory procedure, how would that leave the application of universal credit? It is my view that they should be agreed in advance and not be subject to confirmative resolution after regulations have been made and, indeed, implemented.

I will move on to amendment Nos 19 and 24. As the Minister mentioned in the debate on the previous group, we had discussions on the duty to report. I welcome the fact that the Minister has tabled an amendment. The single difference between the two amendments is the word "independent", and we had a similar debate on the previous group. I welcome the Minister's commitment to reviewing the Welfare Reform Act three years after it receives Royal Assent, but it is my view that the review should be independent. At the previous stage, I tabled an amendment that gave more detail on what I would like to be in such a report. In seeking to meet the Minister halfway, I have removed the "vulnerable groups" stipulation, and I leave the terms of reference to the Department, but I feel that it is important to keep the word "independent". The Department and the Executive have a clear policy intent in introducing the Welfare Reform Bill. It should be an outside body that reports on its impact, its effectiveness and its implementation.

Amendment No 25, tabled by the SDLP, proposes that the joint standards committee monitor the standards and quality of decision-making on sanctions. I think that the amendment is sound. I will wait to hear the rationale from the proposer and the Minister's response, but, at this time, I am minded to support it.

I think that I am right in saying that the only other amendment is amendment No 12, which seems to be a simple rewording.

I do not see any policy change there, although, again, we will wait to hear the Minister's rationale.

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

To summarise briefly, my amendments are important, as they would bring further Assembly scrutiny of regulations and of the Bill, should it pass Final Stage, in the form of an independent report. This is a major piece of legislation, and it has taken a long time to get here. Many have concerns about it, and it is right that the greatest scrutiny possible be given to the implementation of the Bill itself, to the regulations that come from it, to how effective it is and to what its effect is.

Mr Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Given the lateness of the hour and your encouragement to Members at the beginning of the debate on this group of amendments to stick to the amendments and to try not to speak for too long, I will make only a few remarks.

The second group concerns the issue of Assembly control over future regulations and so on, and the question of the reporting of the operation of the Act and how it is working out. The first three amendments are superfluous, given that the arrangements that will be put in place will enhance considerably and significantly the Assembly's control over the regulations in the time ahead. Obviously, some of the details of that have still to be worked out.

The main point that I want to make is that, in all our discussions on the Welfare Reform Bill since it was introduced some time ago, one of Sinn Féin's most major and significant concerns has been the ideology behind it from the Tories in London. I think that "nasty agenda" was the terminology used by their coalition partners in

Westminster. There is an ideologically driven agenda that is about slashing public services and targeting the most vulnerable in our society. I do not need to rehearse all those categories.

Some people subscribe to that ideology politically, but I think that most Members in the Chamber do not really. The package that has been agreed and negotiated and that we are still working our way through is largely a measure of the fact that most of the parties in the Chamber want to do their best for the people we collectively represent. We recognise that there are a lot of people out there who are vulnerable and need support, and that is really what the Stormont House Agreement is all about.

One of the key issues for Sinn Féin was always around the enabling aspect of the Welfare Reform Bill. We always cited as one of our key objectives neutralising some of the worst aspects of the Bill, including some of the enabling aspects. What we have tried to do in our deliberations is adhere to the key concept of supporting the most vulnerable in our society and protecting the people out there in that category whom, as I said, all the parties in the House represent to some degree or other.

We have sought a package and a deal that gives us belt and braces to protect those most vulnerable people. For the record, no one in Sinn Féin ever said that no one would ever lose out as the result of the Welfare Reform Bill. There are aspects of the welfare agenda that are with us today, even before this Bill becomes an Act. There will be people who will fall foul of aspects of the legislation, because it comes from Westminster. The Minister, Mervyn Storey, has already made it very clear that there are elements of the welfare programme over which the Executive and the Assembly have absolutely no control or authority. That is the first thing that has to be said. There are things for which no one in the House can be held responsible, such as tax credits and so on and so forth. No matter how they vote, no Members or parties can be accused of deliberately misleading the public or the House. There are aspects of welfare legislation that are outside the control and authority of the Assembly and the Executive. It is important that people have the honesty to acknowledge that.

8.45 pm

We have tried with others, and we certainly are not on our own in that. I would argue and make it very clear that this party stands on a solid record of campaigning and lobbying very hard. We mobilised, marshalled opinion and engaged with all the sectors, from the Churches right through to the community and voluntary sector and everybody else in between. We went to London and met Lord Freud. Martin McGuinness and Gerry Adams along with others, including the First Minister, raised the matter directly with David Cameron in Downing Street. As I said, we have put tens of thousands of leaflets and bulletins around every one of our constituencies to highlight the issue. Often, we did that when we were being slated by others who were telling us that there was nothing more that we could do, that we could not get another penny, that the benefits system is generous enough and that we could not do anything for these people because we would be taking it from somebody else's budget.

I make it very clear on behalf of Sinn Féin again in the Chamber that we see the key pillars of any society that is compassionate and wants to look after the most vulnerable as being health, education and welfare. They have to be the cornerstones of a system that looks after the people out there who need good health and who need a good education to make themselves the most productive contributors to our society that they can be and help their human well-being. Welfare has to be a system that is compassionate and caring and supports people who fall foul of illness or have the problem of not being able to get a job.

Every Member knows full well that there are a lot of people in our society who are on a low income. We all know about the zero-hour contracts and the people who are vulnerable out there who are ill, sick or long-term unemployed. We know all about that. Those who want to want to support people in that category want to try to make sure that we have the best welfare system that we can get. That is what we are trying to do here.

Are we starting off with the best welfare system today? No, we are certainly not. There has been an ongoing attack on the welfare system for several years. This is not the first Welfare Reform Bill that has gone through the Assembly. There was one in 2007, and that enabled other measures to be introduced in the House that Members have had to suck up, so to speak, on behalf of the people out there we all represent. In recent years, all the parties in the Chamber have had to accept statutory regulations coming through the Assembly that they could not prevent or stop and that were detrimental to the people we represent. Sinn Féin was struck very hard by that, and we focused on that when we had any discussion on the Welfare Reform Bill and the welfare cuts agenda. We are very clear that we are opposed to those cuts and have resolutely opposed them.

At the end of the day, we went into the negotiations before Christmas, and I am very pleased that we had what you would call a five-party agreement. Let us not even worry or confuse or bother ourselves about the technicalities around a four-party agreement or a five-party agreement. We had a five-party agreement, and I am glad that we had that. That meant that the five parties committed the Executive and the Assembly to do so much more for people than had been agreed up to December. Before December, we had a package of mitigation measures that were available to the House two years ago but that we did not avail ourselves of. Post the Stormont House Agreement, there is now money on the table for people who, thankfully, will be able to retain it in their pockets.

We have talked about the people who are the most vulnerable out there and have engaged with civic society. Every Member and every party in the House talks about the most vulnerable. Let me make it clear: when we look at a tin, and it says "the most vulnerable" on that tin, those are the people we are determined to support. Those are the people we were working for and on behalf of. I am very pleased that the Executive and the five parties in the House agreed that there was a package that we could deliver for the people out there.

It is very interesting that, months ago — Mr Agnew referred to it earlier — everybody challenged us against the veracity of the Department's figures. We are now working on the Department's figures, and we are still told that we are wrong. You cannot have it two ways: either the Department's figures are right or they are wrong. All that I can say is this: the five parties sat down and knuckled down to get a way forward on welfare and came up with a

package that keeps more or less £600 million in people's pockets over the next number of years. That should be welcomed by people in here and not criticised. It was not on offer before December; that is very clear.

I want to make a point, because I have heard all the amendments and I have read all the amendments. Like the Minister, I have heard a lot of discussion and debate over the last couple of weeks. I quoted Mr Nesbitt, who was there when the parties were brought together to look at the final package and to take it at 11·00 am on 23 December. I see amendments from the SDLP. Obviously, the last couple were withdrawn. Alasdair McDonnell, on behalf of the SDLP, said that he was "very pleased" with the finance and the welfare package. You are very pleased with a package, then, all of a sudden, every day after that you bad-mouth it. Mr McDonnell was also at that meeting with the Secretary of State, Theresa Villiers, and Charlie Flanagan, an Tánaiste. He made the point that he did not think that the deal was comprehensive enough across a range of issues; he mentioned outstanding matters and all the rest of it, which we totally agreed with. However, he also said that the SDLP would welcome the paper and that they would not bad-mouth it. In the last couple of debates, all they have done is bad-mouth it. As I said earlier, you try to have your cake and eat it. You accepted the deal; you were party to negotiating it. I would have thought that you would be pleased to able to say that you were party to negotiating a deal that allows that amount of money to remain in people's pockets.

To conclude my remarks, because this group —

Mr Dickson: Will the Member give way?

Mr Maskey: No, thank you. It is getting late, and I am doing what the Cheann Comhairle has asked me to do.

I move now to control. I have made it clear that the Assembly will have greater authority over the regulations coming forward in the future. It is enabling, and we have a lot of work to do yet. The Minister will acknowledge and confirm that his party and the other parties should be operating through the party leaders' group, because that is the implementation of the Stormont House Agreement. Some people signed on to an agreement; then they signed on to the fact that their party leaders would act with the other party leaders and become the implementation group for the Stormont House Agreement; and, since then, they have virtually walked away from it. That is a shameful position for any party leader to adopt. It lacks integrity, but that is the reality that we are in. Therefore we have these sham debates and sham arguments with people trying to score political points off others and scaring the life out of people in our community. Those people should not be frightened; they should not be worried; they should feel that the parties are prepared to work for them and to support them to the best of our ability.

The Minister has outlined the various schemes, and he has made it clear that the detail of the schemes has yet to be worked out. They will go to public consultation; they will come back to the Assembly; and they will go through the Executive. Where there are major concerns, people will have the right to bring them to the Executive. I am pleased with that, because it allows us some other means of protection for the people we represent.

Sinn Féin has been trying to get legislation in place, with appropriate amendments, to make sure that the regulations will be subject to greater scrutiny, accountability and authority from the Executive. We have also been trying to make sure that the various guidelines are put in place to operate all the statutory regulations as they go forward and to ensure a significant package of mitigation measures. That is how we are trying, in the round, to tackle the welfare cuts agenda that is coming from London.

People who want to attack Sinn Féin or somebody else forget the little thing that this is a Bill coming from London; it is being imposed on us by London. I will repeat this ad nauseam if I need to: I am very pleased that we got a five-party agreement that goes a long way to protect the most vulnerable. If that is rolling over, I am happy to be a roll-over *[Interruption.]* It is allowing money to be kept in the pockets of the people who are most vulnerable — the people you all talk about, but then you want to make a joke about. Mr McNarry wants to make a joke from a sedentary position. You have not been in the debate.

Mr McNarry: You would not give way.

Mr Maskey: No, I would not, because you could not take the time or interest to come to the Chamber to discuss this issue for months, never mind over the past couple of weeks.

Mr Speaker: Let us confine ourselves to the discussion.

Mr Maskey: The Member is obviously not concerned enough to come into the Chamber to debate the issue — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Maskey: — so he will not be eating into my time.

We support the Minister's amendments, because we think that they add the requirement for important reports to be introduced and for other important measures as part of an overall programme to protect the most vulnerable. We oppose amendment Nos 5, 6, 7, 19 and 25.

Mr Attwood: I will, if I am permitted, make some wider comments towards the end of my contribution. First of all, because I did not do this at Consideration Stage, I thank the Bill Office and the staff in the Assembly for all the work that they have done on this. A lot of this stuff tends to be done at the eleventh hour and even past the eleventh hour, and the people in the Bill Office and the Assembly generally were always willing and helpful and tried to find resolutions to problems rather than find problems. Some people take a different approach.

To exhaust an analogy, I say to the Minister that there may be a new broom, but I am afraid that there is an old handle stuck to it. As I said the last time, maybe even between now and 11.00 pm or whenever the debate concludes I might conclude something different.

I agree with Mr Maskey on one thing: I do not think that politicians in the Assembly across the parties are indifferent to the needs of people and the needs of people in need. I may dissent and differ from Mr Allister and Mr McCallister's contributions, which veered towards that at times. I do not think that that was their intention, but, in some of their language, that seemed to be the case. The SDLP's view of the purpose of all of this and all of the amendments is that it is about dealing with people in need. I speak from memory, so this may be inaccurate, but there is £70 billion in tax that should be claimed by HMRC, and it has 350 people going

after those who are avoiding paying their tax of £70 billion; there are 3,500 people in the welfare system going after a tiny amount of claim fraud in welfare. When it comes to our priorities, yes, we should crack down on welfare fraud and benefit fraud, but, when you look at those figures and see how much time and resources are invested in going after welfare claimants compared with the time, money and resources invested going after the tax cheats, the corporate tax evasion and all of that, you begin to wonder where people's priorities lie.

We will support the amendments tabled by Mr Agnew. The reason we are supporting the amendments on positive resolution and independent reports and extra function being given to the joint standards committee is to try to ensure that the people in need have the maximum protection. One of the ways and mechanisms to ensure maximum protection is to have the maximum oversight in the Chamber of regulations, reports in respect of the work of the Department and the powers of the joint standards committee. We are backing all those amendments so that the Chamber and the Department and the joint standards committee have the wherewithal to properly interrogate welfare regulations and welfare practice to ensure that there is maximum protection.

The reason for all of that, if I could take just one minute, is to go back to Mr Allister's comments. Why? Because Mr Allister failed to read into the record the fact that, when it comes to children living in low-income families, the figure is 40% in West Belfast — the worst constituency in the North. North Antrim is 18·4%. When it comes to people claiming housing benefit, the figure is 21·6% in West Belfast — the second worst constituency in the North.

Mr McNarry: Will the Member give way?

Mr Attwood: I will shortly.

North Antrim has 9·5%, and 9·5% is not good enough either.

Do not let Mr Allister point the finger at a culture of dependency in my constituency when that is its culture of life. The percentage of people claiming income support is 9·7% in West Belfast and 3% in North Antrim. The percentage of those claiming benefits is 50·5% in West Belfast and 38·3% in North Antrim. It is not for me to tell another Member how to do his business in his constituency, but when nearly 40% of people in his constituency are claiming benefits, maybe he should begin to ask questions. Unemployment is 9·4% in West Belfast, 4·8% in North Antrim and so on.

9.00 pm

Critically, as of 31 March 2014, the greatest differences, with prevalence rates being higher in West Belfast than the Northern Ireland average, were for chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, diabetes mellitus, coronary heart disease and hypertension. It goes on and on, and it is published every month by the Assembly for the profile of disadvantage and deprivation. How dare Mr Allister point the finger when their life experience is informed by those figures, when those people have to live those lives, this year and this decade and decade after decade in this part of Ireland, compounded by the error of partition? How dare Mr Allister point the finger at any of those people?

Mr McNarry: I appreciate the Member giving way. I wonder whether, for clarification, the Member could explain to others outside the West Belfast constituency why the percentages that he quotes exist. An explanation would do quite a lot of good and would help those who sit outside West Belfast. Is it the failure of its representatives over these long years? Why are those percentages being quoted, and why are they so obviously different from those in other parts of Northern Ireland?

Mr Attwood: There are many answers to that, and I will give one or two, if I may. One reason is the history of this part of this country since partition. The people of west Belfast were subject to discrimination. I remind people that this is not Catholic west Belfast; this is all of west Belfast, in which there is still a significant minority that comes from a different political tradition to the one that I represent. If you have a situation in which, in this part of Ireland, long-term male Catholic unemployment is virtually unchanged decades after fair employment, where increasing numbers of Protestant male adults experience the same long-term, generational unemployment whereby nobody in a family — children, parents or grandparents — works, what do you do to remedy that? You invest to deal with that disadvantage. That means that you do not put FDI into south and east Belfast but protect industrial sites in west Belfast and try to move into those areas.

Mr Speaker: Let us remind ourselves that we are discussing the Further Consideration Stage of the Welfare Reform Bill. It is appropriate that Mr Attwood should respond to another Member's comments during the debate. However, I think that you have done that quite significantly, comprehensively and effectively, and I ask you to come back to the debate. The hour is getting late, and we should focus on the issues that have to be decided this evening.

Mr Attwood: I take the lead from you, Mr Speaker. However, if the Member wants to have a further conversation about that, I am more than willing to do so.

I will deal with amendment No 25, which is a new clause. I remind the Minister of what he said on 11 February at Consideration Stage. When it came to the work of the joint standards committee, he made the point that its work:

> *"specifically includes the accuracy of decisions on sanctions." - [Official Report, Bound Volume 101, p520, col 1].*

The Minister will remember making that point, and he will also recall my reply:

> *"'Accuracy' is a very precise term, and I am sure that, somewhere, some lawyer has defined it." - [Official Report, Bound Volume 101, p520, col 1].*

In my view, accuracy is a technical word that is not about the character of the decisions being made. It is just box ticking when it comes to decisions that were made. The Minister then added, when that point was made:

> *"I take what the Member has said about this. Will he allow me the opportunity to take away those comments that he has made specifically on this issue and to give further thought to what he has said?" — [Official Report, Bound Volume 101, p520, col 2].*

My question to the Minister is this: what further thought has he given to what was said on that day? I refer the Minister to the meeting of the joint standards committee held on 23 September 2014. This is very current, and I refer to it because, in my view, our concern that the joint

standards committee cannot look at the decision-making is corroborated by the report, which says:

> *"The balanced scorecard target for 2014-15 is to achieve 97% cash value accuracy by 31 March 2014 for both old and new rules combined.*
>
> *The sample size for the monitoring year 2014-15 has been confirmed by departmental statisticians as 546 in total for both schemes (312 for new rules and 234 for old rules). The monitoring is based upon a confidence level of 95% with a tolerance level of +/- 2·45%.*
>
> *This quarter, the division monitored 46 cases for cash value accuracy".*

I have to say to the Minister that the entire record of that meeting is about checking accuracy; it is not about interrogating decision-making. I do not, at this late hour, intend to go into any more detail, but there are reams of this stuff.

The joint standards committee does a very good job of looking at the accuracy of people with the responsibility to maintain accuracy in the Social Security Agency. It does good work checking that homework, and I do not take away from that. I have no doubt that it maximises its mandate, but, from looking at the record of meetings — that is only one typical example — it seems that it is all about accuracy and not about interrogating decision-making. That is why we re-tabled our amendment to monitor the quality of decision-making on sanctions. I do not intend to rehearse all of the arguments and concerns about sanctions. The point is that the JSC needs to have the explicit power in law to dig under the profile of accuracy to which I referred in order to see whether the decision-making is of the quality required. It is easy to conduct a quantitative exercise by looking at facts and figures. We need a qualitative exercise that interrogates those facts and figures to ensure that, when it comes to sanctions, it is doing what it should.

I will conclude with one or two brief comments in response to comments made by Mr Maskey. On the last occasion, I said to the Minister and the leader of the DUP that, when we gave a press conference after Stormont House, just a few yards from here, our position was crystal clear, and we have not varied from it: we will implement as fully and faithfully as we can that which is strong in the Stormont House Agreement and try to rectify what is weak. We are right in that. In the last couple of days, there was a meeting in this Building of the party leaders. We differ from all other parties on how to implement the proposals for dealing with the past. We want to protect the authority of Patten and the accountability mechanisms of the Policing Board. Others seem to think otherwise when it comes to the appointment of senior staff and so on and so forth. Where we think that things can be done better or are weak, we will work to rectify them. We have always maintained that argument, and we are not going to change. It is crucial that we do that, because, as I said on the previous occasion, there are parts, including those on dealing with the past, that are less about truth and accountability and more about protecting the vested interests of the people in command and control of state organisations and terror groups that were active in the past. On the basis of our political values and the ethics that we uphold, we will dissent from all of that. We are not dissidents, but we value the right to dissent. If there are things in the Stormont House Agreement that we have to dissent from to make the weak better, that is what we will do.

The problem with the debate is that people have decided that they want to live in a political straitjacket known as the Stormont House Agreement, when people outside in the advice sector and from the Human Rights Commission are saying, "There are things that you can do to enhance this". On the previous day, we had petitions of concern, and, today, in the absence of petitions of concern but with the same outcome, we are voting down the best advice from the people with the best authority in this part of the world whom we should not second-guess. In fact, we should embrace and endorse what they say and put it into the primary law. Forgive me, Mr Maskey, but we will implement what is strong and try to —

Mr Maskey: Will the Member give way?

Mr Attwood: — rectify what is weak. *[Interruption.]* Sorry, I was going to give way.

Mr Maskey: I made this point earlier, but this is simply a case of having your cake and eating it.

Mr Attwood: In the context of a debate about welfare and given the scale of the benefit cuts and changes that have been proposed, comments that reduce good arguments and good authority to being about having your cake and eating it are not helpful. If there is advice from outside the Chamber, you might want to describe it as having your cake and eating it; I would describe it as taking best advice from people who are well qualified to give it. Given that we have had some good conversations with the Minister, I regret that some useful opportunities to enhance where we are seem to have been declined in the past few hours.

Mr Speaker: Thank you. I call Mr — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Maskey: I thank the Member for giving way. Let me make this point very clearly: I did not, in any way, suggest anything about the advice sector. There are people there whom I have worked with for many years and people whom I value. I was referring to the SDLP having its cake and eating it.

Mr Speaker: Mr Attwood, to clarify, did you conclude your remarks, or did I misunderstand you?

Mr Attwood: I was concluding, but I am prepared to give way.

Mr Speaker: No, if you have concluded, you cannot do that. I call Mr Roy Beggs. Thank you.

Mr Beggs: Given the lateness of the hour, I will try to conclude with remarks that are specifically on the amendments.

The matters in amendment Nos 5 and 6 were discussed at Consideration Stage. However, I realise that Mr Agnew is at least trying to focus his attention more specifically this time around. My party's concerns at Consideration Stage on just how much of the Bill is simply enabling legislation remain. Although I welcomed the Minister's explicit commitment to work with the Committee, we will have to wait some time to make a fair assessment of that. However, it certainly does no harm to raise the issue once again in order to maximise oversight of the regulations.

Amendment Nos 5 and 6 specifically seek to change the Assembly procedure for some of the most important regulations, including those on the standard allowance, housing costs and sanctions. It is crucial that those be properly reviewed, but there is a very real danger that the proposed changes could again result in a stalemate in the Assembly. That has to be recognised by all. Public services have already been hit with a penalty of some £100 million, as Sinn Féin walked itself into a corner, only to later change direction as our Budget process faced a crash a few weeks ago.

In addition, we will be hit with penalties of tens of millions of pounds in the new financial year beginning 2015-16. That will be happening unless we bring about change and implement changes. We simply cannot afford further delay.

9.15 pm

These amendments, whilst they may be well meaning, could result in deadlock, which will mean further fines. We cannot afford that, as such fines would again adversely affect public services. Just look at what happened during this financial year where, mid-year, we had to claw back, through a number of Departments, and pull money back into the centre. That certainly has adversely affected my constituents, and I would not wish to see it happening again.

We note the commitment of the Minister to review the Act within three years. The Ulster Unionists are satisfied that the Department should have the ability to carry that out without having to bring in an independent organisation.

The final amendment I will address is in regard to giving the joint standards committee an enhanced role. I believe that the standard of decision-making in relation to sanctions is already monitored by the committee. If that is the case, why would the Department be reluctant to see this legislated for? I look forward to hear what the Minister will say in that regard. That concludes my comments on this section of the Bill.

Mr Dickson: I also will be brief. I support the amendments put forward by the Department in group 2. I particularly welcome amendment No 24, which will place a duty on the Department to publish a report on the operation of this legislation within three years of Royal Assent. This provides us with a further guarantee with regard to the implementation and the propriety of that implementation.

We have heard much today and in the previous debate about those who wished to deny that which they supported in the Stormont Castle agreement or the Stormont House Agreement. At one stage, the leader of the Ulster Unionist Party claimed that he had brokered the entire deal, particularly in respect of welfare reform, but that all seems to have been forgotten.

What is not to be forgotten in all of this are the most vulnerable in society, and that is what we are attempting to do here with these mitigating factors. We are also trying to do something a great deal more than that. Not only are we here to protect the most vulnerable in society but to build our economy, including our corporation tax; to deliver jobs and get people out of the poverty they are in; to tackle the issue of west Belfast once and for all; and to deal with the health inequalities and the employment inequalities for every citizen in Northern Ireland. That is what I believe we have been elected here to do.

Mr Humphrey: I am grateful to the Member for giving way. As a Belfast representative, I am only too glad to see investment coming to Northern Ireland and, in particular, to this city. I must say that I am amazed. Many of the people Mr Attwood made reference to in west Belfast live in the greater Shankill area. I have to say that, when jobs come to Belfast, whether they come to west Belfast, east Belfast or south Belfast — Members seem to be complaining about direct investment in south and east Belfast — it is the people of Belfast and the Belfast basin who benefit from those jobs coming to the city. Does the Member agree?

Mr Dickson: I agree with the Member. This community, this society, and this Assembly need to move on from the type of debate we have been having and remember where people are in terms of jobs, employment and opportunities. I should not miss the opportunity to mention the people in east Antrim who, many years ago, had excellent opportunities for employment but who today struggle like everyone else across Northern Ireland to have employment.

I will be very brief, Mr Speaker. We support the Department's amendments in group 2 and encourage the House to press on with this legislation; allow us to monitor it over time; deal with it; and deliver for everyone in Northern Ireland, including the most vulnerable, thereby allowing them to have an opportunity to receive the appropriate benefits, and encourage a society that will drive forward and deliver jobs.

Mr Speaker: Thank you very much. You have no idea how happy I am to come to the Minister for Social Development so quickly — *[Laughter.]*

Mr Storey: You do not know how happy I am that you have called me. I want to be brief. However, it is important that there are certain things that we place on the record of the House, when others, as I know the Member for West Belfast will want to interrogate me, regardless of whether I say that I am a handle, a broom or Dusty. It does not matter what it is.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, for calling me in relation to these amendments. Amendment Nos 5, 6 and 7 refer to clause 44, which relates to Assembly control. Clause 44 provides for the procedure by which the Northern Ireland Assembly can control the making of regulations. Amendment Nos 5 and 6 would remove the regulations on the amounts for the standard allowance; children and young people's element; housing costs element; claimants subject to no work-related requirements; sanctions; and hardship payments. From the list of regulations subject to the confirmatory procedure, amendment No 7 would result in the regulations on those aspects being subject to the draft affirmative procedure.

As I said two weeks ago at Consideration Stage, Assembly controls for universal credit regulations will, in the main, follow the more common form of control, that is, the negative resolution procedure. That follows the conventional approach to delegated legislation in this area. However, regulations that introduce new concepts into the benefits system will be subject to the confirmatory procedure in the first instance. That will ensure a debate on any areas of concern. It will also maintain the flexibility to amend the legislation quickly in the future to respond to changes without making disproportionate demands on the legislature. If the amounts payable in universal credit

were subject to the affirmative procedure, that would apply to the first set of regulations only. As a general rule, the affirmative procedure would be applied to regulations that are unique to Northern Ireland, that is, they are not parity-based, outside social security, provide for something controversial or deal with financial assistance, such as the discretionary support scheme.

I propose that the form of Assembly control to be applied to regulations remain as drafted in the Bill, as that will enable subordinate legislation to make timely progress. That means that the first set of regulations, which introduces major policy changes, will be made using the confirmatory procedure.

The alternative approach suggested by the amendments for the payment amounts — affirmative — which provides for debate and discussion before the regulations come into effect is rarely applied to social security legislation, as it could lead to significant delays in implementation, bearing in mind the need to implement welfare reform legislation as quickly as possible to avoid additional financial burdens in relation to the issue of fines, which, I remind Members, has not gone away in its entirety. That is something that we need to keep a focus on. In light of that, I urge Members to reject amendment Nos 5, 6 and 7.

Clause 78 was added following an amendment tabled by the Ulster Unionist Party and accepted following debate at Consideration Stage. It makes provision for a pilot scheme to be carried out in advance of the personal independence payment going live in Northern Ireland. It is important that the administration of new benefits be well planned and managed to avoid the sort of backlog and delivery uncertainties that occurred in Great Britain when PIP was implemented. I trust that the pilot will provide the assurance that the Northern Ireland PIP customer journey and associated processes are robust; help to inform plans for the roll-out of PIP in Northern Ireland; and provide further information on outcomes.

Participation in the pilot will be entirely voluntary and will not impact on a person's current DLA award or future PIP reassessment, and there will be no actual PIP payment. The tabled amendment clarifies that there will be no PIP payments made as a result of the pilot. I urge Members to accept the amendment.

I now come to amendment Nos 19 and 24. At Consideration Stage, several amendments were tabled in relation to reporting on the implementation of the Act and on setting up a dedicated welfare reform committee of the Assembly, following the example of the Scottish Government.

The Scottish Welfare Reform Committee was established on 25 January 2012. Its role is to keep under review the passage of the UK Welfare Reform Act 2012 and to monitor its implementation as it affects welfare provision in Scotland, and to consider relevant Scottish legislation and other consequential amendments. Members should bear in mind that social security legislation is not a devolved matter in Scotland. Social security legislation for Scotland is made through Parliament by the UK Government, and, therefore, it does not have the same level of scrutiny that is afforded to our legislation and carried out by our Social Development Committee and the Assembly.

Devolved responsibility for social security legislation to the Assembly means that Northern Ireland has the opportunity to make different arrangements from those pertaining elsewhere in Great Britain. Therefore, we are in a very different situation from Scotland. Of course, we are constrained by the principle of parity and the fact that we depend on a shared IT system, but, provided that we are prepared to fund any additional costs that arise as a result of doing things differently, Northern Ireland can legislate in a manner that takes into account our regional issues. I believe that the Assembly's scrutiny of the Bill demonstrates that we are already fully engaged in that regard.

Whilst the Bill has been contentious, mostly because of the scale of the reforms being proposed, Members should reflect that the Bill, as and when it becomes law, will be only one legislative instrument amongst a vast number of statutory instruments pertaining in the field of social security. I consider that to separate out the Bill for particular scrutiny by establishing specific Committee structures would undermine the overarching role that the Committee for Social Development has in the wider social security arena.

Another issue raised during the debate at Consideration Stage related to the reporting of the implementation of the Act. I assured Mr Agnew that I would consider it further, and, having discussed it with him, I have tabled amendment No 24, which commits the Department to publishing and laying a report on the operation of the Act within three years of Royal Assent. I note that the Member has tabled amendment No 19, which is similar to mine, with the only difference being the word "independent" again. On the issue of independence, I reiterate that the Department already has significant checks and balances to ensure its objectivity and gathers sufficient data to report on the Bill without the need for the additional cost of producing an independent report. I made comments on that during the previous debate.

Over the past two years, my Department has published a series of impact studies on each of the major reforms, and I can assure Members that that programme of research will continue as we move through the implementation process. Any reports on welfare reform produced by my Department will use data produced by the Northern Ireland Research and Statistics Agency, which, as Members are aware, is governed by the national rules on the use of official statistics. As part of the future research programme in DSD, officials are considering how best to assess the longer-term impact of the changes to the welfare system. It is expected that any study of that will need to involve a number of other Departments, particularly on issues such as poverty and public health.

I believe that the important point with these amendments is that the Assembly will put in place a statutory duty for a report to be produced on the impact of welfare reform and that Members will have the opportunity to debate the content of those reports. I am sure that the Assembly will wish to be assured that any such report is comprehensive and is based on robust information sources. I am not convinced by the argument that by putting into statute the term "independent" in front of the report will ensure that the Assembly receives a report that meets that criteria. I will certainly wish to involve independent experts in helping shape the overall evaluation strategy for welfare reform, and, indeed, my Department may commission some independent groups to carry out some research.

The Bill as drafted already contains various reporting requirements, such as to publish reports on the operation of assessments for personal independence payment. That is in clause 90. It also requires reports on the standards of decision-making and payment accuracy and on the operation of sanctions for universal credit, jobseeker's allowance, income support and employment and support allowance. That is in clause 121. I will consider, in conjunction with my officials, how best any composite report can reflect the views that have been expressed. While I know that Members will not be completely satisfied with that, I hope that the assurances that I have given will at least go some way to placing on record my commitment and that of my Department as to how we will deal with those issues.

I will turn to amendment No 25, which is new clause 132D.

The Member mentioned that I was giving this more thought. In a sense, I want to revisit the issue. The new clause provides that the standards and quality of decision-making on sanctions will be monitored by the social security joint standards committee on an annual basis. It also provides for the committee to report on the standards and quality of decision-making on sanctions.

9.30 pm

What needs to be rehearsed at this juncture is that the JSC is tasked with reporting on standards of decision-making — that is payment accuracy. The technical accuracy refers to payments, which are clearly a mathematical calculation. However, the JSC also looks at standards of decision-making. However, in light of what the Member has said about his concerns, I am happy, as a result of his comments on the reports that have already been carried out and the issues that he highlighted, to undertake a review of the working of the process over the next number of months to satisfy myself that we can attain high standards of decision-making and to look not only at the accuracy of those decision-making processes but at the standards, including the quality of those decisions. While that may not change the view of the Member, I trust that he will take what is offered in good faith, and it will give me satisfaction and assurance that this is not just a cold paper exercise but has validity and importance.

In conclusion, I place on record my thanks and appreciation to all those who have taken part today. I want to say this: I worked extremely hard to ensure that there was no need for petitions of concern today. I have endeavoured over the last period — maybe not as extensively as Members would have wished but within the time constraints that have been placed on me — to do what could be done at Further Consideration Stage. I also thank the Chair, Deputy Chair and members of the Social Development Committee for their contributions to today's proceedings. I look forward to continuing to work with the Committee through what will be a long process. It is not the case that, once the Bill has been passed and given Royal Assent, Members can take their ease. I also thank my officials for all their hard work over many hours and the many documents that they have produced for me and others, including the Committee, which have provided all the relevant information to the Assembly and is available for others. I place my appreciation of their hard work on record.

Mr Agnew: Given the late hour, I will try to be brief. I will conclude by thanking the Bill Office for their work on the amendments, both at Consideration Stage and Further Consideration Stage. As mentioned by Mr Attwood, the way in which we do legislation here means that there is a short period to work on such amendments. Certainly, there was not a single amendment that I could not bring forward due to lack of time, thanks to the hard work of the Bill Office.

It will be those outside the Chamber who will judge who, in the overall debate today, has been genuine and upfront about the changes being put through by the Assembly. The Stormont House Agreement was raised on numerous occasions. Parties will also be judged by those outside the Chamber on their role during and since the Stormont House negotiations.

I will speak very briefly on the amendments. I welcome the Minister's tabling of an amendment to report within three years of Royal Assent. I intend to move my amendment with the word "independent". We will agree to disagree on that, but I appreciate that he has sought to meet me halfway on the proposal that I tabled at Consideration Stage. That should be acknowledged. It is important that such significant legislation be reported on. An independent report would give the public more confidence. I suspect that outside agencies will produce reports on the Welfare Reform Act anyway, so it will be interesting to see how the Department takes forward the reporting process, subject to the outcome of the votes after the debate.

The Minister has given a commitment to Mr Attwood and the SDLP should their amendment not be passed. The Minister is well aware of my concerns and those of many others about the sanctions regime and how it will be implemented. It is important that we remain vigilant. The sanctions regime has the potential to drive people into severe destitution and reliance on food banks. Whilst I disagree with the system, it should be applied correctly and fairly; it should not be used as a way of cutting the welfare bill. I welcome the Minister's commitment on those issues and to ensuring the accuracy and standards of the sanctions regime.

That concludes my remarks on the group 2 amendments. I thank all those who contributed to the debate and gave consideration to my amendments and all the others that were debated today.

Question, That amendment No 5 be made, put and negatived.

Amendment No 6 not moved.

Mr Speaker: I will not call amendment No 7 as it is consequential to amendment Nos 5 and 6, the first of which was not made and the second of which was not moved.

Clause 47 (Sanctions)

Amendment Nos 8 to 10 not moved.

Clause 70 (Housing benefit: determination of appropriate maximum)

Amendment No 11 proposed: In page 56, line 32, at end insert

> *"(6) Regulations may not provide for the reduction of an existing award where a claimant declines the*

offer of suitable alternative accommodation.".— [Mr Attwood.]

Question put, That amendment No 11 be made.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 12; Noes 69.

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Attwood, Mr D Bradley, Mr Eastwood, Mrs D Kelly, Dr McDonnell, Mr McGlone, Mrs McKevitt, Mr McKinney, Mr A Maginness, Mr Ramsey, Mr Rogers.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr McGlone and Mrs McKevitt.

NOES

Mr Anderson, Mr Beggs, Mr Bell, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Ms P Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Buchanan, Mrs Cameron, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hazzard, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr G Kelly, Mr Kinahan, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Mr McCallister, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McCausland, Ms McCorley, Mr B McCrea, Mr I McCrea, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr M McGuinness, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McKay, Mr McMullan, Mr McQuillan, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr Ó Muilleoir, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Ms Ruane, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr McQuillan and Mr G Robinson.

Question accordingly negatived.

Clause 78 (Pilot scheme)

Amendment No 12 made: In page 59, line 6, leave out "making personal independence payments" and insert "personal independence payment".— *[Mr Storey (The Minister for Social Development).]*

Clause 81 (Ability to carry out daily living activities or mobility activities)

Amendment No 13 made: In page 60, line 32, leave out subsection (3).— *[Mr Storey (The Minister for Social Development).]*

Mr Speaker: Amendment No 14 has already been debated and is consequential to amendment No 13, which was made.

Amendment No 14 made: In page 60, line 39, leave out paragraph (c) and insert"(c) must provide for relevant medical evidence to be taken into account in assessing a person and may make provision about other matters which are, or are not, to be taken into account.".— *[Mr Storey (The Minister for Social Development).]*

Clause 89 (Claims, awards and information)

Amendment No 15 proposed: In page 64, line 24, at end insert

"(3A) A person entitled to personal independence payment shall receive the award no later than 16 weeks after the date on which a claim for it is made or treated as made.".— [Mr Agnew.]

Mr Speaker: I have been advised by the party Whips, in accordance with Standing Order 27(1A)(b), that there is agreement that we can dispense with the three-minute rule and move straight to the Division.

Question put, That amendment No 15 be made.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 12; Noes 69.

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Attwood, Mr D Bradley, Mr Eastwood, Mrs D Kelly, Dr McDonnell, Mr McGlone, Mrs McKevitt, Mr McKinney, Mr A Maginness, Mr Ramsey, Mr Rogers.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Agnew and Mr A Maginness.

NOES

Mr Anderson, Mr Beggs, Mr Bell, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Ms P Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Buchanan, Mrs Cameron, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hazzard, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr G Kelly, Mr Kinahan, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Mr McCallister, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McCausland, Ms McCorley, Mr B McCrea, Mr I McCrea, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr M McGuinness, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McKay, Mr McMullan, Mr McQuillan, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr Ó Muilleoir, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Ms Ruane, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr McQuillan and Mr G Robinson.

Question accordingly negatived.

New Clause

Amendment No 16 not moved.

New Clause

Amendment No 17 proposed: After clause 120 insert

*"**Duty to ensure access to independent advice***

***120A**.—(1) The Department shall ensure that any person making a claim under this Act shall be entitled to have access to independent confidential advice and assistance provided free of charge in relation to making a claim under this Act.*

(2) For the purposes of subsection (1) the Department must bring forward guidance on the independent confidential advice and assistance which is to be developed in consultation with the Northern Ireland Advice Services Consortium, within 3 months of the commencement of this section.".— [Mr Attwood.]

Question put, That amendment No 17 be made.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 21; Noes 59.

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Attwood, Mr Beggs, Mr D Bradley, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson, Mr Eastwood, Mr Elliott, Mr Gardiner, Mrs D Kelly, Mr Kinahan, Dr McDonnell, Mr McGlone,

Mrs McKevitt, Mr McKinney, Mr A Maginness, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mr Ramsey, Mr Rogers, Mr Swann.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr A Maginness and Mr McGlone.

NOES

Mr Anderson, Mr Bell, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Ms P Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Buchanan, Mrs Cameron, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Craig, Mr Dickson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hazzard, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Mr McCallister, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McCausland, Ms McCorley, Mr B McCrea, Mr I McCrea, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr M McGuinness, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McKay, Mr McMullan, Mr McQuillan, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Mr Moutray, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr Ó Muilleoir, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Ms Ruane, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr McQuillan and Mr G Robinson.

Question accordingly negatived.

Clause 121 (Reports by Department)

Amendment No 18 made: In page 88, line 26, leave out "and" and insert

> *"(aa) the standards of advice and assistance provided under section 132B of the Welfare Reform Act (Northern Ireland) 2015; and".— [Mr Storey (The Minister for Social Development).]*

New Clause

Amendment No 19 proposed: After clause 121 insert

> *"**Duty to report on operation of this Act***
>
> ***121A**.—(1) The Department must, not later than 3 years after this Act receives Royal Assent, publish an independent report on the operation of this Act.*
>
> *(2) The Department must lay the report before the Assembly.".— [Mr Agnew.]*

Question put, That amendment No 19 be made.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 12; Noes 69.

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Attwood, Mr D Bradley, Mr Eastwood, Mrs D Kelly, Dr McDonnell, Mr McGlone, Mrs McKevitt, Mr McKinney, Mr A Maginness, Mr Ramsey, Mr Rogers.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Agnew and Mr A Maginness.

NOES

Mr Anderson, Mr Beggs, Mr Bell, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Ms P Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Buchanan, Mrs Cameron, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hazzard, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr G Kelly, Mr Kinahan, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Mr McCallister, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McCausland, Ms McCorley, Mr B McCrea, Mr I McCrea, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr M McGuinness, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McKay, Mr McMullan, Mr McQuillan, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr Ó Muilleoir, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Ms Ruane, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr McQuillan and Mr G Robinson.

Question accordingly negatived.

Clause 130 (Rate relief schemes: application of housing benefit law)

Amendment No 20 made: In page 92, line 26, after "housing benefit" insert "or universal credit".— *[Mr Storey (The Minister for Social Development).]*

Clause 131 (Discretionary support)

Mr Speaker: Amendment No 21 has already been debated. I call Mr Alex Attwood to move the amendment formally.

Mr Attwood: I thought that that amendment was consequential to the previous one. If it was not, I will move it.

Mr Speaker: Can I tell you a lie? *[Laughter.]*

Amendment No 21 proposed: In page 93, line 39, at end insert"(6A) Regulations may not provide for the reduction of an existing award where a claimant declines the offer of alternative accommodation.".— *[Mr Attwood.]*

Question, That amendment No 21 be made, put and negatived.

New Clause

Amendment No 22 made:

After clause 132 insert

> *"Payments to persons suffering financial disadvantage*
>
> ***Payments to persons suffering financial disadvantage***
>
> ***132A**.—(1) The purpose of this section is to enable the Department to make payments to persons who suffer financial disadvantage as a result of the changes to social security benefits and tax credits contained in this Act and the Welfare Reform Act 2012.*
>
> *(2) The Department may by regulations make provision for the purpose mentioned in subsection (1).*
>
> *(3) Regulations under this section may in particular make provision —*
>
> *(a) for determining whether a person has suffered financial disadvantage as a result of the changes mentioned in subsection (1) and, if so, the amount of that disadvantage;*
>
> *(b) for determining eligibility for payments, including provision for payments to be made only in prescribed circumstances or only to persons who meet prescribed conditions;*
>
> *(c) for determining —*
>
> *(i) the amount of payments;*
>
> *(ii) the period or periods for or in respect of which payments are to be made;*

(d) for claims for payments to be made in prescribed cases and in the prescribed form and manner and for the procedures to be followed in dealing with and disposing of such claims;

(e) for payments to be made in prescribed cases without any claim being made;

(f) imposing conditions on persons claiming or receiving payments, including conditions requiring them to provide to the Department such information as may be prescribed;

(g) for payments to cease to be made in prescribed circumstances;

(h) for the disclosure of information relating to payments in prescribed circumstances or to prescribed persons;

(i) for the recovery of payments by the Department in prescribed circumstances;

(j) requiring or authorising reviews (whether by the Department or by prescribed persons) of decisions made by the Department with respect to the making or recovery of payments;

(k) imposing functions on a statutory body other than the Department in connection with the administration of the regulations;

(l) for such other matters as appear to the Department to be necessary or appropriate in connection with the making of payments including provision creating criminal offences and provision amending or applying (with or without modification) any statutory provision.

(4) Payments are not to be regarded as a social security benefit; but regulations under this section may provide for any statutory provision relating to a social security benefit (or to such benefits generally) to apply with prescribed modifications in relation to payments.

(5) The Department shall, in respect of each financial year in which payments are made, prepare and lay before the Assembly a report on the payments made in that year.

(6) No regulations shall be made under this section unless a draft of the regulations has been laid before, and approved by resolution of, the Assembly.

(7) If regulations under this section impose functions on any statutory body other than the Department, the Department must consult that body before making the regulations.

(8) A power conferred by this section to make regulations includes power —

(a) to make such incidental, supplementary, consequential or transitional provision as appears to the Department to be necessary or expedient for the purposes of those regulations;

(b) to provide for the Department to exercise a discretion in dealing with any matter.

(9) In this section—

"prescribed" means prescribed by regulations under this section;

"payment" mean a payment under this section;

"statutory body" means a body established by or under a statutory provision.".— [Mr Storey (The Minister for Social Development).]

New Clause

Mr Speaker: Amendment No 23 is mutually exclusive with amendment No 17, which has not been made.

Amendment No 23 made:

After clause 132 insert

"Duties of the Department

Duty to ensure availability of advice and assistance

***132B**.The Department must ensure that advice and assistance are made available free of charge to persons making a claim under this Act in connection with that claim.".— [Mr Storey (The Minister for Social Development).]*

New Clause

Mr Speaker: Amendment No 24 is mutually exclusive with amendment No 19, which has not been made.

Amendment No 24 made:

After clause 132 insert

*"**Duty to report on operation of this Act***

***132C**.—(1) The Department must, not later than 3 years after this Act receives Royal Assent, publish a report on the operation of this Act.*

(2) The Department must lay the report before the Assembly.".— [Mr Storey (The Minister for Social Development).]

New Clause

Amendment No 25 not moved.

Clause 135 (Commencement)

Mr Speaker: Amendment No 26 is consequential to amendment Nos 22, 23 and 24.

Amendment No 26 made:

In clause 135, page 95, line 37, at end insert"( ) *section 132A (payments to persons suffering financial disadvantage);*

( ) section 132B (duty to ensure availability of advice and assistance);

( ) section 132C (review of this Act);".— [Mr Storey (The Minister for Social Development).]

Schedule 1 (Universal credit: supplementary regulation-making powers)

Amendment No 27 not moved.

Mr Speaker: That concludes the Further Consideration Stage of the Welfare Reform Bill, and the Bill stands referred to the Speaker.

Budget Bill: Final Stage

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

That the Budget Bill [NIA Bill 45/11-16] do now pass.

Mr Speaker, I am being encouraged to stop there. *[Laughter.]* I think that that is from all sides of the House.

Today's Final Stage Budget Bill debate draws to a close the financial legislative process for the 2014-15 year. The Bill before us has been the subject of much debate over recent weeks, a debate that has at times strayed much wider than the Budget Bill itself. Nevertheless, the debate has been informative, and I welcome the opportunity that Members have had to have their say on this important legislation. I hope that it is now completely clear to everyone that this Budget Bill covers the 2014-15 financial year but also provides legal authority for the Departments to spend in the first few months of 2015-16. In addition, it gives legal authority to the Department of Justice to incur spend on a new judiciary pension scheme in 2015-16.

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

As this financial year draws to a close, now is an opportune time to reflect briefly on what was perhaps the most challenging financial environment facing the Executive and the Assembly since devolution was restored in 2007. During the year, we had to sanction in-year resource spending reductions to manage the overall block position. This requirement for departmental reductions was largely due to the delay in agreeing a way forward on welfare reform. It is therefore encouraging that the Executive have now reached agreement on this issue and that the welfare reform legislation is now finally passing through the Assembly. Only last month, the Executive and the Assembly also agreed the Budget for 2015-16. Again, this was achieved against the backdrop of a highly challenging public expenditure environment next year.

We also agreed the Stormont House Agreement. This not only provided a significant financial package to fund public sector voluntary exit schemes and investment in shared education facilities but paved the way for the devolution of corporation tax powers.

With our economic recovery still fragile, including in our private sector, it is more important than ever that we focus our attention on putting in place the conditions that will allow our economy to flourish. I believe that the devolution of corporation tax is an important part of that economic strategy. However, make no mistake: it is not a silver bullet. We need to continue to invest in our children and young people, in securing our skills pipeline, in making our firms more innovative and in ensuring that we have a first-class infrastructure. Only then can we take full advantage of the strategic advantage that a lower rate of corporation tax affords Northern Ireland.

10.30 pm

Of course, innovation should not happen just in the private sector. I am determined that the public sector becomes more innovative and that we find better and smarter ways to do things. Not only is that desirable but it is an imperative in the context of an increasingly constrained public expenditure environment. I will continue to do all that I can to ensure that the people of Northern Ireland have access to the best public services that are delivered in the most effective and efficient manner possible.

To conclude, this is the Final Stage of our financial legislative process this year, and the legislation has already been subject to much debate. However, I look forward to hearing any final thoughts from Members on this important legislation.

Mr McKay (The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. By this stage in the passage of the Budget Bill 2015, Members will be well aware of its purpose and provisions. It provides the statutory authority for expenditure in 2014-15 as specified in the spring Supplementary Estimates, encompassing the year's monitoring rounds. The Bill also includes the Vote on Account, which allows public expenditure to continue in the early part of the next financial year until the Assembly votes on the Main Estimates for 2015-16 in early June.

I do not intend to rehearse the Committee's contribution to the debate on the Supply resolutions, as that was the appropriate time to debate the detail of the provisions in the Supplementary Estimates.

As the Finance Committee recognised previously and in plenary debates over recent weeks, the legislative stages for the existing Budget and financial processes are cumbersome and in need of reform. Contributions to the recent debates have, in my mind, affirmed that there is broad acceptance across all parties that an overhaul of existing processes should be undertaken.

I welcome the Minister's comments during last week's Second Stage debate, when he indicated his willingness for work to resume on the memorandum of understanding on the Budget process. At its meeting last week, the Committee agreed that I should write to the Minister to request that that happens quickly to put in place improved arrangements for the next Budget process so that it meets the needs of the Executive and the Assembly. Where the latter is concerned, that would include changes to front-load Committees' input so that their scrutiny and advice is provided at the formative stage of the Budget-setting process and before the Executive have agreed the draft Budget. During 2015-16, we will be faced with the commencement of another Budget process, so we must not delay that work.

As I outlined previously, the Committee took evidence on the Bill from DFP officials in early February. That marked the culmination of a process of scrutiny of the 2014-15 in-year monitoring rounds at a strategic and departmental level. On the basis of that engagement process, the Committee determined that it was content to grant accelerated passage under Standing Order 42(2). The Committee therefore welcomes the engagement with DFP during the quarterly monitoring rounds and on the Estimates and the Bill. It was particularly helpful for members to receive clarification on the details of the in-year technical changes to Departments' resource and capital allocations, some of which were quite significant.

Where the residual issues to be addressed in the weeks ahead are concerned, the Committee reiterates the importance of Departments' minimising any year-end underspend to ensure that the Executive keep within the limits of the Budget exchange scheme, which was agreed with the Treasury. I expect that all the Statutory

Committees will closely monitor their respective Departments' forecasting and expenditure during the remainder of this financial year and, indeed, over the next financial year.

Given that the Bill makes partial provision for 2015-16, I shall take a few moments to reiterate some of the Committee's key conclusions on and recommendations for the next financial year and beyond. The Committee identified various strategic issues that will need to be addressed sooner rather than later. Those include careful management of the voluntary exit scheme to minimise risk to public-service delivery, and the Committee will continue its scrutiny of that at its meeting tomorrow. The Executive will need to take a corporate approach to controlling and bearing down on administrative expenditure across Departments. The Committee was concerned to note how this has increased in various Departments over recent years. There will need to be greater focus on preventative spending, and I am interested to note that this is an area being considered within the terms of reference for an ongoing OECD review. A coordinated approach to promoting the uptake of financial transactions capital will also be needed.

The Committee has also called for a fully informed and mature public debate on how best to help to meet the further budgetary challenges ahead, based on complete information and analysis of all options for raising additional revenue through charges and further devolved taxes and duties.

The Committee has called for measures to compensate for the fundamental weakness in our system of budgetary control and oversight, which came about when DFP's role changed following devolution from one of challenge to one of pure coordination. Noting the particular governmental structures in the North, the Committee has highlighted the need for a robust external advisory and challenge function to be exercised within and across all Departments in respect of budgetary savings and efficiencies. Specific recommendations have been made, which would be distinctive from, but complement, the role of existing oversight bodies, including the Assembly.

Finally, in facilitating the role of the Assembly, full and timely engagement by Departments with their respective Committee will be crucial in ensuring that all Statutory Committees can fulfil their important advisory and scrutiny functions in the implementation of the 2015-16 Budget provisions. In turn, I believe that the Committee functions are exercised most effectively when they provide constructive input that adds value to the Budget considerations.

This evening, on behalf of the Committee, I support the motion.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Thank you for the opportunity to speak at Final Stage of the Budget Bill.

We have come to the end of an intensive period of debate on budgetary issues, and the SDLP's attitude to the Budget has been set out very clearly in the contributions made by our spokesperson. So, as the hour is late, I will confine my remarks to some of the points raised by the Minister in his introductory comments, particularly those on corporation tax.

The SDLP agrees in principle with the proposal to devolve corporation tax but urges a cautious approach. Detailed and careful consideration of a number of issues will be required to take account of the risks to the local economy arising from decreasing public finances and significant proposed reductions in public-sector employment. We would, therefore, like further issues to be addressed in a more detailed consideration of the proposal, including the acceptability of the proposed terms; whether the benefit is adequate; whether it will deepen regional economic imbalance; and what will happen when there is reduced funding for the public sector. It is also worth considering what the situation would be if the UK were to withdraw from the European Union.

It is paramount that the most accurate and up-to-date figure work is finalised with as much precision as possible in the weeks that lie ahead so that there is transparency on corporation tax. To enable informed decisions on the potential benefits and risks arising from the devolution of corporation tax, it will be important to have clarity on the number of private-sector jobs that will, potentially, be created. We have heard a variety of figures mentioned. In yesterday's debate, the Minister referred to 37,000, and there have been other estimates. Likewise, it will be important to have clarity on the impact on public-sector jobs and services arising from meeting the costs of the proposal.

We need to consider the implications of continued reductions in the block grant in coming years, as it seems certain that the Executive will not share in any of the secondary tax take.

That uncertainty reinforces the need to proceed positively but carefully. We need agreement on additional tools to manage revenue volatility. There is an obvious need to have protections in place to avoid the risk of aggressive tax avoidance between the rest of the UK and Northern Ireland and to ensure that the regime will result in genuine increased economic activity here. Separate from that matter, renewed efforts are required to secure corporate tax compliance.

The devolution of corporation tax holds the risk of compounding regional economic imbalances. Evidence indicates that foreign direct investment clusters where the skills base exists. The potential is that that will be in the greater Belfast area, with renewed risk for the other regions that could be compounded by a reduction in the Budget baseline. That issue should be acknowledged now and possible remedies sought because it is already critical and is likely to be exacerbated in the event of the devolution of corporation tax.

In summary, while the SDLP agrees in principle with the proposal to devolve corporation tax, we believe that a cautious approach is necessary. Associated uncertainties, not least regarding the impact on public finances, reinforce the need to proceed positively but carefully, as I said.

Mr Cree: As the Minister said, this is the Final Stage of the Budget Bill, and it seems that we have been discussing it for a very long time. It is not difficult to repeat a lot of what has been said, and I do not think that we really want to do that, but there are some important lessons that we have learned in the process. Arguably, the most important one relates to the consultation around the Budget and the consideration of the several thousand responses that were received. There is little evidence that the responses were taken on board in the short time that was available.

In many instances, Departments failed to produce spending plans for scrutiny by the respective statutory Committees.

In my opinion, that is not good enough and can easily be overcome by moving the start date of the process forward or backward, depending on how you look at it.

The Budget was able to be agreed by the two larger parties because of increased borrowing powers. We know from recent media coverage that increased borrowing was not favoured by the Executive, but it would appear that it was the only way forward. Servicing the existing debt will cost the Executive some £63 million in 2015-16, and that will increase significantly with the additional borrowing. I ask the Minister to advise on the full effect of borrowing in this year's Budget, going forward.

Now that welfare reform has been resolved, I wonder if there is any chance of the penalties that were applied to us because of the non-implementation of the reform being returned to our Budget. I believe that the last figure for the penalties was £114 million.

The main reason for the additional borrowing was to fund the voluntary exit scheme. We have been told that the scheme will save £88 million in its first full year in the Civil Service. The Stormont House deal anticipated around 20,000 jobs being lost from the public sector over the next four years. It would help if the Minister could provide further information on his estimate of the split and the likely working out of the scheme. The number of recruitment posts that will be frozen and the number of promotions that will not go ahead would also be appreciated to give some bones to the plans. The group of people who will avail themselves of the scheme is likely, in my opinion, to be at the higher grades. That would cause a loss of experience. If there is no promotion, I wonder how that gap can be closed. Those at the lowest grades are likely to have short service and, with alternative jobs being scarce, they are more likely to remain in post. Clearly, it is vital that the scheme delivers. We should all be concerned that it does and that there are no unplanned scenarios that could cause it to fail.

Last summer, at the Final Stage of the Budget process for the current year, I raised the issue of DARD's wind farm development, which was expected to generate savings of £1 million. There was never any chance of the development being completed in time, and the fallback position was a contingent action to sell timber from the Forest Service. I notice that a lot of trees have been felled in Cairn Wood in my constituency of North Down and remain lying on the ground. I wonder if the Minister can advise us what has happened with the DARD project that was agreed in the Budget.

10.45 pm

It is now only a matter of weeks before the end of the financial year, and it would be useful to know what the indications are on several points: the capital spend to be carried forward; the likely Budget exchange scheme result; any resource capital at risk of being returned to the Treasury; the state of financial transactions capital; any resources being held at the centre; and, finally, whether all Barnett consequentials have been taken into account and clearly identified. The Minister referred to a comprehensive programme of public-sector reform that the Executive would shortly adopt. I would like to know whether the Minister can tell us this evening when it is likely to be announced and what the ongoing issues are for Budget 2015-16, which we will scrutinise in detail in June.

Mr Dickson: Thank you, Minister, for taking us to the Final Stage of the Budget Bill. First of all, I apologise on behalf of my colleague Judith Cochrane, who has followed this debate through, but, given the lateness of the hour and childcare arrangements, it is not practical for her to be in the House at this time of night. Perhaps that is a lesson to us all.

The Alliance Party has opposed the Budget at various stages of the debate. Those have been times when the Budget has been available and amenable to amendment and change. We made those points strongly and validly, but tonight is the time to pass the Budget into legislation to deliver to Departments and to Ministers and to allow them to continue to do the work of the Assembly under the Budget that has been allocated. Therefore, we will support the Budget this evening.

Mr McNarry: This is not a Budget for the faint-hearted; they passed out ages ago. It is not a Budget for economic growth or stimulation. It is not a Budget for employment, nor is it one to neutralise unemployment. This is not a Budget to reduce hospital waiting times, to pay the nurses the salary that they deserve or pay up the pay increases that are being held back. This is not a Budget to encourage investment or attract the long-awaited tourists queuing at the airports and ferry terminals eager to rush in and enjoy our fresh air and spend their euros, for is that not what we have been told? It is not a Budget to build its way out of recession with much-needed affordable homes to buy or rent. This is not a Budget to develop our grammar schools or make every school a good school; that soundbite hit the rails a long time ago. It is not a Budget to protect community transport, let alone deliver signature transportation that is cost-effective, arrives on time or even has a rail track to run on, nor is it a Budget to reward our farmers or fishing fleets and assist them to stay afloat against a tide of nonsense EU directives. Above all, this will not be a Budget that restores confidence in many people's spending power.

As for our elderly, the pensioners and the many hard-pressed families and single parents, artistic licence has been taken to say to them, "Things are tight, but stick with us because we know what we are doing. Tighten your belt; it will get better soon". Bunkum. Despite the cocoon of the Executive's cosy, arrogant, cavalier fiscal policies, people out there are not being fooled. They are right to say to the big spenders, the wasteful spenders and the negligent spenders, "You don't know what you're doing". And they do not.

This is not a Budget for the in work, the out of work, the better off and the not so well off. It is a Budget for the hangers-on, and you will find them in the Executive. This is not a twist-and-stick Budget; too many low numbers and then they hit the last card in a five-card-trick gamble. This is a Budget that is taking a gamble, with the dealer George Osborne holding all the cards. What negotiations have taken place with that paymaster? On the evidence of this Budget, there have been none of benefit. What contingency is in the Budget for when the Tories launch more ruthless austerity measures? None. Yet the Executive have already opened the floodgates on parity through the sell-out or the sell-off between them, depending on whom you believe. The point is that no one believes in them any more; this is only a Budget for the Minister's fiefdom. They play at running our affairs, vying to be the Minister of this and that, when, in many cases, kudos is the only game. One Minister stands head and

shoulders above the rest because she tries. She tries because she cares, and she cares because she knows and respects the importance of her job. That is Minister Foster. She sets a good example, but she stands alone and, I suspect, on her own. *[Interruption.]* I appreciate the timing of the Minister's entrance there when I caught her orange glow out of the corner of my eye.

Mr B McCrea: Is that what won you over?

Mr McNarry: I was won over a long time ago, Mr Deputy Speaker.

This Budget is, as we know, a freak Budget, given a year longer to run than anticipated, because elections to the Assembly have been postponed. The cynic would say that this is also a freak Assembly, because the parties in the coalition today will be the parties in the coalition next time. We will have to see about that. All I can say is "Keep going. You are wasting money; you are devaluing development; you are hurting people in pain; are you are turning what was once the best education system in the world upside down, with neither teachers, parents nor pupils knowing what is going on. And do you know what? Despite the potholes that you cannot afford to repair, the dual carriageway back to power just ain't going to be that easy next year".

Mr Deputy Speaker, this is a Tory Budget. This Budget offers a magic wand solution to the carelessness of the Executive, and nowhere is the effort by Ministers to up their game evidenced in this Budget. They will all have a role to play, but it is a Budget to ignore, should they decide — they will — to spend money that they do not have. There are no disciplines, no dismissals, no sanctions to prevent any Minister doing a solo run. This is a Budget patched up by borrowing and rising debt. It is an indictment of an Executive not fit for purpose and now hanging on to power by the flimsy thread of the Stormont House Agreement, which unravels daily as the five-party interpretation of this cobbled-together agreement exposes their differences. Some, it is clear, are not even sure what they signed up to on Christmas Eve. What we really have before us this evening is a marionette Executive in hock to the Treasury, delivering a Tory Budget at the behest of their Tory paymasters. Having lived beyond their means for years, these irresponsible Ministers, who allowed the crisis and the Budgets that they managed previously to get out of all proportion because of irresponsible spending on pet schemes to the extent that they have had to be bailed out, now ask us to believe that these former incompetents have become paragons of political and fiscal rectitude delivering responsible finance and real political leadership and direction.

The First Minister said before Christmas that he was in charge — in charge of an Executive that was not fit for purpose. He is now telling us that Theresa, the Christmas fairy, waved her magic wand and these fiscal geniuses have now become fit for purpose, and he is fully in charge of them. Are we seriously to believe that we can expect fiscal prudence, tough decisions and political wisdom from these former big spenders? If anybody believes that, they obviously believe that the age of miracles is not dead and that the tooth fairy is alive and well and living in Stormont House.

Look at the evidence of one recent issue. A tough decision beckoned: the Minister for Employment and Learning said that teacher training had to be rationalised. He talked tough. Then, Ministers clustered around the Executive table and emerged with another non-decision. There was to be no change, and subsidies to teacher training colleges were to continue. A decision by the Employment and Learning Minister became a non-decision by the Executive. You understand, Mr Deputy Speaker, that I am not commenting on the correctness or otherwise of his decision; what I am saying is that the age of political fudge is still alive and kicking around the Executive table. The new tough decision makers, sprinkled with financial reality dust from the Treasury and monitored by the same Treasury, came out with another non-decision. The omens are not good. The age of no decision-making lives on. You see, old habits die hard. Are we in for another four years of dithering, procrastination and delay?

I am pleased with the one Treasury decision that took on board my idea, given at no cost to it, to put in place a Treasury-appointed Budget control overseer to monitor the recklessness of the Executive's spending. Over the last few years, these Ministers have openly bragged about the highly dubious practice of in-year monitoring as a means to sustain their departmental budget. They were actually saying that they were being saved by their own inefficiency in spending money voted by the Assembly. Where, I ask, was the clarity of vision in that highly questionable system?

I now turn to the core reason why we have a Budget in the first place: the Programme for Government. Where is it? Is it lost? Is it in the quicksands of budgetary change? Has the Programme for Government been amended? If so, by whom? What are the new policies? Where are the new targets against which we are to measure the success of its delivery? Has Assembly approval been sought? Has it been given? I think not. However, given the mushroom politics of this place, bathed in darkness and fed a diet of — I must be careful to use parliamentary language — non-information, it is hard for any of us, if we are honest, to tell where we are.

Government is not about maintaining departmental budgets and the oversized bureaucracies that feed on them; it is actually about having a programme and policies, costing and delivering them and then assessing the extent to which you can deliver them. A Government of Departments should not be what we have; we should have a real Government. They would call it a coalition. Of course, the rampant big-party domination and carve-up that the Assembly has become is not really a Government; it might be a cipher delivering Tory policies at arm's length. It might be a back room somewhere in Stormont Castle where the DUP and Sinn Féin decide things and cut their deals without reference, it seems, to their junior partners. It is not a Government taking real transparent fiscal decisions that they link to a Programme for Government in an open and honest way that can be openly debated on the Floor of the Assembly, where the people are represented.

Do we have a new revised Programme for Government? Are we are told what it is, what its targets are and how they are costed, and how the Budget links up to something other than keeping the Executive afloat, in much the same way as the Government in Greece are kept afloat on a hand-to-mouth basis?

11.00 pm

The jury of the public, and public opinion, is out on these Ministers. The public are watching to see if they can make a better job of living within their means this time. They

are waiting to see if there will be any more solo runs on spending. The public are waiting to see if the Ministers can do the job of governing Northern Ireland as opposed to greedily looking after their narrow, party self-interests.

What is needed is a new politics for Northern Ireland; a politics based on vision, on planning, on the public interest and public engagement in those decisions and on delivering the real benefits to be had from devolution. This will only be achieved when parties are willing to bury the plethora of political correctness that is drowning real decision-making in a sea of meaningless double-talk.

Why are we funding the not necessary and the not urgent when we have a procurement system that is upside down and lamentably ineffective? Why are we serving up downright expensive indulgences that are so obvious as photo shoots for camera-seeking Ministers when we cannot recognise either the purpose or the cost of their value? In an Executive with too many questions over procurement, contract placing and financial impropriety, why are we watching over a Programme for Government that is being written as we trundle along? That is what this Budget will trot out this year — an election year.

It is a Budget punctuated and highlighted by the outcry of austerity, with the Executive's spin doctors out-working that the cost of spending is good for you. Spending on capital terms that have not been costed, such as a rail track estimated at £20 million and repriced at £40 million, is not good for you. I wonder: where was the ministerial photo shoot for that one?

This Budget is the corporate work and agreement of a coalition of losers. The DUP and Sinn Féin can well do — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Order.

Mr McNarry: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. The DUP and Sinn Féin can well do — and are entitled to do so — as the power players in this coalition, but what on earth are the Alliance Party, the SDLP and the Ulster Unionists doing backing this Budget? These losers should not be in a coalition of Government. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Order.

Mr McNarry: They should be here with UKIP, denouncing this Budget and fighting with UKIP to expose this Budget's incredible assumptions and inescapable spending as nothing more than a Budget for the hangers-on.

Yet it is they who are hanging on and clinging on to office. Like the people looking in from the outside, as UKIP currently does, there is not a hope of the losers — the Alliance Party with its two unbalanced Ministers, unbalanced in the fairness of their appointments, I would make clear; the SDLP with its single Minister representing its sister party's leader Ed Miliband; and the hear-no-evil, see-no-evil, speak-no-evil, if-it-is-85%-then-count-us-in Ulster Unionists with their one Minister staying put in case his departure sparks a leadership crisis — even being a success in opposing inside the five-party coalition. Perhaps it is no wonder that they have not got the guts or the integrity to pull out and go into opposition with UKIP.

Let the people know, and they will be told, that this Budget is not Simon Hamilton's work alone. They are, as someone recently said and as I have heard tonight, all in it together. They are in it together and already sidestepping issues and trying to master the "Not me, guv" defence, yet they are unable to unhinge themselves from their Executive masters the DUP and Sinn Féin, who sit right under their noses as a brazen double act in a coalition all of their own. You do not need to be in it. You do not need to oppose it. You do not need to form a strategic official opposition with perks and brass knobs. You just need to stick to principle, but in that area you have also proved yourself to be falling well short. It is your Budget, not mine. It is not being sold or bought in UKIP's name either. You will sow what you reap, but the financial harvest for our people will be a poor yield. It is not regrettable; it just cannot be defended. *[Interruption.]*

Mr McNarry: Pardon?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Order.

Mr P Robinson: Will the Member give way?

Mr McNarry: Yes.

Mr P Robinson: Could he tell us how you sow what you reap? I thought that you reaped what you sowed.

Mr McNarry: I am very glad that you are probably the only intelligent person who picked that up. *[Laughter.]* The conundrums of this Budget are exactly what I have said they are.

Mr A Maginness: That is why he is First Minister.

Mr McNarry: I would not say that.

Mr B McCrea: Just when I thought there was no point in me being here, I have to confess that it has been a night of surprises. The previous contributor, Mr McNarry, has delivered a wonderful, wonderful, wonderful speech. I know that I am not in the same league as the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment or, indeed, the First Minister, but if there is anybody from the media listening or milling around, I think that they should listen to that speech because it was really well crafted. It had wonderful words of poetry, dulcet tones and honeyed words. A lot of effort was put into that speech. I am actually a little disappointed that we only got to hear it at this hour. Of course, despite the way in which it was delivered, quite a lot of it was rubbish. *[Laughter.]* But do not let that detract from the eloquence of what was put forward.

There are some important things that I would like to say. I do not know whether they would count as intelligent but I will say them anyway. Before I do that, I just want to check something. Mrs Foster has moved to the Back Benches. *[Laughter.]* I am just checking whether there is anything that you know, Mr McNarry —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Order. Could I encourage the Member to come back to the Bill, please?

Mr B McCrea: Mr Deputy Speaker, you are, as ever, erudite and to the point. I shall return to the point that we were discussing, which was that one of the really difficult issues that I have heard in the debate, not just tonight but earlier, is economic illiteracy. One of the real problems that I hear when people talk about things that they would do when in office, or money that they would spend, is that they do not seem to be able to cost it properly. I am actually a little disappointed that Mr Agnew is not speaking before me, because his leader was fairly to the point on the radio and TV on that.

There are some important points that we will have to deal with, and I say that knowing that I have no influence or power in this place. I am just sort of here at 11.00 at night and I put some things down because I think that, in the future, we will have to deal with them. The issue that I see looming large in front of us is the health budget. People have said time and again that the demand on our health services is rising at 6% per annum because, fortunately, we have an ageing population. With an ageing population, however, come issues like dementia, Alzheimer's, broken hips, different drugs and what we do for care.

Those factors affect all of us, yet the problem is that the available budget is increasing at 1%. Even those with only a tenuous grasp of economics can understand that, over a period of years, we are going to lose money and not be able to fund that gap in health. The dilemma is that we will end up with a health service that is less well-funded and provided for than in other parts of the United Kingdom. This is a challenge that will come back to this House, and we will have to deal with it. Not only is that Budget issue not sustainable but we are going to have to tackle some really tough issues. When we talked about the Donaldson report, I think we missed some key points. We have to find some way to make the tough political choices that need to be made.

No Minister or Member of this Assembly will welcome the closure of any hospital or facility in his or her constituency. That is obvious, yet when you look at the figures, I heard the Minister of Health say that, if he had to start somewhere, he would not be starting here because we simply have too many facilities.

We talked about welfare reform. She is not here now, but I saw Dolores Kelly shake her head at me a couple of times as I entered the Lobbies along with what I took to be the Government. That was because the only way to deal with these difficult issues is through a collective decision. It is too easy for people to snipe, take advantage and go off and say, "I see a little bit of an opportunity here". That will not work in a Budget. This is something that we are going to have to work out whether we like it or not, and it requires a united political response.

I then come to why we need to do that. As the Minister of Finance and Personnel will know, I raised with him a number of times in this debate the fate of DCAL. I heard what he had to say. He said that he could not be on top of every issue, that he had to take a broader view and that other Ministers had to look after their portfolio. We are making a mistake if, because of the pressure on our health budget, we have to cut everything else. I look at the contributions that Sport NI, NI Screen, National Museums, the Arts Council and many of the arm's-length bodies in DCAL make. They support the efforts of other Ministers and Departments. I look at the contribution that they might make to tourism, health and education. I know that it is only £100 million and that we are taking only £10 million off it, but the impact of those cuts are drastic. They come about because we are under pressure with our health budget. We have to find a different way of looking at this issue. This will not go away; it will get worse. We will see further fiscal tightening from Westminster and see an ageing population putting more and more pressure on our health system.

I come to a few points that I want to close on. The Alliance Party has been castigated because its Members dared to come forward with a few brave statements.

They have been put in the position of being asked, "Are you the party of raising tax? Is this what you're all about?"

11.15 pm

I believe that there are ways that we can make certain things pay in our society. I still do not understand why the public purse should pay for every single facility. I raised in the House the fact that we want to invest in Waterways Ireland, yet we do not put a tax on cruisers. I look at how we might raise things to invest further and how we could do something to increase the economic opportunity. It should not be solely down to the public purse. The public purse should prime the pump, but the private sector should be allowed to kick in at some stage. I think that is a rational argument, not some sort of political stance to take.

When we look at how we might go forward, we need some form of shared vision. Frankly, some of the points on which I agreed with Mr McNarry were on where people stand and take a political punt on something; when they start to say, "This is for the election"; when they start trying to tell the people that black is white and that you can magic money out of something. You cannot do that. We have to find a way of investing properly and, in this case, although I have already said to people that I respect their mandate, when people start talking rubbish, others have to stand up and challenge them.

The conclusion to all this is that I do not want to see the meaningless double-talk that Mr McNarry referred to. I want to see us tackle the real challenges facing our society. I do understand that there are some tough calls. I alone was the person who, when we considered tuition fees, asked whether we were sure that we had got that right. When I heard the debate on the Magee campus, I looked at all that and said that we are going to put more places into Magee. Do you want people to increase their debt, to go and get an education and then have no jobs to go to? You cannot do it in isolation. I note, just for the record, that in the United Kingdom, they are now saying that 49% of people will default on their tuition fees — a sum of £2 billion — yet our universities and colleges are falling behind.

I am in the enviable, easy position of being on my own here. I can stand up and say what I feel. I can point out to people where they are going wrong and then sit down or leave the Chamber, but I choose not to do that. Instead, I say to you that there is a necessity to do something, but you will have to find a way of doing something similar to the Welfare Reform Bill, where you need a five-party coalition that genuinely works together and moves forward. It is on that basis that I am supporting the Budget.

Mr McCallister: I was going to point out to Mr McNarry before he left that I agreed with some of his points attacking other parties. It was probably slightly bizarre that he was keen, and has been for a number of years, to do a deal with the same party he is attacking. He may have even wanted to be the unity candidate in South Belfast as recently as last week.

I will say several things that I have said throughout the Budget debate. You need to get to a point where you have collective Cabinet government. We badly need to reform

this place so that the Minister and other Ministers can get to a point where they can deliver on policy agendas. My views on having an opposition here are well known, but we need to have people who are either in Government or in opposition, and not doing a bit of both. That is what reduces the credibility of the Assembly and the Executive if people agree a Programme for Government.

Although the Minister has done enough to get a Budget over the line to take us to the end of this mandate, we cannot come back here — whoever is returned, and whatever the new Executive look like after the 2016 election — and have another term. In 2011, this term was promised to be the term of delivery. We cannot come back to this place and do the same again. That is why reform of this institution is vital.

My constant criticisms of the Budget, and in the previous debate on welfare reform, are that we give the impression that we are making these reforms only because Westminster has put us in the position where we have to and we have kicked the can down the road for so long. As I said in the debate on welfare reform, we should be looking at a Budget and collective government and all of it joining up. How are you growing an economy? How will you make people less dependent on welfare? Where will the lead come from? If we go down the road of corporation tax, that will tend to help the better educated, not those trapped on benefits. That is where I want to see joined-up government and where I want us to move to.

The Minister will know that I put some questions to him on the voluntary exit scheme, and I have replies from him about it. Minister, I have to say that my concern still stands that you are not going to publish the business case for the voluntary exit scheme. The necessity here is to reduce the pay bill; that is fine. However, I find alarming your comments that this is not strategic workforce planning. I find it alarming that, in your answer to me, you say that you have to take out 2,400 staff. However, you have no strategic plan as to how we do that and how we ensure against a brain drain from the Civil Service. The age profile is likely to be lower. What will that lead to? Can we manage if there is a huge brain drain and a severe lack of experience in the Civil Service?

An Audit Office report on the UK Government's response to this in 2010 said that you would need to manage it. There were some good points made about how a Government and how DFP should be managing it. That is still my huge concern about the voluntary exit scheme. At a time when we are committed to spending £565 million on welfare reform, there is also the possible cost of a reduction in corporation tax of £325 million and our borrowing money from the Treasury for the voluntary exit scheme. Much more thought needs to be put into those things. A plan needs to be drawn up as to how we take 20,000 workers out of the public sector over the next four years. That is a mammoth task and something that Northern Ireland has not experienced before. It is alarming that this reform is being pushed by Westminster onto a reluctant Executive that have no key plan for how they will deliver it.

Mr P Robinson: I speak not as leader of the party or as First Minister but as a constituency representative. I was encouraged to do so by my outrage at a comment by an SDLP Member in the last debate. I want to draw it to the attention of my colleague and to seek from him an assurance that, under no circumstances, will he take the advice and change the funding and investment priorities of the Executive to meet the demand of the Member for West Belfast Alex Attwood, who, in an intervention to the Member for Strangford Mr McNarry in the last debate, suggested that what was required to deal with the employment and investment difficulties in west Belfast was to stop investment in south Belfast and east Belfast. I have to say that, as a representative of East Belfast, I find that an outrageous statement. I wonder whether his colleague and party leader the representative for South Belfast also advocates the banning of FDI in south Belfast. It would be interesting to find out what Mr McDonnell's position is on that issue.

What I want to be clear on is that, in any Budget that my friend puts his hand to, there will be no cut in investment in south Belfast and east Belfast. Anybody who knows anything about investment and jobs knows that, in a relatively small city like Belfast, jobs in south Belfast and east Belfast are accessible to people in north Belfast and west Belfast. Anybody who knows anything about foreign direct investment knows that no Minister directs where a company will go. They will determine, on the basis of their requirements, what part of Belfast or Northern Ireland is best for their business. The suggestion that we would somehow close the doors of east Belfast and south Belfast is not only ludicrous but contrary to any sensible proposal to provide jobs for the people of the city as a whole.

We then heard some comments from the SDLP Benches about corporation tax. The more I see the behaviour of the SDLP in relation to financial issues flowing from Stormont Castle and Stormont House, the more I am appalled by their behaviour. There was a five-party agreement on financial issues. I have seen brows being furrowed and hands going up in the air as if they do not know what happened or what they have agreed to in the past, and I have heard the vulgar language in meetings from the leader of the SDLP, who is unhappy about comments that were made about backtracking in implementation. I want to make it abundantly clear that not only was a five-party agreement reached at Stormont Castle but, along with the four other parties, the SDLP trooped down with us to Stormont House to sell that agreement to the Government. So, when people talk about us being forced to do things by the Tories and so forth — rubbish. This was our agreement. We agreed it together and we went down and sold it to the Conservative Secretary of State. Those are the facts, and nobody can gainsay those facts.

Mrs Foster: Will the Member give way?

Mr P Robinson: I would be happy to give way to Orange Lil. *[Laughter.]*

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for his very apt description of me. Does he join me in being rather bemused this evening to hear the leader of the Ulster Unionist Party raise issues about the Stormont House Agreement with my friend the Minister for Social Development? He challenged him and said that he did not have a copy of the Stormont Castle agreement that actually said it was the Stormont Castle agreement and, in some way, tried to say that he had not signed up to that agreement.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): I encourage Members to come back to the Bill.

Mr P Robinson: As a matter of courtesy, I think that I must respond and try to do so within the context of the debate. Of course, we can all dance on the head of a pin about whether the words at the top of the agreement said "Stormont Castle agreement". That is irrelevant. The pages that were put into the Library are the comments that were agreed by the various parties. The leader of the Ulster Unionist Party knows that as well as anybody else who was there on that occasion.

Let me deal with the SDLP's comments about corporation tax. Corporation tax, incidentally, will only come about because we agree to a Budget and welfare changes. Those who try to disrupt the Budget process and try to stop welfare changes are, at the same time, saying that they are quite prepared to stymie the process that would see corporation tax powers being given to the Executive in Northern Ireland.

11.30 pm

Yesterday, in my view, we had a very good meeting of party leaders. We met the chief executive of Invest Northern Ireland. The message he gave clearly to those who could listen, or who were prepared to listen, was this, "Let no party go out and attempt to undermine by suggesting different rates, different starting times, or that there might or should be changes in corporation tax; let there be a united agreement by the Executive on the issue. If you do not do that, you make my job as chief executive of Invest Northern Ireland more difficult." That was his message. If I go to an employer and ask him to look at our new level of corporation tax and come to Northern Ireland as a result of that, and somebody in the background is saying, "We want to be cautious about this. Maybe the rate isn't right" or "Maybe it shouldn't be done at this time", or "Maybe it's going to cause regional disparities" or whatever the excuses might be, the employer is going to say, "That doesn't sound as if it is a very stable or permanent arrangement that you are asking me to enter into." That drives away jobs.

Incidentally, a question was asked about the number of jobs. Let me explain the science behind that. The Minister was right in the figures that he gave. These are the most up-to-date figures; around 37,000 or 38,000 new jobs are expected. Previously, the expectation that over 50,000 jobs would come had been discussed. The difference between the two figures, apart from the sheer subtraction that is necessary, is that the larger figure was based on a corporation tax level in the rest of the United Kingdom of 26%, but it is now based on the level that we know it is going to be at in 2017, which is 20%. That causes the differential. Of course, I hope that Invest Northern Ireland will go out and attempt to beat those targets, but that is the reason why the figure was revised.

Let me deal with the issue of regional disparity, because the leader of the SDLP raised it at the meeting yesterday and was told that there was no empirical evidence whatsoever to suggest that lowering the level of corporation tax was going to have any adverse impact in relation to regional disparity. I am as keen to see jobs in the north-west or any other part of Northern Ireland as I am to see them in the Belfast area. Indeed, the deputy First Minister and I have had discussions fairly recently with a very significant prospect for the north-west of the Province. So, we are trying to drive forward the argument that there is a pool of skilled labour in the north-west of the Province and that we have to try to attract more jobs into the Londonderry and general Fermanagh and Tyrone areas, because —

Mr G Robinson: Limavady.

Mr P Robinson: And Limavady — *[Laughter.]* So, it is on our agenda to deal with those disparities. The issue of corporation tax is irrelevant to those disparities, except to this extent: the more jobs you get into Northern Ireland, the more people will be employed and the less unemployment there will be.

It is not as if going from one part of Northern Ireland to another is the same as going from one state in the United States to another. We are a relatively small country, and there is a certain mobility about our labour. Only during the course of the past few days, I went down to the Ulster Bank, where 350 new jobs were being announced for RBS. As we went round, it was as though we were going to the whole of Northern Ireland and meeting people from every county of Northern Ireland. So, there is a mobility about our labour.

I say this to the SDLP: please do not start to do on corporation tax what you have done on the Budget and welfare reform by being pernickety, niggling and attempting to find any small issue on which you can try to set yourself up as being different from the rest of us. It is essential that we speak together on this issue, advocate the new level of corporation tax and try to get the best benefit we can from it.

An issue about the penalties arising from welfare reform and whether we would get them back was raised. The Stormont House Agreement is clear on the issue. The penalties stop at the moment we have welfare reform dealt with by legislation and have agreed regulations. At that stage, which we imagine should be at the half-year point of the financial year, the penalties will stop. We have taken this into account in our Budget calculations for the 2015-16 financial year.

I had decided to speak before Mr McNarry, a Member for Strangford, rose to make his comments. I have to say that he spoke like someone who was reading another person's work. It was not David McNarry who I was listening to. I do not know whether he has taken on an intern from some primary school in the area or how he got the researcher who brought forward the information, but it was gobbledygook. It was nonsense. It might have been strung together, he might have had it well punctuated, the delivery left a little to be desired, but the content was not impressive whatsoever. He threw out this question as though he had got a real nugget: "Where is the Programme for Government?". Walk down to the Library, David. All you have to do is ask for it. It is there. You can get the Programme for Government. The Programme for Government takes us up until the May period, and then a new Programme for Government for the remaining period, which will be an extension of the present one, plus some enhancements, will be in place for the last year of our term.

It seemed that it had disappeared or had never been there in the first place. However, the Assembly has passed the Programme for Government, it is the product of the collective work of the Executive Ministers, it is published and available online and in the Library, and, if the Member cannot get it from any of those sources, I am quite happy to give him my copy. Of course, we will then move to the

final year, which is the extended year, of the Executive and Assembly and deal with the Programme for Government.

I found this interesting. I am sorry that he is not in his place; I am not sure where he is. The fact remains that he said that we had "cobbled together" the Stormont House Agreement. This is the chief adviser to David Trimble telling us that we have "cobbled together" an agreement. I suspect that this agreement will be implemented in a way that his — David McNarry's — Belfast Agreement was not able to deliver. He wants to forget his past as Trimble's right-hand man and tries to set himself up under his new UKIP regalia as someone who is somehow separate from his history and who has the answers to all our problems. He perhaps is in a slightly depressed form today because of the very significant drop in UKIP support in the polls. Of course, we, the 38 of us who won elections, are the losers, as opposed to the one of him who won an election under a different label and has not won any election under his new label.

However, I want to go on to comments from the Member for Lagan Valley, which were more sensible. I agree with him on the health issue. Having been a Finance Minister, I know about and I watched the steady increase in the cost of health in Northern Ireland. It is in common with that in most places around the world. People are living longer, their expectations are greater and there are more costly drugs on the market. All those issues have combined to push up the cost. When you get to my age, I can say that I am quite happy that people are living longer, and I am sure that, at some stage, I will have to lean on the health service, as many in the House will have to as well.

Of course, we need to look at how we do things to see whether we can offset the additional cost by doing things in different ways. That is what Transforming Your Care was about. It is also a factor, and I agree with him on this, that there are difficult decisions that we will have to take when it comes to the use and location of various facilities that the Department of Health is responsible for. I do not think that this House should easily set aside the professional and expert advice that it has been given. That does not mean that you take it all or do it all in the way that is suggested, but to walk away and just continue with things the way they are is not the answer. You might escape the wrath of those who live closest and want the facilities there at present, but you will not escape the wrath of a future generation who will find a health service that cannot be funded and a depletion of services across the board.

The truth is that there are many people who are beginning to recognise that there are levels of expertise in certain hospitals for certain illnesses and diseases. There are people who are prepared to drive past present local hospitals to get to that expertise, and all the professional advice is that that is the sensible thing to do. Therefore, we need to restructure the health service in a way that ensures that, while you do not necessarily take away provision in a local area, you have to look at the spread of provision and how it is divided across the Province. I am not afraid of taking those difficult decisions and I am glad to hear that the Member is content to be a part of taking them. Quite honestly, I doubt that there are very many in this Assembly who would argue with the need to do that but, sadly, in politics, there will be people who will want to take some political advantage out of people who will do what is required and what is right. There is a requirement for maturity not just in debate but on the decisions that will have to flow thereafter.

Mr McCallister had not quite washed out of his system welfare reform and the restructuring of the public sector in Northern Ireland from the previous debate, so he gave us a replay. It was no more convincing on this occasion than it was on the last, so let me tell him something about the restructuring. Northern Ireland has significantly more public servants per head of population than anywhere else in the British Isles: England, Scotland, Wales or the Republic of Ireland. A 10% reduction in our public service profile would still leave us over-represented; that is the fact of the matter. Unless the Member is going to stand up and tell me that Northern Ireland public servants are less capable than those elsewhere in the British Isles, I believe that our public servants are capable of doing the job with fewer numbers. Again, it is part of the five-party agreement that we have to deal with that issue, and it has to be done in a way that ensures that we do not lose expertise or damage the services that we provide, so it will require care.

The idea that we are going into this blind is wrong. The head of the Civil Service and those under him, who are working directly on this matter and have been preparing for it for months, know exactly what they are doing. It is a difficult task to carry out, and it is over a four-year period. However, at the end of that, it will have reduced the pay bill by about £500 million — half a billion pounds — a year. So, when somebody talks about borrowing £700 million to make this happen, let us have it in a context that is sensible. The context is a reduction of half a billion pounds a year in our pay bill, so it makes financial sense to do it.

More than that, it makes political sense, because what we are attempting to do is rebalance our economy, and every serious economist has been telling us for years that we have to change our dependency on the public sector and build up the private sector. That is why the issue of corporation tax is completely connected to reform of the public sector, because what you are attempting to do with a reduction in the level of corporation tax is to bring in jobs that have a profit centre in Northern Ireland locally and, therefore, will increase the strength and growth within the private sector while, at the same time, you are slimming down and streamlining the public sector.

This is what is called rebalancing the economy. It is a sound policy to have. It is the only economic policy that makes sense for Northern Ireland. It is the one that has been endorsed by political parties. It has been endorsed by economists, and it has been endorsed by political commentators. It is recognised that this is the right way to go. Of course, there will be bits and pieces where, if you take them on their own, people will say, "That is something that I would rather not do", but it does make sense in the overall scheme of rebalancing our economy.

11.45 pm

In terms of this idea that we are all losers in this Assembly and Executive, I know that the level of debate is pretty low when these kinds of terms are used. It might be worthwhile for us to remember some of the successes that we have because I am one of the few people in this House who is old enough to remember previous occasions when there were economic downturns, and when we had to wait for years after the rest of the United Kingdom came out of that economic downturn for us to crawl out of the

decline as well. That is not happening this time. We are bringing ourselves out at the same time as the rest of the United Kingdom.

Unemployment in Northern Ireland is 5·7%. When I entered the House of Commons, 30-odd years ago, unemployment was at 18%. Who is the loser in that? For 25 consecutive months, our unemployment levels have been going down. That indicates success.

It is wonderful how some people attribute success to things that would have happened anyway but say that failures are the responsibility of the Executive. The truth is that we have been able to bring more foreign direct investment into Northern Ireland, even during the recession, than any other part of the United Kingdom on the basis of population. We have been able to bring in more foreign direct investment than London and more than the south-east of England, and we have been able to bring in more foreign direct investment than at any time in our history. We have done more in terms of our infrastructure than at any time in our history. We have lower local taxes than any other part of the United Kingdom. We have been able to bring events to Northern Ireland to be able to showcase Northern Ireland to the world with organisations that would not have dreamed of coming to Northern Ireland before. Businesses are coming in and looking at Northern Ireland that would not have touched Northern Ireland before, and the UKIP Member, who has absented himself once again, says we are losers. These are stories of success.

Of course there are difficulties, and those difficulties, I have to say, come around because of a global banking crisis, not because of the actions of this Executive or even because of the actions of the United Kingdom Government. In spite of those difficulties, we have been able to make very considerable progress in terms of our economy in Northern Ireland. We do have to take difficult decisions, and the Finance Minister has to front those difficult decisions. The truth of it is that we do not have the ability to bring in large amounts of money unless we are prepared to take some decisions that will punish our people even more.

I have to say that, in terms of political courage, I admire the Alliance Party standing up and saying that it wants to introduce water charges at £300 or £400 to every family in Northern Ireland. It is that party's view and not mine; I believe in a low-tax regime. That is why I prided Northern Ireland for having the lowest local taxes in the whole of the United Kingdom. You can bring in more money if you are prepared to do that, but there is a downside to it. It means that there is less money in the pockets of people of Northern Ireland and less money going into shops and businesses in Northern Ireland as a result of it. I do not run away from the issue either, and I have to say to the Member for Lagan Valley who raised the issue of tuition fees that I think that we took the right decision on them. I do not believe that a person's access to university should be based upon how rich or poor their father or mother is. Therefore, I think that we took the right decisions.

However, every year costs go up, and I do not think it unreasonable to review the level of tuition fees. I would not oppose a modest increase in the fees, providing, of course, that it is used to help to get more university places so that we can have more skilled people to take the jobs that are coming through.

I congratulate my friend for bringing forward a sensible Budget based on having to deal with the difficult economic situation that the whole of the United Kingdom is in. For anybody from UKIP to suggest that somehow the Tories were going to bring in more difficult proposals if they were to be returned when his party actually supports that type of austerity is hard for me to swallow. I believe entirely that the Minister had the right priorities of protecting our health and education budgets and ensuring that we have the ability to bring in new jobs and increase skills. Of course, there will be difficult divisions of those funds between the various Departments. That is why you want to cut out the costs where you can, whether it is through restructuring or by looking at other areas of the public sector where we can have greater efficiencies. I hope that many of the proposals that the Finance Minister has trailed on efficiencies will be taken up by those who want to ensure that we have more money available for front-line services.

I encourage everybody in the House, late in the night though it may be, to enthusiastically go through the Lobbies with the Minister. They should forget about the whingers, who have nothing to offer and who made no proposals at any earlier stage about how it could be done better. They should go through with those who have had a very careful hand on the tiller and who have brought us through very difficult times. I believe that they have given us the hope of a very prosperous future for Northern Ireland.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

Mr Attwood: I was not inclined to speak in the debate, as I probably spoke more than enough today.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

Mr Attwood: I have been encouraged to respond to the comments of the First Minister in particular. Before doing so, let me point out where I might agree with the First Minister, although he spoke as a Member for East Belfast. I agree with the points that he made about health and the economy. I ask the First Minister this: if there is an all-Ireland health study that was conducted and completed a number of years ago, is there not an imperative, as we move to rebalance our economy, also to rebalance our health service on an all-Ireland basis? Given the scale of moneys now going into health provision on the island of Ireland, — 50% of public expenditure in the North, over 40% in the South and 33% in Britain — is there not an obligation on the First Minister, who applauds the Executive for what they have done for the economy, to now have them apply themselves to health provision on an all-Ireland basis?

That is why the SDLP warmly welcomed the decision that Minister Wells and Minister Varadkar made some months ago on children's cardiac care. That demonstrated what lateral, innovative thinking in the Governments on this island can do to provide a better service for people in health need on the island. I suggest to the First Minister that if he wants now to go in a bold and innovative way, we should do so on the basis of the 2000 health study. Let that be part of the sectoral developments in the North/South Ministerial Council that were indicated at the Stormont House Agreement. Maybe, if you were to take those forward, there would be further reason to applaud this Executive in what it does.

These were the words that the First Minister used in relation to a number of debates in the Chamber during the course of the last number of hours — "pernickety", "niggling", "small issue" when we were trying to differentiate from the rest. "Pernickety", "niggling", "small issue". As I said earlier to the Alliance Member for East Antrim: do not send a message to people who give best advice to those in the Chamber about how welfare should be shaped, how the economy should be shaped, how health should be shaped, or how any area of public policy should be shaped. Do not dismiss their advice as "pernickety", "niggling" and a "small issue" when people are differentiating themselves from other parties. When you make that comment about the SDLP, First Minister, you are making it about people of good authority who give good advice to the parties in this Chamber on how to take forward various public policies. You can say what you want about the SDLP, but you should not send that message to those who serve the people of Northern Ireland in many ways and for the betterment of those whom we represent.

Let me ask the First Minister this question: what was the announcement made yesterday by Apple in relation to a new data centre in Galway? It was an €850 million investment by Apple in Galway with 300 jobs. When the announcement was made, the economy Minister in the South said that they were:

> *"accelerating jobs growth in every region of the country."*

That is what the Irish Government have done. They have recognised that, contrary to what the First Minister says, there is evidence that when foreign direct investment comes into a country, it goes where there are clusters of skills. One of the risks in relation to the devolution of corporation tax, which the SDLP supports in principle, is that we will not learn the lesson from the Republic of Ireland, the lesson corroborated by the Apple announcement yesterday, and that you will compound the regional imbalance that is already too acute and critical if you do not have what the Irish Government say, which is:

> *"accelerating jobs growth in every region of the country."*

The evidence is that, internationally as well as nationally, FDI will go where the skills are, and in the context of Northern Ireland that is the greater Belfast area.

We need to learn from the South where, as part of their overall development of the economy, they have invested in regional colleges and universities that are developing students with skills who can serve the needs of FDI. That is the lesson that you draw from yesterday's announcement — an €850 million investment in Athenry, outside Galway, because Galway has become a university town and one that is developing the skills and capacity that FDI companies want.

In our view, the First Minister is not fully correct to say that there is no evidence that FDI is going to come to any part of the country. It will go where there are skills clusters. If we do not anticipate that, and invest in other parts of Northern Ireland, not least in the city of Derry and at Magee campus, you will have, as a consequence of the welcome devolution of corporation tax, at least the risk of a further concentration of jobs in the greater Belfast area to the loss of the North.

12.00 midnight

The SDLP supports the devolution of corporation tax, but we have been absolutely right to put down questions and markers for when and how it will take place. What would happen if the people of Britain and Northern Ireland were to decide to exit the EU? What would the consequences be if that referendum were held in 2016 as opposed to 2017?

Mr P Robinson: Will the Member give way?

Mr Attwood: I will in a second.

How would that work itself through in the management of the economy in Northern Ireland? What if the Tories are re-elected and move towards reducing corporation tax further, down to 18%, 17% or 16%? How would that impact on a Northern Ireland corporation tax rate of 12·5%? How would Derry maximise the opportunities of the devolution of corporation tax without the necessary infrastructure, such as a road from Dungiven to Derry, when best advice, including from the chamber of commerce in the city of Derry, says that the future of Derry is the university and its infrastructure and that that would be the game changer for its citizens?

So we are saying, in relation to corporation tax —

Mr P Robinson: The Member was going to give way.

Mr Attwood: I will give way in a second.

On corporation tax, are these not the right questions to ask? What happens in the event of EU withdrawal? What are the consequences of a general reduction in corporation tax in Britain? How will we mitigate the potential for regional imbalance? How will we ensure that the infrastructure across Northern Ireland is what is necessary to attract and sustain FDI? Those are valid questions, and we would be negligent as parliamentarians, and as a political party, if we did not ask them in the context of the principle of the devolution of corporation tax and its timing and agreed rate.

I will give way to the First Minister.

Mr P Robinson: I am grateful. I should have asked to intervene earlier when he was suggesting that there was some difference between us over corporation tax and where FDI goes. I agree with him: FDI will go wherever a company wants it to go, based on whether the skills and a sufficient number of people to be employed are there. That issue relates not to corporation tax but to the infrastructure more generally around Northern Ireland and whether the necessary skills exist in each area, and, in that regard, Magee and other issues come into play. So we are not in a different place on that issue, although he might think that we are.

When he asks what would happen if the United Kingdom was to come out of the European Union, I hope that he is not suggesting that we should put off taking a decision on the level of corporation tax until after the negotiations in Europe and the subsequent referendum. If we wait that long, we will have wasted at least a year of the free time that we have before the introduction of corporation tax.

My answer to the second question about what would happen if the United Kingdom was to decide to reduce its level of corporation tax from 20% to 18% or 16% is that that would be tremendous, and I hope that it does. That

would reduce the gap and would, therefore, reduce the cost to our block grant.

Mr Attwood: I thank the First Minister for that intervention because I think that everything he said corroborates the fact that the questions that we have raised, which were raised by the leader at the leaders' meeting yesterday and, as I understand it, at the Executive by Minister Mark H Durkan in his submissions on the corporation tax papers from DFP, are the right ones to be asked and the right ones to be answered.

It suggests to me that, given that the First Minister has just said that he agrees with us that these are all legitimate questions, to portray what we are saying as pernickety, niggling and small issues, indicates some conflict and tension between what the First Minister said earlier and what he said in the last couple of minutes.

So, no, we should not put off the decision on corporation tax, but we should not ignore the events that could conspire to create difficulties for the economy of Northern Ireland and of these islands.

Mrs Foster: Will the Member give way?

Mr Attwood: I will in a second. Remember that it is about the economy of these islands. If you speak to the Irish Government, they will tell you that one of their biggest preoccupations at the moment, and rightly so, is the consequences for the Irish economy in the event that Britain and Northern Ireland withdraw from the EU, given the trading relationship and the big trading partnership between Dublin and London.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Order. I ask the Member to return to the Bill rather than talking about whether or not the United Kingdom should remain in Europe. I ask the Member to continue on the Bill.

Mr Attwood: I will take your direction. In relation to the Budget Bill, the First Minister made some comments about what he believes, it seems, that I said about FDI and the greater Belfast area. Let me be very clear about what I have said to various Ministers in the Executive and in a conversation with my colleagues in the SDLP. I said that it is always welcome when jobs come to Belfast. Anybody who denies that is denying a self-evident truth. Any jobs that come to Belfast are welcome, but we have to recognise that the FDI jobs coming to Belfast are concentrated in the Queen's Island/Titanic/Harbour Commission corridor. That is a fact. You have only to look at the suitable accommodation that has been or is being built in the harbour estate to confirm that the businesses that are coming into the city are, for very good reasons, going to those areas. Just as the regional imbalance in economic development in Northern Ireland could be compounded if we do not manage corporation tax properly, there is a regional imbalance in the greater Belfast area.

Earlier, in response to comments made by Mr Allister, I read into the record the profile of need in west Belfast. The reality is that you can help to address that profile of need, for which there are multiple indicators, if you locate jobs in that area.

Mrs Foster: Will the Member give way?

Mr Attwood: I will. Before I give way to the Minister, I ask her to corroborate this: Delta Print and Packaging, which is one of our premium businesses and main exporters, now employs 265 people and is about to open a business in Poland and businesses in China. There are areas in other parts of the city, not just the south and east, where there are opportunities to invest and build suitable accommodation for FDI. Terry Cross, and his company, Delta Print and Packaging, confirms what can be done. That is why we had a conversation with the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment about protecting land in west Belfast, particularly the Visteon land. We want to ensure that there are industrial opportunities in the future rather than all the land of west Belfast being used for social housing and other housing development.

There is a strategic issue that we have to face up to. The city is regenerating itself through McAleer and Rushe building suitable accommodation for FDI, which is welcome, and the harbour is regenerating itself because the Harbour Commission has the means to draw down moneys to build suitable accommodation for FDI, of which there is likely to be more in the future. So, does it not follow that similar investments in north and west Belfast, given its profile of need, in order to lift those areas and help people out of the poverty that they have experienced for generations and right up until this day —

Mr McKinney: Will the Member give way?

Mr Attwood: I will in a moment.

Is it not a valid argument to make that, in addition to investment in south and east Belfast, you have to take forward investment opportunities in north and west Belfast? Why? It will lift the place, regenerate it and deal with the decades of disadvantage and alienation that are all too evident.

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for eventually giving way. It is not just about bringing new jobs to places that have significant difficulties, such as west Belfast. He will recognise that there is a need to go much deeper and deal with the underlying issues that present themselves in areas such as west Belfast. That is why the Minister for Employment and Learning and I have brought forward to the Executive an economic inactivity strategy to deal with the key underlying problems. His colleague in Londonderry will tell him that we have engaged very well on what we are trying to do. He will know that we have set up an Executive subcommittee to deal with regional opportunities. I do not like regional disadvantages; we need to look for regional opportunities. In that city, we are also looking at Digital Derry — yes, I did use the word because that is what it is called. We are dealing with those much wider issues. Is the glass half full or half empty? I prefer to see the glass as being half full, to view it in a positive way and to move forward. I hope that the Member will move forward with us to seek new jobs for those areas.

Mr Attwood: I do not mind whether you call it Digital Derry or Digital Londonderry. I am relaxed. If you want to rename it, I will not have any issue, and I do not think that our party will have any issue. The answer, of course, to your question about whether the glass is half full or half empty is that the glass — *[Interruption.]* Well, it is not in the Budget. The glass should be full.

I note all the initiatives that you referred to, and I do not discount, deny or diminish those good interventions in any shape or form. Ministers cannot, however, deny that there is an opportunity to regenerate areas of need with industrial lands, be it Strabane or somewhere else. I

remember Mr McElduff asking a question of the Enterprise Minister about protecting land zoned in his constituency, and, on the back of that, I asked the same question about my constituency. Can the Minister not develop a strategy to bring FDI and other potential investors and employers to areas of disadvantage? Given the multiple reasons for disadvantage, the key to regeneration and the undoing of deprivation is jobs investment and factories. That is what the Southern strategy tells us. You spread it; you do not concentrate it. In the SDLP's view, that is part of the conversation about corporation tax.

Mr McKinney: I thank the Member for giving way. The Member will recall that the First Minister and others in the Chamber laboured at great length the cost to the health service. Is it not true that the cost to the health service is partly because of long-term unemployment and deprivation and that investing in those areas sub-subregionally would make a difference to the overall bill?

Mr Attwood: Of course I agree with that. Indeed, in response to Mr Allister's narrow-minded approach, I read into the record the health profile of my constituency of West Belfast, which includes the Shankill and extends to Lagmore. The profile of my constituency for coronary heart disease, diabetes, pulmonary disease and mental health is, if I recall correctly, the worst or second-worst in Northern Ireland. In those circumstances, the strategy for dealing with health issues involves dealing with job issues, and part of the strategy for dealing with job issues is saying that, if land is zoned for industrial use, and if business can go into the harbour estate and south and east Belfast, welcome as that is, the same applies to my constituency and all other areas of disadvantage in Northern Ireland.

I very much welcome, therefore, the intervention of the Member for East Belfast, which has crystallised some of the discussions that we need to have. However, let me tell Mr Robinson this: the SDLP will argue these issues from the basis that we have outlined tonight, and we will not just make an argument and accept that the bigger parties will prevail.

That is not the democracy we believe in, and that is not the approach we will adopt.

12.15 am

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Now, Members, I call the Minister of Finance and Personnel, Mr Simon Hamilton —

Some Members: Hear, hear.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): — to conclude and wind on the Final Stage of the Budget Bill.

Mr Hamilton: I welcome so many Members to the House for the debate. I suspect that it is not in anticipation of my contribution but because of the fact that, at 12.15 am in Parliament Buildings, there is little better to do than coming into the Chamber and listening to whomever is speaking, although the last contribution probably rendered that useless.

I thank most of the Members who took time to contribute to the Final Stage debate of the Budget Bill today — this morning. Members, in their own inimitable style in many cases, sought to add to the debate that we have been having over the last number of weeks. I welcome those who brought up relevant issues — I stress the word "relevant" — during today's proceedings. There will always be some who will seek to use Budget Bill debates as a platform for issues that have tenuous links to the Bill that is before us, but I welcome all inputs that are made to the debate.

I appreciate that Members will not want me to respond to all issues; I have no intention of doing so. I thank the Committee for Finance and Personnel, particularly the Chair, Mr McKay, for its assistance in granting accelerated passage to the Bill through the Assembly. The support of the Committee will enable the Bill to receive Royal Assent, House permitting, by 31 March and allow a smooth continuation of public services into the new financial year.

I will turn to some of the issues raised by Members. Dominic Bradley spoke at length about corporation tax. He started with the intention of keeping his contribution short, and I think he culled a lot of the stuff that he wanted to say. He talked about corporation tax, which sparked a longer debate than perhaps he or I anticipated this evening, or this morning. I echo the First Minister's comments pleading with the SDLP to be careful with its language around the issue. That is not to say that they should not raise issues — there are proper fora for those issues to be raised in — but they must be careful about the language they use. I reiterate the point that the First Minister made: a lot of what we do from here on — I am sure that the economy Minister will affirm this — is as much a sales job as anything else. It is critically important that the language, tone and message coming from the House is one, is united and is clearly in favour of what we seek to do and what we have fought long and hard for in respect of the ability to reduce corporation tax in Northern Ireland and reap the benefits that that will bring. I hope that the SDLP is more faithful on corporation tax than it was on the deal it did on welfare reform.

Nobody understands better than me, in my position, that there will be public spending concerns. Those concerns have been raised by many Members in the House. We know that one certainty around corporation tax is that it will come at a cost to our block grant. Several factors are changing that situation on an ongoing basis, and they are worth bearing in mind. The first is the fact — this has been confirmed by Treasury — that there will be a stepping-in of the cost to Northern Ireland so that it is much more affordable in early years than perhaps we anticipated. It was a point made by the First Minister at Question Time a week or so ago.

I understand the concerns around public spending, but the public spending situation and settlement for future years is not yet known. As I said in the debate yesterday — I think that Mr Bradley was in the House for most it — we watch and listen with interest to Conservative and Labour spokespeople trying to outdo and outbid each other in what they wish to protect, whether it is health or education, in real or cash terms. The benefit of all that to Northern Ireland is that, because we spend so much of our Budget — some 65% — on health and education, whilst we will still endure spending reductions, they will be much less than perhaps we feared. The fear that we had of having, perhaps, 13% real-terms reductions in public spending in Northern Ireland is very quickly dissipating as each of the two main parties tries to outdo the other in a bidding war in advance of the general election.

The third factor that has to be considered in and around public spending concerns and corporation tax has to do with exactly what savings we reap from a voluntary exit scheme. By the time the powers will be devolved and

the costs will be coming in, we will be well through our voluntary exit scheme; in fact, we will be into its third year. We anticipate it to be making considerable savings by that time that will ease the burden of the cost.

It is something that we have striven hard to secure. Its benefits are almost universally agreed in the House and further afield, with 37,500 net new jobs being the latest estimate and over 10% growth in the economy in Northern Ireland by 2030. It is important that all the parties in the Executive agree a rate and a date and give not just Invest Northern Ireland but those who wish to invest in Northern Ireland the certainty that they need on corporation tax.

I also want to pick up on the points made about regional imbalance: absolutely no evidence at all has been presented. A lot of work has been done on corporation tax and its effects, and there is no evidence that devolving corporation tax would distort the economy further or affect negatively the regional imbalances that, we accept, exist. A lower rate of corporation tax will, of course, be open to all businesses in Northern Ireland, and it could present a needed shot in the arm to businesses in the north-west, the west, the south-west or wherever they may be.

The Member represents a part of Northern Ireland that is not in the greater Belfast area; he represents the Newry area. From the visits that I have made to the area in my job as Finance Minister I know that it is one of the more impressive places in Northern Ireland for the indigenous companies that have grown in that city, many of which will be able to avail themselves of a lower rate of corporation tax. The example of Newry is one that he, perhaps, should sell to his party colleagues who represent other parts of Northern Ireland. What has been done in Newry over the last number of decades as a result of the hard work of entrepreneurs is something that I admire. It is something that, perhaps, those in the north-west in particular would learn a lot from if they followed that example.

Mrs Foster: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Hamilton: Yes, I will.

Mrs Foster: Will the Minister also acknowledge that not only will we secure more jobs through the reduction of the corporation tax rate but there will be growth in the economy generally? In fact, commentators indicate that the economy generally will grow by at least 10%.

Mr Hamilton: I listened particularly to Mr Attwood's latter comments. The argument from the SDLP or, at least, from that quarter of the SDLP is that because it has some doubts or concerns — without any evidence — about how a lower rate of corporation tax may or may not impact on this or that part of Northern Ireland, the benefits to the whole of Northern Ireland should be denied to all the people of Northern Ireland.

My colleague the economy Minister is right to point out the latest evidence produced by the University of Ulster that suggests growth of over 10% in the economy in just over 10 years. That is not to be sniffed at, nor are 37,500 net new jobs in the whole of the economy. These are benefits and prizes that we should grasp[very quickly, and we should decide on a rate and a date as soon as we can.

We should not be surprised, I suppose, by the confusion in the SDLP ranks when we have a Member for West Belfast saying to the House that there should not be any more jobs in south and east Belfast. I am very proud of the record of DETI, Invest Northern Ireland and the economy Minister, who is, of course, as Mr McNarry told us, the only Minister doing her job in the Executive. *[Laughter.]* There was, perhaps, too much laughter there; we should move quickly on. We should be very proud of our record. Many Ministers, including the First Minister and the deputy First Minister, are going around Northern Ireland and selling it as a place in which to invest, which has attracted fantastic firms not just to south and east Belfast but to all parts of Northern Ireland. It is a record that we should be proud of. I wonder what Mr McDonnell — he is in the Chamber, and he has had a tough week — would think of the calls from his party colleague to have no more investment in his constituency. I know that there are others seeking the Westminster seat who, I am sure, would be more than willing to stand up for South Belfast and investment in that constituency.

Mr Leslie Cree made far too many points for my pen to keep up with at this late hour. I will review Hansard and come back to him. He asked detailed and specific questions that should never be asked at 11.00 in the evening. He mentioned welfare reform penalties, which I think the First Minister adequately addressed in respect of when that might come back and the pro rata nature of all that. On the voluntary exit scheme, I reiterate to Mr Cree, as I have to others, that the objective is a pay bill reduction. He asked what the split would be between those who would leave under the voluntary exit scheme and how many posts would go as a result of a recruitment freeze and so on. We are yet to develop all that. The point is that the objective that has been agreed across the parties is 20,000 posts through a range of interventions, not just the voluntary exit scheme. Recruitment freezes and suppression of vacancies will obviously play a major part in achieving that aim.

I can certainly say with regard to the DARD project on wind energy that the Member would be far better taking that up with DARD than with me. I have no specific answers on that issue.

I will turn to Mr McNarry, who, unfortunately, is not here, and his riddle, which often sounded like a very difficult 11-plus question from my past. He kept talking about debating next year's Budget. This has been a problem throughout this stage and previous stages of the Bill. Had he taken any notice or been in the Chamber at any previous debates on the Budget Bill, he would perhaps have appreciated this more: we are not debating next year's Budget; we are debating the Budget of this current year and the Vote on Account for the start of next year. However, next year's Budget is one that backs health and education. It backs health by increasing its allocation by £204 million, an allocation that Mr McNarry voted against. It is a Budget that actually boosts support for the schools budget. There is £80 million more going to the schools budget, compared with the draft Budget position, an allocation that Mr McNarry opposed. He questions what the Budget for next year does for our economy and for unemployment. It is a Budget that has employment as one of its central pillars, underpinning the economic growth that we are enjoying in Northern Ireland. It has seemingly not come to Mr McNarry's notice that unemployment in Northern Ireland has fallen to 5·7%. The claimant count has been down for 25 months in a row. That is a seemingly inconvenient fact for Mr McNarry, given the pre-written script that he was reading out.

The Member asked what the Budget dis for hard-working families. He says that next year's Budget does nothing for them. Next year's Budget maintains household bills in Northern Ireland at the lowest levels in the whole of the United Kingdom. Household bills in Northern are at an average now of £812 per household compared with £1,433 in England, from where he now takes his marching orders. He accuses us of reckless spending. The insinuation of reckless spending suggests that the Executive are spending more money than they have in the past. Of course, the fact is that we have not breached our Budget in the past. We have never had to hand any money back to Treasury. We have never lost any money. Even with the very grave difficulties that we have had this year and having to have in-year reductions in spending, I believe that we are on course to ensure that we live within our Budget this year as well.

As the First Minister said, it is difficult for many of us on this side of the House and, I am sure, on other sides of the House to take a lecture about the Stormont House Agreement, shoddy deals and bad agreements from the man who was David Trimble's lieutenant throughout the Belfast Agreement and its implementation in the years thereafter. I also find it difficult to take lectures from a member of the United Kingdom Independence Party about public spending in Northern Ireland when his party's position is that it wants to see the Barnett formula, which is far from perfect but has served Northern Ireland well over the years, scrapped. Why? Because it wants to send more of our money to England. That is the stated position of the United Kingdom Independence Party on public spending.

Mr McCallister mentioned reform, as he has done frequently throughout the debate. To be fair, he has contributed, I think, at every stage of the debate on the Budget Bill, unlike some others who contributed this evening. He is right on some bits, but I take exception to others. He made the argument that all or many of the reforms that we are doing — perhaps I am going too far in saying this — are being done because they are being forced on us by the Conservative Party or Her Majesty's Government. That is not the case. On many of the reforms that we are taking forward, particularly in shared services and digitisation, we have been doing them for some time and are in advance of what is happening in Great Britain.

There are some that we are less enthusiastic about having to do. That might include a voluntary exit scheme. This is not something that Westminster pushed us into, as the First Minister made clear. This was a proposal that the five Executive parties put to the Secretary of State, who sold it to the Prime Minister. It was an idea that came from us, not them.

12.30 am

He is right, and I made this point to him in a written answer that I think he got today, in that the voluntary exit scheme is:

> *"not a strategic workforce planning exercise".*

Its objective is to reduce the pay bill. We have to do that in a sensitive way. We have to be mindful of the skills that we lose and those that we need to retain or build up. That work will continue on an ongoing basis.

When he attacks the voluntary exit scheme as he has done, he seems to do so from a position where he thinks that this is some sort of luxury and that we can choose not to do it. The First Minister eloquently set out how this was part of a broader economic reform and strategy that the Executive agreed to. However, we are not in the position to do anything other than to try as quickly as possible to reduce the pay bill in the public sector in Northern Ireland.

Mr McCallister: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way. He quoted some of his written answer to me, and I will give him some more of it:

> *"This is not a strategic workforce planning exercise and skills, performance and experience are not, therefore, selection criteria for the scheme."*

My concern is how you manage that. I have constantly warned that I did not want this to turn into another Patten, where you end up having to use that large amount of money but will not end up with the pay bill reduction of half a billion pounds that you need to pay for it. Instead, you will end up with a brain drain or will bring people back in because you have lost the necessary expertise and experience. Those are my real concerns about this.

Mr Hamilton: I am glad he acknowledges that we will save, or that the aim is to save, around half a billion pounds from this and that it is not, as others say, that we are borrowing and there is no benefit from it. There is an important benefit at a time when public spending will remain under pressure.

If we had the luxury of more time, some of the issues that the Member raises would obviously be factored in in a much greater way. We do not have that luxury, however. The next financial year starts in a matter of weeks. Civil Service Departments alone have indicated the need to reduce their headcount by around 2,400 posts in one year to live within their budgets for next year and to prepare themselves for the years thereafter.

Making those sorts of reductions will be challenging and incredibly difficult, but we do not have the luxury of time that will allow us to sit around and look at things, very important issues though they are, and to let them get in the way of making the savings that Departments need to make.

I will move on to Alex Attwood's comments and the bit of a flight of fancy about Irish unity that he started with.

Mrs Foster: I missed that.

Mr Hamilton: You were fortunate. It was a bit of an attempt, I think, to distract from his shafting his party leader about having no jobs in South Belfast. It was an argument, of course, against West Belfast, which, strangely enough, is his constituency.

Are we on these Benches content to learn from the Irish Republic? Yes. Are we content to cooperate with the Irish Republic on areas of shared mutual interest? Absolutely. However, doing everything that the Republic of Ireland does? Absolutely not.

He spelt out a couple of areas — health and the economy. On health, there are lots of things that we can do. I admire and support what my colleague the Health Minister is taking forward on congenital heart disease and the cooperation on that on a North/South basis. There is also the radiotherapy unit at Altnagelvin, which some said that we should not have proceeded with. Those are practical,

sensible manoeuvres on a way forward. North/South cooperation on health? Absolutely, we can do that.

What we do not want to see is a move in Northern Ireland to an Irish-style health service where people have to pay between €40 and €60 to visit a GP. When we look across the border at some of the things that they do well in health, let us not kid ourselves that we want to do everything that they do here in Northern Ireland. Equally, in respect of the economy and public spending, I very much admire what the Republic of Ireland Government have done to quickly get to grips with the problems that they face. I and others in the Executive and this party have said to the Irish Government that we think they were absolutely right to do what they did. It was very difficult and challenging. It was difficult on their people and their country but we are seeing, in the way that their economy is improving, that it was worth doing and was absolutely necessary.

However, as he talks about the economy and employment in the South, he fails to talk about unemployment in the Irish Republic. We have an unemployment rate of 5·7%, which is falling and has fallen for 25 consecutive months. It is still too high and we need to continue to work at it. We need to reduce it further. It is now sitting at the UK average. As he talks about employment and what they are doing in the Irish Republic, he does not talk about unemployment there, which sits at 10·7%, a full five percentage points higher than it is here in Northern Ireland. I am happy, as are colleagues, to look at and learn from what the Irish Republic is doing to build its economy. Corporation tax is something that we have looked at incredibly closely, but we are not prepared to do everything that they did, because they have not got it right either. We are not going to take a lecture on Irish unity and how everything that they do is absolutely the right way to go about it.

In conclusion, I again thank Members for their contributions today — two days, actually. I have endeavoured to respond to as many issues as possible at this late hour, but there will always be some that I cannot respond to due to time constraints, not least Mr Cree's long list of issues. I will come back to him on those.

I conclude by once again highlighting the critical importance of obtaining the Assembly's agreement to the 2015 Budget Bill. Not only will it sanction final public expenditure plans for this financial year but it will ensure that our Departments have legal authority to spend in the first few months of 2015-16. That is critical to safeguard the smooth functioning and delivery of essential public services.

In the time that this debate has happened I have moved from my wife's birthday to my eldest son's birthday —

A Member: And Stephen Moutray's birthday.

Mr Hamilton: Stephen Moutray's birthday as well. Happy birthday. Given the degree of self-indulgence that there has been at times during the debate this evening, can I indulge the House by wishing Lewis a happy ninth birthday?

Some Members: Hear, hear.

Mr Hamilton: On that note, I commend to Members the 2015 Budget Bill.

Mr Attwood: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I ask you to check the Hansard record of my earlier comments about investment in west Belfast and in south and east Belfast. You will see what the Hansard record says, as opposed to what other people claim was said.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): The Member has put his point on the record. Before we proceed to the Question, I remind Members that, as this is the Budget Bill, cross-community support is required.

Question put.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 58; Noes 21.

AYES

Nationalist

Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr Brady, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Hazzard, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McKay, Mr McMullan, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr Ó Muilleoir, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Ms Ruane.

Unionist

Mr Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Mr Buchanan, Mrs Cameron, Mr Craig, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mr Hamilton, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr McCausland, Mr B McCrea, Mr I McCrea, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Mr Moutray, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir.

Other

Mr Dickson, Dr Farry.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr McQuillan and Mr G Robinson.

NOES

Nationalist

Mr Attwood, Mr D Bradley, Mr Eastwood, Mrs D Kelly, Dr McDonnell, Mr McGlone, Mrs McKevitt, Mr McKinney, Mr A Maginness, Mr Ramsey, Mr Rogers.

Unionist

Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson, Mr Elliott, Mr Gardiner, Mr Kinahan, Mr McCallister, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mr Swann.

Other

Mr Agnew.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr D Bradley and Mr McKinney.

Total Votes	*79*	*Total Ayes*	*58*	*[73.4%]*
Nationalist Votes	*37*	*Nationalist Ayes*	*26*	*[70.3%]*
Unionist Votes	*39*	*Unionist Ayes*	*30*	*[76.9%]*
Other Votes	*3*	*Other Ayes*	*2*	*[66.7%]*

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved (with cross-community support):

That the Budget Bill [NIA Bill 45/11-16] do now pass.

Adjourned at 12.50 am.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 2 March 2015

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Ministerial Statement

Civil Service Departments: Reduction/Names/Functions

Mr Speaker: The First Minister wishes to make a statement.

Mr P Robinson (The First Minister): Mr Speaker, I want to make a statement to the Assembly on recent decisions reached by the Executive on the names and functions of future Departments.

There is a commitment in the Programme for Government to agree changes to the structures of government that will operate in the next Assembly mandate. One of the areas covered by last year's political talks was institutional reform. The Stormont House Agreement of 23 December 2014 included a commitment that the number of Departments should be reduced from 12 to nine in time for the 2016 Assembly election, with the new allocation of departmental functions to be agreed by the parties. Given the pressing timescale, it was important that early decisions were made on the names and functions of the future Departments. The matter was discussed in January by the party leaders, convened in an implementation group set up to follow through on the Stormont House Agreement commitments. Furthermore, the Executive discussed departmental reorganisation extensively at no fewer than four meetings during January and February. Those discussions concluded at last Thursday's Executive meeting. I am now able to announce the decisions that have been reached on the departmental structures coming into operation next year.

The following will be the nine future Departments.

The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs will bring together most of the existing functions of DARD with the inland fisheries functions of DCAL and most of DOE's environmental functions, including regulation. It will also take on OFMDFM's current policy responsibility for sustainability strategy.

The Department for Communities will combine the existing functions of DSD with most DCAL functions, with the exceptions being inland fisheries and waterways. It will also take over DEL's employment service and DOE's responsibilities for local government and built heritage. In addition, the future Department will assume a range of OFMDFM delivery and operational functions on the social investment fund, racial equality, united communities and good relations, disability and poverty, gender and sexual orientation, and north-west sites and strategy.

The Department for the Economy will combine the functions of DETI and DEL, except for the employment service.

The Department of Education will continue the existing functions of DE, together with a range of children's services, including OFMDFM's policy responsibilities for the childcare strategy and for children and young people. The definition of children's services transferring to this new Department will need further refinement, though it is agreed that child protection will remain with the Department of Health.

The Department of Finance will continue with the existing functions of DFP, but also take over from OFMDFM the government advertising unit and the NI Direct central editorial team.

The Department of Health will continue the existing functions of DHSSPS, except for public safety. It will also take on OFMDFM's policy responsibilities for older people and the active ageing strategy.

The Department for Infrastructure will exercise the existing responsibilities of DRD, but will also take on a range of functions from other existing Departments: vehicle regulation, road safety and Driver and Vehicle Agency functions from DOE; the Rivers Agency from DARD; inland waterways from DCAL; and, from OFMDFM, the strategic investment unit and several regeneration sites, including the Crumlin Road Gaol.

The Department of Justice will continue the existing functions of DOJ, but will also take responsibility for public safety from DHSSPS, and the support function for the Planning Appeals Commission/Water Appeals Commission from OFMDFM.

Finally, our Department, OFMDFM, will be significantly transformed. Its new name will be the Executive Office. As is clear from the previous description of the functions of the other Executive Departments, OFMDFM will be transferring most of its delivery functions. It will retain its role in supporting the Executive and the central institutions, including coordination of the Programme for Government, international relations, civil contingencies and the executive information service. Policy responsibility and coordination will remain in relation to equality, good relations, the Together: Building a United Community strategy and Delivering Social Change. Sponsorship and support for a number of key institutions will also be retained, notably the Attorney General's Office, the Equality Commission, the Commissioner for Public Appointments, the Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Commission, the historical institutional abuse inquiry, the

Maze/Long Kesh Development Corporation, the Victims and Survivors Service and the Commissioner for Victims and Survivors.

That, then, is the general shape of the future departmental system as agreed by the Executive. It will be subject to further refinement of details as work proceeds on the legislative implementation of these decisions.

These are machinery of government changes. No functions are being done away with and no policies terminated. Staff will follow functions, and there may be a certain amount of early disruption. However, once the changes have been effected, there will undoubtedly be greater efficiency. There will be fewer Ministers and departmental hierarchies. Permanent secretaries, central management units, press offices and support functions can all be rationalised.

This will be administratively challenging, but a broadly based programme board has been established to set direction and oversee implementation. The Executive have also agreed the drafting of a Departments Bill and a Transfer of Functions Order to provide a legislative basis for these changes. We aim to introduce the Departments Bill to the Assembly after the Easter recess. A more detailed Transfer of Functions Order will be available for Assembly scrutiny later this year. There will be extensive opportunity for the Assembly to consider and debate these changes.

This will be the most extensive reorganisation of the departmental system since 1999. It provides an opportunity for a leaner, more joined-up Administration, with improved cohesion between, and within, Departments. This should mean ultimately greater efficiency in our Administration and improved services to our citizens.

Mr Nesbitt (The Chairperson of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): I welcome the First Minister's statement and the commitment to deliver on this important Stormont House Agreement commitment. The Minister talks about a significant transformation in his own Department. He will be aware that OFMDFM is sometimes ridiculed for having more staff than 10 Downing Street or the west wing of the White House. I wonder what the implications are for staffing, as OFMDFM becomes the Executive Office and sheds its delivery functions.

Mr P Robinson: I am grateful for the question, not least because it allows me to ridicule those who make the comparison between the White House and a delivery Department, which is what OFMDFM was, with hundreds of staff acting as a full Department rather than just as an Executive office. It will be massively transformed; the staff complement will be significantly reduced. Only at a later stage will we be able to indicate precisely what that division will be, but, after this change, it will be one of the most effective and efficient organisations that one could possibly imagine.

Mr Moutray: I thank the First Minister for his statement. Can the First Minister indicate what the rationale is for a single name for most Departments?

Mr P Robinson: I think that my friend will be aware that literally hundreds of functions are carried out by Departments. We went through this at the Executive meeting, and each of the Departments would have maybe 10 major functions outlined if one were to give standing to each of those elements. We tried where possible — for most of the Departments, it was possible — to get some generic title that would cover the range of functions that they will hold. The one Department for which it was not quite possible to do that was the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs because it is very hard to get a generic term that will cover each of those sometimes diverse functions. It is to make it less confusing. It will take some time, I suppose, for everybody to get used to which Department carries out various functions, but, as no functions have been terminated, no policies have been brought to an end and all the functions of government will still go on, I think that the easier that the title is for people to remember, the better.

Ms McGahan: Go raibh maith agat. I thank the First Minister for his statement. Minister, do you feel that the reduction in Departments will help to reduce the silo mentality that exists in the Departments?

Mr P Robinson: Yes, I think that the silo mentality is worsened because of the system of government that we have. The Departments almost take on a party flavour. You talk about Sinn Féin Departments or DUP Departments or SDLP, Alliance or Ulster Unionist Departments, and people should be focused on what is actually being delivered by those Departments. Whatever we do here, the purpose of it is not simply some moving around of the responsibilities that each of the parties will have; this is about getting a proper, efficient, functioning Executive. I think that the longer that the Executive work together the more that we will be able to get that collectivity that is necessary in the Executive and the more that people will look at the overall picture. Indeed, from St Andrews, it has been necessary, I think, for Ministers in a Department to win support from their colleagues for any novel, contentious or cross-cutting issue. I think that that adds to the collective responsibility that we each have one to the other.

Mr Attwood: I thank the First Minister for his statement. Which new Department and which new Minister will in future be responsible for strategic planning and taking article 31 decisions? Given that you have said that the numbers of staff in OFMDFM will be significantly reduced, can you indicate, in round terms, whether that will be 40%, 50% or 60%? Will that extend to the number of special advisers — SpAds — that OFMDFM enjoys?

Mr P Robinson: I think that the remaining planning functions go to the Department for Infrastructure. I cannot tell you who the Minister will be because these will take effect after the next Assembly election.

Mr Hamilton: It could be you.

Mr P Robinson: It may well be that we will have 100% of the seats, and, therefore, I could perhaps give you a name. Whoever the Minister is, I think that you will have a much more coherent Department with all the infrastructure issues being dealt with together.

This will reduce the number of Ministers.

It may have an impact on the number of junior Ministers. Some larger Departments might argue that they have a better case for a junior Minister than the Executive Office. The SpAds will follow the Ministers wherever they go, but there will be fewer special advisers because of the reduced number of Departments. That should bring joy to some people in the House at least.

12.15 pm

Mr Lyttle: I welcome progress on the important Stormont House commitment to improve the effectiveness of the Northern Ireland Executive. Will the First Minister provide an update on the Stormont House commitment to deliver an independent audit of the cost of division to all Departments to ensure service delivery that promotes sharing over separation in Northern Ireland?

Mr P Robinson: As we are dealing with a specific issue about Departments and functions, that does not exactly sit alongside it. However, an implementation group has been set up as a result of the Stormont House Agreement, and the leaders of each party and some of their colleagues are on it. If the Member feels that progress is not fast enough, I am sure that he will get the ear of his party leader and tell him that he is not moving fast enough.

Mrs Hale: I thank the First Minister for his statement to the House this afternoon. You reiterated that no functions are being done away with and no policies are being terminated, so do you expect financial savings when the changes take place?

Mr P Robinson: Unquestionably, there will be savings, which might come to the Assembly as well as to the Executive. When you cut out three private offices, three permanent secretaries and their staff and all the paraphernalia of government that goes with them, there are savings to be made. If you have nine rather than 12 Committees covering Departments, I am sure that the Assembly will also offer money back to my colleague the Minister of Finance on the savings that will be made here.

Mr A Maginness: I thank the First Minister for his statement. With the proposed disappearance of DCAL, there is an obvious point to be made about the role of arts and sport in our community. That will be absorbed in the Department for Communities, but would it not have been more appropriate to have included, together with communities, a reference to the arts and sport, given their central importance?

Mr P Robinson: I mentioned to my colleague that there are hundreds of functions of government, and I am sure that all Assembly Members will have their own view of what the real priorities are. However, if one were to look at the Department for Communities and add “arts” to the title, is the Member saying that that is more important than housing; urban regeneration; the Social Security Agency; child maintenance services; the voluntary and community sector; museums; libraries; creativity and architecture; language; cultural diversity; sport; the Public Record Office; employment services; local government; the social investment fund; and racial equality? I could go on and on. If the argument is that arts is more important than all those issues, the Member can ask the question, but I do not believe that it is more important than many of those issues. That is why a generic title serves the Department much better.

Mr Spratt: I thank the First Minister for his statement to the House this afternoon. If changes are being made to the number of Departments for 2016, why are we waiting until 2021 to change the number of MLAs?

Mr P Robinson: After over a decade of my party arguing for a reduction in the number of Departments, I do not want my joy to be dampened in any way now that that is crystallising in the Assembly. We also want a reduction in the number of Assembly Members.

During the talks process, my party argued that it should be down to somewhere in the region of 70. We were prepared to compromise in the region of 90. At the end of the day, the Stormont House Agreement said that it would be reduced to 90 by 2021, but it could be done for 2016 and would still be within the terms set out in the agreement. I hope that, in the implementation group the party leaders are in, we can convince people that a faster timetable is possible. There is no legislative reason why it could not be done, there would be significant savings and it would make the Assembly more in line, though not entirely in line, with the representation in Scotland and Wales. The Assembly is still two or three times as large, per head of the population, as Scotland and Wales. I think everybody recognises that it needs to be done, and I hope we have sufficient stability here for people to think that this is the right time to do it.

Mr Kinahan: I find this fascinating. It will be great to see the Department of the Economy coming on board, which I think was Lord Empey’s idea many years ago.

Will the Executive move on from being a two-party system or, using the implementation groups, will it move to involving all parties in the consensus that we are working towards, particularly in how we link with the Government at Westminster to deal with the reserved matters that affect us? We do not seem to have any suitable links for pulling things together.

Mr P Robinson: Far be it from me to remind the Member that it was his party that created the system. We have been able to refine and improve it as time has gone on, but it should not be a two-party system. We have a full-time implementation body: it is called the Executive. All the Executive parties are there, and all take part in the discussions that we have and the decisions that are made. I hope that, as time goes on, the smaller parties — I have to point out that not all of the three smaller parties are in the same category on this — recognise that they have a responsibility to their colleagues in the Executive to take the position that is collectively agreed, rather than trying to score party political points outside and look for issues where they can try to undermine the two main parties. The onus is not on the two main parties but on those who choose to separate themselves from an Executive decision.

Mr G Robinson: My question could be partially answered, but could I ask the First Minister whether any consideration has been given to the role of junior Ministers?

Mr P Robinson: Junior Ministers were thought to be necessary in OFMDFM because, unknown to a number of people — at least if they know, they have not let on — OFMDFM takes in the broad range of work of all of the government Departments and therefore, both in terms of special advisers and the need for junior Ministers, it is recognised that there is a considerable workload across the range of government responsibilities. We will maintain all the strategic roles, issues and functions of OFMDFM, but we will have a much more strategic role, rather than a delivery role. That will allow greater coordination between Departments in the future. I indicated in my statement that this was the broad outline of what we wanted to do.

It was necessary for us to have agreement on what the Departments would be and what they would be called because we have to start preparing the legislation. We can refine the functions further. There is still room for us to discuss some of those issues. We still have not decided whether junior Ministers are needed in the new Executive Office, whether they should go to other Departments and whether there is a view that, because more business will be carried out by other Departments, they have a greater call for a junior Minister. Those issues have not been decided. The responsibility for that lies with the deputy First Minister and me. We have the sole responsibility under the legislation for determining whether there are junior Ministers and where they should be. The deputy First Minister and I will discuss that in the future.

Ms Lo: I welcome the Minister's statement, particularly the inclusion of "Environment" in the new Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs. However, given the recent examples of us facing imminent risk of infraction fines over horse mussels in Strangford lough due to the opposing objectives of DARD and DOE, what safeguards will be put in place to ensure that the interests of the agriculture and fishing industries will not trump the protection of the environment?

Mr P Robinson: The safeguard is in the hands of the Minister, the Committee and those who have the responsibility. I would have thought that having the two of them in the one Department allows for greater coordination and hopefully a greater understanding of the pros and cons of each issue. Ultimately, the responsibility lies, as it always has, with a Minister, and the responsibility for calling that Minister to account lies, as it always has, with a departmental Committee set up by the Assembly.

Mr Dunne: I thank the First Minister for his statement. Can he clarify if it is necessary to wait until after 2016 to make changes to OFMDFM functions?

Mr P Robinson: The present timetable requires us to get a Bill through the House so that it becomes a Departments Act and to get a functions order through the Assembly. If we were to decide to reallocate the functions of any Department — the Member mentions OFMDFM's delivery functions — it could be done legally and it could be done within the time that is allocated. I am not sure that there is a great advantage in making that change for what would probably end up being about eight or nine months, because you would be spreading those amongst the 11 existing Departments, as opposed to the eight other Departments that would be in place after the election. While it could be done, I do not see any real advantage in doing it, and it seems that the election and a new Assembly is the right time for the complete change to take place.

Mr Wilson: The cost savings that will result from this exercise are important during a time of financial restraint, but the real goal is to achieve much more efficient, joined-up and effective delivery of government. Can the First Minister outline how he believes this change will help us to move away from the silo mentality of separate Departments and lead to more strategic joined-up decision-making and policies?

Mr P Robinson: My friend is entirely correct in indicating what the purpose and value of the changes will be. While the silo mentality is ultimately in the minds of individuals as opposed to the structure of any Department, the fact that there will be fewer Departments obviously makes it easier for coordination and cooperation between them. There is also greater recognition that, as we mature as an Assembly, we need to look towards joined-up government and that Departments, even when you reduce them to the number that we have, will still have overlap and will still have the necessity to work with each other. I hope that the silo mentality will be removed from the minds of Ministers. The reductions that we have had and the savings that will flow from them are entirely in line with what we have been attempting to do at a time of great financial difficulty.

Of course, I recognise, and I should put on record, that we are putting a significant burden on our Civil Service, which is already having to handle significant change as a result of the reduction in size of the public service. This requires very careful work to ensure that front-line services are not adversely affected and will also involve moving staff around Departments. The Civil Service will therefore be under very considerable pressure over the next number of months, and we should put on record our appreciation. We can take a decision at an Executive meeting, in an implementation body or at Stormont House, but civil servants have to do the work on the ground to put it in place.

12.30 pm

Mr Allister: Reducing the Departments to nine is good, as far it goes; but I am more interested in democratising the appointment of Ministers to Departments. We are about to have a general election. If the Stormont system applied, Cameron, Miliband and Clegg would all end up in Downing Street, and there would be no Opposition. How absurd that would be — how unworkable, as this place demonstrates. When will we bring into line with the rest of the democratic world the way in which we appoint Ministers?

Mr P Robinson: When the Member joins with me and is able to convince other colleagues in this House that a voluntary coalition is the right way to go. I went to Stormont House, and I argued for that; however, we came out with the highest level of agreement possible. I recognise entirely that, as time goes on, we have to democratise and normalise the Assembly much more, and that can only be done if we get something akin to the system that we had at Westminster. I am not sure that his analogy was the best in the present circumstances: who knows who will be in the next Government of the United Kingdom?

Mr Agnew: How can the new Department of Education protect other children's services, particularly early years services for children before they start school, given the draw on resources by schools?

Mr P Robinson: This statement does not go into the allocation of funding. What will happen, I suspect, is that the Finance Minister, when looking at future Budgets, will look at the funds received for the various functions and pass them on to the new Department responsible. There will always be a call for more money for every element of government. Indeed, I could have argued a long time ago that children's functions should have gone to the Department of Education. It has now been recognised that all children's services, excepting those that relate to health, will be in the Department of Education, which is the right place for them in my view.

In terms of the finance, I hope that, when we come to the Budget, a more responsible attitude will be taken by some

people in this House, who simply want to vote against a Budget, no matter what it is. When you allocate funds, it is always easy to look at the various permutations, but the hard decision has to be taken, and, in circumstances where our Budget has been massively reduced over the last number of years because of decisions taken by the coalition Government, those decisions become harder and harder. By saving money, by reducing the number of Departments and their staff, we are taking a further step to the reform of public services that my colleague is taking forward.

Mr B McCrea: I ask the First Minister about silos and finances. As the First Minister will be aware, in-year monitoring rounds are important for the efficient management of government, but many of the surrenders of funds are complicated by historical factors. Some can be transferred within a Department; others must go back to the centre. When we amalgamate certain Departments, will he give an undertaking that we will ensure that we can do interdepartmental funding without having to return funds to the centre?

Mr P Robinson: My advice to the Finance Minister would be not to do that. To give any Minister the ability to move money around the various functions in a Department would be a retrograde step. The Executive, collectively, need to make the determination on each of the heads of expenditure and be satisfied that that is the right balance. It would be wrong for any Minister to take it out of balance.

As we go through a year, there will be circumstances where, if there are savings in one area, the Finance Minister can allocate them to other Departments or give flexibility to a Minister to use those savings in his or her Department. My view is that we are far better having a system where everything comes back to the centre and is reallocated. On that basis, you can look at a priority in a Department as opposed to what the priority might be in another Department; that is how money should be allocated.

When we enter a new Assembly and a new CSR period, all previous bets are off; it will be up to the Executive to take the decision about how funds are allocated in-year as well as over the Budget period.

Ms Sugden: I welcome the reduction in the number of Departments, but it acknowledges the Departments' failure to work together for efficiency and the betterment of Northern Ireland. How will the First Minister encourage his Executive to start working together right now so that we can hit the ground running when the changes are made?

Mr P Robinson: There needs to be an open and honest acknowledgement that no politician in their right senses would have produced a government with 12 Departments, as was done here. It was done for entirely political reasons; it was done to have the maximum number of people in the Executive so that there would be a share-out to parties that were smaller than the main parties. It was done, no doubt, for the best of intentions; it was important to get as wide a buy-in to the process as possible.

None of that, whether it is nine Departments or 12, should stop colleagues working together effectively and efficiently. We are from different Departments, and there are coalitions that are much less successful than ours elsewhere in the world, including some not too far from where we are. There are difficulties in operating a coalition of any form. To have a mandatory coalition, where you are put into an Executive not because you have common views but because you have a percentage of the vote, shows just how difficult it is to operate. Much more credit should be given to the fact that, in spite of the massive ideological differences amongst the parties, they have been able to work to the level that they have together and that they have been able to reach some significant agreements.

Mr Beggs: I give a general welcome to the new departmental layout. I see savings and efficiencies coming from it, and there will also be an opportunity for better coordination to meet the needs of people. In terms of the operational aspects of the social investment fund, which are transferring to the Department of the community, which is largely built on DSD, is that a recognition of the delays in setting up the social investment fund and getting moneys out on the ground, and the inefficiency of having that duplication of service that already exists under DSD and local government?

Mr P Robinson: It is the same recognition that there is with every other delivery function that is being taken out of OFMDFM. We want to make the new Executive office a strategic Department rather than a delivery Department. That makes sense for the overview that we have and the role that we have of coordinating the Executive. It also makes sense because it is bound to be easier for one Minister to take a decision than it is for two Ministers to take a decision, no matter how agreeable they might be. The fact is that we have removed most, if not all, the delivery functions from the Executive office to make it a Department that will have a strategic overview of all the Executive's work, and, particularly, some of the issues that are allocated to it in policy terms.

Executive Committee Business

Special Educational Needs and Disability Bill: First Stage

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): I beg to introduce the Special Educational Needs and Disability Bill [NIA 46/11-16], which is a Bill to amend the law relating to special education and disability discrimination in schools.

Bill passed First Stage and ordered to be printed.

Health and Social Care (Safety and Quality) Bill: Legislative Consent Motion

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

> *That this Assembly endorses the principle of the extension to Northern Ireland of the provisions of the Health and Social Care (Safety and Quality) Bill, as introduced in the House of Commons on 2 July 2014, contained in clause 5 and paragraphs 1 to 6 of the schedule dealing with the objectives of regulators of health and social care professionals.*

In July of last year, the Secretary of State for Health, Jeremy Hunt MP, wrote to former Minister Poots seeking his agreement to a legislative consent motion (LCM) on provisions contained in a private Member's Bill that was introduced in Westminster in that same month by Jeremy Lefroy, the MP for Stafford. The full title of the Bill is the Health and Social Care (Safety and Quality) Bill, and it has a wide patient-safety theme following on from the events at the Mid Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust.

At the outset, it is important to say that the vast majority of the provisions in the Bill apply to England only. Members will be aware that any Westminster Bill that seeks to introduce changes that relate to a devolved matter must be agreed by the Assembly by means of a legislative consent motion. One provision in the Bill relates to the regulation of health-care professionals, which is a devolved matter for Northern Ireland. A legislative consent motion is therefore required for the provision. It is that provision to which I now want to draw Members' attention.

The provision seeks to introduce an overarching public-protection objective for health-care professional regulators — for example, the Nursing and Midwifery Council and the General Dental Council — and the Professional Standards Authority for Health and Social Care, which oversees the work of the health-care regulators. It is intended that the provision will apply on a UK-wide basis. That is because, with the exception of pharmacy, the jurisdiction of the health-care professional regulators is UK-wide, as is the jurisdiction of the Professional Standards Authority.

The clause introduces an overarching objective of public protection, with further objectives relating to public safety, public confidence in the professions and proper professional standards, each of which are of equal importance. There is well-established case law setting out the expectation that regulators and their fitness-to-practise panels will consider those objectives. However, the Bill seeks to establish those explicitly and consistently in statute. In practice, that will give regulators a clear and consistent legal basis on which to act with confidence to ensure the protection of the public.

The approach of having an overarching public-protection objective, together with the three related objectives, secures the focus on public protection that regulators were keen to emphasise, while also ensuring that regulatory bodies are able to act, where appropriate, in the absence of any explicit patient-safety issue; for example, where a registrant has engaged in behaviour that might undermine public confidence in the profession to such a degree that it would make the public reluctant to seek that individual's help but where the issue is not related to professional competence or patient safety. The Bill also requires the

regulators' panels and committees dealing with fitness-to-practise issues to have regard to the objectives. That will help contribute to ensuring ongoing public confidence in the professional regulatory system.

The Department of Health in England has confirmed that the Professional Standards Authority and the regulators affected are content with the regulatory provisions in the Bill. However, those bodies' general position is that the private Member's Bill does not go far enough, as the legal framework governing regulation of health-care professionals requires more significant reform.

12.45 pm

Members will be aware that the United Kingdom law commissions, including the Northern Ireland Law Commission, jointly undertook a review of the regulation of health-care professionals. They published their final report, together with a draft Bill, in April 2014, and a copy of that Bill was laid before the Assembly. The aim of the work was to make recommendations for a clear, modern and effective legal framework for now and for the future. In fact, the regulatory provisions in the private Member's Bill are derived from two of the commissions' key recommendations. The regulators and the Professional Standards Authority are eager for the commissions' reforms to be implemented as a priority.

On 29 January 2015, the UK Government issued a joint response to the commissions' report on behalf of the four United Kingdom Health Ministers. In the response, the Government accepted the large majority of the recommendations whilst acknowledging that further work will be required in some other areas. Government officials, including those from my Department, will continue to work constructively with the Department of Health in England, the other devolved Administrations and the bodies affected to progress those issues.

The response highlighted again that the UK Government remain committed to legislate in this important area when parliamentary time allows. In the interim, a number of pieces of secondary legislation have been introduced UK-wide to improve the regulatory bodies' processes in order to enhance patient safety and improve public confidence. The regulatory measure included in the private Member's Bill seeks to build on that.

Members should note that the private Member's Bill will not introduce the overarching public protection objective for either the General Medical Council, which regulates doctors on a UK-wide basis, or the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland, which regulates pharmacists in Northern Ireland only. With regard to the Pharmaceutical Society, the Department of Health in England identified issues with applying the overarching public protection objective provision to the society. Whilst legislative amendments in 2012 enabled an enhanced role in public protection and regulatory activity for the society, its current objectives, set out in the Pharmacy (Northern Ireland) Order 1976, are more reflective of a leadership and membership organisation rather than one focused on public protection. Therefore, introduction of the new proposed public protection objective would represent a fundamental change to the society's statutory basis.

I agree with the position taken by my ministerial colleague in England, and the Bill is not an appropriate vehicle to introduce such a change to the arrangements for regulation for the pharmacy profession in Northern Ireland. I also understand that the society has not raised any objections to its exclusion from the Bill.

I can also advise Members that I have asked departmental officials to begin preparatory work to explore options for the future arrangements for the regulation of the pharmacy profession in Northern Ireland. That will include consideration of the existing professional leadership role of the Pharmaceutical Society. I will continue to keep the Assembly and the Health Committee updated on that as work develops.

In relation to the General Medical Council, the overarching public protection objective will be introduced through a different UK-wide legislative order, which is being taken forward.

In conclusion, the UK Governments, including my Department, support the Bill as it relates to the regulation of health-care professionals. As this is a devolved matter, a legislative consent motion is required. It is important that the provisions extend to Northern Ireland to ensure that we retain parity with the rest of the United Kingdom in that regard so that the public in Northern Ireland can be assured that they are safeguarded in the same way and afforded the same protections as other UK citizens.

On that basis, I ask the Assembly to support the motion.

Mr McCarthy: I take this opportunity to thank Minister Wells for bringing the LCM to the Assembly today. Speaking on behalf of the Alliance Party, I support the legislative consent motion. It is a somewhat unusual LCM, in that we are lending our support to a private Member's Bill progressing through Westminster. However, given that the UK Government are supporting the Bill and notwithstanding the reality that health care, including the role of health-care workers, is devolved, there is an understanding of maintaining a common framework for regulation across different jurisdictions, especially in the context of greater mobility between jurisdictions and even mobility by patients and those in care. It is important that we do what we can to enhance protection of those who are most vulnerable, maintain public confidence and uphold standards.

With those few words on this important issue, I am happy to relay the Alliance Party's agreement to the LCM.

Mr Speaker: With those few words, it is back to the Minister.

Mr Wells: I was expecting many more contributions. Maybe they have all been won over by my oratory; I do not know.

I welcome MLA McCarthy's comments. He makes a very valid observation that, more and more within the United Kingdom, patients and medical staff are moving back and forward across the borders of the four jurisdictions. Therefore, it is very important that we have parity and that members of the public in Northern Ireland feel that they have exactly the same regulatory framework as those in England, Scotland and Wales. I am glad to say that the standard of medical care in Northern Ireland is extremely high and the number of referrals to any regulatory body is a very small proportion of the number of engagements with patients. However, we all still need to have the confidence that, if things do go wrong, there is a very effective and rigorous framework in which to deal with it. I welcome the

fact that the Member who contributed is supporting the Department in this.

As I said, the Bill will introduce a consistent overarching objective for the Professional Standards Authority and the regulators of the affected groups of health-care professionals, including dentists, nurses, midwives and opticians, and will ensure that public protection is at the heart of what the Professional Standards Authority and these professional regulators do. The Bill will contribute to public protection, by providing clarity and consistency across the roles of the PSA and these regulators, and will increase public confidence in the professional regulatory system.

It is important that Northern Ireland continues to retain parity with the rest of the UK in relation to the regulation of health-care professionals. Therefore, I commend the motion to the House. The legislative consent motion came before the Health Committee for scrutiny, and the Committee was broadly supportive of it. I welcome that. I suspect that the fact that the Committee has done much of the scrutiny work already is why this particular legislative consent motion has not attracted a great deal of debate.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

> *That this Assembly endorses the principle of the extension to Northern Ireland of the provisions of the Health and Social Care (Safety and Quality) Bill, as introduced in the House of Commons on 2 July 2014, contained in clause 5 and paragraphs 1 to 6 of the schedule dealing with the objectives of regulators of health and social care professionals.*

Donaghadee Harbour (Transfer of Harbour Undertaking) Order (Northern Ireland) 2015

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): I beg to move

> *That the Donaghadee Harbour (Transfer of Harbour Undertaking) Order (Northern Ireland) 2015 be affirmed.*

The harbour is managed by my Department, overseen by the Donaghadee Harbour Commissioners, who are civil servants from my Department. Two staff, a harbour master and an assistant, are employed directly at the harbour. My Department is not well placed to manage a harbour or to oversee it remotely from Clarence Court. The focus has been on keeping the harbour open and as safe as is practicable, with due regard being given to its special heritage qualities.

More recently, our policy has been to transfer Donaghadee harbour from its current status as a trust port to that of a municipal harbour owned and managed by the relevant local authority. There are firm practical grounds supporting this option. Local councils are already harbour authorities and, therefore, competent to undertake the associated management responsibilities. The transfer would also address the practical difficulties and inefficiencies associated with operating a singleton harbour; for example, in arranging emergency cover and maximising the utilisation of the specialised harbour staff. It would also enable the anachronistic legislation associated with the harbour to be repealed. Sometimes words are easier written than said; I must speak again to my officials. *[Laughter.]* The transfer is linked to the review of public administration proposals and the reorganisation of councils and is, therefore, expected to happen in parallel with those changes from 1 April 2015. The order has been subject to public consultation in accordance with the Department's guidelines. My Department is grateful for the responses that have been received to the consultation and notes that there were no objections to the order.

I am also grateful for the consideration that has been given to the proposal by my Executive colleagues and the Regional Development Committee. The Examiner of Statutory Rules has also considered the order and did not make any formal comments in his ninth report of this session. That has allowed the order to be brought forward to the debate to seek affirmation.

In summary, the order will transfer Donaghadee harbour from the commissioners to North Down and Ards District Council — *[Interruption.]* Ards Borough Council.

Miss M McIlveen: Ards.

Mr Hamilton: Ards and North Down.

Mr Kennedy: That might become a matter for resignation. I had better correct that. *[Laughter.]* That will include all the functions, property rights, liabilities and obligations. The two members of staff who are employed at the harbour will also transfer to the council, and that will be achieved through the promotion of a transfer scheme. The order will also seek to wind up and dissolve the existing commission. I, therefore, recommend the Donaghadee Harbour (Transfer of Harbour Undertaking) Order to the House.

Mr Clarke (The Chairperson of the Committee for Regional Development): The Committee for Regional Development considered the policy for the legislation

at its meeting of 10 December 2014 and was content with the merits of the policy. The statutory rule came before members at the meeting of 18 February 2014, and members had no objections to it. The Committee for Regional Development, therefore, supports the motion.

Mr Lyttle: I welcome the detail that the Minister has set out on the proposals. On behalf of Alliance Party council colleagues in the area and businesspeople who have been in touch with me, I seek his assurances that the transfer will be conducted with the harbour in an adequate state of repair.

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the members and Chair of the Regional Development Committee for their positive support and the scrutiny that they have undertaken. I thank the Chair for that. I also indicate to Mr Lyttle that my officials have been in close consultation with council officials to resolve any outstanding issues. We confidently expect those to be resolved in time for the transfer to take legal effect.

I am glad that the House has agreed the transfer of Donaghadee harbour. I am somewhat sorry to see it go. It never had a navy. Nonetheless, I think that the council will be best placed to undertake its management in the future. I wish all the staff involved well and thank them for their contribution.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

> *That the Donaghadee Harbour (Transfer of Harbour Undertaking) Order (Northern Ireland) 2015 be affirmed.*

Rates (Temporary Rebate) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2015

Mr Speaker: The next item on the Order Paper is a motion to affirm the first of three statutory rules from the Minister of Finance and Personnel.

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

> *That the Rates (Temporary Rebate) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2015 be affirmed.*

Before I deal with the statutory rule, I will set out some background to the measure. The purpose of the legislation is to extend the empty shops rates concession. That was introduced in April 2012 and was subsequently extended for a further two years in April 2013. The concession was introduced as an amendment to the Rates Amendment Act (Northern Ireland) 2012. At that time, a package of measures was introduced to rebalance the rating system to assist ailing businesses and to improve the appearance of our town and city centres.

1.00 pm

The empty shops rates concession serves to provide a one-year concession which effectively allows 50% empty property relief to continue for one year when a qualifying property which has been empty for at least one year becomes occupied again.

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

The current legislative provision under article 31D of the Rates (Northern Ireland) Order 1977, as inserted by the Rates (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2012, permits applications for this concession until 31 March 2015. The window for applications will close soon and, following the success of this scheme, I have made the decision to extend the application period to the end of the current Budget period.

Unfortunately, there remains a need to provide whatever assistance we can to counteract the many shop closures and the effect that this has had on the vitality of our towns and cities. The extension of this concession will allow Land and Property Services (LPS) to continue to receive applications for the scheme up until 31 March 2016.

This scheme has been a huge success. So far, it has seen 375 new businesses get up and running across Northern Ireland. Also, since the scheme was introduced in April 2012, data that was produced by the Northern Ireland Retail Consortium in February 2015 shows that the vacancy rate in Northern Ireland has reduced to 16·3%. Although the picture has improved slightly, I think that there is still a need for a scheme of this type.

The range of businesses that have benefited from the scheme include a fish market in Enniskillen, a children's clothes shop in Larne, a gift shop in Londonderry, a restaurant in Belfast city centre and a hotel in Ballycastle. They all created new jobs for local people.

I feel that this is a policy that makes a real difference to business start-ups, particularly in town centres and on arterial routes. Furthermore, it is a sensible measure in terms of cost. In all likelihood, the Executive would not have been getting any more revenue from these units

through rates if they had continued to be empty. Therefore, it is effectively a cost-neutral policy.

Beyond that, after an initial period of reduced liability, these businesses will end up paying full rates after the difficult first year of trading is over, so it may even prove to bring in more money than it costs. Such has been the success of the scheme that similar schemes have now been introduced in all other parts of the United Kingdom. It was this Executive that led the way, having listened to and taken on board ideas from retailers and traders.

My Executive colleagues and members of the Finance and Personnel Committee have been advised on the detail of the statutory rule. The Committee indicated that it was content for applications to be received for the empty shops rates concession until 31 March 2016. Article 1 of the order sets out the citation and commencement. Article 2 provides for the amendment of article 31D of the Rates (Northern Ireland) Order 1977, substituting the new end date of 31 March 2016.

In conclusion, I look forward to Members' comments and commend the Rates (Temporary Rebate) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2015 to the House.

Mr McKay (The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle.

I thank the Minister for his remarks. As has been outlined by the Minister, the purpose of the rule is to amend paragraph 2 of article 31D of the Rates (NI) Order 1977. This would allow an extension for applications to the empty retail premises rate rebates scheme beyond the present March 2015 closing date until the end of the present Budget period in March 2016.

In 2012, the Committee was first advised of the initial proposal to provide 50% relief for one year to a new occupier of an empty shop. The initial scheme was limited to one year so as to reduce any unwanted displacement and minimise any advantage over established traders, and it also allowed the Department to review the success of the scheme during the initial period.

The Department undertook an early review of the scheme in 2013, which indicated that, although there had been a reasonable number of successful applicants throughout the time of the scheme, they were not evenly spread throughout the North and, as a result, the scheme was extended for two years. The purpose of the rule is to provide a further extension of the scheme to the end of this Budget period on 31 March 2016. The Committee formally considered the statutory rule that is before the Assembly at its meeting on 18 February. It also considered the accompanying report from the Assembly's Examiner of Statutory Rules, which raised no issues by way of technical scrutiny.

The Committee agreed to recommend that statutory rule 48/2015, the Rates (Temporary Rebate) (Amendment) Order (NI) 2015, be affirmed by the Assembly. I therefore support the motion.

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Member, the Chairman of the Committee, for his comments. I agree with him. I believe that this is a scheme that is worth preserving as it has been a major success story for the Department and the Executive.

The Member mentioned the geographical spread of the 375 new premises that have opened as a result of the scheme. I think that we should celebrate the fact that 375, probably fast-approaching 400, as we speak, have been confirmed as using this relief. Those businesses are spread across every district council area of Northern Ireland. I commented on a few in my opening remarks. The bulk of those — 77 — are in the Belfast area, as you would probably expect them to be, Mr Deputy Speaker. I have visited many across Northern Ireland, as did my predecessor, and they do a range of things. That shows the success of the scheme.

The fact that the scheme has been extended for a further year will suggest to Members that the Department and I will do what we can to promote the scheme, but it is also incumbent on Members to promote the scheme in their own areas. By extending the scheme, we can help to ensure that more empty commercial properties are brought back into use, thereby improving the appearance of towns and creating jobs in communities. I ask Members to support the measure. I commend the order to the Assembly.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

> *That the Rates (Temporary Rebate) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2015 be affirmed.*

Rates (Exemption for Automatic Telling Machines in Rural Areas) Order (Northern Ireland) 2015

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

> *That the Rates (Exemption for Automatic Telling Machines in Rural Areas) Order (Northern Ireland) 2015 be affirmed.*

This scheme was initially introduced in 2007 with the objective of encouraging and sustaining the provision of ATMs in rural areas. It was originally introduced in 2007 for a fixed period of three years, but it has been extended twice, following evaluation. The latest order provides for a further one-year extension for the 2015-16 Budget period until the end of March 2016.

It is not a big policy. It currently provides rates exemption to around 70 ATMs that would otherwise be liable for a separate rates bill of around £2,000 a year, but it is still an important policy for our rural communities. The number of ATMs that get the exemption has increased from 37 to 70 since the scheme was introduced. Perhaps, most importantly, the context has changed. It has done so in such a way that, I believe, this modest measure is even more important today than it was before, because of the closure of many rural bank branches.

If I may, I will outline what the scheme does. The exemption is provided for stand-alone ATMs that are individually valued in the valuation list, such as those located outside petrol stations or on high streets. It does not apply to those located in banks or building societies, which tend to be valued as part of that property.

The current cost of the scheme is around £130,000 in terms of revenue forgone. I consider that to be an affordable sum, given the benefits that it can bring. ATMs play an important role in the sustainability of rural economies. Evidence assessed by my Department demonstrated that money withdrawn locally is spent locally. Of every £10 withdrawn from a cash machine, almost two thirds is spent locally.

I turn now to the statutory rule itself. My Executive colleagues and members of the Finance and Personnel Committee have already been advised on its detail. The Committee indicated that it was content for individual, separately valued ATMs in designated rural areas to continue to be exempt from rates, particularly given the modest cost of the scheme.

Article 1 of the order sets out the citation, commencement and interpretation provisions, and article 2 provides for the extension of the relevant date, before which the scheme must end, to 1 April 2016.

In conclusion, I look forward to Members' comment and commend the Rates (Exemption for Automatic Telling Machines in Rural Areas) Order (Northern Ireland) 2015 to the House.

Mr McKay (The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The purpose of this rule is to extend the current rates exemption for any ATM that is assessed separately for rating purposes in a designated rural area from 31 March 2015 to 1 April 2016. ATMs that are located in banks or building societies tend to be valued as part of the property and are therefore not affected.

The exemption initially came into effect in 2007, and policy evaluations carried out in 2009 and 2012 showed increases in the number of rural ATMs. The Committee noted that, at present, Land and Property Services (LPS) has estimated that around 60 ATMs are covered by the scheme. The Department has estimated that the cost of the scheme in 2014-15 is just over £130,000, with an estimated cost of around £2,200 per ATM.

At its meeting on 14 January, the Committee considered the proposal to make the order. During that consideration, several points were raised about which designation of rural areas was being used for the scheme, who exactly assessed which of the machines was stand-alone or part of a building and who exactly would receive the exemption. The Committee was advised that NISRA provided the designation of rural areas, that the professional valuation officers from LPS assessed each ATM and decided whether it fell into the scheme's remit, and that the exemption would go to the individuals or group responsible for the stand-alone ATM.

On a minor technical point that I noted subsequent to the Committee receiving its briefing, perhaps the Minister could clarify why the rule provides for an extension to 1 April 2016, rather than 31 March, as has been the case in previous years.

The Committee was nonetheless satisfied with the Department's answers to its queries and had no objection to the policy proposals at that time. The formal statutory rule was subsequently considered at the Committee's meeting on 18 February 2015, together with the accompanying report from the Assembly's Examiner of Statutory Rules. The Examiner raised no issues by way of technical scrutiny.

The Committee agreed to recommend that the Assembly affirm statutory rule 46/2015, the Rates (Exemption for Automatic Telling Machines in Rural Areas) Order (NI) 2015.

As a rural MLA, I also support the motion on a party basis. I recall, as a councillor and an MLA, lobbying for many years to get ATMs in villages. I am sure that every rural MLA has done the same. This is a very worthwhile proposal. It is worth continuing, as it provides a great service to young and old alike in our countryside villages and towns.

Mr Hamilton: I again thank the Committee Chair for his comments. He raised a couple of issues, one of which I think he already received clarification from officials on, concerning what was designated rural. He is right that it was NISRA that helped to define the designated rural wards where ATMs would benefit from this exemption. When the legislation was first passed in 2007, over 200 wards were prescribed as rural. My Department will be redesignating the wards at the earliest opportunity once, stemming from the ongoing council restructuring, the settlement information is available from NISRA.

He asked about 1 April 2016. There seems to be no particular reason why that, as opposed to 31 March, is there. Perhaps it was thought that a wee change was required to see whether anybody noticed. Far be it from me to pre-empt what the House might do in future, but,

as the Member highlighted, this is a good scheme. I do not foresee it disappearing any time soon, particularly at a time when bank branches everywhere are closing, especially in rural areas. I see that Mr McCarthy, Mr Nesbitt and Miss McIlveen are in the House. They and I represent the Strangford constituency, and we know how important this is in places like Portaferry, for example, where we can recall the last remaining bank branch closing. This scheme has helped to retain a stand-alone ATM that belongs to that bank in the village. The proposal is helpful in retaining that important service that I think most of the House appreciates. Even if you do not represent a rural area, you will appreciate the importance of having ATMs and that service in the local area.

By extending the scheme, we can help to ensure that ATMs are retained and perhaps even increased in rural wards, providing greater access and support to those communities.

I ask Members to support the measure, and I commend the order to the Assembly.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

> *That the Rates (Exemption for Automatic Telling Machines in Rural Areas) Order (Northern Ireland) 2015 be affirmed.*

Rates (Owners Allowances) Order (Northern Ireland) 2015

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

> *That the Rates (Owners Allowances) Order (Northern Ireland) 2015 be affirmed.*

The final order today is the Rates (Owners Allowances) Order (Northern Ireland) 2015. Before turning to the order itself, I think that it is important to provide Members with some brief context to the statutory rule.

1.15 pm

The first point that I make is that the rating system that has served us and previous Administrations for over 160 years is founded on the principle that the occupier pays. That works pretty well, given that rates are a charge for regional and local services. However, there are practical difficulties in strictly adhering to the principle when it comes to rented domestic property, because of the problems associated with recovering unpaid rates from tenants, who tend to move about more in lower- and average-value houses. That is not a new phenomenon, which is why landlord allowances are a long-standing feature of the domestic rating system here. Various discounts are given to landlords in return for collecting rates from tenants and passing them on to Land and Property Services (LPS). It helps revenue collection. At the moment, the allowances vary, depending on whether they relate to compulsory or voluntary landlord liability, and there are differences between the private rented sector and the social rented sector.

Members may well jump to the conclusion of asking why we should give landlords anything by way of discount. I can understand why Members might think that, but I reiterate that, in essence, rates are an occupier-based charge. Even if the landlord is liable to hand over payment to LPS, the tenant still pays the rates through the rent, and the landlord is effectively acting as a collection agent.

There is another key point to make — one that sometimes gets drowned out — which is that landlords' representatives have consistently told us that they do not want anything to do with rate collection. Their preference is to have no liability at all for the payment of rates to the Department, as is the case in the rest of the UK with council tax. Therefore, to impose a duty on a landlord to collect rates, as part of the rent, from the person who lives in the house and not make an allowance for it would represent a major shift in policy. It is not something that we can contemplate without undertaking a lot more research and consultation. For that reason, I wish to initiate a fundamental review of the whole policy area later this year, and I have asked my Department to factor that into its plans.

The order that we are debating today has the effect of creating a unified rate of compensatory allowance across all sectors and categories of liability. It will not affect the level of rates paid by tenants as part of their rent. Under the Rates (Northern Ireland) Order 1977, there are two types of landlord liability for domestic property. The first falls under the compulsory liability provisions in article 20 of the 1977 Order. Landlords who fall within that provision must pay the rates on the property. The second falls under article 21 of the 1977 Order. That provision allows landlords to volunteer to pay rates on

their property through a formal agreement with Land and Property Services. The landlord allowance is currently 7·5% for compulsory liability landlords. A 12·5% allowance is provided for voluntary liability landlords in the private rented sector, while in the social rented sector it is 10%. The changes that I am taking forward in this order have been informed and supported by a public consultation and are aimed at simplifying the system.

It is appropriate at this point to acknowledge the key role that the Finance Committee played during 2013 and 2014 in a detailed discussion of the issues surrounding the rating of the rental sector. Some of the small but important changes arising from the outcomes of that consultation process were implemented through the Financial Provisions Act (NI) 2014. The provisions in today's order see the final outcome from that consultation being implemented.

I turn now to the detail of the order. Article 1 sets out the title of the order and gives the operational date as 1 April 2015. Article 2 increases from 7·5% to 10% any allowance given to a property owner who is rated under the compulsory liability provisions in article 20 of the 1977 order. Article 2 also provides that the increase in allowance will not apply to a rate made for a year ending before 1 April 2015. Article 3 then serves to reduce from 12·5% to 10% the maximum allowance that can be given to a property owner who, under article 21 of the 1977 Order, agrees to pay the rates chargeable for a property whether it is occupied or not and who pays those rates on or before the date or dates specified in the agreement.

Article 4 substitutes 10% for any allowance in an existing agreement made under article 21 of the 1977 Order between the Department and a person or body other than a housing association or the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, as housing associations and the Housing Executive already receive a 10% allowance. Article 5 serves to revoke the Rates (Payments by Owners by Agreement) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011.

I look forward to hearing Members' comments, and I commend the order to the House.

Mr McKay (The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel): Go raibh maith agat, a Leas Cheann Comhairle. The purpose of the rule is threefold. The first aspect is to increase the allowance or discount that the Department provides to landlords — owners — who are subject to compulsory provisions under the Rates (NI) Order 1977.

A landlord who is responsible for rates payments under certain criteria receives an allowance of 7·5% provided that payment is made before 30 September or within one month of billing, whichever is the later. This rule aims to increase that allowance to 10%.

The second aspect is to reduce the maximum allowance, or discount, provided for by a rates payment agreement between the Department and landlords. Landlords whose rent is paid or collected at intervals shorter than quarterly may, by agreement with the Department, undertake to pay the rates chargeable in respect of the hereditament whether it is occupied or not. The Department may agree, where the owners so undertake and pay the Department on or before the date or dates specified in the agreement the amounts payable by him thereunder, to make an allowance not exceeding 12·5%. The order reduces this maximum allowance to 10%.

The rule also seeks to substitute 10% for any allowance in an existing agreement made under the 1977 Order between the Department and a person or body other than a housing association or the Housing Executive.

The formal statutory rule before the Assembly today was considered by the Committee in February, together with the accompanying report from the Assembly's Examiner of Statutory Rules. The Examiner raised no issues by way of technical scrutiny. The Committee agreed to recommend that the Rates (Owner Allowances) Order (NI) 2015, be affirmed by the Assembly. I, therefore, support the motion.

Mr Hamilton: I was worrying, Mr Deputy Speaker, that a debate might have kicked off.

I thank Mr McKay for his contribution to the debate on behalf of the Committee. I will be very brief. I trust that Members will show the necessary support to the order and back the Committee in its work. Therefore, I commend the order to the Assembly and ask Members to affirm the order before us today.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

> *That the Rates (Owners Allowances) Order (Northern Ireland) 2015 be affirmed.*

Committee Business

Children's Services Co-operation Bill: Extension of Committee Stage

Mr Nesbitt (The Chairperson of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): I beg to move

> *That, in accordance with Standing Order 33(4), the period referred to in Standing Order 33(2) be extended to 3 July 2015, in relation to the Committee Stage of the Children's Services Co-operation Bill [NIA Bill 44/11-16].*

As Chair of the Committee, I ask for the support of Members today. The Children's Services Co-operation Bill passed its Second Stage at the Assembly on 26 January. It was then referred to the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister for Committee Stage. We put out a public call for evidence, and we also wrote directly to stakeholders. The closing date was last week. However, written submissions are still being received by the Committee office, and our first oral evidence session in connection with the Bill will be heard by the Committee this week.

The Bill requires Departments to discharge their functions and to cooperate to further the achievement of six high-level outcomes for children and young people. Those are taken from the strategy and are as follows: being healthy; enjoying learning and achieving; living in safety and with stability; experiencing economic and environmental well-being; contributing positively to community and society; and living in a society that respects their rights. The Bill also creates an enabling power to allow Departments to pool budgets.

The Committee received a briefing from the Bill's sponsor, Mr Agnew, on 14 January following the Bill's introduction, and we also heard from officials from the Department on the same date. Although it is a short Bill, it is clear from the discussions to date that there are a number of issues that require more detailed consideration by the Committee. Indeed, I highlighted some of them during the Second Stage debate. Both Mr Agnew and departmental officials have already signalled potential amendments that could address some of the issues raised, and the Committee expects to be kept fully apprised of developments throughout the Committee Stage.

There is a lot of work to be done, even though it is a short Bill. Indeed, earlier today, the First Minister, in his statement regarding the reconfiguration of Departments, made it clear that there will be some significant impact on the delivery of services for children and young people. We need to take time, as a Committee, to consider the implications of that for Mr Agnew's Bill.

The Committee believes that it is essential that it is afforded more time to fully examine the Bill and to properly exercise its scrutiny role, not just for the Bill but for business coming out of the Committee, which I regard as our primary duty. Therefore, on behalf of the Committee, I ask that the House supports the motion to extend the Committee Stage to 3 July 2015.

Mr Attwood: I obviously support all the comments made by the Committee Chair. I only want to make the point that we have in or around 40 sitting weeks before the end of the mandate. Given the time frame and the points that the Chair has just made in respect of the reconfiguration of the Departments, that certain functions relating to children will be transferred to one or more than one of the new Departments, it is urgent that we get this through the business of the Committee and the House. It will require maximum effort from OFMDFM to ensure that there is a fair wind and every opportunity for the Bill to come back to the Floor before the next mandate.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Does the Chairman of the Committee have concluding remarks?

Mr Nesbitt: I have some very short concluding remarks. I concur with Mr Attwood. Given the timescales, it is important that we get on with it, and we cannot get on with it without the cooperation of the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister. We look forward to its urgent and detailed engagement in this matter.

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 3 July 2015, in relation to the Committee Stage of the Children's Services Co-operation Bill [NIA Bill 44/11-16].*

STEM in Schools

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 30 minutes for this debate. The proposer of the motion will have 10 minutes to propose and 10 minutes to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who are called to speak will have five minutes.

Miss M McIlveen (The Chairperson of the Committee for Education): I beg to move

> *That this Assembly notes the recent publication of the Education and Training Inspectorate's evaluation of the implementation of the World Around Us, the Confederation of British Industry's 'Step Change: A new approach for schools in Northern Ireland' report, Momentum's digital sector action plan and the Engineering UK 2015 report, all of which highlight the importance of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) in schools; recognises the role of STEM as a key driver of the economy; and calls on the Minister of Education to support and encourage the full implementation of the STEM aspects of the curriculum in order to bring about high quality learning for all children.*

The skills required for today's job market are very different from those needed when I and, indeed, other Committee members were at school. The world is vastly different, and, thanks to technology, it is a much smaller place. It is paramount that our education system equips all our young people with the skills and knowledge to excel in the modern world.

The Education Committee has been lobbied by a number of interested groups in respect of the teaching of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) in schools. The Committee has held information events involving schoolchildren and a wide variety of stakeholder organisations. Members also had the great pleasure of visiting the BT Young Scientist and Technology Exhibition in January and meeting the enthusiastic and extremely knowledgeable pupils from our local schools competing in that very prestigious competition.

The Committee noted with great interest a number of recent reports, which are referenced in the motion. You will be glad to hear, Mr Deputy Speaker, that I do not propose to put forward for debate everything that is in all those publications, but I would like to touch on a small number of key points, and I will rely on my Committee colleagues to fill in any salient matters that have been missed.

When the Committee is lobbied by educational groups, there is a common theme: they want us to make a part of the revised curriculum compulsory. Some of the suggestions, relating to science, for example, are extremely persuasive. They have gained the Committee's support and, I believe, are worthy of at least some further study by the Department.

STEM learning and teaching, both in primary and post-primary schools, is of particular interest to the Committee. The motion indicates that STEM is a key driver of our economy, both current and future, and it is for that reason that the Committee has sought this debate.

Today, I anticipate that most of the Committee's commentary will focus on science, technology and engineering rather than on mathematics, but that is not to undermine the critical importance of the latter.

1.30 pm

In primary schools, science teaching at Key Stage 2 is largely based on an element of the curriculum called the World Around Us. That combines science, geography and history and is designed to allow teachers the flexibility to tailor delivery and engender interest in science while also preparing students for more in-depth study later in their school life. Lobby groups such as the Royal Society of Chemistry and the Association for Science Education have expressed concerns about blending other subjects with science. They feel that this has led to a reduction in the science content of teaching at primary schools. They are also worried about a reported lack of inquiry-based learning, which they see as central to a good and rounded education for all children.

The trends in international mathematics and science study (TIMSS) in 2011 found that just 13% of year 6 pupils in Northern Ireland were taught by teachers who emphasised science investigation in lessons, compared with around 40% in England and the Irish Republic. TIMSS also found that teachers had relatively limited confidence in the delivery of science at primary school. Furthermore, the Committee noted the relatively low level of uptake of science options by primary school student teachers at both university colleges.

The Committee raised some of those issues with the Department, and we were subsequently advised that the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) would undertake a review of the World Around Us. ETI found much of what the Committee expected: good practice in many schools but also a lack of definition of science in the curriculum and a need for improved linkages to the levels of progression. ETI also found some suggestion of, if not an overcrowded curriculum, at least some "initiative overload". Members noted with interest suggestions that there tended to be a lack of inquiry-based learning and limited provision of planned opportunities for problem-solving and investigation. ETI found that, despite the good practice, the science and technology strand of the World Around Us is still underdeveloped in 54% of primary schools.

Those findings have much resonance with the evidence from the lobby groups that I referred to. The Committee welcomes ETI's recommendations, including the promotion of science in initial teacher education as well as the use of a baseline of science education in primary schools and better tracking of pupil progression in STEM.

As you are aware, the motion also references the CBI's 'Step Change' report and the Engineering UK report, and members agreed with the sentiments of both reports, particularly the recognition of the importance of science subjects and computing at post-primary level and the value of the Success through STEM strategy. Members, however, do not necessarily endorse all the recommendations in those reports.

The motion also refers to Momentum's digital strategy action plan. That report highlights the value of learning computer coding in primary schools. Although the Committee welcomes initiatives like IT's Your Choice: A Computer Programming Continuum for Schools, members felt that there was limited information on current levels of

formal and informal computer-coding teaching in schools. There is, therefore, a need for a formal use of baselines on this aspect of learning. This would be only sensible and should pre-empt any further policy decisions on altering the curriculum in this regard.

There is clearly good practice and excellent STEM teaching at very many of our schools. Evidence of that was provided last week when, as part of the NI Science Festival, children attempted the largest practical science lesson in the world.

The Committee is not suggesting that the Minister reinvent the wheel on STEM education, nor is the Committee suggesting that he presses Ctrl-Alt-Delete and recodes completely the way in which science is taught in schools. Rather, the Committee is calling for the Minister to reflect on the ETI review and the other reports, apply the scientific method of evidence-based decision-making and take the next steps to provide a consistent STEM educational experience for all our children.

In closing, I would like to make two additional points. First, Members were concerned to learn that the software systems development A level, as well as other applied A levels, are not recognised by universities in the Irish Republic. I ask the Minister, in his response, to comment on the portability of applied STEM and other A levels to other jurisdictions, as it has the potential to impose a massive roadblock to the educational progression of our young people.

Finally, I would like to make reference to Sentinus. Members were surprised to learn that the organisation, which has a leading role in promoting STEM in schools, is facing a possible significant cut to its budget. Perhaps the Minister will confirm if that is the case, and, if so, can he explain how the decision and the possible loss of match funding fits in with the Success through STEM strategy? At that juncture, I will close my remarks.

Mr Rogers: I am delighted to have the opportunity to speak on this particular topic. STEM subjects are not simply a collection of facts and figures but an active and practical way of investigating the natural world. To me, it is the experimentation that brings the learning alive. I am concerned, as are other members of the Education Committee, that, particularly in our primary schools, science is being delivered a bit like any other academic subject, without the messy learning and experimentation.

We have the World Around Us as an integral part of the curriculum, but science and technology are buried in that curriculum area, along with history and geography. The primary-school experience is the essential foundation and building block of our children's learning. Children in those early years are sponges for learning. That creativity and sense of adventure need to be satisfied early. Children will stop asking the question, "Why?", if, for years, they do not get a satisfactory answer.

I taught mathematics and computing in the secondary sector for many years. Frequently, I would meet children of 11 who said that they hated maths, but, in most cases, when you answered the "Why?", they gained the confidence. They never got to the stage of loving maths, but they got their GCSE. The same is true for other STEM subjects and can be even more profound. You will not turn a 14-year-old on to physics if the only physics experience is their physics text book.

I remember well the early days of computer coding at Queen's in the 1970s and teaching it in the 1980s. Then, we had the ICT revolution, but if we are to advance the next generation, it must be more than simply learning about word processing, spreadsheets and slide shows. We must teach our children to problem solve, code and design programmes that perform useful functions. Learning to send emails is useful, but it will not make a talented software engineer. All too often, the real computer whizz is not the teacher at the white board but the student at the back of the class who is programming in their spare time.

One of the barriers is the lack of qualified STEM teachers, especially in our primary schools, with only around 1%. Most STEM graduates are snapped up and choose more lucrative careers. The lack of time and resources for quality continuing professional development for science teachers can lead teachers to play safe and be less adventurous in the science experiences that they deliver in the classroom. We have some excellent examples, but, at best, it is sporadic.

The lack of adventure is encouraged by a system that does not judge the quality of practical science delivered or learned by students. School practice is driven by what teachers believe is valued by ETI. Everything in education is driven by grades. Students want better grades as their passport and schools want to climb the league tables. By removing the contribution of practical work to grades, you inevitably remove the value of practical work.

The digital world has changed beyond all recognition in the last 30 years, but our education system needs to get up to speed. If we are to succeed in the globally competitive world, we need to learn from other countries, find our technical niches and occupy them early in primary school.

We must ensure that we have a sufficient number of talented teachers in key subject areas if we are to have a highly skilled workforce necessary for our future economy. We need subject specialists who can inspire students with their own passion. Many teachers are crying out for that extra support and the opportunity to develop their teaching skills and subject knowledge. We must ensure that young people are equipped for the challenges of the 21st century through improving the teaching of programming and ICT. It is expected that we will need an extra 20,000 people in that sector over the next three years. That can only be achieved by working to ensure continuity of demand for the region and the knowledge economy whilst ensuring that the skills pool continues to be populated so that we have a talented pool of people to meet the growing demand.

We must ensure that our curriculum is future-proofed. Computer programming and coding is already part of the curriculum in some areas, including in two of our nearest neighbours, England and the Republic. While we welcome workers from others areas, will our students be at a disadvantage when applying for jobs in the digital economy? Digital opportunities are huge, both economically and socially, because technology is such a great leveller. Children can rise to the top based on aptitude and ability irrespective of their gender or background. There are more and more job opportunities in the technology sector — more now than ever before.

To meet the long-term recruitment challenge, education is, as I said before, the foundation of building our economy.

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

Mr Rogers: Minister, there are two things. First, we must ensure that the place of STEM subjects is strengthened in the World Around Us and, secondly, must raise the status of our teaching profession to the height that it deserves.

Mrs Overend: The importance of matching the skills set of our young people coming through school into the world of work to the demands of the workplace is a central issue that we must focus on and is yet another example where proper, working, joined-up government would be successful. As a mother of three children, aged 14, 12 and nine, I am acutely aware of how I try to influence how my children choose their subjects and think about their future careers, but, ultimately, the school has the responsibility to nurture every child's skills and talents and open up their education to what is out there in the world.

In the first nine months of my job in this place, I was a member of the Employment and Learning Committee, and it heard from various employer organisations and representatives groups that emphasised that there were not enough people with the right skills available to meet the demands of the Northern Ireland workplace. We often hear of the fantastic job opportunities that are brought about by successful companies in Northern Ireland as well as by foreign direct investment companies that come to Northern Ireland, but it is really important that we keep on top of the supply of those skills to enable our economy to improve and to build Northern Ireland. That analysis in the Employment and Learning Committee led to an inquiry into the careers advisory service, primarily on how our young people find out about careers, what we should be promoting and what subjects are necessary to supply the workers that are needed.

That focus goes further. Not only do we need to give our young people the right advice about their future career, but we need to take the skills focus right back to the beginning; not just to post-primary education but right down to primary education. It is very often the case that the earlier our young people learn about a subject, the better their understanding will be and an interest will be sparked to learn more. We have heard that in years gone by about the teaching of languages being started at primary school, and it is also the case with STEM subjects, including computer coding, which we are hearing so much more about.

To me, this debate is a no-brainer. If our business economy is demanding workers with skills in science, technology, engineering and maths, we must find better ways of providing the workforce to meet those demands. This debate is timely given the recent series of events associated with the Northern Ireland Science Festival and the fact that the recent half-term break would have seen lots of schoolchildren travel to W5 at the Odyssey to get a taste of the wonder of science.

The Committee motion refers to several recent reports on STEM. We could add the 2008 MATRIX report from the Northern Ireland Science Industry Panel and the STEM review a year later, which produced a report that was jointly published by the Department for Employment and Learning and the Department of Education. Out of the same review came the STEM strategy, which was developed and endorsed in March 2011 by the Executive and taken forward by a cross-cutting implementation group, of which Joanne Stuart OBE was the chairperson.

1.45 pm

Mrs Stuart highlighted in the one-year progress report published in 2012 the skills mismatch, which, she argued, could hold back the growth of the Northern Ireland economy. That remains the acid test. Has there been the growth in the numbers of young people taking up these subjects at school and then in higher or further education to provide the skills reservoir to fill the high-tech jobs that we expect to be created here in the next few years? Are young people being encouraged to study STEM subjects and to choose careers in those important sectors of the economy? There has been a slow upward trend in the number of A-level STEM entries, with 10,702 STEM entries in 2004-05 rising to 12,659 in 2010-11. That is a fairly underwhelming increase, might I say, and I hope that the Education Minister can reassure the House that recent figures show more positive trends.

Is there political leadership in the Assembly? Mr Deputy Speaker, judging by what I have witnessed in the Education Committee, I have my doubts. I do not hear the Education Minister promoting the STEM agenda as our priority for the curriculum. Far too often, I hear at Question Time after Question Time —

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

Mrs Overend: — an obsession with getting rid of academic selection and a blatantly partisan promotion of Irish-medium education. Mr Deputy Speaker, I will leave it there; I support the motion.

Mr Hazzard: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the opportunity to speak on this and apologise to the Chair for missing the start. If I have missed anything that she has covered, I will pick it up afterwards.

We welcome the opportunity to talk about the importance of STEM subjects and their role in our education system today and into the future as we build an economy that works better for everybody. However, it is not all bad. STEM subjects are fairly well established in our schools. The recent report identified some areas as needing improvement, but we have a fairly good platform to start from. We see brilliant examples of good practice in our schools, at primary and post-primary level. It is important, therefore, that we do not get carried away and turn this into some sort of crisis. That is simply not the case: there is an increase in those taking and doing well in STEM subjects. We have an increasing number of STEM-facilitated local businesses every year, for which the revised curriculum and entitlement framework was largely responsible a number of years ago.

Indeed, it is for that reason that I am surprised at the criticism from the last Member to speak of the "obsession" with academic selection. It has always been about widening the scope for those at school and involving those who are interested in engineering and the sciences without having to go down the one route. That flexibility is very important. Young people studying the World Around Us get to apply what they learn in science not just in the classroom; when they go into the garden they can ask questions. Building in our young people a sense of enquiry — why does something happen and why is it important? — is very important if we are to see an increase in small and medium-sized enterprises locally. That requires the ability

in our young people, which they get from science study and notions of enquiry, to take a risk.

We must also appreciate that there is more to STEM than science: it includes technologies, design, engineering and maths. It is important that we do not get bogged down in the old notion that there are just biology, chemistry and physics. STEM is a lot more than that.

STEM subjects are certainly not just for boys. Recently, according to an article in the 'Guardian', children were asked as homework to talk about a famous scientist. What did he look like? Was he married? Did he have a family? One child's mother was a scientist. We need to get beyond that. In the North, we certainly do better than many other areas. The imbalance between boys and girls is certainly not what it is elsewhere: young girls are taking up STEM subjects more and more. It is great to see that because there is far more to STEM subjects than some people envisage. At the BT Young Scientist and Technology Exhibition 2015 last month, we saw huge numbers of young women from across the island engaging in science, technology and design. We met a young winner from a couple of years ago, who was hugely inspiring. It is important to get as many young women involved as possible.

Inspiration is a big thing. South Down supplies huge numbers to the Civil Service and the public sector. We perhaps do not have as many small enterprises as we should, yet Hans Sloane and William Thomson, known to others as Lord Kelvin, came from this part of the world. They are huge figures in science. We could do more to inspire our young people to look up to scientists because, as I said, we have a very proud record. Some of the greatest scientific discoveries have been made by Irish people. I mentioned Hans Sloane, and it is important that we venerate such people and help young people to know what they did. Perhaps it is time that we looked at having a greater number of STEM-related scholarships so that our young people can really get the benefit.

It is important that we do not just see STEM as the golden nugget that will deliver a wonderful economy and a far better education service. Modern languages need to come into the mix, and we should not forget the arts. As well as the likes of Hans Sloane, south Down is very proud to have Francis Hutcheson, so philosophy and culture are also very important. We need to make sure that, when we talk about STEM, we are creating far more rounded individuals as well. We should not forget other subjects.

Mr McCausland: Will the Member give way?

Mr Hazzard: I will indeed.

Mr McCausland: Does the Member share my appreciation of the fact that, when he mentions William Thomson — Lord Kelvin — Hans Sloane and Francis Hutcheson, he mentions three of the individuals who are pre-eminent in the contribution of the Ulster Scots to the history of Northern Ireland?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): The Member will be pleased to know that he has an extra minute to answer that one.

Mr Hazzard: I thank the Member for his comment, and I agree: the Irish Scots were very important throughout the world. Francis Hutcheson went on to inspire many people who took part in the American Revolution. Indeed, he inspired many people around my part of the world — Ballynahinch and Saintfield — into the United Irishmen. He talked about democracy —

Mr B McCrea: Will the Member give way?

Mr Hazzard: I will indeed. Go ahead.

Mr B McCrea: We should mention John Stewart Bell. We are just after naming a crescent after him. He came from Tates Avenue, and he was nominated for the Nobel prize in physics. He proved Einstein wrong. Unfortunately, he died before he could be given the prize.

Mr Hazzard: I thank the Member for his intervention. We could probably get a phone book out and go through lots of names of different people who did lots of things. When we talk about scientists, it is important that we realise that we have massive figures in our shared history, such as Francis Hutcheson, who did so much for the world of education, philosophy and everything else. We should look to use the example of those people to inspire our young people.

Mr Lunn: I support the motion and agree with just about everything that the other parties have said so far. I confess that I was not expecting to hear selection, the Irish language or Ulster Scots mentioned in the debate, but there we are.

The value of, and necessity for, STEM subjects being prioritised has long been advocated by the CBI, and by industry generally. We now have all the various reports — they have been listed, so I will not list them again — that are clearly making the same case. In that respect, we are only going to follow the rest of the world, particularly the major economies of India and China. Although we cannot expect to compete with them numerically, there is absolutely no reason why we should not develop as a centre of excellence in the areas of STEM and digital technology. We have had considerable success there, which really only confirms the untapped potential that there still is. I pay tribute to the companies operating in those areas, many of which are home-grown, that have already established in Northern Ireland. We have a good base to build on, but we risk running out of qualified personnel if we do not get this right.

It is generally agreed now that the process starts at primary level. That is a relatively new development, but it is good to see. I agree with Chris Hazzard that this is not a critical motion and that we do not need to dwell on any failure. We could do better, but things are not all bad by any means. There is a general upsurge in enthusiasm. I pay particular tribute to the primary schools that have embraced this and to the excellent work of Sentinus and BT. The biggest science lesson in the world was referred to as well. You have only to go to one of those events, whether it be at primary or secondary level, to see the enthusiasm of the children at any age. It really is marvellous.

For my sins, I have two grandsons, one of whom has just turned 10 and the other has just turned seven, who ask me questions now and I think, "Where did they get that from?" They get it from the World Around Us. *[Interruption.]* Mr Kinahan wants to know whether I can answer them, but it is with some difficulty.

The level of education they are receiving and their level of interest in it is quite startling, even at that age. That is what is, perhaps, at the nub of this issue. The World Around

Us is very wide-ranging. It is a mixture of science, history and geography, as the Chairperson said, and you would wonder about the advisability of that particular mix and whether there is a need to concentrate more effort purely on the scientific side of it. I do not know the answer, but it is certainly worth looking at.

There is also, as Members have mentioned and the various reports have alluded to, a lack of confidence among teachers, particularly at primary level, in their ability to deliver the curriculum of the World Around Us because it is so broad-ranging. I note statistics in the ETI report that show that 87% of schools have a staff member with specific knowledge, two thirds have a staff member with a specific qualification, but only 37% have specific STEM course accreditation. Another statistic that catches my eye is that 93% of schools use external expertise but do not cluster sufficiently, and primary schools rarely use expertise from post-primary level. There is work to be done there as well to make it more efficient and effective.

The CBI's 'Step Change' report advocates something fairly radical, which is switching the focus from exam results to real-life preparation. I would have to tread carefully there but I know what it is getting at; it is advocating vocational A levels. I cannot help thinking that this is, perhaps, the way to go.

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

Mr Lunn: I will quickly make the point that advocating vocational A levels and trying to increase the number of places to provide those vocational A levels does not fit too well with increasing the number of teachers in training when we do not need that number of teachers.

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

Mr Lunn: It is taking away from the DEL budget and it could be reprioritised.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Order. As Question Time begins at 2.00 pm, I suggest that the House takes its ease until then. This debate will continue after Question Time, when the next Member to speak will be Nelson McCausland.

The debate stood suspended.

2.00 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): I inform Members that questions 2 and 4 have been withdrawn.

Older People's Strategy

1. **Mr D McIlveen** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on their strategy for improving the lives of older people. *(AQO 7677/11-15)*

Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister): The purpose of the Active Ageing strategy is to transform attitudes to and services for older people. It is important that we fully acknowledge the enormous contribution that older people make to our society and that we challenge the negative stereotyping of older people. The strategy, when published, will provide direction for Departments' policies, make connections between strategies and lead to the improvement of services for older people.

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

In developing the draft strategy, we have worked closely with the Commissioner for Older People and the ageing strategy advisory group, which includes older people and people working for organisations that represent older people as members. Officials met the advisory group on Wednesday 25 February and plan to hold a workshop later this month to finalise outcomes and work with our statisticians to develop indicators and discuss the final draft of the strategy, which, once finalised, will be subject to Committee consideration and endorsement by the Executive. Subject to that approval, we hope to publish the Active Ageing strategy in the coming weeks. The draft indicators for the strategy, which will establish baselines on current levels of need and will be used to monitor the implementation of the strategy, will be issued for public consultation in the near future.

Mr D McIlveen: I thank the deputy First Minister for his answer and for the vital work that is being done for that group of vulnerable people within our society. Has any thought been given, under the Delivering Social Change network, to some sort of a cross-departmental signature project that might be particularly targeted towards the needs of our older people?

Mr M McGuinness: I certainly think that, in the context of developing an Active Ageing strategy for older people, it is incumbent on all Departments to recognise their responsibility and to give whatever additionality they can to supporting older people, who deserve to be supported and have made massive contributions towards the development of our economy and society down the ages. If the Member has any particular ideas or suggestions, both the junior Ministers, Jonathan Bell and Jennifer McCann, would be only too happy to speak to him. I certainly think that, if that cross-cutting work can work to the benefit of older people in a way that delivers more for them, our Department, the First Minister, myself and the junior

Ministers will be very supportive of what the Member has just said.

Mr Kinahan: I wonder if the deputy First Minister shares my concerns at the fact that clear-up rates for crimes against older people are only 9% when, in fact, they are 17% for other groups, meaning that they really have less protection.

Mr M McGuinness: I certainly would be very concerned about those figures. What that does is place a huge responsibility on all of us, not least the Police Service, to ensure that we continue to examine ways in which we can support older people.

Fear of crime is a big issue for older people. In all the dialogue and discussions that there have been with the stakeholders and the Commissioner for Older People and in other conversations with older people, that has come through as one of the main areas of concern. I certainly agree with the Member that, in going forward, we have to look at what more we can do, and the police have to look at what more they can do. This is a huge issue for society. All of us — the Police Service, the voluntary and community sector, local communities and politicians — have to work together to identify what need there is and to see whether we can bring forward solutions.

Mr McCarthy: The deputy First Minister will be aware that, on more than one occasion, this Assembly or previous Assemblies have supported the idea of help with personal care for our elderly people when they need it. Will he bring forward or help to bring forward some idea that would prevent our older people having to sell the roof over their heads to pay for elderly care in their twilight years?

Mr M McGuinness: That has been a concern for a lot of people in recent times. In our view, the strategic aims will improve existing services to ensure that they best meet the needs of older people. In addition, we have worked with Departments to tackle the challenges facing older people, and those will be taken forward in phases. Obviously, the Member identifies a key issue, because that engenders concern and fear about the future in the minds of a lot of older people. It represents one of the further challenges that we have to deal with in the time ahead. The issue has been raised in conversations with the Commissioner for Older People and individual stakeholders, which include an awful lot of older people. We need to look at what more can be done.

Ms McGahan: Go raibh maith agat. Will the Minister outline any projects that will support the Active Ageing strategy?

Mr M McGuinness: As I said, the whole purpose of the strategic aims is to improve existing services and ensure that they best meet the needs of older people. In addition, we have worked with Departments on projects that will support the Active Ageing strategy to tackle all the challenges that face our older people. That will be taken forward in phases.

The first phase will involve programmes whereby resources have already been identified to make them happen. Those include things like encouraging and helping the new councils to sign up to the World Health Organization's age-friendly environment programme; a project to tackle fuel poverty; affordable warmth; tackling fear of crime; increasing the engagement of older people with policymakers; increasing digital inclusion; and a new mental capacity Bill. Additional resources will be required for the remaining programme proposals. Subject to funding being available, they will be prioritised and will subsequently form the second phase of the implementation of that strategy.

Age Discrimination Legislation

3. **Ms Fearon** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on age discrimination in relation to goods, facilities and services legislation. *(AQO 7679/11-15)*

8. **Mr Weir** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the implementation of legislation to eliminate age discrimination in the provision of goods, facilities and services. *(AQO 7684/11-15)*

Mr M McGuinness: With your permission, Mr Speaker, junior Minister McCann will answer.

Ms J McCann (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): With your permission, Mr Speaker, I will answer questions 3 and 8 together.

On 19 February, the First Minister and deputy First Minister made a written statement to the Assembly about the Programme for Government commitment to extend legislation to give legal protection from unfair age discrimination by those providing goods, facilities and services (GFS). The proposed new legislation will apply to people aged 16 and over. The aim of the new legislation is to protect all people aged 16 and over from discrimination because of their age when accessing goods, facilities and services. That will put age discrimination outside work on a similar footing to discrimination law in employment. It sends out a clear message that ageist attitudes and practices are as unacceptable in service provision as they are in the workplace. Subject to Executive agreement, we intend to bring forward a consultation document in the near future setting out our proposals on the matter.

Following consultation, we will consider all the options that are available to us for bringing the legislation before the Assembly.

Ms Fearon: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her answer. Would she be supportive of future legislation to allow for the inclusion of under-16s in respect of age discrimination in GFS?

Ms J McCann: I am most definitely supportive of more inclusive legislation to stop age discrimination in the provision of goods, facilities and services, and we will continue to work with the children and young people's sector to progress the full extension of age discrimination legislation. The current agreement on the scope of the legislation means that, where previously no one had protection against age discrimination, we now have the most advanced legislation on these islands for people aged 16 and over.

Mr Weir: I thank the junior Minister for her answers so far. Will she outline the timetable for the implementation of such legislation? Does she envisage it being implemented in this mandate?

Ms J McCann: The Member will know that it is a Programme for Government commitment. We have been working with officials. We recently agreed the scope of the legislation and are looking at how we can take it forward. There will obviously be the consultation period, but we are

looking at all the possibilities to try to bring the legislation forward in this mandate.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a freagraí. The Minister said that she will consider extending age discrimination provisions to people under 16 in the future. Why can she not do that now?

Ms J McCann: The Member will be aware that we could not get political consensus on that issue. I would have preferred to have been able to say that the age discrimination legislation would cover all ages, but we have to remember that we are where we are. The main gap in the anti-discrimination law here is that, at the moment, there is no protection from age discrimination for any age in the provision of goods facilities and services, so this is a move in the right direction and a move forward. As I said in my previous answer, I hope that we can work towards getting that legislation for everyone. That would put us in a better place.

Mr Lyttle: I thank the junior Minister for her update on the issue and welcome the long overdue progress on legislation to protect people from age discrimination. The older person's parliament in particular will welcome this long overdue announcement. What did the Minister make of the evidence that was given to the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister about those under 16 who have been excluded from the legislation? In that evidence, there were assurances that exemptions could be delivered that should allow the legislation to be extended to all ages.

Ms J McCann: I reiterate my previous answer to the Member. He will know that I have spoken to members of the Committee inside and outside of the Committee. I wish that I was standing here saying that the legislation would cover all ages. I certainly believe that that would have been better legislation, particularly as it is anti-discrimination law. I will endeavour to work towards that. We will be protecting people who are over 16. We do not have anything on that at all at the moment, so this is a step in the right direction. I hope that we will be able to see progress at some stage and that I will be able to say that it will cover all ages.

Mr B McCrea: With regard to age discrimination, does the Minister consider that the use of voluntary redundancy and vacancy control may discriminate against younger people? When she is considering legislation in future, will she undertake to address the imbalance between ages old and ages young? That is a serious issue for our society.

Ms J McCann: I am not sure what the Member means about voluntary redundancy. Voluntary redundancy is obviously just that: you take it because you want it. In the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, we have responsibility for equality legislation and the policy on equality issues. Certainly, if the Member wants to come and discuss the issue with me, the other junior Minister or indeed the First Minister or deputy First Minister, he would be most welcome.

2.15 pm

Social Investment Fund: Applications

5. **Ms Sugden** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline their responsibility for informing applicants to the social investment fund as to whether their application has been successful. *(AQO 7681/11-15)*

Mr M McGuinness: With your permission, Mr Speaker, I will ask junior Minister McCann to answer this question.

Ms J McCann: In keeping with the community-based ethos of the social investment fund, zonal steering groups made the final decisions on projects that were selected for their area plans. Individuals or groups that were involved with concepts which did not make it into the area plans were advised at the time. The area plans were submitted in February 2013. When the zonal allocations were subsequently announced, the steering groups were asked to prioritise their area plan projects again in their assigned zonal budgets. This process was completed by November 2013. The steering groups should have informed those involved of the decisions. If anyone is still in doubt, they should contact their zone's steering group directly. Contact details for these steering groups can be found on the NI Direct website.

Ms Sugden: I think that this whole process is actually quite empty. The fact that you are referring us back to a steering group that obviously knows as much as you do about this is quite disappointing. Was any money actually in place when this process was first announced, and is there any money in place to fulfil the many applications?

Ms J McCann: The Member would know that in her area, quite a bit of progress has been made. Her area covers three zones; Derry, the western zone and the northern zone. Around £50 million has already been committed in letters of offer and projects that have already started. While the money is not in the baseline of the OFMDFM budget because it is, in fact, an Executive budget, there is a clear indication that when the money needs to be drawn down, it will be drawn down.

It is really the responsibility of local steering groups to, if you like, inform the areas and projects that were unsuccessful. Those local steering groups were set up for the purpose, first of all, of deciding which particular projects they wanted to bring forward. They should also encompass, if you like, members of the community, the voluntary sector and other statutory organisations so that those individuals form a clear, wide membership of those steering groups.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Can the Minister outline the process for ensuring that letters of offer to social investment fund projects will be taken forward in a timely and efficient manner?

Ms J McCann: Obviously, as I said, it is good news that the majority of projects are now progressing, but we are aware that a small number of projects still have not reached full approval stage. Officials are refocusing efforts to secure the business case approval on all remaining projects in the allocations for each zone. Steering groups are aware of this. While we have to be sure that all projects are fit for purpose and demonstrate value for money, we remain committed to ensuring that all projects in affordability levels are approved, letters of offer issued and projects commenced as soon as possible in order to get the benefits from the social investment programme. Again, I just want to say that we are working with people and the local steering groups to try to ensure that these projects are brought forward as quickly as possible.

Mrs D Kelly: I do not think that I have ever heard the words "timely and efficient" being used to describe the social investment fund, since £30 million has been

underspent as it is. The junior Minister referred only to money that has been promised as opposed to having actually been spent. Can the junior Minister outline what evaluation and monitoring methods are deployed with regard to the social investment fund?

Ms J McCann: First of all, I want to say to the Member that she is actually wrong because two projects have actually started. They are the Coleraine rural and urban network in the northern zone and the Bryson Street Surgery in east Belfast. There are a number of projects. I can give the Member a list of many that will be taking work forward soon. Can I say again that while this money has not been in OFMDFM's baseline, it has been allocated. Almost £50 million has been offered through letters of offer and everything else.

So, I think that it is disingenuous of the Member to say —

Mrs D Kelly: I think that it is disingenuous of you —

Mr Speaker: Order.

Ms J McCann: If you want the whole plan of it and to know how it has been rolled out, I will certainly give that to the Member in written form.

Mr Speaker: It is very far from in order to interrupt a Minister in the middle of an answer. I will not tolerate that.

Mrs Overend: Is the junior Minister aware that applicants in my area did not even know that there was such a thing as a steering group or know how to contact it? What key things have you learned about the roll-out of the social investment fund?

Ms J McCann: Different areas must have different ways of working the steering groups. Some of the steering groups that I know in west Belfast and, indeed, in the south-eastern zone, are made up of members of the local community and members of voluntary and statutory organisations. Once they were clear on what projects they wanted brought forward, they brought in members from the statutory groups or the business community to whichever projects they wanted to deliver. They work closely together, not only by way of the steering group working together, but through work with other policies and programmes like neighbourhood renewal, for instance, or with people in the council who are involved in community planning. Local people are designing the projects for their areas. The make-up of steering groups should, obviously, be from local areas.

T:BUC: Shared Campuses

6. **Mr McAleer** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the shared campuses element of Together: Building a United Community. *(AQO 7682/11-15)*

Mr M McGuinness: The development of 10 shared education campuses is one of the seven headline actions announced alongside Together: Building a United Community. The programme was launched by the Department of Education in January 2014, and 16 applications were received under the first call for expressions of interest. In July 2014, the first three projects to be supported were announced as shared STEM and sixth-form facilities in St Mary's High School, Limavady and Limavady High School; a shared education campus, incorporating Moy Regional Controlled Primary School and St John's Primary School, Moy; and a shared education campus, incorporating Ballycastle High School and Cross and Passion College, Ballycastle. Project boards for those three schemes have been established, and detailed economic appraisals, including technical feasibility studies, are under way. Exact costs will not be known until the appraisals have been successfully completed.

A second call for expressions of interest opened on 1 October 2014, with a deadline for submissions of 30 January 2015, and a further six proposals involving more than 20 schools have been received in response to that second call. The expressions of interest received were for Marmount shared sports facility; IQ centre, north Belfast; Brookeborough shared education campus; Digital Derry; Duneane and Moneynick partners in learning; and Cookstown SEED centre. The first four of those projects were unsuccessful under the first call and have reapplied under the second call. Those applications are now being assessed, and it is hoped that the successful projects under the second tranche will be announced in June 2015.

Mr McAleer: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answer. Will the Minister provide us with a progress update on the Lisanelly shared education campus in Omagh?

Mr M McGuinness: The Lisanelly shared education campus programme is, as many people know, additional to the Together: Building a United Community commitment of 10 shared campuses included in the headline actions. I can report that very good progress is being made. The first phase of construction, which is at Arvalee School and Resource Centre, is expected to commence in the current financial year, with the school becoming fully operational in September 2016. Work is also continuing to develop the overall exemplar of campus design and to prepare the wider site.

The Lisanelly shared education campus is additional to the Together: Building a United Community commitment and is mentioned in the strategy in the context of enhancing overall shared education provision through the creation of the 10 shared campuses that are to be based on the Lisanelly model. Six schools in total are relocating to the Lisanelly shared education campus. Those are Arvalee School and Resource Centre; Christian Brothers Grammar School; Loreto Grammar School; Omagh Academy; Omagh High School; and Sacred Heart College.

This is a totemic project, and one that has generated huge interest in County Tyrone and further afield. I know that a lot of people are looking at it very carefully. I think that, in the context of the Stormont House negotiations, which the First Minister and I and others were involved in, the fact that the project was in the pipeline greatly assisted us in achieving the half a billion pounds that we achieved for use in integrated and shared education.

Mr Dallat: I thank the deputy First Minister for his answer. I do not disagree with a single syllable of it, but, given the seriousness of the situation, in that not a single peace wall has been dismantled and paramilitaries are still flourishing, is this shared campus experiment sufficiently funded and will it really encourage the peace and reconciliation that the people voted for in 1998?

Mr M McGuinness: I think that there is a very strong view on the Executive and, indeed, among the parties that negotiated the Stormont House Agreement that the achievement of the £500 million — half a billion pounds

— to bring our young people together in shared education campuses and to support integrated education is a very worthwhile project as we continue to build for the future. There are clear and ongoing examples of people making an effort to come together. I know that considerable discussion is taking place between officials from the Department of Justice and people on either side of the horrid so-called peace walls that exist in Belfast to see whether we can continue to meet the target that we have set ourselves to bring those peace walls down.

Absolutely essential to all of that is the leadership that is shown in the Assembly and between political parties. I described the Stormont House Agreement as an opportunity for a fresh start, and I think that we all need to seize that opportunity so that we can continue to build confidence in the political process and between communities. If I may say so even in this conversation, I warmly welcome the fact that the Loyalist Londonderry Bands Forum will make a presentation to the Sinn Féin ard fheis this weekend in Derry city. I think that all of that represents a big effort being made by people on all sides to see what unites us, as opposed to what divides us. The sort of leadership that is being shown in the city of Derry is something that could be followed everywhere.

Mr Lyttle: What level and type of shared contact will occur between pupils in shared education of this kind?

Mr M McGuinness: Essentially, the opportunities for shared education right across all the work that schools are involved in are clearly there for all of us to see. The fact that the Lisanelly campus, for example, is seen as a totemic project and is being looked at by schools all over the North of Ireland and, indeed, further afield clearly shows that people recognise that there are opportunities to bring people together. That is the case not just in the context of sixth-form lessons. If more people are brought onto shared sites, we will see a level of contact that we have not seen in the past. It will be a real opportunity to have people working together and sharing, for example, restaurant, canteen and sporting facilities.

The First Minister and I recently met people from Brookeborough in County Fermanagh. I have to say that it was inspirational to listen to the sort of leadership they were giving. The recognition that they understand is given to these projects will hugely benefit our young people in all sorts of ways — through their education; through sport, drama and arts; and through a whole range of issues.

2.30 pm

Of course, key to all of it is the leadership being given in these institutions. I think that that leadership is being given. People recognise the value of bringing our people together and ensuring that, as much as we possibly can within the challenges that we face, we continue to integrate our young people with a view to ensuring that it pays dividends in the future in moving to a much more peaceful and less divided society.

Mr Speaker: That brings us to the end of the period for listed questions. We now move on to 15 minutes of topical questions.

OFMDFM: St Patrick's Day US Trip

T1. **Mrs Hale** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether, as part of their trip to the US for St Patrick's Day, they expect to promote Northern Ireland as a good place to invest. *(AQT 2181/11-15)*

Mr M McGuinness: Well, I have been very privileged in this job, going back to when the DUP and Sinn Féin first agreed, with others, to go into government together in 2007, to work on how we can develop, as a central plank of our economy, the attraction of foreign direct investment to the North. The late Rev Ian Paisley and I had a very successful visit in December 2007, and since then I have worked very closely with the First Minister, Peter Robinson, all over the United States of America. In the course of that work we have managed, even against the backdrop of a very cruel world economic recession, to attract more foreign direct investment jobs to the North than at any other time in the history of the state.

Quite clearly, there is an open door for us in the United States, whether it be in California, Chicago, New York or Washington. We had, during our stewardship of OFMDFM, a very important economic investment conference right in the State Department, from which flowed many of the new job announcements that we are now seeing on a very regular basis. I believe that we will continue with a very positive message and, against the success of the Stormont House Agreement, make it absolutely clear to everybody that we are open for business. In the context of the debate around corporation tax, it is quite obvious to all of us that there are great opportunities, as well as challenges, that lie ahead.

Mrs Hale: Deputy First Minister, you anticipated part of my supplementary question. Do you agree that the sooner we have the devolution of corporation tax and know the rate at which it will be set, the better it will be for Invest NI and the Executive to attract more jobs to Northern Ireland?

Mr M McGuinness: I certainly do agree, and the First Minister and I have been involved in discussions around that. It will also be discussed during the course of the party leaders' implementation meetings. When you consider the sort of access we have in going to the United States and actually meeting President Obama, Vice President Joe Biden and others, you can clearly see that there is incredible interest in the ongoing success of the peace process here.

There is also tremendous interest in supporting economic development here. In the course of our conversations, we recognise that Invest NI has a very important job to do, and we need to give it as much support as we possibly can. That means coming, as quickly to possible, to an agreement on time frames and on the rate that we strike. Of course, in the meantime we have to await the finalisation of the legislation in the House of Commons, but I am confident that the decisions that have to be made will be made in a very expedient way, with a view to ensuring that we garner as much opportunity as we possibly can.

Faith Communities: Protections

T2. **Mr D McIlveen** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether they believe that improvements could be made in the Executive in affording more protections to faith communities in Northern Ireland. *(AQT 2182/11-15)*

Mr M McGuinness: I think that there are tremendous protections for faith communities in the North of Ireland, and I have a tremendous respect for all of the Churches and the contributions that they have made through what has been a very challenging time for us in terms of the political process, and also the tremendous work that the Churches do in bringing people together.

The point that the Member mentioned obviously has some currency in relation to the ongoing discussions. I understand that there was an important meeting between the Bishop of Down and Connor and the DUP last week. It was quite interesting that there was also a meeting between me and the Bishop of Down and Connor a week before that. Obviously, the Churches have a very great interest in meeting politicians. As we go forward, we have to ensure that we have a very fine balance between the rights of faith communities and minorities in our society, because a chief responsibility of the Assembly and the Executive is to ensure that we protect the rights of everyone and that there is equality for everyone whilst, at the same time, not denying anyone the right to practise their faith.

Mr D McIlveen: I thank the deputy First Minister for his answer and welcome the fact of his church attendance in the last couple of weeks. Will the deputy First Minister give us some indication, bearing in mind that he made the point that faith is not just reserved for the Christian community but is broader, of whether he has any objections to the issue of the protection and the rights of people of faith being included in the commission that was recommended by the Stormont House Agreement? Has he any objections to that being part of it?

Mr M McGuinness: I think that the Member mentioning my attendance at church in recent times is a bit bizarre. I am a regular church attender, and sometimes I go there with the First Minister and, indeed, with others when the occasion demands. I have a huge respect for all Churches. As someone who is a Catholic, I try to be the best Catholic that I possibly can be. At the same time, during the Stormont House negotiations, the purpose of the commission that we agreed was to deal with the whole issue of flags, symbols and emblems, and I think that that would be stretching the remit, although I am certainly open to conversations during the party leaders' meeting around the issue that the Member raised. I know that he is very close to his own faith. I know some people who are very close to him also, and he knows that I know them, and he knows that I have a great admiration and respect for them, even though they come from a completely different religious position from mine.

I think that we all have to respect each other. We have to recognise that the whole issue of religion can be very divisive and very damaging to our society. We only have to look further afield to what is happening in other parts of the world to see the atrocious activities of groups like ISIS and the way in which it targets religions of all descriptions and carries out mass murder in order to get its own way. So, hopefully we are a society —

Mr Allister: You are talking about mass murder?

Mr M McGuinness: — that is emerging successfully from conflict, and I think that the vast majority of the Members, with the exception of maybe one in the House, sing from the same hymn sheet as I do on this.

Mr Speaker: I intend to make this the last time that I warn Members. If you interrupt a Minister in the middle of an answer — that is, you are preventing everybody else from hearing the answer — I will take action. I hope that that is as clear as it can be.

Shackleton Barracks, Ballykelly: Progress

T3. **Mr Cree** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the progress of development at Shackleton Barracks, Ballykelly. *(AQT 2183/11-15)*

Mr M McGuinness: I am very delighted to be able to say that the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development and I were in Ballykelly less than two weeks ago with the local community and with representatives of all the political parties — the Ulster Unionists, the DUP, the SDLP and Sinn Féin. I am not sure whether there were any Alliance members there but there probably were. We were there to view the ongoing demolition of military buildings on the site so that we can begin the process of relocating an entire Department, the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, to the Ballykelly site.

When the Ballykelly site first came into our ownership, many people thought that it would be a hindrance to the Executive and that it would cost us money to maintain. It cost us some initial funds, but I believe that they were well spent. The site is twice the size of the Maze/Long Kesh site. The First Minister and I have been involved in some 40 expressions of interest from people who wish to go onto the site. We are absolutely confident that we can create thousands of new jobs on the Ballykelly site, which will be a major boost for people in Derry city, Limavady and the Coleraine area, not to mention Ballykelly itself, so the whole of County Derry and wider afield will benefit through the site's development. It is a very encouraging and optimistic message, and I believe that it will be a success.

Mr Cree: I thank the deputy First Minister for that. I was at Ballykelly recently with the Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee to have a look around and I must say that I was surprised at the number of buildings, which are in all sorts of condition. I wonder whether it is anticipated that any of those buildings will be retained.

Mr M McGuinness: I believe that some of them will be retained and refurbished. The First Minister and I have spoken to people who are looking to take out a short-term lease during this year for the next nine months. They have a project that is ready to go. Without breaking confidentiality, it is a very exciting project. For that to work for them, it will require the utilisation of some buildings on the site.

Shackleton Barracks, Ballykelly: Private Investment

T4. **Mr G Robinson** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the potential number of jobs that could be created by private investment in the 740-acre Ballykelly site, as well as the relocation of DARD HQ jobs to Ballykelly. *(AQT 2184/11-15)*

Mr M McGuinness: When a Member get up to ask a question, it is always hard to know what the question will be. However, in the case of the Member for East Londonderry, it was highly predictable that his question would be about Ballykelly. I know that he has a tremendous

interest in the development of the site in the interests of the people of the constituency. From that point of view, we sing from the same hymn sheet.

We are absolutely confident about this. Apart from the relocation of DARD's headquarters to the site and NI Water's interest in a project on it, many other expressions of interest have come from private companies, some of them from overseas. Even at this stage, we can predict that, when fully developed on the site, there will be thousands of new jobs. God knows where I will be 10 years from now, but I think that people will remember the decision to use the site to see, over the next short while, what level of interest there is as we sell off lots. As the Member said, it is an absolutely massive site, so we can predict that it will be very successfully exploited for the purpose of putting our people into work.

Mr Speaker: A quick supplementary question, Mr Robinson.

Mr G Robinson: I thank the deputy First Minister for his answer. Does he agree that the opposition of political parties to any redevelopment of the Ballykelly site could be damaging to the economic future of the north-west?

Mr M McGuinness: I was surprised to hear that reservations were being expressed. I will not use this exercise as an opportunity to score party political points, except to say that this is a wonderful site and there are tremendous opportunities. The First Minister and I are absolutely determined that we will exploit the development of the site for the benefit of business, bringing in foreign direct investment and putting our people into work. That will be a massive benefit to the whole of County Derry, as I call it, or County Londonderry, as you call it.

Mr Speaker: Mr Alastair Ross, I am afraid that I do not have enough time for you to ask a supplementary question, but if you put your question, you will get an answer.

Mr Ross: I will be as succinct as I can, Mr Speaker.

MLAs: Reduction in Number

T5. **Mr Ross** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether they agree that it is now time that we act to make the Assembly smaller by reducing the number of Assembly Members and, if so, whether they see any reason why that could not be done by 2016, given that, earlier today, the First Minister outlined the new names and functions of the smaller Executive, which will be good for efficiency and for saving money, and reform within the public sector is under way. *(AQT 2185/11-15)*

2.45 pm

Mr M McGuinness: We have an agreement. It is in the Stormont House Agreement that we will deal with the reduction in the number of MLAs by 2021, when the election after the one in 2016 will take place. Speaking personally, I have no difficulty at all with the reductions, except to say that, because the current number was part of the Good Friday Agreement and did not change during the discussions on the St Andrews Agreement, the reality is that we will require the support of all the parties who signed up to the Good Friday Agreement and who supported it in the referendum. I know that reservations about the speed of all of this have been expressed by the Ulster Unionist Party and the SDLP. I think that this matter will essentially have to be processed through the party leaders' meetings. We are determined to deal with the issue, but it has to be in a way that brings everybody on board.

Education

St Joseph's High School, Crossmaglen: New Build

1. **Mr D Bradley** asked the Minister of Education for an update on the proposal for a new build at St Joseph's High School, Crossmaglen. *(AQO 7691/11-15)*

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): The first draft of the feasibility study for the new build at St Joseph's High School was submitted to the Department in week ending 20 February 2015. When the feasibility study has been signed off, the Department will undertake an economic appraisal and business case. DFP approval will be required for this business case due to the value of the project. Provided that there is no delay due to issues with the feasibility study, it is anticipated that business case approval could be obtained as early as April 2015. The procurement of the integrated design team to take forward the project as a design and build will be carried out in tandem with the preparation of the business case. However, the appointment cannot be made until the approval of the business case is obtained. This project is still at early planning stage and hence there is not yet a programme time frame available for the build and design.

Mr D Bradley: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. Seo an chéad lá de Sheachtain na Gaeilge agus tá súil agam go ndéanfaidh gach Comhalta a dhícheall a oiread Gaeilge agus is féidir a labhairt le linn Sheachtain na Gaeilge. I thank the Minister. It is, of course, the first day of Irish Language Week, so I urge all Members to do their best to use Irish during their questions or answers.

As I said, I thank the Minister for his answer. The Minister will know that I have raised this issue on a number of occasions, and he has responded very positively by visiting the school and through his announcement of funding. Can the Minister give us an assurance that his Department will facilitate the new-build process in every way possible?

Mr O'Dowd: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Chomhalta as a cheist. I thank the Member for his question, and I welcome his comments about Seachtain na Gaeilge.

I can assure the Member that I am wedded to this project. My Department and I are driving it forward, and he will note even from my answer that we are working our way through the project. It is quite a significant public investment, and we have to follow the proper protocol and policies, not only of my Department but of DFP. I think that things are moving forward well, and, without being pre-emptive, if we can get the business case approved by April, that will move us to the next stage.

Mr Irwin: While the Minister is answering questions about my constituency, can he let us know whether he will prioritise a new build for Markethill High School in County Armagh?

Mr O'Dowd: We have quite a significant number of schools in our estate at primary level and post-primary level that

require new builds or significant investment. I am not in a position to announce any further building programmes at this stage. How the budget, particularly the capital budget, works out through 2015-16 will decide whether any future capital investment announcements are made during this Assembly term. It may be the duty of the next Assembly or the next Minister to make announcements around future builds in the years beyond 2015-16, but I continue to keep the situation under review.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a freagraí. I thank the Minister for his answers to date. There is a good presentation here in relation to capital build projects in Newry and Armagh. Will the Minister take this opportunity to give an update on capital projects across the North?

Mr O'Dowd: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Chomhalta as an cheist. I have made a number of announcements since coming into post. In 2012, I made an announcement of 18 projects, valued at £133 million. Eight school builds are now on site. Arvalee special school is due to go on site in March 2015, with a further five going on site early in the start of the next financial year. St Gerard's resource centre is now complete. In 2013, there was an announcement of a total of 22 projects, valued at £222 million. Currently, there are eight business cases approved, and work is progressing well on the remainder.

Eight of the projects are expected to move on to site in 2015-16, subject to availability of capital in subsequent years. I also made an announcement in 2014. The projects are at the very early stage of planning and are going through the appropriate policy development and business cases etc. It is vital that we are able to announce capital builds because it takes a significant number of years from announcement to put a new build on site. So, we do that years in advance, and we have to ensure that the money is there to follow that up.

Unfortunately, my Department's capital budget is not what I would like to have seen, and I am sure that that is the case for my Executive colleagues as well. We all want to see further investment in capital across the Executive, but I will keep the situation under review, and if I believe that it is appropriate to make an announcement of further capital builds for years going forward, I will do so later in 2015.

Mr Speaker: Questions 3, 4 and 7 have been withdrawn.

Pupil Dropouts: Year 13/Year 14

2. **Mr Givan** asked the Minister of Education to outline the number of young people who fail to complete years 13 and 14 of full-time education. *(AQO 7692/11-15)*

Mr O'Dowd: The number of pupils who fail to complete years 13 and 14 is relatively small. The school leavers' survey shows that, in 2012-13, some 522 pupils left post-primary school without completing year 13, and 305 left without completing year 14. The survey also shows that the majority of those pupils — 76% of those leaving year 13 and 71 % of those leaving year 14 — went on to further education colleges, employment or training.

Many of those who fail to complete year 13 or year 14 do so because they are not content with their chosen pathway and decide to change direction. It is important, therefore, that young people are supported in making the right choices at the right time. Effective and timely careers guidance is important to support young people in making informed choices. That is why I welcomed the recent review of the joint DE/DEL careers strategy, which found that the strategy is sound and has resulted in significant improvements in the delivery of careers education over the past four years.

Mr Givan: I thank the Minister for that response. Whilst it is a small number, I would be interested to know how many make an in-year change and then decide to change to a college. When I was 16, I went to Lisburn college, realised that the course was not for me and went back to secondary school to do A levels. Those statistics would provide an interesting insight. What further steps can be taken to try to minimise the type of change that takes place, because there is a cost to the taxpayer, and there is a lost opportunity to the young people who are involved? What more can be done to try to limit those experiences that we are having?

Mr O'Dowd: I know that the Member has asked questions previously in relation to this matter, and some statistics were provided at that stage. It is when and how the statistics are gathered and provided that will illuminate as to some of the points that you made in relation to whether young people make those choices at the start of the year or the middle of the year. I suspect that it is a mixture of both, but I will investigate to see whether we have the detail to answer the question that you have posed.

In relation to how we ensure that young people make the right choices, it is down to careers advice. It is down to ensuring that young people are fully informed of the career options that they have and the pathways that they will have to follow and where those pathways will lead them if they make certain subject choices. As I mentioned in my original answer to you, the recent review of the careers strategy has been quite positive, pointing out that we are beginning to make positive changes to careers advice and that young people are now receiving much-improved careers advice from that given in previous years, but we will continue to keep that matter under review.

Mr Rogers: Minister, you rightly put the emphasis on the careers education programme. What discussions have you had with the Department for Employment and Learning to bring forward the recommendations from the careers review?

Mr O'Dowd: I have had discussions directly with the Minister, and my officials are in discussion with his officials about the matter. We are continuing to investigate how to bring forward the recommendations of the review, particularly given the constrained budgetary period for both Departments.

Mr Kinahan: I thank the Minister for his answers so far, and it is good to hear that there are so few. Has the Minister thought about or even discussed with officials the idea that has been suggested in the UK of extending the school years to include 17- and 18-year-olds or adding some flexibility into the system?

Mr O'Dowd: I think the Member is referring to the compulsory age of leaving school being 17 or 18, and I think it is worth exploring. I am not proactively doing that, but people's lifestyles are changing, and the figures show that more and more young people stay in education beyond the age of 16, 17 or 18. Our career pathways are changing, our education system is changing and, indeed,

the skills bases that employers require are changing. As we all know, we are also expected to work longer, so it is important that we start looking back down the track at how long our young people should stay in school. It will be a wide-ranging debate with implications for a significant number of Departments, but I think that it will have positive outcomes for young people and may well have a positive outcome for the economy, and, whether or not I have the opportunity to explore it during this term in office, I believe that it is something that our society and the Executive need to start discussing in detail.

Lisanelly Stakeholder Group

5. **Mr McElduff** asked the Minister of Education for an update on the work of the Lisanelly education campus stakeholder group. *(AQO 7695/11-15)*

Mr O'Dowd: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Chomhalta as an cheist. The Lisanelly shared education campus (LSEC) community stakeholder group held its inaugural meeting in December 2014 and is due to meet again in the near future. The group includes representation from the district council, community organisations and statutory bodies. Its main focus is to contribute to the achievement of the vision and objectives of the LSEC programme through a process of ongoing two-way engagement that allows for consideration of issues that may impact on the local community. The group will achieve this by exploring how opportunities and benefits for the Omagh area can be maximised in economic, social and community regeneration objectives.

Following the group's first meeting, reflecting the areas discussed and ideas generated, my Department, in conjunction with other Departments and relevant organisations, is examining the provision of additional community services and facilities that may be provided on the site. Progress will be communicated to the group at its next meeting.

As part of a wider communication strategy, work has also commenced to develop an overarching brand and vision for the campus. My Department has written to the community stakeholder group asking for its involvement in that exercise. Members of the group will be consulted to ensure that the views of the local community, young people and other key stakeholders on the development of the site and brand are captured.

I would also note that, at the request of the group, Omagh Youth Council has nominated two of its members to sit on the group. This will help to ensure the views of young people and potential LSEC pupils are captured and taken account of.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Can I thank the Minister for his answer and his pioneering work in leading this iconic Lisanelly education campus. Can the Minister indicate the key milestones that are up ahead for the project, for this calendar year and for future calendar years? Are we on course for the 2020 opening — is it? — of the schools that will be on the site? What are the key milestones up ahead?

Mr O'Dowd: The key milestone up ahead is the starting of Arvalee special needs school, and that is on track. We are on track to have schools on site towards 2020. There has been significant progress made over the last year and a half in moving the project forward.

It is the biggest capital project that the Executive are involved in. It is a massive investment in shared education and in the Omagh area. I know that, at times, progress has been frustrating for the local community, but we are now back on track and are ensuring that things are moving forward.

3.00 pm

Arvalee School is expected to open in September 2016. A contract for site-wide demolition was recently awarded, and work has commenced on the site. Planning of future phases of development is ongoing in close consultation with the relevant schools and schools authority. It is expected that construction of the five post-primary schools will commence in 2017, with the campus opening in September 2020. We are moving ahead, and, after long years of visioning, talking and planning the project, physical work is taking place on the site, and employment is being generated in the community. Schools in the Omagh area are at the very heart of planning the site. As I said in my original answer, many aspects of the community are involved in it.

Mr Buchanan: Minister, progress has been slow and very frustrating. You said that it would be open by 2020: is that subject to funding, or will it take place on the ground in 2020?

Mr O'Dowd: Unfortunately, everything in this life is subject to funding. It is part of our forward planning, and, when we sit down to talk about capital for future years, the Lisanelly site is always front and centre because it is a Programme for Government commitment. There have been delays in the past, but we are determined to deliver it on time. Arvalee School is expected to open in September 2016, and work will commence on that very shortly. People will then have the confidence that the site is for real, that the schools are moving on to it, and that the Executive will deliver on their Programme for Government target.

Mr Lyttle: What level and type of contact does the Minister hope for between pupils at shared education of that kind? How will he know if it has been achieved?

Mr O'Dowd: I wish for maximum sharing on the site. The local schools are involved in discussions on how and when to use the facilities. It is about how schools use them together and how the young people on the site create a common identity but with schools with a different ethos on the site. There should be a common identity among pupils attending the Lisanelly education campus and being proud of that corporate identity.

How will we know that it has worked? I think that the commitment of the local schools and stakeholders in Omagh will make it work. I have no doubt that, over many years, there will be much scrutiny and many case studies of the Lisanelly site. At times, there will be a steep learning process for some, but what encourages me, as Minister, is that people are willing to learn and to challenge one another and themselves about the shared education site at Omagh. It is a pathfinder project that offers massive opportunities for the community of Omagh and, indeed, across the North.

SEN Students: Statements

6. **Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Education how he is accelerating and streamlining the process of statementing for special educational needs students in mainstream post-primary schools. *(AQO 7696/11-15)*

Mr O'Dowd: My proposals, following the review of SEN and inclusion, contain measures to reduce the time for completion of statutory assessments for SEN children in all schools. The proposals also aim to reduce the administration around statementing. I propose a reduction to 20 weeks in the time frame for statutory assessment and statementing. A revised statutory code of practice will set out practical arrangements for the Education Authority and schools to meet a child's special educational needs. That will follow provision in the Special Educational Needs and Disability Bill and the supporting regulations. The revised code will describe the new processes for three levels of support and the respective duties of boards of governors and the authority. It will complement the anticipated streamlined process following the creation of the Education Authority. To reduce the administrative burden associated with annual reviews of statements, I propose that some reviews will provide an opportunity for a swifter process. That would require parents and schools to be fully satisfied with the current provision in a statement. Parents and schools would both have to agree that a review involving other advice-givers is not necessary.

The Department will indicate to the authority and schools the acceptable time frames for completion of assessment and provision of supports. Ongoing capacity-building training for special educational needs coordinators has been delivered to ensure that schools are fully informed of the processes for the identification and assessment of children's needs. I intend that to be supplemented by training for each school and board of governors on the new SEN framework prior to implementation.

Lord Morrow: I thank the Minister for his answer. I did not quite catch whether he said that he hopes to reduce the processing time to 20 weeks or that it is 20 weeks at the moment. Could he clarify that point, when he rises to speak again?

Does he accept that the time taken for assessments is too long and is affecting the development of some students?

Mr O'Dowd: The current time frame is 26 weeks. We wish to reduce that to 20 weeks in the legislation and regulations.

I note that the Member has been asking a significant number of questions for written answer on special educational needs, and I am more than happy for my officials to meet him to discuss the issues of concern to him. There are clearly issues that he is bearing down on and wishes to have further clarification on. If it is of assistance, I am more than happy for my officials to meet him to discuss matters further.

Mr Dallat: Given the awful legacy of illiteracy and innumeracy inherited from predecessors, what hope can the Minister give to parents who believe that their child has special needs when the Education Authority believes otherwise? How will those parents approach the tribunal and what support will they have?

Mr O'Dowd: First, I would encourage parents to talk to the teacher and, if need be, follow it up with the board of governors and/or the principal of the school. They should discuss the matter in detail to ensure that whatever support is required for the child is delivered, whether it is the responsibility of the school or, as we move forwards, the Education Authority. In all cases, there is an appeal mechanism in place that I will encourage parents to follow through to its conclusion.

I introduced a Bill today that will have its Second Reading next Tuesday. We are attempting to modernise special educational needs provision to deliver a more effective and efficient service to children, families and schools. The Bill will quite rightly attract significant attention; I have no doubt that the Education Committee will scrutinise it in great detail. I have already agreed to work with it on the matter. There are many matters that I bring before the Assembly over which I am prepared to dig my heels in and fight the good fight, but this is not one of them. I believe that, if the Assembly, the Committee and I work together, we can achieve a statementing process through the Special Educational Needs and Disability Bill that meets the needs of our young people.

Mr McCallister: I welcome the Minister's commitment to cut the time from 26 to 20 weeks. He will be aware that I wrote to him recently about a constituent, and the broad context of that was whether he was now prepared to say that he will accept statements from other parts of the UK? Would that not help to streamline the process, rather than repeating it? Will he now give a commitment to accept statements from all constituent parts of the UK?

Mr O'Dowd: This is not an issue about the "constituent parts of the UK", as you put it. It has nothing to do with my views on the constitution of this society, the North or whatever you want to call it. As I set out in great detail in the written response, this is to do with the different emphases in the statementing process in England, Scotland or Wales. The statementing process may be different in England, Scotland or Wales from the process here. There are variations in the processes as they would apply to a young person travelling from here to Britain. Those are just facts that we have to deal with, and I want to deal with them as quickly as possible. I want to remove obstacles to parents and children rather than place obstacles in their way. I can assure the Member that I will look for any way around this that does not interrupt the legislative process that we have to follow. Statementing and so on is all set down in legislation; it is not simply a matter for the Minister to dismiss. I assure the Member that I will not place any obstacles in the way of ensuring that young people receive the services they require, regardless of where they are from.

Mrs Overend: I might have missed the answer to the last question, although I have been listening to all the rest. I appreciate what the Minister said about cutting the wait from 26 weeks to 20 weeks, although I recognise that that has not always been met in the past. Will he guarantee that the upcoming Bill will end the current postcode lottery?

Mr O'Dowd: One of the initial reasons why the Bill was brought forward was an attempt to end the postcode lottery. There is a difference in the delivery of some of the services across the boards. Now that we have the Education Authority in place, that body will bring together best practice from across the boards. It will take some time to do

that because it has a significant work programme in front of it. The shape of the legislation now rests with the Assembly, As sponsoring Minister, I have agreement from the Executive to bring forward a Bill. That Bill will be introduced and will go through the various stages of the Assembly. The shape of the final Bill will be as the Assembly dictates. I am prepared to work with the Assembly and the Committee and vice versa. We have had a very good working relationship on the matter to date, and I hope to continue that. I have no reason to suspect that that will not be the case. Let us produce an Act that meets the needs of our young people at the end of the journey.

School Transport: Integrated Sector

8. **Mr Wilson** asked the Minister of Education what percentage of children attending integrated schools receive free school transport. *(AQO 7698/11-15)*

Mr O'Dowd: The percentages of pupils attending integrated schools who are eligible for assistance with home-to-school transport are 17·8% for primary and 51·9% for post-primary.

Mr Speaker: I call Mr Wilson for a quick supplementary.

Mr Wilson: The discrepancy between the percentage of pupils who qualify for free school transport in the integrated sector and that for the controlled and maintained sector is a ratio of about 3:1, which partly explains the popularity of the integrated sector, especially at secondary level. That presents an unfair advantage for integrated schools over the maintained and controlled schools adjacent to them. It distorts the budget and the capital budget.

Mr Speaker: Is there a question coming?

Mr Wilson: What is the Minister doing and what consideration is he giving to ensure that there is a level playing field when it comes to that very important incentive for pupils to attend one sector as opposed to another?

Mr O'Dowd: The Member will be aware that I recently received the transport review. It is a detailed document that has studied our transport system in great detail and has come forward with a significant number of recommendations. It is my intention, in the coming months, to publish that document for consultation. From that consultation, I will bring forward changes to our transport system that are felt to be required to ensure that we have a level playing field for everyone.

Education Authority: Update

9. **Mr Maskey** asked the Minister of Education for an update on the establishment of the Education Authority. *(AQO 7699/11-15)*

Mr O'Dowd: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Chomhalta as an cheist. The Education Authority was formally established as a body corporate on 12 December 2014. The education and library boards and their staff commission will be dissolved on 1 April 2015, and their assets, liabilities, duties, functions and staff will transfer to the Education Authority. The Education Authority will become operational on that date.

Mr Maskey: I thank the Minister for that response. Will he advise the House of when the new appointees to the board will be publicly announced?

Mr O'Dowd: A number of the appointees have recently been informed that their nomination has been accepted. The chair has recently been informed of their appointment, and formal letters etc have been exchanged. I am reluctant to announce names at this stage because I am not 100% sure of whether everyone has been formally informed and has formally accepted their nomination, but I assure the Member that it is well advanced and that there will be a board in place by 1 April.

3.15 pm

Mr Speaker: That ends the period for listed questions. We now move on to topical questions.

Special Educational Needs and Disability Bill: Health Issues

T1. **Mr D Bradley** asked the Minister of Education what discussions he has had with the Health Minister about the Special Educational Needs and Disability Bill, which he referred to earlier, given the fact that health issues can often impinge upon special educational needs. *(AQT 2191/11-15)*

Mr O'Dowd: I have had no discussions with the current Health Minister, but I had significant discussions with his predecessor, simply because of the timescale within which the Bill was drawn up and prepared for delivery to the Executive. My officials are in regular engagement with health officials under the current Health Minister in relation to this matter as they were under the previous Minister. I have no doubt that, as the Bill progresses and as matters arise, the Health Minister and I will have engagements around those points.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh mile maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a fhreagra. Too often in the past, parents and schools have said that there is a silo mentality in relation to health and education around these issues. Can the Minister assure the House that the Bill will contain provisions that will break down those silos?

Mr O'Dowd: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Chomhalta as an cheist. I am satisfied that the Bill allows for a closer working relationship between my Department and the Health Department. Indeed, I believe that the silo mentality across the Executive has been broken down over the last number of years with a better working relationship among Ministers, although, sometimes, the public may not believe that. There is a better working relationship, which has been sponsored by the Civil Service in regards to cross-departmental working. I believe that the Bill presents us with an opportunity to enhance and increase that, but I would also put on record the significant amount of cross-departmental work that already takes place.

Education Authority: Chair

T2. **Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Education why he is appointing someone with no education background as chair of the new Education Authority; someone who, on the day she leaves her existing post, will leave with a £250,000 golden handshake to walk into a public appointment that the Minister is gifting to her. *(AQT 2192/11-15)*

Mr O'Dowd: I am satisfied that all the appointments that I have made to date, including that of the chair of the

Education Authority, are the correct appointments, that they meet the criteria of the post and that the person involved will be more than capable of delivering quite a challenging role in the time ahead, ensuring that we end up with a body that is made up of different sectors operating as one sector for the betterment of our education system.

Mr Allister: Given the background of the other two shortlisted persons that the Minister considered, is he playing the green card in appointing Ms O'Connor?

Mr O'Dowd: I find that question totally unacceptable, and an accusation that I have acted in an inappropriate and illegal manner. I ask you, Mr Speaker, to investigate Mr Allister's comments because he has accused me not only of breaking the ministerial code but of acting illegally.

Mr Wilson: You would not be the first Sinn Féin Minister to do so.

Mr Speaker: Order. Let me respond to your point of order. The question was presented as a question and not as an accusation, but I will study Hansard. My first impression is that, in fact, he did not make an accusation but asked a rhetorical question, perhaps provocatively so.

Schools: Capital Funding

T3. **Mr Poots** asked the Minister of Education when he will be in a position to announce the next round of capital funding projects for new-build schools. *(AQT 2193/11-15)*

Mr O'Dowd: I am not sure when that will be. First, I have to formally announce the outcome of the education budget for resource and capital, and I will appear before the Education Committee on Wednesday to do so. It depends how the capital programme rolls out this year, how much investment and spend we get out on the ground this year and how we believe that will impact moving into 2016-17. I want to be in a position to make a further announcement in this financial year, but I cannot confirm that at this stage.

Mr Poots: I trust that, when the Minister is looking at that opportunity, he will not ignore the chance to look at educational need in Dromore High School. The school was developed many years ago for around half of the population that it currently caters for, it performs particularly well in the local community and is very well regarded, and it does not have suitable recreational facilities for the needs of that school community.

Mr O'Dowd: I am acutely aware of the needs of Dromore High School. The Member and a number of his colleagues have raised the issue with me on numerous occasions. The Member will also be aware that I recently approved expenditure to purchase a site for a new build. I cannot pre-empt any announcement going into the future, but I certainly want to follow up on our initial investment in a site.

Austerity: Interdepartmental Working

T4. **Mr Brady** asked the Minister of Education whether he agrees that there is a need for his Department to work with the other Departments to fight austerity. *(AQT 2194/11-15)*

Mr O'Dowd: There is a need. Like many around the Executive table who have approached the recent Stormont House Agreement and the Budget, I think that we are doing our best to mitigate the worst aspects of austerity. We are doing it, however, in the context of a much-reduced resource and capital budget, but decisions that were made at the Executive are ensuring that the quality of life of many of our people and, indeed, young people in our schools is greatly improved rather than those decisions being made by someone else.

Mr Brady: I thank the Minister for his answer. What are his views on the current strike action in the teachers' unions?

Mr O'Dowd: Teachers' unions and other public-sector workers have decided to move forward towards ballots for strike action, which they are perfectly entitled to do. I do not think that any of the teachers' unions have announced the outworkings of those ballots yet. We will wait to see the decision of their membership. I assure the unions, their membership and the general public that I am doing everything within my power to obtain as much investment for education as possible. The Member will note that, as part of the final Budget settlement, the Executive agreed to an additional £64 million for education.

It is worth noting — I made the point recently at a teachers' trade union conference — that, between the draft Budget and the final Budget, the Executive increased investment in public services. If, as some wish, the Tories take over here directly and we have direct rule, any change between the draft Budget and the final Budget, and any funds that became available, would not be invested in public services. They would be sent directly back to the Treasury. As a result of my interventions and those of the Executive and others, we ensured that there is an additional £64 million in education. If others had their way, that £64 million would have gone straight back to the Treasury.

Schools: New-build Criteria

T5. **Mr Beggs** asked the Minister of Education what plans he has to increase the transparency of the school-building process so that there is a greater understanding of the cumulative pressures for capital rebuild and a greater level of transparency as to how projects are prioritised, given his recent comment that he has a list of around 100 schools that he would like to be rebuilt. *(AQT 2195/11-15)*

Mr O'Dowd: The Member will be or should be aware that, after my announcement in 2013 or 2014, I published on my Department's website the criteria that are used for the selection of new builds. There is no onus on me to do that. The authority rests solely with the Minister as to which new builds go ahead, but I believe in transparency in government and in accountability, hence the reason why I published the criteria.

Mr Beggs: Will the Minister acknowledge that it would be healthy if there was a wider understanding of the pressures that schools are under, the poor condition of some of them and the need to rebuild so that, when deciding whether to build new departmental headquarters, thought is given to costs and options so that all Departments are prioritised appropriately?

Mr O'Dowd: In general, there is acceptance among the political class of the pressures on all our budgets, particularly capital and resource. The question is about where you place priorities in society and what you want the direction of travel to be. That is at the heart of the question. I have a capital budget that is 20% reduced on last year. I have to make decisions. I will be making announcements in the coming days, and I will be in the Education Committee for further scrutiny around those matters. I

remain hopeful that, through in-year funding, I will be able to access further capital funds for various projects. We are at a stage in education where we have a significant number of projects that are, if not shovel ready, very close to being shovel ready and can react quite quickly to the availability of funds.

Education: Departmental Opportunities

T9. **Mr Sheehan** asked the Minister of Education what opportunities exist in the realignment of his Department in the years ahead. *(AQT 2199/11-15)*

Mr O'Dowd: Bringing children's services into the Department of Education is the right decision. It allows for a complete focus on the child and on children's needs, pressures and opportunities. It has been the right move. It is an opportunity for the Department to engage in the entire education and well-being of the child. As I have often said standing here, while we have many, many, many fine teachers, they cannot do this on their own. Unless we look at all aspects of a child's life, education is not going to work.

Mr Sheehan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a fhreagra. Could the Minister tell the Assembly what priorities he suggests the new board focuses on?

Mr O'Dowd: I do not wish to bring the wrath of the Education Authority down on me in the first number of weeks of it taking charge of the education remit, but there are quite significant budgetary challenges ahead. The focus for us all has to be on improving educational outcomes for all our young people and on ensuring that, where opportunities exist, they are exploited to the full and that, where challenges exist, there are answers and ways found for our young people. The Education Authority presents a huge opportunity for our education system. Its membership is from a wide range of organisations. I suspect that they will naturally come in thinking initially about the needs of their own organisation but will quite quickly gel around a common cause. That common cause has to be the educational well-being of all our young people.

Programming and Coding: A-level Qualification

T10. **Mr Buchanan** asked the Minister of Education how seriously he views the fact that only six post-primary schools in Northern Ireland are offering an A-level qualification in programming and coding — a qualification required by over 60% of companies in Northern Ireland that are looking for employees — and what he is doing to address this situation. *(AQT 2200/11-15)*

Mr O'Dowd: The Member may be referring to a new A level that has been introduced into the system. I do not have the exact numbers of schools providing that A level. We are providing training and support to schools so that a greater number of them can take on that A level. It is very relevant to the STEM debate that the Assembly is holding.

Mr Buchanan: I thank the Minister for his answer. Does he agree that it is an essential qualification that post-primary schools should be taking up?

Mr O'Dowd: It is certainly an essential qualification if you are going to enter the field of computer science or computing. This goes back to one of the other questions that I was asked during Question Time. I hope that young people who are seeking to enter a career in computing and ICT are advised that this new A level is available and will significantly enhance their opportunities. It all comes back to good careers advice being given to young people so that they know which pathway they want to choose and what qualifications they require to follow that pathway.

3.30 pm

Committee Business

STEM in Schools

Debate resumed on motion:

> *That this Assembly notes the recent publication of the Education and Training Inspectorate's evaluation of the implementation of the World Around Us, the Confederation of British Industry's 'Step Change: A new approach for schools in Northern Ireland' report, Momentum's digital sector action plan and the Engineering UK 2015 report, all of which highlight the importance of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) in schools; recognises the role of STEM as a key driver of the economy; and calls on the Minister of Education to support and encourage the full implementation of the STEM aspects of the curriculum in order to bring about high quality learning for all children. — [Miss M McIlveen (The Chairperson of the Committee for Education).]*

Mr McCausland: As a member of the Education Committee and a former science teacher, I support the motion. It is a very relevant motion. The subjects of science, technology, engineering and mathematics, or STEM as we describe them, are extremely important, and the motion refers to a number of recent reports and evaluations that emphasise the importance of children having access to and a good knowledge of those subjects.

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

The inspectorate has said that STEM subjects are important, the sector has said that they are important and the Committee and common sense would say that they are important as well. The motion calls on the Minister to support the schools and the system to:

> *"encourage the full implementation of the STEM aspects of the curriculum in order to bring about high quality learning for all children."*

We know that the Minister will have a number of priorities and things that he wants to happen and be done during his tenure in office. I sincerely hope that that is one of them and that he will make the teaching of STEM subjects one of his priorities.

The motion also states that STEM subjects are a "key driver of the economy". They are a growth area for the economy. If that is the case, and if we want to address issues of unemployment, particularly among younger people, surely we do not want to put ourselves in a situation where we have to bring into Northern Ireland young people with the requisite skills in those areas to fill the opportunities that there are in a range of businesses in the STEM areas. We should be in a position where young people here are available with the skills to take up the jobs that are being created and to help to create more jobs in what is clearly a key driver for the economy and a growth area.

STEM subjects tend to be focused on at secondary level. However, as the motion implies, they also have a relevance in primary schools. The Royal Society of Chemistry, along with other scientific organisations, have stressed the importance of that subject in primary as well as secondary schools. The Committee sincerely hopes that the Minister will throw his full weight, his full support and his full resources behind STEM subjects to ensure that they are taught at primary and secondary level and that all aspects of the reports and the evaluations by the inspectorate are taken into account in so doing.

It was touched on, maybe a little bit humorously, earlier that there is an opportunity to say to young people in Northern Ireland that there are good examples that can be an encouragement and perhaps even an inspiration to them. The IT link across the Atlantic with America is referred to as Project Kelvin. One of the great things about Lord Kelvin was that, not only was he a theoretical scientist, he was a very practical scientist who created many different inventions and so on. We should also keep it in mind that there is a value in making children in schools more aware of the scientific, technical, engineering and mathematical heritage of Ulster, which has produced so many significant figures in those areas.

It would be remiss of me to simply leave it with Lord Kelvin. We might also refer to Sir Samuel Davidson and the Sirocco Works. He was a pre-eminent engineer with so many different and diverse inventions to his name. He was also the proprietor of a major engineering works that not only produced goods in Belfast but exported them around the world. Belfast was very much a centre of engineering and of invention and innovation. We might also think of Harry Ferguson, the engineer who made such a significant contribution in the agricultural field. For the benefit of Mr Hazzard, who is no longer with us, the common theme across Sir Samuel Davidson, Harry Ferguson and Lord Kelvin is not simply their engineering expertise but the fact that they were staunch unionists and very much in support of Ulster and the union —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Will the Member draw his remarks to a close?

Mr McCausland: I am sure that Mr Hazzard will want to take that to heart.

I support the motion and hope that the Minister will take it to heart.

Mr Newton: I, too, support the motion. Like my colleague, I want to hone in on what I see as a key phrase in the motion:

> *"STEM as a key driver of the economy".*

I want to make two points on that. Our history on STEM, and indeed Northern Ireland's successful high achievers who have come out of what we now call "STEM" — certainly, it was not called "STEM" in their day — is a platform on which we can build to take us forward. In the STEM areas, Northern Ireland has punched well above its weight; much like our sporting achievements over the weekend. It is often said that the only resources that we have in Northern Ireland are our people. STEM gives us an opportunity to embrace all those elements on which to build a strategy for success.

I want to mention, as others have, a few people who have been successful and their backgrounds. Harry Ferguson, who has been mentioned, was a farmer's son from County Down; he started life in a very humble way, working in a bicycle and car repair business. He was fascinated by aviation and inspired by the Wright brothers. Indeed, he

wanted to embrace, and he did, his scientific and technical knowledge and convert it into success in running a business. It is difficult to think what the agriculture industry might be like today had it not been for the benefits of his skills and engineering knowledge.

Another was John Stewart Bell. He was born in Belfast in a very humble background; he decided on a career in science when he was 11 years of age. He did not have the opportunity to go to a grammar school, but he finished his education at Belfast technical college. He became a technician at Queen's University and was inspired there. He graduated with two degrees in experimental physics and mathematical physics. This was a man from Belfast who corrected Einstein. Only recently he had a street named after him in Belfast. Unfortunately, he missed out on a Nobel prize only because of his untimely death.

Dame Jocelyn Bell Burnell was born in Belfast and educated in Lurgan. She failed her 11-plus. She was educated in York and impressed her physics teacher so much that he encouraged her down the line of science. She graduated from Glasgow University with a Bachelor of Science degree. She campaigned to increase the number of females who participate in physics and astronomy. She is house patron of Burnell House at Cambridge House Grammar School in Ballymena.

There are many, many more who could be named. Others in the Chamber mentioned them. Lord Kelvin — or 1st Baron Kelvin, as he was referred to — was mentioned because of the recent Kelvin infrastructure for communications.

Let me just say this in the short time that I have left: the benefits of STEM will be realised fully only when there is an increased understanding between science, technology and mathematics and a full understanding of the potential of those subjects to our community and society. We need pathways for young skilled and knowledgeable people; we need a change of culture to reduce and manage risk aversion; we need a change of culture to build the links between Northern Ireland businesses, universities and publicly funded research projects.

I hope, on the basis of what the First Minister said earlier today, that the silo mentality can be got over —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Will the Member draw his remarks to a close?

Mr Newton: — and that the Departments can work together to maximise the potential of STEM to our economy.

Mr McGlone: Mo bhuíochas leat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Agus mo bhuíochas leis an Choiste as ucht an t-ábhar seo a thabhairt os ár gcomhair inniu. I welcome the motion, and I thank the Education Committee in particular for bringing it to the Assembly for debate. All of us will, I hope, agree that science, technology, engineering and mathematics — STEM — play a key role in driving the economy, and we can agree on the importance of STEM subjects in our schools.

There are consistent themes in the reports referred to in the motion. I will begin with the Education and Training Inspectorate's evaluation of the implementation of the World Around Us in primary schools. From December 2013 to June 2014, the inspectorate visited primary schools across all education and library boards and management types and sizes. In addition, it held discussions with stakeholders, and a web survey was completed by school principals in consultation with their staff. The inspectorate found that, although primary schools are at different points in their implementation of World Around Us, two thirds of schools have prioritised its development in the past three years. However, overall, schools remain more confident about the quality of their provision in history and geography and in thinking skills and personal capabilities. Almost half believe that they do not include the progression of the relevant practical, experiential skills in science and technology in their planning. Those schools cite various reasons for that, including competing priorities such as literacy, numeracy and assessment and a lack of access to training.

Significantly, only 37% of the 107 schools that responded to the web survey reported that they had staff who had completed STEM training with recognised providers. The inspectorate made recommendations in its report, three of which were specifically for the Department of Education. Those recommendations are to encourage and support the full implementation of the science and technology strand of WAU in the primary school to bring about high-quality learning for all children; to investigate how primary schools can be supported in the delivery of WAU through a variety of means, including expertise from the post-primary sector and from a range of external stakeholders, such as the Curriculum Advisory and Support Service (CASS); and to re-emphasise the importance of WAU, particularly the significance of science and technology in policy and planning for initial teacher education. It should not be difficult or incur any significant cost for the Minister to endorse those recommendations to improve the provision of STEM subjects in our primary schools.

A report from the Momentum digital summit rightly applauds what has been done so far but emphasises the need to build on those achievements. Among the proposals to emerge from the summit is the need for:

> *"Major changes to the current education system in its support for the sector and the core technical skills required by employers on short, medium and long-term basis."*

Key to the changes it proposes is the identification of education as being at the heart of the drive for sustainable success. Momentum recognises the serious issues faced in the upskilling of teachers so that they are able to teach coding or "computer programming", as it is more widely known, with confidence. It also acknowledges that the way in which the education system works allows, in theory, for flexibility in the provision of teaching of coding.

The revised curriculum includes ICT as a cross-curricular skill, and the flexibility already in place in the revised curriculum allows schools to teach computer science in any Key Stage. However, Momentum points out that that rarely happens, other than in an ad hoc way, for a number of reasons. Schools need to seek access to the knowledge required in teaching coding, and the demand for the subject needs to be fostered, especially in primary school and at pre-GCSE level. It argues strongly for the introduction of teaching coding to children from primary school age at Key Stage 2. It is essential to deliver coding to the widest cross-section of pupils at the earliest opportunity. Momentum used the example of Estonia, where, with a similar-sized population, the Government

have pledged to introduce coding early in primary schools. I support that call. Children in the North should have access to coding from the age of eight. As Momentum stated, that would:

> *"build upon the current on-going initiatives for the rollout of GCSE and 'A' Level computing courses to post primary schools."*

The CBI's 'Step Change' report argued that education is about:

> *"preparing young people for success"*

in work and in life.

3.45 pm

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Will the Member draw his remarks to a close?

Mr McGlone: As part of the proposed systemic review of the education system, it recommended more action on implementing the Government's Success through STEM strategy. It also recommended that computing be taught as a core subject for children in Northern Ireland, that all schools should be required to offer separate sciences —

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

Mr McGlone: — as an option for young people at GCSE level and that where schools are too small, they should offer effectively —

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

Mr McGlone: — a full range of subjects. They should continue to be encouraged to —

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

Mr B McCrea: I worry a bit about this debate. I realise that we are not speaking to a packed House, but I heard Mr Lunn, Mr Hazzard and a few other people say, "Do you know what? Things are not so bad. They are going OK". Actually, I am not so sure that they are. Of course, we can talk about the ETI report that has come out, which says that of our primary schools, just over half — 54% — felt capable of teaching the science strand, but it goes further than that. I do not know whether Members were listening to the radio on Sunday, but, on 'Inside Business', Des Speed of PathXL stated that the shortage of software skills had become something of a crisis and that we need joined-up government to sort that shortage out. Peter Fitzgerald of Randox said that they are desperate for more scientists and engineers.

I know that Members here have talked about the great Northern Ireland Science Festival. It was very successful, with 10,000 predicted to go but 30,000 actually turning up at the 11-day event, which had over 100 events. However, I wonder how many of the Members here present went to any of those. How many of you went to hear about John Stewart Bell? A few accolades were given here, but I am sure that my Ulster Unionist colleagues would be delighted to know that he was a cousin of Billy Bell, a former MLA from my constituency, and that his entire family was there. I am sure that that is something that they would like to make something of.

I was also surprised not to see many Members — none, apart from the Minister — at the Turing lecture. Over 700 people turned out, which was a record. It was fantastic. By 2020, which is only five years away, 20 billion devices will be connected to the Internet. Loads of other things were talked about. How many people went to see the Bodyworks exhibition, which was brought by SmithKline Beecham of Glasgow? How many people went to see the laser demonstration for the International Year of Light when it was at the museum? Basically, there is a lot of talk but not much action. How many people have been to CERN, built by a Northern Ireland man, to see what it is about? How many people have been to the Science Museum in London? How many people have listened to NASA? How many people know that 1·46 million people in the UK are employed in IT and that 1·2 billion tech jobs have not been filled worldwide? Those issues show why we must get more people involved.

I got a very nice email from Roisin Crawford, whom Members from the north-west will know as the person who runs STEM Aware. She mentioned the Northern Ireland primary school curriculum, saying that little science is required with even less practised. She also says that some older teachers practise, but others never did science. I think that the Minister has to take it on board that science has been hit by the fact that the unofficial 11-plus tests do not deal with science. If it is not measured, it does not get taught, so there is a problem coming through in the next three or four years.

It is interesting that Roisin, being a female engineer, also said that she did not think that we should have a go at girls specifically as part of the gender balance but we should point it out to them that they have an unfair advantage in the jobs market. People are desperate to get women into science, IT and all those areas.

There is an issue with Sentinus that I want to deal with. I hope that the Minister will tell us that a bit more funding on that is coming through. It is an excellent exercise. I also wonder how many Members went down to the BT Young Scientists and Technology Exhibition. I listened to Jennifer McKinley, who is a senior lecturer in the school of geography, archaeology and palaeoecology. What has that got to do with anything? She is a world expert in forensic science, that is what. We have got to push our really good people. I have to say to Members that it is all very well trotting out the fine words, having the speech and doing all those things, but I wish that a few more of you could find your way to joining the excellent APG on science and technology, getting involved in the science debate and going along to all these great things. Science is the future, but actions speak louder than words.

Mr McCallister: I just have a few remarks about this. I take some of the points from earlier in the debate about coding. Mr McGlone made points around how we get kids and young people interested in that earlier. I will be interested in the Minister's response. Now we are doing an A level on IT and computing, but have we the expertise to deliver that across the board? My experience in my constituency is that we do not. Are there other options for lifting the skills of our teachers and the staff who are needed to deliver this? Are there models online that we should look to be able to do that and to extend those choices?

I too hear much talk about STEM. For the entire almost eight years that I have been a Member of the House, probably not a year has gone by when we have not debated this subject or something very close to it. That

is something, yet when you come to look at what action we have taken or whether we have improved Northern Ireland's game particularly in this area, I am not so sure that we have. We are still training too many people for law and teaching. We have an entire debate around teacher training places, and some people are happy that we have saved St Mary's and Stranmillis, but at what cost? Is there a cost in the number of university places? Is there a cost in the number of further education places? Is there a cost in the number of experts we could have brought in to look at IT and STEM subjects? All those things we could have done, could have looked at and could have changed, but we have not made the bold decisions that somehow are needed to address this.

That is why I sometimes get slightly frustrated when I read very well intentioned motions from the Committee. It is an important subject for the Committee to acknowledge and to look at, but we are at the point where we need to actually take action and see whether the Minister can now tell us that we have dramatically improved our STEM subjects in the last eight years. Are we getting more of our students interested? Are we putting more people through? Are we creating the economic conditions for that to flourish and develop at the other end, or are we exporting most of them to other parts of the UK or indeed other parts of the world? That is something of which we have to make sure, and I want to hear from the Minister whether we are achieving any of that, rather than just the well-intentioned words.

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): Gabhaim buíochas leis an Choiste as an rún seo a chur faoi bhráid an Tionóil. Cuirim fáilte roimh an deis tacaíocht a chur in iúl don mhéadú i líon na ndaltaí atá ag tabhairt faoi ábhair STEM. I want to thank the Committee for tabling the motion, and I welcome the opportunity to express my support for the increased take-up of STEM subjects in our schools — I did say "increased".

Reading through the motion, I thought to myself, "This is actually a very good motion, and it will be a worthwhile debate in the Chamber". It was my view that, unfortunately, there would be no media interest in it, because there would be no controversial aspect or rivalry across the Floor of the Assembly. In fairness, however, some Members actually managed to bring in which party or which tradition certain scientists belonged to. That may actually attract some media interest to the core subject, which will actually help us all in our task of ensuring that there is a good and informed debate about the STEM subjects. In a strange way, a wee bit of community rivalry may actually assist us in raising the profile of the subject. I emphasise again that I fully support the motion and do not require my arm to be bent up my back on the matter. In my response, I will outline how my Department has worked on the issue in the past.

I absolutely recognise the importance to our economy and society of having young people familiar with and qualified in STEM subjects, and my Department continues to prioritise the delivery of the STEM strategy. It is crucial that our education system continues to work, above all, in the interests of our young people. That includes enabling them to take their place in the world of work as employees and, indeed, as employers. I also welcome the opportunity to highlight the importance of giving heed to the voices of industry in the education debate, voices such as the CBI, Momentum and Engineering UK. I have spent considerable time engaging with representative bodies such as the CBI and Momentum, and I have also engaged with a significant number of employers about what they require from our education system for young people moving forward, including in the STEM subjects. I have found it enlightening and informative, even in terms of that debate, and the representative bodies and employers now understand better the role of the Department and the work that it is involved in. That conversation continues, as it should. They also seek to support and encourage students not only in the subjects that they choose but in the development of the skills that they will need to thrive in the workplace.

Engagement with STEM begins in primary school, as many Members pointed out. The recent ETI report on the implementation of the World Around Us area of learning at primary level highlighted the good practice that is evident in the majority of our primary schools. The report highlighted that whole-school planning and implementation of the World Around Us is key to children developing the skills and concepts associated with the World Around Us over their time in school. Some very good practice was highlighted. I was particularly impressed with Lough View Integrated Primary School, which uses the school grounds, including a polytunnel and pond, in an imaginative way to support the delivery of the World Around Us to engage the pupils with environmental science.

Children benefit from the flexibility of our curriculum, as it allows teachers and schools to express their own interests and expertise in teaching. I noted the comments of the Chair of the Education Committee, who pointed out that many of the organisations that present to the Committee on a specialised field wish that specialised field to form a statutory part of the curriculum. It is about getting the balance right, whether that is computer coding or other elements of the STEM agenda. If we emphasise one element, are we in danger of losing out to another element? I am on record as saying that I think that the curriculum will need to be reviewed by the latter part of 2016, when I am not in post. It is an apt time for a review, given how long the curriculum has been in place. A lot of those questions can be posed and answered as to what elements of the curriculum, if any, should be statutory, including STEM subjects.

We need to encourage our primary-school teachers to deliver this area of learning. A great science teacher is a great teacher, not necessarily a great scientist, and we are fortunate to have many great teachers. The report has recommendations for my Department as well as for schools and the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment. I have agreed in principle to the recommendations for my Department and have asked my officials to consider what actions might help to deliver on the recommendations. That report is being actioned.

The flexibility in the curriculum is also valued by our pupils, who have the freedom to follow their own interests in choosing the qualifications that they wish to pursue at GCSE and A level. Under the entitlement framework, all young people, regardless of where they live or which school they attend, are guaranteed access to a minimum number and range of courses at Key Stage 4 and post 16.

Mr Storey: I appreciate the Minister giving way. That issue has been prevalent in recent days, so is he confident that the entitlement framework and buy-in from schools will continue, given the budgetary constraints that we face? A

number of schools in my constituency said that it will be difficult for them to meet the financial requirements. They bought into the concept of the entitlement framework, but they are not sure that they can afford it.

Mr O'Dowd: It is no longer a case of whether schools wish to buy into it; it is compulsory. I understand that there are financial pressures on schools, but this has been in the planning since 2006. In fact, funding was supposed to have stopped a number of years ago. I have continued the funding; I reduced it over those years to allow schools to prepare for the reduction. I suspect that, over the next number of years, that funding will continue to reduce. Schools have to prepare for that. Also, as planning authorities, we have to prepare for it by ensuring that we have a network of sustainable schools in place that are capable of delivering the curriculum that our young people require and that is so vital, given the wide range of subjects in the STEM field. We need an entitlement framework with such a wide range of subjects available to pupils. It is certainly a challenge for schools, planners — in area planning — and future Ministers.

4.00 pm

In making decisions about courses and qualifications, young people must be supported by appropriate information and advice on careers. My Department has been supportive of efforts to increase teachers' knowledge of the range of careers that a qualification in a STEM subject can lead to. I am also aware that teachers are not the only advisers to our young people. A vital role is played by parents. Mrs Overend said that she is engaging with her young children about options that they will now have which will dictate career paths in future. That is one of the issues that was raised during the review of careers advice. Parents need to have access to information that enables them to provide it to their young people so that they can choose the correct career options.

In addition to the vital role played by parents, the business sector has a key role to play in encouraging and informing students of the value of pursuing qualifications in STEM subjects. I have encouraged the business sector and businesses that I have met to become engaged with their local schools and knock on the door of their local primary school and post-primary school to introduce themselves and make those connections, which are vital to education and business. That would bring industry, sciences and engineering out of the workshops and labs and into the schools and say, "If you want to follow this career, you need to follow these subjects". That is vital, and there is clear evidence that connections between our businesses and our schools are improving. I believe that increased involvement —

Mr B McCrea: Will the Minister give way?

Mr O'Dowd: Just let me finish this point, and I will. I believe that the increased involvement of businesses in schools by providing, for example, work experience is key to ensuring that the students who leave our schools are skilled in the areas that will lead to employment.

Mr B McCrea: I wish to support the statement that the Minister has just made and draw to his attention the opinion of Dr Martin Brown, who runs Science and Technology Experts in Primary Schools (STEPS). We need to find some way of getting modest funding to encourage industry to go into primary schools. I know that, in these financial times, things are difficult, but we need to encourage people to go and work in primary schools.

Mr O'Dowd: I accept that money makes the world go round, but resources are limited at this stage. I have been lobbied strongly by the Assembly, schools, parents and pupils to ring-fence as much money as possible for schools. Thus far, we have achieved a significant further investment in schools. I will make the final announcement on my budget in the next number of days. I assure the Member that, if I had moneys to do other projects, I would do them, but we do not have the money at this stage.

I move to the involvement of girls in STEM subjects. We are unusual here in that there is no great difference between boys' and girls' attainment in the STEM subjects overall, but there are differences between specific subjects. In particular, I am aware that many girls can envisage a career in medical science in a way that they cannot envisage one in engineering. I note Mr McCrea's comments and the contact that he has had. There is no better example than personal experience. When a young woman who is engaged in engineering speaks to other young women about the subject, it certainly opens up new pathways for our young women. It was refreshing to note the examples of female scientists that were referred to during the debate. I also noted the comments of Mr Hazzard about 'The Guardian' article. We can be careless about these things at times, which can have a detrimental impact. Sometimes, I hear comments from my daughter about what careers are available to girls, and I certainly hope that she does not get the perception from me that a line has been drawn somewhere so that women cannot enter this or that field. Certainly, we have to be very careful that we do not present barriers to anyone entering their chosen career.

As I said, there are differences between specific subjects. In particular, I am aware of that many girls can envisage a career in medical science in a way that they cannot envisage one in engineering. The causes of this are large and cannot be addressed by schools alone. We need business to work to ensure that all students are aware of careers in engineering and fight against traditional stereotyping. Careers in engineering are not jobs for the boys, as they are often perceived, but jobs for everyone.

In supporting the involvement of business in informing our students of the opportunities available to them, I am aware that Momentum in particular has been lobbying for computer coding to be made compulsory at primary school. I have already commented on that. The curriculum as it stands provides for all primary pupils to engage in age-appropriate coding. I am aware that some schools provide computer coding to their pupils as an after-school club. Some provide this through the Sentinus IT's Your Choice programme, which is funded by my Department. In response to the Chair of the Education Committee's comment about the Sentinus budget, the final decisions on budgets have not been made yet. Under the draft budget, there was a proposal to remove £100,000 from the Sentinus budget line. That is from a £400,000 budget line, so is quite a significant cut. When I am trying to direct funding into schools, I have to look at all areas of my budget, and I will give confirmation regarding all these matters at a later date.

As the ETI report on the implementation of the World Around Us has made clear, teachers value the flexibility in the curriculum and children engage in and enjoy learning about subjects that their teachers are passionate and knowledgeable about. I am keen that the flexibility in the curriculum should be maintained, and, as I have said, future Ministers may wish to review the curriculum to decide which, if any, parts of it should be compulsory at that time. However, my Department will continue to support initiatives that encourage teachers and students to engage with coding at primary level, and I personally encourage schools to take up the challenge. Let us get our children a step ahead in this vital skill set. I am also keen to see organisations such as Momentum link with other relevant organisations and apply for funding streams such as Horizon 2020 or Erasmus+ to further develop educational resources and initiatives to promote computer coding.

As well as encouraging industry to play a role, my Department funds interventions to promote STEM. As I have mentioned, Sentinus, the Department's front-line STEM delivery partner, delivers programmes to more than 57,000 primary and post-primary schoolchildren every year. We also have our STEM truck, which has proved very popular with schools and at any events that it moves along to.

Teacher training has been raised. Clearly, teachers have a key role to play in ensuring that young people have the skills and knowledge to join the workforce, but they need to be properly equipped to do the job. Initial teacher education is designed to meet the needs of our curriculum, and there needs to be adequate provision of suitably qualified teachers in STEM specialities. To this end, my Department has been encouraging higher education institutions to increase the number of students undertaking STEM subjects. I will continue to ensure that the providers maintain their drive to recruit students specialising in those subjects. One Member pointed out that students who have specialised in STEM at post-primary school or, indeed, at university are being snapped up by industry and are then lost to the teaching profession. Teaching simply cannot compete with the wages that are being provided in industry. Our success in encouraging students to take up STEM does not necessarily reflect recruitment into teaching, but we will continue to work at that.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Will the Minister draw his remarks to a close?

Mr O'Dowd: I welcome the debate. There are many, many initiatives taking place. I think that we are improving, but I accept that there is still more to do.

Mr Kinahan: I welcome today's debate, and, on behalf of the Committee, I thank all the Members who spoke and the Minister for contributing to what proved to be an interesting and, I think, kindly debate. I also thank the many lobby groups that have contacted the Committee and informed our scrutiny, including Sentinus, Momentum, W5, the Royal Society of Chemistry, the Association for Science Education, BT and the Northern Ireland Science Park, with which the Committee organised the STEM is Cool event in January 2014. I hope that they will all go on keeping the pressure on us.

The Chairperson mentioned the crucial importance of STEM to our economy, the good work already under way in our schools and the need for a full implementation of the STEM aspects of the curriculum to bring about high-quality learning for all our children. There appear to be a number of key elements to that. The first is initial teacher education. Clearly, the promotion of science and technology, including, perhaps, some change to the student teacher curriculum, will enhance primary teacher confidence in the delivery of science.

The second important element is continuing professional development (CPD) in STEM for teachers. I think that the Committee will agree with the Department that the best way to promote the uptake of STEM subjects — any subjects — in schools is through good teaching. The best way to promote good teaching is by good initial teacher education and CPD.

Another key element of promoting STEM in schools is good planned opportunities for problem solving, investigation and inquiry-based learning. Even if pupils do not go on to study science, that kind of learning, which promotes what is called scientific method — gathering evidence and analysing results — is a good grounding for children in many areas of study.

The Committee also recognises the value of teacher innovation. It is that element of the study of STEM in schools that has led to more pupils studying computer coding and taking up the associated A level. The Committee, therefore, supports ETI's call for more guidance materials from CCEA and greater facilitation by the Department of support by external STEM stakeholders for schools.

I would like to make one or two comments of my own. My colleague Mrs Overend said that the STEM programme was not ambitious enough; I think that that is probably one of the greatest understatements. We have rightly highlighted the gap between skills and industry and business and the jobs needed. Current estimates suggest that, by 2020, about 1·3 million scientists, engineers and technicians will be needed in the UK. We are also told that 80% of future jobs will include IT or technology. In a speech that I gave a few years back, I remember quoting the fact that China produces 75,000 engineers every year. It is probably more by now. The point is that we are not doing as well as we all seem to be putting across today, and I feel that we should re-look at how we are doing and put much more effort into it.

When we look at what we provide and all the summaries from the inspection and from Sentinus, we get vague figures. We do not seem to really grasp the subject to make sure that STEM is available to all our children at every level. We need a completely new approach. We need to look at a zero tolerance on literacy and numeracy being carried on to every child having the chance to do STEM at every level. It is then up to them whether they choose to go into science or into something else. We should not tolerate anything less. That is the drive that we should be putting on the back of today's debate and not sitting thinking that we are doing particularly well.

I know that the Minister is struggling with a budget, but I hope that he can find some way of keeping the £100,000 for Sentinus. I am disturbed by the answer that he gave me last week. When asked about the use of the change fund for science, he told me that he had been turned down by DFP and that there was no more money for Sentinus. At the same time, there is a huge lack of morale in the education system. We need to find a way of lifting the

whole education system, so I go back to my point that we need a complete review of how we do everything. The budget cuts that are coming through emphasise the point that we should rethink how we do everything, dropping the sacred cows and trying to find a way forward. We need to see STEM much more in all parts of our education system; we need to see all teachers with some grounding in it; we need to see it at every level; we need to see it at further education; and we need to carry it through in society.

I understand the balance that the Minister mentioned. If you go for one subject being compulsory, you lose on others, but the world is changing so fast and furious that you have to take more of a risk and lean towards it. If we have a different Minister in the future and another review, we will all have to make the same points again, but it is important that we look at leaning more towards STEM subjects.

I will move on to one or two comments from those who have spoken. Seán Rogers said that we must encourage inquisitiveness and problem solving. That is the same as Lord Ballyedmond said to me once when he discovered that I was in politics: we must have students who can think outside the box and solve problems for themselves.

Mr Rogers also said that we need to do much more practical work, and there were many other very good points in his contribution. He said that technology is a great leveller but that we should be spreading it out so that everyone can do it. It certainly failed with me at school.

4.15 pm

Sandra Overend said that we need to focus on careers, that it is a no-brainer and that business demands more STEM, hence the comments that I made in my speech.

Chris Hazzard said that it is not all bad. I accept that there are many very good things going on, but we must not just sit back on our laurels. He said that there are great examples and that we are not in crisis, yet Basil McCrea pointed out in his speech that we are in crisis. We need to look much closer at what we are doing. We need to look at enquiring into what is going on and to look for the inspiration. Terrific names have been mentioned today, such as Hans Sloane, Francis Hutcheson and William Thomson. There is a whole mass there. However, there are many whom we just do not see, and they are the people of the future. When you watch the Generation Innovation video and see all the great technologies that we have in Northern Ireland, you realise that things are bright, but, as I said, we must not rest on our laurels.

Trevor Lunn made many more points. He said that there is a lack of confidence in primary schools, especially in science, and that there is a great deal of work to be done.

Nelson McCausland said that we should make teaching STEM one of our top priorities, and he, too, showed us the great Ulster-Scots links to so many of the mathematicians, scientists and those with technical brilliance from Northern Ireland.

Robin Newton talked about the framework and mentioned Harry Ferguson and the Wright brothers. I worked at Shorts a few years ago. The first vertical take-off aircraft was developed there. We have a terrific history, and we should be working on that.

Patsy McGlone highlighted the statistics and the issues raised by the ETI and the World Around Us. He said that we could do more with WAU and that we are doing things. I think that the main point raised today is that we must not rest on our laurels, and Basil McCrea said that we must do much more. I think he said that there are 1·2 billion people in the IT world in the whole world. We need to see Northern Ireland becoming a leading technological industry in the future. That is what we all should be aiming for. We must not rest on our laurels. Other good points were made, but we could get buried in them all.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

> *That this Assembly notes the recent publication of the Education and Training Inspectorate's evaluation of the implementation of the World Around Us, the Confederation of British Industry's 'Step Change: A new approach for schools in Northern Ireland' report, Momentum's digital sector action plan and the Engineering UK 2015 report, all of which highlight the importance of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) in schools; recognises the role of STEM as a key driver of the economy; and calls on the Minister of Education to support and encourage the full implementation of the STEM aspects of the curriculum in order to bring about high quality learning for all children.*

Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Inclusion Framework

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): 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 Irwin (The Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development): I beg to move

> *That this Assembly notes the effective impact the tackling rural poverty and social inclusion (TRPSI) framework has had on the farming and rural community; and calls on the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to implement the recommendations outlined in the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development position paper on the review of the TRPSI framework.*

The tackling rural poverty and social inclusion framework — TRPSI as it is known — is designed to address rural poverty and disadvantage via a range of measures in partnership with a number of voluntary and community groups and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. TRPSI focuses on three priority areas for intervention: access poverty; financial poverty; and social isolation. Its aim is to cover target areas such as the elderly, lone parents, the disabled, the unemployed and children.

The framework is delivered by DARD in partnership with other Departments and includes a wide range of programmes, each with its own objectives and targets, with an overall evaluation anticipated some time this year. It is also one of the Department's targets in the Programme for Government and the rural White Paper action plan.

Members will be aware that those who live in rural areas are often at a disadvantage when it comes to service provision and employment prospects. They are often isolated and are living in poverty. Things that the urban dweller takes for granted, such as broadband, regular transport, access to essential services and job opportunities, are often missing in rural areas. This can have a long-term detrimental effect on rural dwellers, their families, their health and life in general. We are all too familiar with stories of the hardship and loneliness faced by the person living on their own or the desperation felt by our young people with no job prospects.

With this in mind, the Committee agreed to review the current TRPSI programme to find out how effective it has been and whether it could be improved in order to maximise opportunities. The Committee took evidence from a wide range of community and voluntary groups, the Department, the Public Health Agency and statistics' experts. It also commissioned a number of research papers on issues affecting rural poverty and isolation.

Due to the number of interested voluntary and community groups, the Committee was anxious that it captured as much evidence as it could to inform the review. It decided, therefore, to organise a stakeholder event, which was held in a central rural location to facilitate those groups. It was very clear to the Committee, even before the review commenced, that the issues faced by our rural communities today are genuine, cause great concern and need to be given the importance they deserve. The stakeholder event was a well-attended and worthwhile experience. It showed us the passion and commitment of rural dwellers, community groups and voluntary workers and the endless hours of effort they commit to in order to improve the lives of rural dwellers.

What was apparent from all the oral evidence sessions and the stakeholder event was that there was overwhelming agreement that the current TRPSI programme has had a substantial impact on the lives of rural dwellers. It was felt that the programmes TRPSI offers, such as the assisted rural travel scheme, farm families health checks programme and fuel poverty initiatives, to name but a few, have made a real difference to people in the rural community.

The groups and individuals that the Committee met demonstrated far-reaching local knowledge of the issues and concerns in their communities. This is one of the factors that has made the TRPSI programme a success. Local people working in partnership at a grass-roots level know what is happening in their own area. They have years of expertise and knowledge, which they are able to maximise to reach out to those most in need.

The voluntary and community groups are all known to one another and have good working relationships. They are able to signpost the services available, with numerous positive outcomes to date. This has been a key factor in the success of the TRPSI programme.

One of our key recommendations, therefore, is that the Department build on the successes of the current programme to include the knowledge of grass-roots organisations. They know the real issues the rural community faces and have the drive and ambition to deliver solutions. This aspect cannot afford to be overlooked by the Department, and, if used in a meaningful way, will inform and shape any future programme.

Particular mention should be made of the maximising access in rural areas (MARA) programme, delivered in conjunction with the Public Health Agency. MARA aims to improve the health and well-being of people living in rural areas, where the hidden nature of poverty and isolation can make it difficult to connect with the most vulnerable. The Committee heard that MARA has visited up to 14,000 households to share information on services, grants and benefits that the rural dweller may be entitled to. This has in turn released previously unclaimed money, which has not only been of value to the individual, but has benefited the wider economy of Northern Ireland. The success of MARA can be very clearly linked to the ability to tap into local knowledge and expertise quickly and effectively, thereby targeting those rural dwellers most in need.

Given that MARA has now collected a considerable amount of data, it is the opinion of the Committee that this data can provide a valuable insight into the issues of poverty and deprivation that the rural community faces. This is why we are recommending that the Department fully utilises the data captured, along with the evaluation of the project when available, to inform a successor programme.

Another notable issue that emerged during the review was about how rural deprivation is currently measured. Again, that is where the rural dweller is at a disadvantage. Unlike an urban area, where people are socially separated, rural areas quite often have an affluent person living

alongside someone deprived and experiencing real poverty. That method of measurement has to change in order to accurately assess the real rural picture to better inform the decisions of the policymakers. As a Committee, we have called on the Department to work alongside the Department of Finance and Personnel to commission NISRA to undertake a review of how to measure rural deprivation. The Committee firmly believes, as do the community groups that appeared before us, that, if that review is carried out, it will make a real difference to the identification of rural deprivation and will, in turn, produce a positive outcome for the rural dweller.

Over the course of the review, the Committee heard from witnesses that there appears to be a lack of basic awareness of the use of the Northern Ireland multiple deprivation indices. Despite guidance being available from NISRA, it would seem that little or no attention is paid to that aspect of measuring deprivation. The guidance is vital to any policy that aims to target rural areas. The Committee, therefore, recommends that DARD actively engages with DFP to ensure that NISRA is commissioned to undertake a review of the NI multiple deprivation indices to establish how Departments use the indices and what importance they place on the guidance for rural areas.

Another issue that gave concern to the Committee was the responsibility for rural issues and rural proofing. During the evidence sessions, the Committee heard that there was a general perception that rural issues are the remit of DARD. Whilst it may seem appropriate for DARD to take the lead on rural issues, it was felt that it is not the only Department with responsibility for that area. Stakeholders agreed that Departments were not working with the rural White Paper and that their policies were not rural-proofed. The Committee has, therefore, recommended that DARD commences an evaluation of the level of consideration that other Departments give to rural issues in respect of policy, services and resources, and it is calling for the development of an interdepartmental working group to monitor that. We look forward to hearing the outcome of that recommendation.

Another concern for the Committee that emerged during the review was the intention of the Department to move £1·7 million from resource to capital and the requirement for it to be spent within one year. Whilst the Department has justified that budget move by stating that it will provide more sustainable development, the Committee is of the opinion that capital is generally more difficult to spend and is not necessarily where the need is. That is why we have recommended that the Minister rethinks that budget allocation. As a Committee, we remain to be convinced that that allocation of capital funding is the best option for the TRPSI programme.

Finally, there has been a great deal of apprehension around the creation of the new super-councils. Several stakeholders told the Committee that they fear that the new councils will not have a rural focus or make rural issues a priority. There has been considerable interest in the community planning process, and there is an expectation that rural areas will not be overlooked, but concern exists around budgets and funding for community groups. Again, the people on the ground are best placed to advise where and how any funding is best placed. The Committee is recommending that the Department proactively engages with the new councils to ensure that rural issues are a priority and that they are taken into account —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Will the Member draw his remarks to a close?

Mr Irwin: — when it comes to policy development in rural and farming communities.

Mr McAleer: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I want to be identified with the comments that the Chair of the Committee has just made. I support the recommendations. I want to pay tribute to Stella, Elaine and the other members of the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee team for working very diligently to make all this happen and for bringing the report before us here today.

From listening to all the witnesses during the review, I commend the fact that TRPSI is having a very positive impact on the lives of people in rural areas. Through correspondence with the Minister, I am aware that it is on course to meet its PFG target by 31 March this year. We have seen how MARA, the arts, the fuel poverty, the health checks and all the different components of the programme are having a meaningful impact on people's lives. Of course, on top of that, opportunities will be ushered in with the new rural development programme, which will address issues relating to social isolation and poverty.

4.30 pm

In my contribution, I will speak specifically about one of the recommendations — my colleagues will pick up on other recommendations — on deprivation and how it is measured. During the inquiry, we heard some very strong views that the current methodology for assessing deprivation, the NI multiple deprivation measure (MDM), underestimates the extent of deprivation in rural areas. That theme was particularly flagged up by the Rural Development Council (RDC), the Rural Community Network (RCN) and the Ulster Farmers' Union (UFU) in their contributions to the review. I commend all those groups for making their way up here; we, of course, were also out in the community meeting organisations.

Those issues were also robustly flagged up by Trutz Haase when he appeared before the Committee. Last year, other MLAs, including Patsy McGlone, and I co-hosted a seminar organised by the Carnegie Trust on this very topic, entitled 'Poverty Amongst Plenty?' One of the recurring themes is that, under the current methodology, small and concentrated areas of deprivation are more easily identified in urban areas whereas deprivation is more dispersed in rural areas. In urban areas, there is more of a social concentration of deprivation, whereas it is more widely dispersed in rural areas. You could be in poverty but living in the midst of affluent neighbours in a rural area, and that is quite extensive.

The completion of the report is timely as we begin to scrutinise the Rural Proofing Bill. Many of the themes that were raised in the review will be relevant to the Rural Proofing Bill, which has been designed to protect and develop rural areas.

A number of concerns were raised about the measures, including the fact that the MDM focuses on income and not expenditure. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation's minimum income standard project concluded that it costs 20%

more to live in rural areas. Proximity to services is also a big issue. The weighting that was attributed to the overall score is only 10%; a study commissioned by the Church of Scotland and carried out by Geddes and Houston in 2012 concluded that deprivation of access is overwhelming in rural areas, which can have a significant negative impact on people's lives through employment, medical care and participation in cultural and social activities. That was supported by a study by McKendrick et al in 2011, which noted that the effect of the lower weighting, in which the domain of access to services is weighted at 10%, is that there is a negative impact. No rural areas are ranked in the top 10% of super output areas for deprivation across the North. The closest rural area that I am aware of is in Castlederg in my constituency, which ranks ninety-seventh, out of the 890.

The UFU representatives made a very good point in their contribution. They said that a method must be found to pinpoint deprivation in rural areas, unlike urban areas, which are more socially segregated. They said:

> *"One person could be in poverty and the person down the road could be in relative affluence."*

The RDC and the RCN made the same points.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): The Member must draw his remarks to a close.

Mr McAleer: In conclusion, there is widespread consensus among rural interest groups that the current system is not accurate. I welcome the recommendation in the review that DARD and DFP should work together to find a more effective method of measuring deprivation in rural areas.

Mr Rogers: I believe that there should be fair and equitable treatment for rural communities. Rural proofing is vital for our society as a whole, and it is important for the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Executive to ensure that no policy should directly or indirectly impact on the rural community.

The SDLP is in favour of a framework for tackling rural poverty and social isolation. Since the revised framework was launched in 2012, there have been a number of significant outcomes. It is important to note that many of the projects involved in the framework have been completed in conjunction with other Departments and bodies, including the Public Health Agency, DRD, DEL, DSD, the Rural Community Transport Partnership and the Rural Support Network.

We want to ensure that everything possible is done to advance the rural agenda and to help our rural communities. We believe that this DARD initiative goes some way towards helping rural dwellers who face isolation.

A key goal of the Department is to improve the lives of farmers and other rural dwellers by targeting resources where they are needed most. I believe that the framework goes some way to achieving that.

The framework identified three key priority areas for intervention in rural areas. The first is access poverty, which aims to improve rural access to statutory services. The farm families health check programme has been very successful, and I am happy that nearly 6,000 checks have been completed in 266 locations across Northern Ireland. Access to health care is a major concern of the rural people of south Down. With the dilution of services at Downe Hospital and the removal of the stroke unit from Daisy Hill Hospital, rural people are not convinced of equal access. The closure of rural primary schools is a major concern, and the effect it is having on rural communities is very worrying. Access to broadband is a major drawback for the development of our SMEs throughout our rural areas.

The second priority is around financial poverty and ensuring that incomes can be maximised. The MARA project, which somebody spoke about earlier, is managed by the Public Health Agency and aims to help households complete an electronic assessment form to help assess eligibility for grants and benefits. The main aim of the project is to make our rural dwellers aware of the help that is available out there. The project aims to make people aware of the benefits that they are entitled to and to help and instruct them on how to apply for those benefits. I am happy to see that, by the end of August 2014, the MARA project surpassed the set target of visiting 12,000 homes. I welcome the recent announcement in my area of the Mourne Home 2 Hospital scheme, which helps transport rural people to hospital.

The third priority area is social inclusion. That focuses on measures that identify and address different types of isolation experienced by different vulnerable people. Rural community transport is an essential service to all our rural dwellers. For the last number of years, there have been a number of excellent community transport partnerships that deliver a vital and flexible service throughout rural areas.

I note that, within the framework, there are several different projects aimed at reducing social isolation. The assisted rural transport scheme has been very positive. The Contacting Elderly Rural Isolated project seems to be on track to meet its target of 81,000 additional contacts, with nearly 70,000 new contacts being made. It is also important to note the role of DRD in rural transport, as it offers funding to rural transport services.

Overall, I am pleased to note the positive outcomes that have already come from the tackling rural poverty and social inclusion framework. I hope that more can be done to help deliver the framework to improve the lives of farmers and rural dwellers and help to build a rural economy.

Mrs Dobson: I also pay tribute to Stella, Elaine and their team. It was a useful exercise for the Committee to review the Department's tackling rural poverty and social inclusion framework. It confirmed what many of us will have expected, which is that individual programmes are making important progress in the areas in which they are operating.

Throughout the review, the Committee took evidence from a range of stakeholders, which included specific organisations and schemes being singled out for praise. One that I would like to highlight — it has been mentioned before — is the very important farm families health checks programme. Agriculture is not only a job but a way of life for many of our farmers. Unfortunately, however, it is a lifestyle particularly susceptible to health challenges. Those can range from the problems connected to working long hours in a physically demanding job to isolation from health services that many other people have easy access to and do not think twice about attending. I include in that list of challenges the mental health anguish often

associated with living and working in isolation and the impact of working hard for low or below farmgate prices. The health checks programme has been a potentially life-saving programme to farmers right across Northern Ireland. It flags up early warning signals, and farmers are often then signposted on.

I pay tribute to the teams of nurses who work from the portable units in all types of weather and from all sorts of locations. Their work is to be commended and their impact on farming and rural families cannot be underestimated. I feel that it was a sensible decision to concentrate efforts on regional livestock markets. It makes sense to try to grasp the attention of as many farmers as possible in one location. In fact, I reckon that the current mobile units are becoming so much of a permanent fixture that it would cause issues in the farming community if they were to be removed. I know that a number of charities, including those that focus on mental health challenges, are considering making bids for European funding as a result of seeing the excellent work of these mobile units. Can the Minister detail what impact, if any, the recent reductions to the Public Health Agency's budget will have on the health checks? In regard to her own budget, does she believe that this is the type of programme that should be protected? I share the Committee's concern that next year's budget for the so-called tackling rural poverty and social isolation framework was allocated according to convenience rather than need.

The Committee was especially impressed to hear the glowing reports about the MARA project. It is no surprise that it has been so busy. Our rural population is often older, and we need to bear in mind the condition of some of the housing stock in our rural areas. Many people have lived in their current homes all their lives, and many other homes have passed from one generation to another. It was inevitable that these farmhouses could have benefited from additional energy-saving measures, and I am pleased that many have had elements of that work done.

Unfortunately, however, fuel poverty remains a major and uncompromising issue in rural areas. Some of this can, of course, be put down to the absence of natural gas and the subsequent reliance on oil, which, until recently, was becoming one of the largest household outgoings. However, I believe that even more could and should be done to target these homes. The old warm homes scheme worked well for those who benefited from it, but the number of those homes was too few and the cost of the scheme was too high. It is imperative that our rural roads and laneways are not overlooked by councils because other streets of houses are easier to reach. That may be the case, but deprivation and fuel poverty do not discriminate between those who live in urban and rural areas.

There is a range of other challenges facing our rural dwellers, some of which are addressed in this Committee review and others are not. I will cite just two. The ongoing absence of affordable childcare is often a major barrier to parents in rural areas taking up and sustaining employment. Another major problem right now, and an absolute contradiction to the supposed attempts to tackle rural isolation, is the reduction of care in the community, especially of essential services like home helps.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Will the Member draw her remarks to a close?

Mrs Dobson: To conclude, while there has been progress made, not least in the TRPSI framework, there is still much more that needs to be done.

Mr McCarthy: I support this very important motion. As an Assembly Member representing a rural constituency, I see areas and people throughout the community who strive to keep their heads above water. It is only right and proper that the Assembly recognises all the problems and concerns experienced by rural dwellers and that we try to do something about it.

As a member of Stormont's Agriculture Committee, I welcome the finding of the TRPSI — tackling rural poverty and social inclusion — framework review. Having listened to the contributors who came to give evidence to the Committee, I will say that no one should be in any doubt about the size and scale of the problems experienced by our farming and rural communities. Our Committee Chair and other members have outlined to the Assembly the many hardships and obstacles faced by the rural population.

I would like to put on record my thanks and appreciation for the work done by our Committee staff in bringing together the many stakeholders plus affected and interested parties. Our thanks also goes to those organisations, including the Department, that submitted all the written evidence that was received and considered by the Committee and to those who attended the stakeholder event held last November at the Greenmount campus. We are extremely grateful to the Assembly's research department for providing our Committee with information on rural isolation, rural poverty, rural well-being and many more topics. Our Committee agreed that the earlier work and current programme of TRPSI was done well. The positive impacts that it has made have to be maintained and acknowledged by the allocation of finance to each project.

4.45 pm

We welcomed the comments by the RCN and the PHA about the social return on investment of the first phase of the MARA project, which stands for maximising access in rural areas. That showed that, for every pound invested by DARD and the Public Health Agency, over eight pounds were returned.

It was most gratifying to hear from the many groups involved in tackling rural poverty and isolation of their satisfaction with DARD's contribution. For instance, representatives of the Rural Development Council stated:

> *"We welcome the programme and commend DARD for its approach to implementation, which is largely focused on partnership working, collaboration and ...engaging rural stakeholders in communities."*

Also, it has been mentioned by other Members that the farm families' health check programme got the seal of approval and commendation from the Northern Ireland Agricultural Producers' Association, and the same appreciation came for the assisted rural travel scheme. The Minister, whom we are grateful to see, must be rubbing her hands with glee at all the commendations from other Departments. If so, let us give credit where credit is due and hope that it continues.

The MARA project has contributed enormously to tackling our rural problems. The simple fact — again, it has been mentioned — that it allowed some 14,000 householders

to be visited and that those involved listened and, more importantly, acted on what they heard, has to be commended. We sincerely hope that the data gathered through the project will be wisely used by the Department to make further progress and to reduce and finally eliminate all rural poverty and isolation and to enhance social inclusion. I commend all the groups and the departmental officers for their work and dedication.

I hope that the Assembly endorses the Committee's efforts and appreciates all the positive contributions from all groups, including the Department. I also hope that the Department accepts all the recommendations and implements them without delay.

Mr Buchanan: As a Member of the Agriculture Committee, I welcome the opportunity to speak on the motion. At the outset, I would like to thank the Committee staff for all their work, the researchers and all the stakeholders who made inputs to the inquiry.

For many who live in isolated rural areas, the tackling rural poverty and social isolation framework has been a welcome initiative that has provided much practical help and support for those who are in real need. Minimising poverty, inequality, social exclusion and disadvantage, especially among vulnerable groups in isolated rural communities, is a policy priority in the rural White Paper action plan, and there is no doubt that, through the TRPSI framework, there is clear evidence that policy documents can become a reality and provide tangible benefits for those in greatest need. We have seen that happen with the TRPSI programme.

Unfortunately, poverty and isolation exist throughout all arts and parts of Northern Ireland, and there is no one-size-fits-all solution to that problem. In urban areas, for example, a clear trend of poverty and isolation exists in certain geographical boundaries, where there are areas of affluence and poverty. While those areas can be fairly easily defined and initiatives can be put in place to target the problem, it is not the same in rural areas as no such boundaries exist, which leaves it much more difficult to tackle the problems that rural dwellers face.

No one in the House will be under any illusion as to the pressure that the farming community has been under over the past few years. Year on year, they have been squeezed so far as getting a reasonable price for their product is concerned and that, added to the difficulties posed by banks, has left many farming families struggling. Indeed, it has driven some to the point of despair.

Isolation, loneliness and economic pressures have had a substantial impact on farming families and the entire rural community. The Northern Ireland continuous household survey highlighted the fact that not only is there a growing number of people living alone but the number of people between the ages of 16 and 59 who live alone has doubled in the past 30 years. There is no doubt that that, along with the ageing population, is a contributing factor to rural isolation and loneliness. The challenge to all Departments is to work in tandem with each another to deliver for those who find themselves in such circumstances.

It is only right and proper that we acknowledge and recognise the good work that has been done through the Rural Community Network and the MARA project, as so many in the Chamber have done this evening. That work now needs to be developed further and built on. Figures show that MARA has visited some 14,000 households and helped deliver on the warm homes scheme, welfare benefits and boiler replacements to a total of £3·2 million. Its strength and success is its ability to tap into local knowledge and expertise and to do so quickly and effectively.

As we move forward in addressing the issue in rural areas, it is important to note what other stakeholders said when they came before the Committee. The Ulster Farmers' Union said:

> *"While it is right and proper that DARD should continue to take the lead on this issue, we believe that there needs to be a joined-up approach to this issue. Just because DARD is the only department with 'rural' in its name does not mean that it is the only Department with responsibility for rural dwellers."*

The Rural Community Network said:

> *"RCN believes that the challenge remains that other Departments are not taking rural poverty and social isolation into account to the degree that they should in their service delivery."*

It went on to say:

> *"It is the responsibility of all Departments to take the lead ... every Department has a responsibility to police its money and its priority for rural as well as for urban people."*

That is where I believe the challenge lies, and it is out there for all the other Departments to make rural proofing a reality, for the benefit of the rural community and the people in those areas.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Will the Member draw his remarks to a close?

Mr Buchanan: That is the challenge that we set out in the House this evening. Although the Agriculture Minister is taking the lead on this, the challenge is there for all the other Departments to come in and do their bit so that we can address the issue for the rural community.

Mr McMullan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The revised tackling rural poverty and social isolation framework was launched on 22 February 2012 as a DARD initiative aimed at facilitating a cross-departmental coordinated service. The purpose of the initiative is to maximise access to benefits, grants and local and regional services that will help to support vulnerable rural dwellers who are already in or are at risk of poverty and social isolation.

The framework outlines three priority areas for government to target and take action against. Those are access poverty, financial poverty and social isolation. The Agriculture Minister, who has to be commended for leading on all of this and, indeed, for her innovative thinking on it, secured £16 million in the 2011-15 Budget period to tackle rural isolation and poverty in rural areas under the programme and has secured £5·5 million for the 2014-15 financial year. That money and the work with other Departments, such as the Health Department, have enabled us to lever down a further £11 million in match funding. That is significant investment across a range of issues such as fuel poverty, disability, the elderly and young people, to name but a few.

MARA is delivered through 13 lead community-based organisations. In the past three years, the organisations have arranged and delivered 13,700 home visits. Those visits have generated a further 36,500 individual referrals to other Departments and agencies for a variety of grants, benefits and services. With partnerships in the area of public health, the MARA project will continue into 2015-16, with a further estimated 3,000 home visits planned.

One of the many successes of the MARA project is the farm families health checks programme. Since the programme started in July 2012, 6,826 clients have presented themselves for a health check at 325 venues. Of those venues, 213 were at markets and 112 were at community events. Some 52% of the clients were subsequently advised to see their GP. Over half — over 3,000 people — were referred to their GP for a medical reason. The programme has proved to be a lifeline for farmers, as their work does not leave them time to visit GP clinics and, indeed, the location of their work means that they are isolated from the rest of the community.

Mr McCarthy: I am grateful to the Member for giving way. I acknowledge the good work that is carried out by that group, but does the Member agree that all of that good work will be put at risk unless the massive budget cut in the Public Health Agency is rectified?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): The Member has an extra minute.

Mr McMullan: I thank the Member for his intervention. No, I do not think so, because you will have a range of agencies coming in to deliver the programme. There will be enough to bring that round, considering the small number that was dealing with it at the start. However, I can see where you are coming from, and I appreciate your question.

The programme has proved to be a lifeline for farmers. Another great outcome has been the benefits check. For long enough, farmers have thought that, because they own land, they are not entitled to any benefits. The reverse has now been proven. It is important that vulnerable rural dwellers can access benefits, which are a great help to family incomes. In turn, they help address the extra costs of living in the countryside, such as fuel, transport etc. Farmers need that extra income for their families.

MARA has amassed a large volume of information for the main Departments on health, education, community development and welfare benefits. Rural living must be made more attractive. That is the point: we are now sitting with all this information. The Minister has opened the door for other agencies to come in, and they must come in and deliver on this.

I will give you some numbers from my area, to give you an idea. The north Antrim network has been delivering MARA projects since 2012. It has visited 1,600 households for a first visit. That has involved a total of nearly 1,900 individual assessments, with a follow-up of nearly 1,400 second visits to ensure referrals have been acted on. The outcome of the nearly 1,700 household visits is some 4,000 referrals.

Now that the councils have been set up, they must act on that information and make it a priority that goes into the community plans. Perhaps, the message will go out today that councils should go one step further and set up dedicated committees in their council structures that will deal with rural affairs, because, as those Members who come from a council background will know —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Will the Member draw his remarks to a close?

Mr McMullan: — very few councils had a committee dealing with rural affairs. I commend this.

Mr Anderson: I rise as a member of the ARD Committee to speak in support of the motion on the position paper.

Northern Ireland has a rich industrial and manufacturing heritage, but not all of it is based in towns or cities — far from it. Indeed, our agricultural base, which is an integral part of our industrial and manufacturing heritage, is central to our economy. The well-being of the rural community is therefore a big priority.

In recent decades, our agriculture industry has suffered many setbacks, and that has had a big impact on the quality of life for our rural dwellers. As farmers' incomes have declined, they have been forced to diversify and have more than one job. They have also had to grapple with ever-increasing bureaucracy and red tape. All of that has had a major impact on morale and on the standard of living of farmers and families. Farmers are people with considerable self-respect, and they are often extremely reluctant to seek help. However, financial difficulties do not extend only to farming families. Many non-farming families are also affected, and, in the main, they are private people as well. For that reason, if for no other, I am pleased that a series of measures is being taken to address the financial hardships and pressures on those who live in the countryside.

5.00 pm

We have many folk who live in the countryside who feel vulnerable, and I think particularly of the lonely and elderly who are often targeted for brutal attack where they live in isolated areas. Tackling poverty and social exclusion is a key target for the Executive. The tackling rural poverty and social isolation framework aims to help to tackle poverty and social isolation in rural areas through a series of measures in partnership with statutory and voluntary community groups and Departments. This is a DARD commitment, but it covers a wide range of areas of life, and other Departments and agencies are required to play their part. Too often, others view rural poverty and deprivation as matters merely for DARD. The Ulster Farmers' Union, among others, made that point very strongly.

As the motion confirms, the Committee has been looking at this area, and it has been reviewing the Department's progress on its commitments under its rural anti-poverty and social exclusion programme. Our position paper sets out the details and makes recommendations.

It is obvious that the Minister and her officials are taking TRPSI seriously, and, as we gathered evidence, we were also very impressed by the extent of the efforts of a range of voluntary and community groups to make a real difference to rural dwellers' quality of life. Our paper commends the —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Order. The sound system is picking up interference from a mobile device. I ask Members to make sure that their mobile phones are not causing difficulties.

Mr Anderson: Our paper commends the way in which the community and voluntary sector has risen to the challenge of TRPSI. Those groups deserve the highest praise. Rural Support, which provides a listening and signposting service for farming and rural families in Northern Ireland, is to be highly commended. It has been able to deliver practical results on the ground.

One area that I regard as vital is the transport infrastructure. In the countryside, people need a car just to go about the basics of life. They do not have the easy access to facilities that those who live in towns and cities take for granted. In a recent speech on higher education, I said that no one would argue that we should have a university in every town; the same could be said for hospitals and leisure centres and so on. However, we need to ensure that rural dwellers are not disadvantaged in those things because of where they live. Services to connect with rural dwellers need to be put in place. I commend the voluntary organisations that run transport for rural dwellers, and I would like to see more coordination of planning and resources in that area.

One project that has been well mentioned today and deserves the highest praise is the maximising access to services, grants and benefits in rural areas programme, known as MARA for short. Many who gave evidence to the Committee praised MARA. It is collating a most valuable database that can only help to take TRPSI to the next stage. It is vital that there is a new TRPSI in 2016.

This was also touched on, but another area that needs to be considered is the impact of local government reform on the overall strategy to tackle rural deprivation.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Will the Member draw his remarks to a close?

Mr Anderson: I commend the motion and the position paper to the House. I urge the Minister to implement the paper's recommendations.

Mr Milne: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I will also speak in favour of the motion. Like Members who have spoken before me, I thank our Clerk, Stella, and the Committee staff for their sterling work on this important subject. Indeed, I thank all those who took the time to contribute in any way to the review. Their experience, assessment and input have been essential in evaluating the current programme. They have identified not just the successes, of which there have been many, but the challenges that need to be addressed.

Those challenges come in many forms. As outlined, we discussed how information could be shared, recorded and interpreted so that it could be used to best effect in the future. We have the changing nature of the difficulties facing our rural communities as a whole but particularly those impacted by poverty and isolation. For example, to name but a few, unemployment, emigration, severe weather, the added risk of stress for the growing number of lone workers on our farms and changes to public services adversely affect our rural communities. That is why it is important to take stock every so often, consult individuals and stakeholders and make recommendations such as those that the Committee is making today.

For my contribution, I want to focus on the formation of the new super-councils, the role that they will play in delivering this framework and the Committee's recommendation about them. It came as no surprise to me that the demand for information and involvement in LEADER and the local community plans exceeded expectations in the rural constituency of Mid Ulster. As a native and a representative of the area, I am only too aware of how widely dispersed the population is and how the issues and, indeed, the solutions can differ from one part of the constituency to another.

While it is important that expectations are managed for what is achievable, I am delighted that so many people came forward, presented their thoughts and ideas and expressed their willingness to play a role in shaping the priorities for local government. The new model of LEADER, with its wider local action group membership, will assist in involving a greater number of people, which I hope will ensure that the platform for raising concerns and providing new opportunities to tackle rural poverty and isolation will be as broad as possible. I believe that the councils themselves are well placed to identify areas where resources need to be targeted, but, as was suggested during the review, there will be a limited budget. To make a little go a long way, it will be imperative to match need to funding priorities and to work in partnership with all agencies and Departments, as well as voluntary and community groups, to share responsibility and best practice and to prevent duplication.

While it is right that DARD takes the lead on rural issues and provides the necessary guidance and support, it will be fully effective only when a joined-up approach is taken. I, therefore, support the recommendation that the Department engage proactively with the new councils to ensure that they are active and vigorous in taking rural issues into account in the development of policy and the delivery of services in rural and farming communities, as well as working effectively with the groups and organisations that have been successfully involved in delivering the TRPSI framework.

In closing, I commend our Minister for her commitment in prioritising this area of work and driving this important work forward.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Choiste as an obair atá déanta acu. I thank the Committee and its staff for the work that they have done in bringing the report to the Assembly for debate. As an elected representative from a rural constituency, and having represented parts of it from 1993 onwards, I am very aware of the impact that the tackling rural poverty and social isolation framework has had in tackling poverty and social isolation in farming and rural communities. Other representatives from similar constituencies will undoubtedly agree. That said, there is room for improvement, and that is what the recommendations from the Committee's review of the Department's anti-poverty and social inclusion programme seek to achieve.

The Committee has rightly acknowledged the high level of praise and support for all who help to deliver various TRPSI framework programmes at local levels. As the Rural Development Council stated:

> *"local people are best placed to identify local solutions."*

The groups and organisations involved with the delivery of the TRPSI framework are undoubtedly one of its strengths, and, in no small part, they are a vital component of its success. In view of that fact, the Committee has recommended that the Departments build on the successes of the current programme, including the vast knowledge already available from grass-roots organisations in rural communities, to help to inform and to shape a new TRPSI programme; I will say a bit more about that after a while. Given the importance of joined-up thinking in this area, it is surprising and, as the Committee noted, disappointing that there appeared to be no plan for a coordinated approach to make effective use of the data from the more successful projects such as MARA to inform other projects or a future TRPSI programme.

As I stand here, I consider the number of times that I have received presentations — I and others — about rural poverty, rural isolation, rural health, rural transport, when a plethora of issues comes forward. Many of those reports — I certainly hope that this will not be one of them — are sitting on shelves, having not been acted on. Hence the importance of the Committee's second recommendation, which is that the Department, in conjunction with other Departments, fully utilises the data captured and the evaluation that MARA has produced and uses it to inform and shape the TRPSI successor programme.

It is important, however, that rural matters are not thought of as the exclusive preserve of DARD. Many of the issues have cross-departmental elements and, as such, it is fitting that the Committee also recommends that DARD should undertake an evaluation of the extent to which other Departments and the wider public sector consider rural issues in respect of policy, services and resources. It is at that point, as Mr Buchanan referred to earlier, that rural proofing kicks in. Rural proofing has been about as a nebulous kind of notional issue for a long time, but when it comes to its implementation, some give a nod to its policy direction and some just mention it and do nothing about it. It is high time that we had it on a full statutory footing to deliver across the range of services, because it is not just DARD; it is health, transport, jobs, training, and skills for young people. It is basically about getting social services and care community packages into areas. All of that forms part of rural proofing or, more to the point, the extent and level of services that should be delivered to communities and people in rural areas. Therefore, the Departments and the wider public sector must consider those rural issues in respect of policy, services and resources.

The Committee further recommends that DARD develops an interdepartmental working group with the buy-in of senior civil servants in the relevant Departments. One area of particular concern that the Committee highlighted was the impact that the new super-councils will have on the delivery of services. There are real concerns that new councils may not always have a rural focus — some are big rural councils; others have an amalgam of rural and more urban — and that policy and service delivery may be concentrated on serving urban areas.

Expectations have been raised, particularly in my constituency, as a result of the community planning process, but limited budgets may result in disappointment, and rural communities are concerned that there may in fact —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Will the Member draw his remarks to a close?

Mr McGlone: — be fewer services to rural areas. There is real need, as the Committee recommends. I support the Committee's report.

Mr Elliott: First, I welcome the opportunity to speak on the debate about the report. Secondly, I apologise to the proposer of the motion and to those who made contributions at an early stage for not being present. I am sure that they will get over that. Thirdly, I add my thanks to the Committee staff and the research teams who carried out much work for the project and the inquiry.

Before I get into the main aspects, I want to point out that living in rural areas in Northern Ireland is not all negative. We should not look on everything as having a negative aspect, because there are some very good positives as well. There are advantages, and many of us recognise that. As there has been such a demand over recent years for people to live in the countryside, it proves that many people enjoy the countryside and the pleasures of living there. However, there are many disadvantages.

I want to start off by talking about rural childcare, which was mentioned earlier, and, in particular, affordable rural childcare. Childcare centres, especially those in rural areas where they do not have the numbers of children attending them, are under huge pressure, particularly in relation to some of the guidance and procedures that have come forward from the health agencies. I ask the Minister to have a look at that at some stage. That says to me that one Department in the Executive is not consulting or doing what another Department wants —

Mr McMullan: I thank the Member for giving way. Does he agree that the Noble indices have as much to do with childcare and the lack of childcare in certain areas because of deprivation levels and how they look at them, and that that is out of the hands of everybody? The Noble indices now need to look at the rural dweller and give the mothers in the countryside better access to childcare.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): The Member has an extra minute.

5.15 pm

Mr Elliott: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, and I thank the Member for his intervention. I do not disagree that the Noble indices may have a part to play in it, but I can tell you from my experience in Fermanagh that I have met a number of childcare providers in recent weeks. They have found that, because of new guidelines and procedures coming down from health agencies and the increased numbers of staff that they have to have in order to satisfy the criteria, they find it absolutely impossible to provide that level of staffing for the number of children who come onto their premises. That means that they cannot provide affordable childcare. If they have to raise their fees by £2 per hour per child, it will leave some of those working parents unable to go out to work. It would be much more cost-effective for them to stay at home and not take on that part-time or full-time job. There is a real issue there that needs to be looked at. I have already found that on the ground in my constituency, Fermanagh and South Tyrone.

That leads me to the second negative aspect — if you want to look at it in that way — which is access to services in rural areas. I recall doing a Consumer Council public transport challenge — it must have been seven or eight years ago — in which it was suggested that I make a

series of appointments and use public transport to attend them. As you will appreciate, there is no train service in County Fermanagh, so it was much more difficult, and I was limited in the public transport that I could use. I found that you had to make appointments around the times of the bus or public transport service as opposed to getting the public transport to suit whatever time you had made the appointment. You had to do the thing the opposite way around from how you would normally do it. I found that a difficult challenge.

The third aspect is about working in isolation. Working and living in isolation in the countryside can be a very lonely experience. We all know how the farming community has suffered financially over the last number of years and what significant pressure it has been under. That significant pressure can almost always be worse if you work in isolation, as many in the farming community do. Mental health and suicide issues have been a major traumatic experience in rural communities, and I pay tribute to Rural Support for the work it carries out. Also, when accidents happen, there is often nobody on hand to help. Once you have had an accident, you are on your own, and you are left in isolation. In the last few months, a farmer who lives close to me was attacked by his animals — or that is the thought —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Will the Member draw his remarks to a close?

Mr Elliott: — and he was not found until the next morning. Because he was working in isolation, he did not have the help, backup and provision that you might have in a more urban area.

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank Members for their contributions to the debate. It has been very useful and helpful, and I welcome the fact that people are very positive about the work that is being done through TRPSI. I welcome the positive comments that have been made. Many Members have talked about the benefits of living in a rural community, but there certainly are challenges. Issues of poverty and isolation are very much a reality on the ground. I see it very much as my responsibility to take the lead in trying to bring forward measures to address those areas.

Most Members referred to the fact that this is not just the business of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development; it is the business of all Departments. Rural communities are entitled to the same services as others. I look forward to more cooperation with other Departments in taking forward the measures that we have set out and any new measures that we develop.

I greatly value the work that the Committee has done in producing the report, and I intend to pick up on the recommendations as I respond to the issues that have been set out. I am grateful for the report, and I assure the Committee that, in setting out future plans for tackling rural poverty and isolation, the report will help us in our considerations.

Many Members talked about the importance and the practical delivery of the TRPSI framework, and it is very focused on developing interventions and actions that can help to alleviate rural poverty and isolation and complement and add value to existing government strategies and, of course, help rural communities to help themselves. Due to the complex and multidimensional factors that contribute to poverty and isolation in rural areas, a one-size-fits-all approach definitely could not work. It would most likely result in only addressing pockets of rural isolation or distinct poverty issues. For that reason, the Department has, along with our partners, developed a broad spectrum of actions in an attempt to address the wide range of poverty and isolation-related needs in rural communities.

Members highlighted many very positive projects. I want to provide Members with a short overview of the actions that have been delivered and, in many cases, continue to be delivered as part of the TRPSI programme. I think that it is helpful to relate the actions to the three key priority areas identified in the framework: access poverty, financial poverty and social isolation. I will be happy to respond to any queries, and I will hopefully pick up on all the issues that Members have raised.

The MARA project, to which Members referred, is one of our multifaceted schemes in that it targets financial poverty, access poverty and isolation simultaneously. MARA is being delivered in partnership with the Public Health Agency, and, in this phase of the project to date, over 13,700 vulnerable rural households have been visited. That has generated 36,000 referrals for grants, benefits and local and regional services.

Through the recently completed rural challenge programme, my Department offered a small grant of up to £10,000 each to 44 organisations. Those projects, which concluded their work in December past, have helped over 6,700 individuals, with issues such as financial capability, mental health issues, parenting skills and exclusion all being tackled. Since 2012, the rural support helpline has received over 1,600 calls, all of which have been dealt with quietly and efficiently by their experienced team of volunteers to assist and signpost them to services that can help with problems such as farm finance, paperwork, inheritance, succession, stress and isolation. My Department is working with Libraries NI to extend the Health in Mind initiative in rural areas to increase understanding of mental health issues through reading, learning and information. The farm families health scheme has had a very positive impact to date, with over 6,800 clients availing themselves of a check-up at 325 venues. All Members referred to the benefit of that scheme.

I know that some concerns were raised about the Public Health Agency's role in funding the project, but I can confirm for Members that it has committed its funding for the 2015-16 financial year. That allows us to carry forward that scheme. For me and as everyone has said, it is a scheme that gives tremendous benefit to farmers who, often, will not seek medical help; however, while they are at the marts, this mobile service is there and has certainly been of tremendous benefit. I look forward to rolling it out further.

Through partnership with the Department for Regional Development, my Department has implemented a scheme that has constructed 63 private borewells where accessing the public water mains supply is not technically or financially feasible. Through the assisted rural travel scheme, which enables SmartPass holders to avail themselves of concessionary travel on rural community transport partnership vehicles, it has funded more than 700,000 passenger trips. The connecting elderly rural isolated programme has helped more than 1,900 elderly

individuals and involved 10 community organisations that facilitate the scheme in assisting supported home living.

In relation to fuel poverty, we have supported the installation of whole-house energy efficiency improvements in over 500 rural households, and over 1,300 low-income rural families have benefited from loft and cavity insulation. The BOOST youth employability scheme has supported nearly 1,300 rural young people to develop core industry-recognised skills and therefore improve their prospects of getting into paid employment. In addition, through the rural youth entrepreneurship programme, my Department has supported over 660 young people who have participated in workshops to explore their enterprise and their entrepreneurial potential. My Department's support for community development through the network of subregional rural community development support organisations also complements the objectives of the RDP by improving the economic capability of rural areas, increasing access to funding programmes and building capacity in rural communities.

Members will also be aware that priority 6 of the new rural development programme, which will be delivered by the local action groups, has a specific focus on poverty reduction and tackling rural isolation and will provide another avenue for funding that will complement and add value to TRPSI.

I am delighted with the impact that the interventions have had, and are continuing to have, in rural areas and that the detailed review undertaken by the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development has endorsed the work done through TRPSI and supported the full range of initiatives. Of course, we cannot stand still. There is still a lot to be done, and more that we can do. I have extended the Programme for Government commitment for TRPSI by £4 million into 2015-16. That will enable most of the schemes to continue where they are needed.

Members will be aware that the Department's TRPSI framework has an associated Programme for Government target to bring forward a £13 million package of measures to tackle rural poverty and isolation. We are very much on track to achieve that target. I can assure the House that officials are working very hard, in conjunction with the various delivery partners, to ensure that the package of measures that I outlined reaches out to and continues to support the greatest number of those most in need.

Through the various TRPSI interventions, literally tens of thousands of rural people have benefited, and the impacts that the interventions have had on the lives of many cannot be overestimated. Indeed, in a lot of cases, they are life-changing. It is also worth noting that, through working in partnership with other agencies and Departments, it is conservatively estimated at this stage that the package of measures delivered has levered in over £12 million to date. That is all significant investment in rural communities.

We have taken the views of many different organisations into account. TRPSI could not be a one-size-fits-all package. It has had to be multidimensional, and our discussions with the public and voluntary sectors are reflective of that. My Department has been creative in using different approaches to target distinct needs in rural communities. Some, such as MARA and the farm family health checks programme, have involved visiting individual households or going to where the hardest-to-reach people can be found, as opposed to waiting for them to come to us. For other schemes, we have used workshops and the media to promote and encourage participation. That flexible approach has worked, and so too has the approach of working in conjunction with other Departments and agencies.

Looking forward, I remain firmly committed to tackling issues of rural poverty and isolation, and I am pleased to have extended the tackling rural poverty and social isolation programme into 2015-16, with an associated extension to the Programme for Government target of £4 million.

Already for 2015-16, plans are well developed to continue to assist rural transport, access and associated health issues; to maximise access to benefits and services; to support rural community development; to support youth employment and entrepreneurship; and to assist fuel poverty and broadband issues. In addition, officials are looking at options to provide support to help community and voluntary groups make available much-needed resources for their local communities. I particularly refer to new areas of work, such as a small capital grants scheme for community groups and a rural transport initiative.

I will continue to listen to the needs of rural dwellers, and I thank the Committee again for its recommendations, which will all be considered when developing future initiatives. In saying that, I believe that, from the contributions today, the House is very aware of, and very much wedded to, the benefit of the tackling poverty and social isolation work. We have the opportunity to build on the good work that has been done to date in the time ahead.

The six key recommendations in the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development's position paper look at how the TRPSI work is developed and taken forward. I am committed to working with other Departments, councils and statutory agencies to consider how best we can deliver collectively for rural communities. Those are key considerations for the TRPSI programme going forward. The report will assist in the evaluation of the programme and help us set out a chart for the way forward.

Some Members referred to my intention to bring forward primary legislation in this Assembly mandate to strengthen rural proofing across government, subject to Executive agreement. The proposed rural proofing Bill will support the equitable treatment of rural dwellers by requiring their needs and the impact on rural communities to be addressed appropriately in the development and delivery of policy and public services. The policy proposals for the Bill are out to public consultation until 16 March 2015, and I encourage people to respond to the consultation.

On recommendations 3 and 4, my proposals for a rural proofing Bill include a requirement for DARD to gather and compile information on rural proofing and to publish a monitoring report to be laid before the Assembly.

That will provide an accountability mechanism and greater transparency of the extent to which rural proofing is carried out. It will also include a duty on councils to take into account the needs of rural dwellers in the development of policy and the delivery of services.

5.30 pm

With regard to recommendation five, my Department is represented on the statistics coordinating group, which is

a cross-departmental group considering a review of the multiple deprivation measures. DARD has recommended that there needs to be a full, in-depth review of the measures that should take account of rural-specific issues.

Regarding recommendation six, officials are liaising with partner organisations on how best to use the capital budget in 2015-16, and the evaluation and planning of the post 2015-16 TRPSI programme will include longer-term plans for capital investment.

I will finish there and thank everybody for their contribution to the debate. It has been very positive. One of the Members said that I would be rubbing my hands with glee at all the positivity in the room, but I am rubbing my hands with glee for rural dwellers. This is a fantastic project that we can build on strongly in the time ahead, and I look forward to working with other Departments. I firmly believe, given the sentiment that has been expressed today, that rural dwellers' issues are not just the responsibility of this Department but of the Executive as a whole.

Mr Irwin: Our Deputy Chairperson, Mr Joe Byrne, was to wind up today, but he sends his apologies for missing the debate. I am therefore doing the wind in his place. I thank the staff of the Committee for all the hard work and effort that they have put in with regard to the programme and the inquiry over the last number of months.

As Chairperson of the Committee, at the start of this debate, I outlined the background and highlighted the main recommendations that we are presenting to the Minister. I was very interested in her reply, and I look forward to reading Hansard and giving due consideration to the points she made.

I am delighted to see so many people taking part in the debate. Rural issues and rural development have tended to be overlooked to a degree. I am glad that the debate has brought the issues to the fore, and I am pleased to be able to emphasise on the Floor of the Assembly the outstanding work that the community and voluntary groups have been doing. That has been one of the key themes of the debate, and it is great to see the work of rural groups recognised and acknowledged.

Another theme emerging is the success of the individual projects in the overall TRPSI framework, particularly the MARA project. Some here today have referred to the statistical evidence of the great work that MARA has done, but the success of MARA owes much to its approach. It is an approach that we would like to see duplicated and retained in any future TRPSI programme.

The issue of rural deprivation has also been raised by many MLAs representing rural constituencies. We know how big an issue this is, and that is why we need to see work started as soon as possible on the review of how rural deprivation is measured and used. While there is guidance on how to apply deprivation indices in rural areas, it is disappointing that there is no evidence to suggest that this guidance is being used.

I will now summarise the contributions made by other Members. Mr McAleer commented on rural deprivation and outlined some of the issues in how it is measured. Seán Rogers felt that there was a need to ensure that no policy had a negative impact on the rural community and that steps needed to be taken to continue to advance services and facilities in rural areas. Jo-Anne Dobson paid tribute to the farm families health checks and praised the nurses who delivered the programme.

Kieran McCarthy said that the rural community continually strives to keep its head above water and that many problems continue. He said that TRPSI is to be commended for its success and that stakeholders were happy with DARD and the partnership approach.

Mr McMullan commended the Minister for TRPSI. He said there had been significant investment across the Departments to deliver programmes and there have been many successes to date. Ian Milne felt that there was a challenge to make sure of all information gathered to date and to use it effectively. He said that councils need to work in partnership to share responsibility and good practice.

While Mr McGlone welcomed the impact that TRPSI has had, he said that there is room for improvement. He then focused on the data captured from MARA. He said that super-councils have a role to play.

Tom Elliott said that there is a need for revised guidance on childcare provision and said that it is becoming unaffordable. He said that access to services is an ongoing issue and that transport problems are also a concern for the rural dweller. He also said that working and living in isolation leads to mental health problems.

Tom Buchanan said that, just because DARD is the only Department with "rural" in its name, it does not mean that it should be the only Department covering rural services. He said that it is important that other Departments are involved.

Sydney Anderson, like many others, praised the rural stakeholders for their commitment and work. He singled out rural transport as the main issue affecting rural communities.

I think that that has covered everyone. Thank you.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

> *That this Assembly notes the effective impact the tackling rural poverty and social inclusion (TRPSI) framework has had on the farming and rural community; and calls on the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to implement the recommendations outlined in the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development position paper on the review of the TRPSI framework.*

Adjourned at 5.38 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 3 March 2015

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Ministerial Statements

North/South Ministerial Council: Institutional Format

Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister): A Cheann Comhairle, Mr Speaker, in compliance with section 52C(2) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, we wish to make the following statement on the tenth meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) in institutional format, which was held in Stormont Castle on Wednesday 25 February 2015. The Executive Ministers who attended the meeting have agreed that we can make this report on their behalf. The Executive were represented by the First Minister, Peter Robinson, and me. The Irish Government were represented by the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Charlie Flanagan TD, and Minister of State for Development, Trade Promotion and North-South Co-operation, Seán Sherlock TD. The First Minister and I chaired the meeting.

The meeting began with a good discussion on a range of issues impacting on the economies in each jurisdiction. The importance of connectivity to encourage economic growth was also highlighted.

In line with the Stormont House Agreement of the 23 December 2014, the Council agreed to note a report presented on new sectoral priorities. Ministerial discussions have taken place at sectoral level focusing on areas of mutual benefit, including economic recovery, job creation and improving service delivery. Ministers will now be asked to formally review the work programmes in their various sectors, and an update paper on these discussions will be brought to the June 2015 plenary meeting. It was also agreed that a paper will be brought to a future institutional meeting on longer-term sectoral priorities and that new sectoral priorities will be an agenda item at future NSMC institutional meetings.

EU matters are discussed regularly at NSMC meetings, as this area presents good opportunities for us to cooperate for our mutual benefit. At the meeting, we received an update on the ongoing ministerial discussions examining the potential for collaboration to maximise drawdown of EU funds across all NSMC areas of cooperation. Ministers agreed that these discussions should continue and that a report should be brought to the next NSMC plenary meeting. Ministers also noted the joint target of €175 million that has been set for drawdown of funding under the Horizon 2020 programme. That will be a challenging target, but both jurisdictions are already working well together to achieve it.

The next item on the agenda focused on various issues relating to the North/South bodies. It was noted that all bodies had prepared business plans for 2015 that will deliver the agreed efficiency savings of 8% compared with the 2013 budget. That is very important given the economic challenges faced by both jurisdictions.

Other governance issues were also discussed. We noted that the boards of the bodies are fully operational, that there have been staffing changes at a senior level across a number of bodies and that the North/South pension scheme is in the process of being reformed. We also noted that the Department of Finance and Personnel and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform are taking forward a review of the bodies' financial memoranda. The outcome of the review will be brought to a future NSMC meeting.

The Council then considered a paper on board appointments to North/South bodies. We noted that the terms of appointment for some board members of North/South bodies are due to expire later this year, and we considered a proposal on the terms of appointment for board members. That proposal will realign the terms of appointment for board members of implementation bodies and Tourism Ireland to the new Assembly and Dáil terms. It was agreed that the joint secretariat should investigate that proposal further and that a paper on board member appointments would be brought to the next NSMC plenary meeting.

Ministers then agreed to an amendment to the North/South pension scheme. The amendment will move the scheme to a career average scheme and will link the scheme pension age to the state pension age in each jurisdiction.

We then had a very interesting discussion on the north-west gateway initiative. Ministers noted that, following engagement with key stakeholders in the region on the future direction of the north-west gateway initiative, officials have now consulted with the relevant Departments. The Council also noted developments in relation to local government in the north-west and agreed that a meeting of relevant Ministers be held in the north-west in May 2015, in line with the Stormont House Agreement.

The Council noted the NSMC annual report for 2014, which will be published on the NSMC website before the end of March 2015. Finally, the Council agreed to meet again in institutional format in autumn 2015.

Mr Nesbitt (The Chairperson of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): I thank the deputy First Minister for his statement. I note that it made several references to the Stormont House Agreement. The deputy First Minister is aware of the commitment to reduce the number of

Executive Departments and the number of Members of this legislative Assembly. Why was there no discussion about reducing the number of North/South bodies proportionately, perhaps putting a focus on the economy, which is consistent with our Programme for Government?

Mr M McGuinness: As the Member said, there was no discussion about any reduction in the number of North/South bodies. The North/South bodies are already being impacted by the outcome of discussions between the relevant Finance Ministers, North and South, over the last short while. Given the reports that we have received about the effectiveness of the North/South bodies, it is very clear that they bring enormous benefits to North and South.

As I said, the fact that we have agreed to look at new sectoral priorities, which places a responsibility on Ministers, North and South, to look at how we can gain further advantage by working ever closer together, means that there is an argument going in the other direction: we can save money, pool resources and take initiatives, such as the initiative for the construction of the radiotherapy unit at Altnagelvin hospital. Look at the work that has been done through InterTradeIreland. There have been recent discussions between our Health Minister and the Health Minister in the South, Leo Varadkar, about children's cardiac services. I understand that our Health Minister will make a further statement on that to the Assembly today. All that argues for us to continue to build the levels and areas of cooperation that can bring enormous benefits, North and South.

Mr Spratt: I thank the deputy First Minister for his statement to the House this morning. Will he give us more detail of the amendment to the North/South pension scheme? Does it mirror the changes made here recently to the pension schemes for public servants?

Mr M McGuinness: As I said earlier, we approved the amendment to the North/South pension scheme during the meeting. We believe that the reforms, which will take effect from 1 April, will help to ensure the sustainability of the North/South pension scheme. The key changes are the move to a career average rather than final salary; linking the scheme retirement age to state pension age; and increasing employee contributions to a common level for Northern and Southern members. The North/South pension scheme is modelled on the principal Civil Service pension scheme here in the North. The Finance Ministers in both jurisdictions have already agreed that it is appropriate to apply the changes to the scheme. The Member and other Members will know, because questions have been asked about this in the past, that this was a fraught issue that left a lot of unhappiness. The fact that it has now been resolved will be welcomed by everybody.

Ms McGahan: Go raibh maith agat. I thank the deputy First Minister for his statement. What potential exists for a more collaborative approach across the island to maximising the drawdown of EU funding?

Mr M McGuinness: As I said, we had a very useful discussion on EU matters and, in particular, on maximising the drawdown of EU funds. Ministers are considering opportunities to maximise the drawdown of EU funds in the various sectors. As we all know, EU funding is very important in both jurisdictions. We think that it makes sense that we should work together ever more closely so that we can draw down as much funding as possible. The discussions to date have been very positive, with several opportunities identified. We highlighted to the Irish Government the fact that there may be scope to cooperate to access funding under the Juncker initiative. We will receive a further update on EU funding opportunities at the next plenary, when all Ministers have had the opportunity to discuss this topic.

The First Minister and I have had a number of conversations with the Taoiseach about the Juncker fund. It is a huge fund, which is mostly focused on infrastructural projects. We and the Taoiseach are very keen to explore with the EU and President Juncker how we can benefit from that. Given the challenges that we face, particularly in the funding of various infrastructural projects, this is worthy of further exploration. The First Minister and I intend to visit Brussels in the coming period and, hopefully, have a meeting with President Juncker.

Mr A Maginness: I thank the deputy First Minister for his very detailed report. It seems to have been a very businesslike and comprehensive meeting. The deputy First Minister's statement mentions new sectoral priorities, which seem to have been an important item of business and will be an item for discussion at future meetings. Will he elaborate on what those new sectoral priorities will be? Is there any documentation that he can publish that might inform the House further?

Mr M McGuinness: As I said earlier, Ministers are looking at all areas of cooperation, and there have been good discussions between them about their priorities for the future. These discussions have been aimed mostly at securing economic recovery, job creation, the best use of public funds and the most effective delivery of services for their citizens. We have agreed that Ministers will now formally review their work programmes in each of the areas of cooperation.

We will consider the outcome of those reviews at a future plenary meeting and will keep the new sectoral priorities on the agenda of future institutional meetings.

10.45 am

I know that there is some interest, and I have heard overnight about the release of information in relation to sectoral priorities. The reality is that the report on the new sectoral priorities was part of an NSMC institutional paper tabled at last week's meeting. Papers for North/South Ministerial Council meetings are jointly agreed between the Irish Government and our Executive. We cannot make unilateral decisions to publish an NSMC paper, but, in all fairness, there is nothing secretive about any of it. The ultimate outcomes and conclusions of those discussions will form statements, in the aftermath of agreement at the North/South Ministerial Council, to the Assembly and the Dáil. There is nothing secretive about it. That information will be forthcoming, but there is a considerable body of work to be done. It will be widely welcomed that, at long last, we are seeing a new impetus and new energy being applied to how Ministers, North and South, can be involved in initiatives that bring huge benefits to people on this island.

Mr McCarthy: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I refer the deputy First Minister to the part of the statement in which he talked about an 8% efficiency saving. Can he outline any detrimental effects or, indeed, cancelled

projects, as a result of that 8% cut, which actually is a cut, in the budget?

Mr M McGuinness: It is important that each of the North/South bodies, like other public bodies, deliver their objectives and programmes efficiently, particularly in the current fiscal climate. In that context, and given the pressures on public finances in both jurisdictions, the two Finance Departments agreed a minimum cash-releasing efficiency savings programme of 4% in 2014, culminating in 12% over the period 2014-16. The business plans approved to date by the NSMC include the delivery of those efficiency targets.

I know — it also applies to the working of Departments in the North — that, given the impact of what has been a very cruel world recession and the fallout, for example, of the cut to our block grant by the Administration in London, it places a huge responsibility on Departments and the North/South bodies to continue to deliver their objectives with reduced resources. That certainly represents a real challenge, but I think that good work is being done. We obviously hope for a better economic climate in the time ahead. That might be challenging over the next couple of years, but, ultimately, it is quite clear that the work that has been undertaken by the bodies that have been established under the terms of the agreements are delivering real benefits for people North and South against the backdrop of huge fiscal challenges.

Ms Fearon: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the deputy First Minister for his statement. What level of expenditure delivery has InterTradeIreland demonstrated in its work to promote trade and business on an all-island basis?

Mr M McGuinness: As we all know, InterTradeIreland was set up to promote trade and business on an all-island and cross-border basis and for the enhancement of the global competitiveness of the all-island economy to the mutual benefit of both jurisdictions. It is delivering on the same, and the recent performance figures back that up, with delivery of a 10-to-one return on expenditure, assistance provided to 64 first-time innovators, assistance provided to 127 first-time exporters and delivery of a total business value of £67 million or €78 million. InterTradeIreland is also playing a key role in ensuring that we meet our targets for drawing down funding from the Horizon 2020 EU programme.

Mr Dallat: I also thank the deputy First Minister for his statement. I refer him to paragraph 12, in which he points out the need to make some appointments in future. I ask the deputy First Minister whether those will be done in consultation with the Commissioner for Public Appointments and will reflect the 26 recommendations in the report of the commissioner, dated January 2014. If he has time, can he tell us when those recommendations will be formally accepted by this Assembly to address gender balance, disability and all the other issues of multiple appointments that were raised in that report?

Mr M McGuinness: For good governance reasons, it is important that the boards of bodies are operating effectively. With many board members' terms of appointment about to expire, it is important that we ensure that there is continuity when appointing new members. The joint secretaries have proposed a process that will ensure that there is retention of corporate knowledge on the boards and which will realign the board's terms of appointment to the Assembly in all terms. There is some work to be done on that, and we have asked the joint secretaries to liaise with the sponsor Departments and the bodies and to produce a paper for consideration at the NSMC plenary in June. On the point about how appointments are made, these bodies have been in existence, as the Member will know, for some considerable time, and the appointments will be made consistent with the previous arrangements, whilst absolutely taking into account the latter comments of the Member about opportunities for everybody in society to participate.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the deputy First Minister for his statement. I note that paragraph 15 refers to the interesting discussion on the north-west gateway initiative. I very much welcome that those discussions are taking place and, indeed, the rejuvenation of the north-west through the task force. Can the Minister provide more detail on those discussions, how they are progressing and any further details?

Mr M McGuinness: As I said, we had a very good discussion on the north-west gateway imitative at the meeting, and our respective officials have consulted relevant Departments on the views expressed by stakeholders on the direction and priorities for the north-west. They have also met the chief executives of Donegal County Council and the shadow Derry City and Strabane District Council, which will come into being on 1 April. We understand that work is being progressed jointly by them to develop local and cross-border community and development plans. They will be important contributors to future development in the north-west and have offered to brief Ministers on their plans.

We have asked our officials to make the necessary arrangements for a ministerial meeting in the north-west, to be held in May. Once the details and the programme have been confirmed, we will write to relevant ministerial colleagues, inviting them to attend. A report on the outcome of that meeting can be brought to a future NSMC plenary or institutional meeting. We were also able to apprise both Ministers that we met on the recent initiative that the First Minister and I have been involved in to bring together a number of Ministers to look at opportunities in various areas of the North. However, there is a particular focus on the north-west in relation to, for example, the further expansion of the university campus at Magee, the whole issue of the A5 and the A6, and the development of very important military sites in the north-west. We spoke about the opportunities presented by what is, I think, an incredible opportunity at Ballykelly. Of course, we also discussed the decision to relocate the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development to the west of the Bann. All of that clearly shows that all Ministers and our Executive are very clearly focused on recognising that, where there is a perception of regional disparity, we have to do something about it. I am very encouraged by the conversations that we have been involved in. Aspiration is one thing; delivery is another. However, I think that this is a group of people who are absolutely committed to delivery.

Mr Ramsey: Following on from my colleague from Foyle Maeve McLaughlin's question on re-energising the north-west gateway initiative, and the deputy First Minister's comments on Magee, there is an important opportunity, because there is, as the deputy First Minister will be aware, a level of apathy and low morale in the north-west.

We must ensure access to higher education through the expansion of Magee. Regional imbalance and economic inactivity could be well addressed through the north-west gateway initiative because it will benefit the north-west border areas. Could he finalise that and prioritise it through the ministerial subgroup?

Mr M McGuinness: The Member is correct. What is important, as we go forward against the backdrop of what is a very encouraging initiative in which Ministers are participating whole-heartedly, is that, if we can unite everybody in the city behind what the priorities are and how we deliver them, good work will be done. What we do not need to see are divided opinions in the city about how we go forward, particularly on Magee. We need a single vision and a determination to deliver that vision to ensure that it benefits the regeneration of the city.

As we know, the city has come on tremendously in recent years in the way in which everybody in the community has come together, for example, for the City of Culture. The participation of the unionist, loyalist, nationalist and republican communities in those initiatives, and in continuing to build on them, is very important because peace is crucial. We know that, even in that city, there are still people hell-bent on dragging us back to the past. Our message to them is that they will not drag us back to the past; we are going to go forward. One way that we can continue to undermine the activities of those who wish to drag us back to the past is to continue to make politics work and to continue to deliver for everybody in the city, no matter what their religious of political allegiances may be.

Mr Allister: I note that only the First Minister and the deputy First Minister represented Northern Ireland at this institutional meeting. Is that a change in the modus operandi, as indeed is perhaps the absence of the First Minister this morning? In relation to the North/South creep in the new sectoral priorities, can the deputy First Minister be absolutely clear whether any new sectoral priorities will be managed and operated exclusively within the existing six institutional bodies and the existing six areas of cooperation or whether those will expand? Why does he have to keep the report that enunciates all this secret and hide behind reasons for keeping it secret?

Mr M McGuinness: I have already answered the latter question in a previous answer. It is a matter of getting agreement on North/South announcements, and that requires the agreement of the Irish Government and ourselves. As I have said, there is no secret whatsoever in any of this.

As for the Member's remark on the "creep" in the development of sectoral priorities, I do not think that anybody on the island of Ireland, with the possible exception of himself, is in any way interested in politicians or Ministers North and South not working together. People want to see us working together, and the fact that that can happen without injury to anybody's political allegiance is a good thing. I understand that the Member is totally opposed to North/South development and would like to see its destruction, even though it will benefit people who are suffering from cancer, children who are suffering from heart conditions and businesspeople who are trying to develop their businesses, North and South. This mentality of "Let us close off the North" is over. We have to work together, and we can do so without injury to anybody's political allegiance.

The last thing that I want to say is that the process of the North/South meetings held in institutional format has been continuing with the Minister for Foreign Affairs, the junior Minister, the First Minister and me for quite some time. There is absolutely nothing unusual about it. No inference should be drawn from the absence of the First Minister today. I spoke to him yesterday and he has another engagement, which I understand. Absolutely no offence is taken.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I refer to the part of the statement that deals with sectoral priorities and new sectoral priorities. Can existing sectoral priorities be enhanced and further developed? Access to GP out-of-hours provision has been a pilot in Derry and Inishowen and in the Castleblayney, Keady and Crossmaglen area. Will the deputy First Minister take on board my suggestion that access to GP out-of-hours provision might be a suitable existing sectoral priority for enhancement and further development?

11.00 am

Mr M McGuinness: As I said, our Minister of Health will be making a statement later in the Assembly. In fact, he has just arrived. This is an opportunity to wish him and his family well as they battle illness. It is not easy to deal with a job against the backdrop of what the Minister is dealing with with his wife, and we all hope and pray for her speedy recovery.

However, I am sure that he is as focused on the issues that the Member has raised about how we can continue to work together in a positive way to deliver for citizens through the health service. I reiterate the point that all of that can be done without injury to anybody's political allegiance.

Mr B McCrea: I draw the deputy First Minister's attention to the part of the statement that deals with the Horizon 2020 programme. Some 70% of all funds that were drawn down in Northern Ireland under FP7, the predecessor to Horizon 2020, were drawn down by the two universities. Did science play any part in the discussions on the new sectoral opportunities?

We have had some discussions with the Royal Irish Academy, and it has invited scientists from the North to visit it in the South. Can he use his office or the North/South Ministerial Council to support such interaction, North and South?

Mr M McGuinness: I am always willing to support such interaction. I have been at the Royal Irish Academy in Dublin, and it is a fantastic organisation.

Science matters were not specifically discussed during the meeting. However, as many people know, Horizon 2020 is the European programme aimed at promoting research and innovation. That covers a very wide sphere. The total fund is worth something like £79 billion. As an Executive, we have set ourselves a target of drawing down some £145 million from the fund. In addition, we have agreed a joint target with the Irish Government of €175 million for projects that involve partners from both jurisdictions.

To ensure that we deliver on those targets, we have put in place a range of structures. One of the key structures is the all-island Horizon 2020 steering group, which is chaired by InterTradeIreland and includes representation from key agencies in each jurisdiction. The group has produced a strategic action plan to facilitate the delivery of

the joint target and is overseeing work in both jurisdictions to promote collaborative projects.

I appreciate and accept the general sense of the Member's question. As we move ahead, the challenge for us all is to continue to explore how we can gain best advantage through working with the Irish Government on financial drawdown to benefit businesses and education institutions in the North.

Congenital Cardiac Services: Future Delivery Model

Mr Wells (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): I am grateful for the opportunity to make a statement to the Assembly regarding my final decision on the recommendations of the international working group (IWG) on paediatric congenital cardiac services, which the Minister for Health in the Republic of Ireland, Leo Varadkar, and I published on 14 October 2014. In publishing the report, Minister Varadkar and I stated that we had both agreed to accept all the IWG's recommendations and were committed to their full implementation, subject to the outcome of any necessary consultation.

The public consultation in Northern Ireland closed on 23 January 2015. Following an evaluation of the responses received by my Department, I can now confirm that all of the IWG's recommendations will be implemented to create an all-island congenital heart disease network to meet the needs of the populations of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Minister Varadkar and I have issued a further joint statement today which provides details of the governance and operational arrangements for the network. I will say something further about those in a moment. Before I do so, I would like to thank all those who responded to, and took part in. the public consultation. This includes the patients, their families, the charities who represent them, clinicians, other stakeholders and indeed those Members of the Assembly who attended the public meetings.

I have now published a report containing a full analysis and key points from the consultation on the Department's website. In total, 156 written consultation responses have been received, including 20 from organisations and 136 from individuals. Combined with the feedback that was gathered through a series of public meetings which were held throughout Northern Ireland, the responses reflect a range of views that are broadly supportive of the positive change in the service, but tempered, and understandably so, by a degree of concern over how this will implemented and managed. Insights were given not only on the 14 recommendations specifically, but on wider related areas of concern which are felt by families affected by congenital heart disease.

The majority of the IWG's recommendations were overwhelmingly supported and seen as positive developments for congenital heart disease patients in Northern Ireland, provided they are delivered in full and that families have a say in how the future service is delivered. Although there was broad acceptance of the IWG's expert view, opinions were divided regarding the recommendation to cease paediatric congenital cardiac surgery and interventional cardiology in Belfast. However, I must emphasise that no alternative viable solution was proposed that would allow these procedures to continue to be delivered in Belfast within current international standards. The majority of respondents accepted that to provide these procedures in Dublin in the long term would be preferable to the other viable alternative, which is that the majority of surgery and interventional cardiology would be provided by heart centres in England for Northern Ireland patients.

The majority of respondents stated that their preference was to see the 14 recommendations implemented in full; a one all-island model that meets the needs of both jurisdictions,

providing that Northern Ireland would be an equal partner in such a model. In this regard, respondents expressed their strong preference to see the retention and enhancement of specialist paediatric cardiology skills in Northern Ireland as this would ensure the continued local provision of life-saving skills, particularly in emergency cases. I will have more to say about this vital aspect in a moment.

It is clear from the public consultation that there is significant support in the community for the all-island model that is recommended by the IWG and acceptance of my decision to end paediatric congenital cardiac surgery at the Belfast Trust, which was effective from 31 December 2014. When I read the IWG's report last October, my instinct was that their proposed model was the right way forward for these vulnerable patients and their families. However, I felt that it was right to give them, the clinicians who provide this important service and the public the opportunity to have their say.

Whilst I fully understand the concerns expressed about the ending of surgery in Belfast, we really had to accept that given the overwhelming clinical evidence that we simply do not have sufficient patient numbers to meet the vigorous international standards required for the treatment of this condition. Indeed, this was the fourth report that I or my predecessor, Mr Poots, had received saying that this had to happen: we simply did not have enough children to retain the specialist paediatric cardiac surgery which was required. The model proposed by the IWG means that these children will have their surgery in Dublin, within a reasonable travelling distance from their homes, with their pre- and post-operative care being delivered in Belfast.

Therefore, having fully considered the outcome of the public consultation, I confirm my acceptance of all of the IWG's recommendations and reaffirm my commitment to work with Minister Varadkar on their full implementation. We have, therefore, published today a further joint statement that sets out the governance arrangements for the all-island clinical network, which will be established from 1 April 2015. That comprises a cross-jurisdictional oversight group and an all-island clinical network board. The cross-jurisdictional oversight group will comprise the Chief Medical Officers and senior administrative management of the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety in Northern Ireland and the Department of Health in the Republic of Ireland. It will have overarching responsibility for oversight of the implementation of the recommendations of the IWG report to provide information and assurances to myself and Minister Varadkar.

The all-island congenital heart disease network board will comprise patient representatives, clinicians — doctors, nurses and other specialists — key service providers and commissioners to implement the IWG's recommendations. Its work will reflect the phased approach to the implementation of an all-island model, concentrating initially on services for paediatric and young adult patients and progressing to adults with congenital heart disease. The board will be responsible for the day-to-day operational and clinical management and delivery of the service. It will have several subgroups to provide advice on specific issues of the service, including a family liaison group. The network board will be chaired by Dr Len O'Hagan. I am delighted that Dr O'Hagan has agreed to undertake that role, and I believe that his track record in chairing complex organisations will provide the foundation that the network needs in melding together the clinical and managerial elements of an effective operation.

Minister Varadkar and I have approved the framework document for the governance of the network to be implemented by the network board, and it has been published on the Departments' websites today. The network board will take forward a phased implementation of the all-island network over the next 15 to 18 months. The phasing reflects the need to build up capacity and staffing at Our Lady's Children's Hospital, Crumlin, which is in Dublin, to accommodate Northern Ireland's patient demand for those services. That will commence on 1 April 2015, with paediatric interventional cardiology being provided to Northern Ireland patients in the Crumlin hospital by Belfast Trust cardiologists. I hope that the dates that I am setting out indicate the speed and urgency with which we are moving on this, which we regard as necessary for this very important issue. That is a very welcome start to the new network, and I commend all the clinicians, nurses and managers who have worked together to deliver it. We have had excellent cooperation from the authorities in the Irish Republic on the issue. It has gone extremely smoothly, and there is definitely a buy-in from both jurisdictions to the issue.

I referred to the phased nature of the implementation of the all-island network. In addition to building up the capacity in Crumlin, we need to maintain the existing contingency arrangements with specialist heart centres in England and to take forward the work on developing a specialist cardiology centre in Belfast, combined with a strengthening of the Northern Ireland cardiology network.

During the interim period, we need to continue to ensure that a suitable and safe contingency arrangement is in place to provide surgery for Northern Ireland patients. All elective surgery will, therefore, be carried out in centres in England — in Birmingham and London — whilst provision also exists for patients requiring emergency treatment to be sent to London or to specialist centres in England. Again, I express my thanks to the clinical teams in Birmingham and Evelina children's heart hospitals for the service that they provide to Northern Ireland children and their families.

With regard to the children requiring emergency surgery, I know that Members have expressed concern about the future arrangements for diagnosis of children in the north and north-west of Northern Ireland, for whom transfer time to Dublin could take longer. Ultimately, it will be for the clinicians to decide during the interim period whether a child should be transferred directly to Our Lady's Children's Hospital in Crumlin or whether that child should transfer directly from the Belfast Trust to England.

A key aspect of the single-service model is that, when it is fully implemented, it will have the capacity to deal with all emergency cases. However, it will take some 12 to 15 months before the model is fully in place and operating to capacity. Therefore, in the short to medium term, the Health and Social Care Board and the Belfast Trust will continue to manage the current service level agreements between service providers in Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland and England, where appropriate. It is most important that the existing SLAs continue to operate, are augmented as necessary to enhance the current arrangements and are quickly replaced by the single service model that the international working group proposed.

To assist with the increased workload arising from the transfer of more Northern Ireland patients to England and Dublin, my Department has approved an additional specialist family liaison nurse post at the Belfast Trust, with effect from 1 April 2015, to ensure that the children and their families receive the maximum assistance needed to help them at what is often an extremely worrying time for them.

11.15 am

In my statement on 14 October 2014, I advised the Assembly that I had asked the Health and Social Care Board to bring forward detailed investment proposals to further develop a cardiology centre of excellence at the Belfast Trust and to strengthen the Northern Ireland network as vital elements of the all-island network. That investment will be essential to maintain the specialist skills of the cardiology team in Belfast and to strengthen the service available to hospitals outside of Belfast. Since my statement, my Department has worked closely with the board, the Public Health Agency and the Belfast Trust's management and cardiologists to develop the investment proposals. Two papers have been submitted to me by the cardiologists; one covering adult services and the other children's services. I intend to move forward with those proposals together with the views of the board and the PHA by establishing an implementation group to complete that work by April 2016. I have today published the terms of reference for the group on my Department's website. My Department's deputy chief medical officer will be the interim chair, and the membership will be comprised of representatives from the Health and Social Care Board, the PHA, the Belfast Trust, a clinician from outside Belfast to ensure that we cover all of Northern Ireland and patient representatives from the Children's Heartbeat Trust and Heartbeat-NI.

In order to facilitate the development of an all-island network, including the Belfast cardiology hub, it was very welcome news that my Executive colleague, the Finance Minister, announced in his recent Budget statement a commitment of £1 million from the DFP change fund to invest in the network. I am also pleased to announce today that my Department has committed a further £200,000 for 2015-16 to invest in the network.

Once again, I express my gratitude to the international working group, which was instrumental in facilitating the development of the all-island network. The group was chaired by Dr John Mayer, professor of surgery at Harvard Medical School and senior associate in cardiac surgery at Boston Children's Hospital, and its members included Dr Adrian Moran, associate clinical professor at Tufts medical school and chief of paediatric cardiology at Maine Medical Center in the USA, and Dr John Sinclair, consultant paediatric cardiac anaesthetist at the Royal Hospital for Sick Children in Glasgow. Nursing expertise and advice was provided to the international group by Dr Patricia Hickey, vice president of cardiovascular and critical care services and associate chief nursing officer at Boston Children's Hospital.

In closing, I reiterate that I am delighted to confirm my support and approval for the all-island congenital heart disease network to be established. This represents a tremendous opportunity to build on the respective strengths of the children's heart centres in Belfast and Dublin through the creation of an all-island service that, I believe, has the potential to provide world-class facilities, services and outcomes for those vulnerable children and their families from across the island of Ireland. This is a prize to be strived for, and I send my best wishes to the clinicians, managers and family representatives who will work together to deliver the new service.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin (The Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his statement on this hugely important topic. I welcome the commitment to implement all of the 14 recommendations and to develop the all-island clinical network. I think that it is a good example of real, genuine cooperation across the island, and I acknowledge the Minister's role in that in the interests of children and families.

The Minister talked about the two proposals; one covering adult services and the other children's services. Will he outline whether we are now talking about a children and adult service? In the investment that is required for the cardiology hub, he referred to £1 million in the change fund and an additional £200,000. Has that been costed; is there a gap in what is required; and where will the gap funds be found?

Mr Wells: I thank the Member for her support and her questions, which are quite helpful. Within a week of my appointment, I had to make a statement, and I also went to the Royal one very dark winter's night to meet members of the cardiology team. They were extremely helpful in their input and what they felt was required to further cardiology services in Belfast. After looking at their proposals and discussing them with the Chief Medical Officer and others in the Department, we came to the figure of £1 million. We put that in as a bid to the Department of Finance, and it granted it, quite rightly in my opinion. We reckon that it will require about another £200,000 to provide all that is required. There is total commitment from me and the Department to ensure that this is a success, because we are dealing with some of the most vulnerable people in our society: young children with profound cardiac difficulties. I know, therefore, that people like Mr Swann and others will be watching me very carefully to make absolutely certain that we deliver on all this. We know the consequences of getting it wrong.

I turn to the Member's question about adult and children's services. We are moving to a point at which all critical and acute children's services will be delivered on the all-island model. As far as adults are concerned, we want to retain the best quality of cardiology in the Royal for those individuals, so it is a very difficult balancing exercise. Let me say that we have already stopped acute cardiology operations for children in Belfast, and the new arrangements seem to have worked very well so far. I cannot speak highly enough of the cooperation that I have received from my colleagues in the Republic, and there has certainly been no evidence of vested interests or a silo mentality. It has gone well, and my job is to ensure that that continues.

Ms P Bradley: I also thank the Minister and welcome his statement. Following on from the Chair's comments, what are his plans to strengthen local cardiology skills?

Mr Wells: I perhaps need to emphasise one thing to the Chair: this change does not mean the end of paediatric

cardiology services in the Belfast Trust. The IWG recommends that the single all-island model will provide for a fully integrated team from Belfast and Dublin. Belfast will continue to provide surgery for young adults and the adult population. I want to go further by strengthening Belfast as a centre of excellence for cardiology. The Belfast Trust cardiologists have submitted proposals to secure that and strengthen the regional cardiac network at the same time. That will secure the specialist skills available in Belfast in the single-service model. I have, therefore, published the terms of reference for the implementation group, which, as I said, is chaired by the deputy chief medical officer. I am very interested in people's opinions on that. My guidance comes from the people at the coalface. They are the experts, and they tell me what they need and the resources required for implementation. Therefore, far be it from me or anyone else to dictate what is required; it is their views that count.

Hopefully, we can get the best of both worlds. We can get an excellent service for our young people and babies in Crumlin and also have a greatly enhanced and strengthened cardiology service for young adults in Northern Ireland. The balancing act is getting that right in tandem, and, of course, need continues throughout all this. We are still sending quite a few patients to Birmingham and Evelina, so we are watching this very carefully. What I can say, however, is: "So far so good; it has gone well".

Mr McKinney: I thank the Minister. The SDLP is on record as welcoming the original announcement in October. We welcome this announcement and, in particular, the swift response to the consultation. It is all welcome news. We have some concerns, particularly with timing. Will the Minister confirm that the clock has now started on the 15 to 18 months? What are the implications for phased implementation in that 15 to 18 months? Will some of the phased implementation mean that it will extend beyond the timetable that the Minister has outlined?

Mr Wells: The clock has indeed started, and the 15 to 18 months is a very challenging timescale. I intend to visit Our Lady's in Crumlin to make absolutely certain that I am content with the speed of progress. None of this can happen until Crumlin has built up the capacity required to look after the increased numbers that will come to it. There will be the existing patients in the Irish Republic as well as new patients arriving from Northern Ireland, so all this has been a quite challenging timescale. Remember, my predecessor's first statement on this was on 23 September, and, only six months later, we are moving forward very quickly. While all of this is going on, we still have capacity at Birmingham and Evelina to make certain that children and young babies who require surgery can be flown by charter plane to London or Birmingham for treatment. Later, I might have the chance to reveal the figures, but quite a few children have already gone, and, so far, that has worked out very well.

I give an absolute assurance that whoever is Health Minister when the new facility opens in Crumlin, there will be no permanent transfer until we are absolutely satisfied that Crumlin will provide the best possible service for our children and young people with cardiac problems — otherwise, that could be the worst of all worlds. I also reassure him on a point that will, no doubt, be raised by others, so I will head it off at the pass. Children from Northern Ireland who go down to Crumlin will be treated entirely on the basis of clinical need. There will be no question of a child from Kerry, Galway or wherever being given precedence over a child from Belfast or Londonderry simply because they are from the Irish Republic. The children will be assessed entirely on need, and, if a child from Northern Ireland requires treatment ahead of a child from Longford or Wexford, that will happen. That is part of the arrangement that we have made with the authorities in the Republic, and I am reassured by that. I know that there will be situations in which children will be rushed down the motorway at great speed as a matter of urgency, and those children will be given priority no matter where they are from.

Mrs Dobson: I thank the Minister for his statement. Prior to this consultation, Minister, many parents said that it would be little more than a box-ticking exercise, and they have been proven correct. I pay tribute to those mummies and daddies who lobbied so hard and to Sarah Quinlan from the Children's Heartbeat Trust, who I see is in the Gallery today.

Minister, you referred to children's heart centres in Belfast and Dublin, describing them as providing:

> *"world-class facilities, services and outcomes for these vulnerable children and their families from across the island of Ireland."*

As the Minister with responsibility for these vulnerable children here in Northern Ireland, can you outline precisely how your decision to remove a service from Belfast provides, again quoting your words, "a tremendous opportunity"? Why could it not be a more shared-out service?

Mr Wells: The honourable Member for Upper Bann has raised the most fundamental question, and that is the matter of dealing with recommendation 7. During the various consultation meetings around the Province, this issue came up constantly. Separately, four eminent experts each produced a different report, all telling me that Northern Ireland simply does not have enough children with a congenital heart condition to sustain a world-leading facility. We need at least 400 children a year to sustain that on an all-island basis. Even with the addition of the children from Northern Ireland, we have just enough numbers for an all-island model. This is no different from many, many issues: for instance, muscular dystrophy patients are sent to Newcastle upon Tyne because we do not have enough patients, particularly those with Duchenne, to provide a first-rate service in Northern Ireland.

I accept that this is painful. I would love to have been in the position to retain the facility in Northern Ireland, but the lack of patients would mean, first, that we could not have a sustainable service because there would not be enough patients to keep it going. Secondly, and more importantly, we would not have been able to attract and retain the first-class surgeons that we need in this field to provide the best possible care for our children. You have to balance the need for convenience against the need for a first-rate service, and the only model that anyone can provide me with that achieves that is an all-island one.

I must pay tribute to the two charities, which were very responsible and very helpful throughout this process, as were the parents. In all of the consultation meetings,

everyone expressed a concern about recommendation 7, but not one individual was able to offer an alternative that enabled us to give first-rate treatment to the children whilst retaining the Belfast service. That is the dilemma that I am in, and that is why I have to go down this route.

It is not one-way traffic. Many patients with cancer will come to the new Altnagelvin facility in Londonderry once the new radiotherapy centre has opened there.

Already, almost one third of the patients in the renal facility in Daisy Hill come from Louth and north Monaghan, and I hope that we will be able to extend the use of the cath labs in some of our hospitals to patients from the Irish Republic. It is not all one-way traffic; it is cooperation between two Governments.

11.30 am

Mr McCarthy: Like other Members, I welcome this morning's statement. It has come after a very long rally by the parents of the youngsters who have been affected. The Minister tells us that there will be a specialist family liaison nurse post in the Belfast Trust from 1 April. That is a very welcome idea in helping children and their families. The two Ministers have accepted the view of the majority of respondents, which is to have one all-island model and a preference for the retention and enhancement of paediatric cardiology skills at the Royal in Belfast, which are excellent and must be kept. Can the Minister assure the Assembly — I think that he half-answered the Chair and the deputy Chair along these lines — that sufficient funding and investment will be forthcoming to ensure that we maintain the specialist skills of the cardiology team in Belfast and strengthen the service available in hospitals outside Belfast city?

Mr Wells: First, I should make it clear that we are investing £85,000 in that specialist nurse support. That is an indication of just how committed we are. It was extremely difficult to find the money in 2015-16 for the service. If you saw some of the documents that are on my table at the moment about the efficiency savings that I am required to make, you would realise how difficult our finances are in the health service, but, because we knew that this was so important and we knew of the vulnerability of the children involved in cardiac surgery, we successfully put our case to DFP for the extra money, and we have been able to find a 20% addition to that in our own budget. That is committed, and that will be spent on that service. That is the assessment that we need at the moment.

I will constantly look at this. We do not envisage a huge degree of revenue change; most of this is capital. It is quite expensive to fly children by special chartered plane to Birmingham and London and to take their parents over, put them up and give them all the support that they require. It is technically much easier, particularly for parents who live in the southern part of Northern Ireland, to travel down the motorway to Crumlin. The good news is that Crumlin is in the northern part of Dublin, which makes it more accessible to parents. Therefore, in a way, we are saving money on that aspect but spending more on our commitment to cardiology services in Belfast. I would like to feel that, at the end of the process, we will have got the best of both worlds. I also realise that at least a dozen MLAs will be watching this very carefully. Therefore, that is an incentive to make certain that we get it absolutely right.

Mrs Cameron: I thank the Minister for what is yet another important statement in regard to the care of children with complex medical conditions. Will the Minister tell us a bit more about what experience Dr O'Hagan has that makes him suitable for the role of chairing the congenital heart disease network board?

Mr Wells: First, one of the very good recommendations was that we create a CHD network board. That will include family representatives from Northern Ireland and, indeed, the Republic of Ireland. It will be underpinned by the family advisory group. Hopefully, it will empower families in shaping future services in a way that we have never had before. I must say that we have benefited enormously from the input to this debate from the two charities, which have been extremely forthright and articulate in their arguments, and the numerous meetings that I have had with family members, as well as the various events and the extremely constructive consultation meetings that we have had throughout the Province, where the parents engaged. It was not an argument or a battle; the parents engaged and talked through the recommendations in a very responsible way. Therefore, it is absolutely essential that spokespeople for those parents are represented on the CHD group.

Many in the Assembly will know Mr Len O'Hagan. He was chairman of the Belfast Harbour Commissioners from 2006 until recently. He has board positions on a number of international public companies such as Jefferson Smurfit and Safeway Ireland, of which he is the chairman. He was previously chairman of the Belfast Metropolitan Arts Centre. He is vice-chairman of the Ireland-US Council and a non-executive director of Independent News and Media plc. He was recently appointed chair of the board of Northern Ireland Water and will take up that appointment on 1 April. In 2013, he was appointed chief executive of the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland for a two-year period. Given that mix of management and health-related experience, we are dealing with someone who has expertise in Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic and could command the confidence of the public. I am delighted that someone of his calibre has agreed to take on this important position.

Ms McCorley: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Cuirim fáilte roimh ráiteas an Aire. I welcome the Minister's statement. I agree with other Members that this is a hugely important statement. It lays out the plans for the delivery of models of excellence in cardiac treatment for all the people of Ireland, and that is to be welcomed by everyone.

We acknowledge and accept that there will be an interim period before the services are fully operational and that, during that period, families will still be required to travel to England for their treatment. Would the Minister agree that such circumstances are traumatic and an added burden on families and, although necessary, travel should be kept to a minimum and only if absolutely required?

Mr Wells: I accept that it is traumatic for families to travel to Dublin for this surgery. Remember, however, that parents from Waterford, Sligo, Kerry and Wexford already travel much greater distances. There is only one facility in the Irish Republic, and vulnerable children already have to be brought a considerable distance. For many people in the southern part of Northern Ireland the distance will be less than for parents coming from those areas.

As far as using Evelina and Birmingham is concerned, the difficulty at the moment is that those are the two centres of excellence that have the capacity in the United Kingdom to deal with children in this position. We do not have much choice because we have negotiated capacity with both. We have children who are very vulnerable — some of them in a critical condition — and have to balance the trauma of families being flown to England for that treatment with the fact that there is not the capacity and experience in Northern Ireland to carry out the surgical procedures. Even when we had full-blown capacity in Belfast, we still flew many children to England for surgery, and that was also happening in the Irish Republic.

We hope that we can be ahead of target. I understand that progress in Crumlin is going well. That is remarkable given the difficult economic situation that the Irish Republic finds itself in. We have had no problems with the HSE in the Republic securing the funding for this. Many of us will be down there before we cut the ribbon, as it were. If there is any doubt whatsoever, we will not proceed until we are content with the level of service. Minister Varadkar and I have discussed this: he is committed to getting this right, and so am I. Therefore, I am confident and hopeful. The fact that we have already met many of the targets in the statement issued in September indicates to me that this has a fair wind and is going in the right direction.

I can also reassure Members that the staff in Crumlin have exactly the same high standards as those trained in the United Kingdom. They have exactly the same qualifications and letters after their names. These highly qualified consultants and surgeons trained together and know each other extremely well, so there will be no reason why the standard of care should not be at a very high level in Crumlin.

Mr G Robinson: I thank the Minister for his statement. I am glad to see that his wife is making good progress.

Who will have the final say where children with congenital heart disease in the north-west of the Province will be treated?

Mr Wells: I am not surprised that a representative for East Londonderry has raised the issue. That is one of the most difficult matters that we have to deal with. Remember that, at the moment, a child from Letterkenny or Lifford or — I cannot think of another town — Donegal town has to pass through East Londonderry maybe on his or her way down to Dublin for the same treatment. One of the reasons why we set up the CHD patients and family group is so that we can have frank discussions on this issue. A child in Limavady, for instance, would almost certainly be taken to the Royal for stabilisation and then transferred to Dublin for whatever surgery is required. The practical difficulties are the reason we have asked for the parents to be directly involved in the two charities. If I lived in Limavady, Ballycastle or Coleraine, I would be concerned; I think that is reasonable, but I hope that, once the service is up and running, people will realise that the outcome for their child will be best when they are taken to the centre of excellence.

I thank everyone who has been so friendly and helpful to me in my personal difficulties, but, having seen the standard of service that my wife has got in acute stroke, I would take my wife to Strabane for that service quite happily — to Strabane, Enniskillen, Belleek or wherever — because I would rather she be treated in a centre of excellence than in a local hospital that does not have that excellence. Similarly, parents will, I think, understand that their child has a much better outcome if they are taken to where all the best clinicians, equipment and facilities are available, even though it is inconvenient. They will do that because their child has the best chance of survival and a good outcome. We have done the same for cancer and are doing the same for stroke services and trauma. Unfortunately on this occasion we do not have the population to have that centre of excellence in Northern Ireland, but I still think that in five or 10 years people will look back and say the stats show very clearly that children are surviving, moving on with their life and doing well as a result of this excellent service.

Mr Rogers: I thank the Minister for his statement. I welcome the statement and the commitment to the development of a cardiology centre of excellence. Local hospitals will complement the work of that centre. How do you intend to strengthen the cardiology services, particularly in Daisy Hill and Downe? To clarify a point you made earlier about the clock not yet ticking on this development, could you provide a little more clarification of the timeline for the development of this centre of excellence for cardiology in Belfast?

Mr Wells: The Member may have picked me up wrongly: the clock has well and truly started ticking. Staff have been down to Crumlin and seen the work that is already ongoing there. I would be genuinely worried making this announcement if everything had fossilised in Crumlin; that has not been the case. At every meeting I have with the Minister for Health in the Irish Republic, this is second or third, if not first, on the agenda: “Give us an update on what is happening”.

I was absolutely certain the Member would weave Daisy Hill and Downe hospitals into his question, as he always does. The reality is that paediatric congenital heart surgery has always been concentrated in the Royal, long before this decision was made. Any child who has this complication would always be taken to the Royal because that is where the expertise has been to date. From now on it is probably more likely that someone will be taken there for stabilisation, although in his case in South Down it is more likely that they will be taken directly to Crumlin, because once you are in Newry you can get down to Crumlin very quickly. There is no real role to expand paediatric congenital heart surgery in any local hospital or any of the acute hospitals outside the Royal in Northern Ireland. It is a very specialist area with a relatively small number of children. The scale that one needs for this is 400. Northern Ireland will be producing less than a third of that, and that is why we are going down that model.

The irony was that the most difficult question I had when I first announced this was from Mr Gerry Kelly from North Belfast. We had the rather surreal situation of me trying to argue to him why it was important to have an all-island solution. I am glad to say that he was won over in the end and supported it; he was maybe being a wee bit humorous. Certainly I am pleased that so many parties in the Assembly have bought into this. I have no political baggage here; I will do what is best for the children of Northern Ireland no matter where I have to send them. We owe that to the children. It does not matter whether it is in England, Dublin or Belfast; we will do our best for those people.

There will of course be help for outpatients in cardiology in other parts of Northern Ireland. Dr Damien Armstrong, from the South West Acute, has been asked to serve on the implementation group.

People who report initially with difficulties will be dealt with in a local hospital, but the complex paediatrics will be done in Our Lady's.

11.45 am

Mr Swann: I thank the Minister for his statement. I declare an interest as the father of a child with a congenital heart condition. Minister, I take exception to the part of your statement that says that the public consultation showed an acceptance of your decision to end paediatric congenital cardiac surgery in Belfast. As I am sure you will know, by the time the public consultation went out, that surgery had already ceased. That is why there was an acceptance: there was no other option.

You said in your statement that, from 1 April, paediatric interventional cardiology will be provided to Northern Ireland patients in Crumlin hospital by Belfast Trust cardiologists. What about the other professions and skills such as the anaesthetists, the paediatric intensive care unit nurses and all the other skills that we need to retain in Belfast during that time? We are already sending our patients, and now we are sending our cardiologists down to provide surgery in Crumlin. What are we doing for the other skills?

You talked about finance being put in place for the specialist hub and referred to the £1 million from the DFP change fund supplemented by an extra £200,000 from your Department. Is the £1 million promised by John Compton in 2014 for paediatric cardiology still there? By my calculations, that would make it £2·2 million that you, your Department and DFP have committed to the fund.

Mr Wells: It is important to say that the honourable Member for North Antrim has made an invaluable contribution to this debate, and we wish his son Evan all the best as he continues to progress.

I will outline what has been going on. In 2011-12, 97 paediatric surgeries were carried out in Northern Ireland; there were 13 in the Republic of Ireland and 40 in England. That is a total of 150. In 2014-15, to date, there have been only 12 in Northern Ireland, four in the Irish Republic and 58 in England. Therefore, the numbers being undertaken in Ireland north and south have rapidly declined, and that will be the case until the new service is up and running.

A fully integrated team from Belfast will go to Dublin from 1 April to maintain skills; we are not losing those skills. Those individuals are specialists and know one another integrally; they work together all the time in teams and consult regularly. There is no wall around Northern Ireland as far as paediatric congenital surgery is concerned. Therefore, those skills will be retained, and you will have people with a Northern Ireland accent carrying out surgery in Crumlin. Those people may know the patients and their families extremely well. I am confident that those skills will not be lost, particularly given that we are making a £1·2 million investment in new facilities at the Royal. Without those, we would have lost that team. That is absolutely certain. There is also the investment of £85,000 in nurses.

The £1 million will be spent on the infrastructure and staffing required to invest in the network in Belfast. There is only £1 million. I wish that it was £2 million, but my understanding is that it is £1·2 million plus the £85,000. I will double-check because I know that the Member raised that before. I certainly have not seen where the other £1 million is, and there are very few pots of £1 million sitting around the Department unspent, I can assure you. I will check that for him.

Mr Dallat: The Minister struggled a little bit earlier to name towns in Donegal, which tells me that he was not a student at the Irish college in Ranafast. He certainly has not struggled this morning to sell this project to the Assembly. I know that he has competing priorities, and I think that we all greatly admire him for coming to the House to do it. As Minister of Health, he will be aware that there are always knockers and people in the corner who will want to bash. Is he satisfied that, in terms of public scrutiny, the accountability aspect of this will be open and transparent to ensure that the excellent work that will be done will not be overshadowed by those who will want to pick holes in it?

Mr Wells: Yes. This has been a difficult decision; it has been one of the most studied, consulted upon and discussed decisions made by the Assembly in many years. I wish that I was not in this position, but, when I read the documentation that came to the office, I found the evidence so overwhelming that I would have been negligent had I decided that, for some party-political reason, I wanted to retain the service in Belfast even though we are selling our services to the Irish Republic in many other fields.

I am therefore content that we have made the right decision. I also know that the level of public interest in the decision is such that we are being watched by every possible group. If there is one slip, it will immediately be exposed on a certain radio programme that will remain nameless but is on at 9 o'clock of a Monday morning. *[Interruption.]* It could be Frank Mitchell. What I am saying is this: we know the level of scrutiny.

As far as my visits to Donegal are concerned, I remember that, on my first visit there, it took four guards armed with sub-machine guns to get me in and five to get me out. I am glad to say, however, that times have changed and that I do not have any fears about going up there now. Yes, I am not exactly a world authority on the geography of Donegal, but I was making a very serious point.

I believe that Fanad Head is in Donegal, as is Malin Head. A child in Malin Head who has a cardiac arrest and needs surgery has to travel a much longer distance than anybody in Northern Ireland, and that is something that has to be recognised. The model has worked well for the Republic, even though the distances are large: children go to a centre of excellence, of which we are now going to avail ourselves. I am therefore reassured that there is a fair wind behind the process, but I can assure the Member that it will continue to be investigated and scrutinised.

My final point concerns the £1 million investment identified by Mr John Compton. It remains on the table to be used in the context of the £5 million recurrent expenditure on the new service. It is still there potentially, but, as the Member knows, not a penny in the Department of Health ever sits unused. We could still have that additional investment, but I can say that we have already committed ourselves

to the £1·2 million, and that is an indication, in terribly difficult times, of just how committed we are. I know how painful this is for him as a parent and for the many folk who have spoken to him, but I hope that he will respect my motivation, which is to do what is best for some of the most vulnerable children in our community. This has to be the right way forward, or else, by continuing to operate a service that is not up to the standard of the one available in Crumlin, we run the risk of children either not surviving or having very poor outcomes.

Mr Allister: I very much regret that the Minister has sold out on retaining any surgical services in Northern Ireland, particularly for emergency situations, and I wonder how long it will be before a child needing emergency surgery will pay with his or her life. I press the Minister on his all-Ireland vision as it touches on adult provision. In the statement, he talks about progressing the model to provide for adults with congenital heart disease. Is it his vision that acute provision for adults will also be outside this jurisdiction? Is that his vision? Is that what the paragraph in the statement means, or does it mean something else?

Mr Wells: I know where the Member is coming from, and I suppose that, if I had been sitting in his seat six months ago, I would probably have thought the same. However, when I am faced with absolutely overwhelming evidence that a child's life is best protected by adopting this model, I have to set aside any political difficulties that I may have and do what is best. It is difficult, I have to say that.

The Member raises a legitimate concern about adult cardiology. The fact that we have invested £1·2 million and will continue to have cardiology services delivered by experts in Belfast indicates that there is absolutely no need to transfer services other than paediatric services to Dublin. The numbers are sufficient in Northern Ireland to justify a top-class service, so the issue does not arise. We have many people in Northern Ireland with heart disease, and they will continue to require treatment in Northern Ireland. The issue is specific to one specialist service that has to be delivered to numbers of at least 400, numbers that we simply do not have. I could stand here on my political soapbox and say that, because I am a unionist, I will not move children to the Republic. I could do that, but when the first child were to pass on or develop a very serious condition because of my intransigence, I would have to answer to the media and to the parents. I have dealt with some very passionate, upset parents who are desperate for the best care for their children. What am I going to do? I do what the experts tell me, and they tell me that this is the right model.

Mr B McCrea: We have talked for almost an hour, and only just now did we get to the nub of the issue. I congratulate the Minister on putting forward a formidable defence of his decision, but only towards the end are we getting to why he feels that that is necessary. I may have misunderstood the issue, but I would like to take this opportunity to understand. There is capacity in the existing arrangements in Great Britain, but there is no capacity as yet in Dublin. For what reason are we deciding to move from existing capacity to Dublin? I accept the medical evidence about Northern Ireland, or Belfast, being too small, but I am not sure why we need to make the change. Perhaps he will explain that to me.

He paid tribute to the parents and charities involved. Are they satisfied, having had the consultation, with the decision he has made?

Mr Wells: Yes, we could have opted for a model where we fly all our children to Birmingham or Evelina in London, but he has to understand the huge upheaval it is to the family, and the inherent dangers there are, in flying in an air ambulance or chartered flight to London. The fact is that the parents have to stay for maybe days, weeks or even months with their child in Birmingham or London. That is extremely expensive for them and extremely difficult for their children back home.

Parents said throughout all this that they were not particularly happy with having to go down this route but that, if it were a choice between driving down the motorway to Our Lady's in Crumlin with their loved one or having to fly to the mainland of the United Kingdom, then the former was definitely the lesser of two evils. For parents in my constituency of South Down, or in Newry, Armagh or Craigavon, it is a much more convenient place for the care of their child.

I accept Mr Robinson's comments about children from the north of the Province. There was no great enthusiasm; the parents would have loved to have gone down Mr Allister's route of having a full-blown modern paediatric congenital heart disease surgical team in Belfast, but the problem is that the team would have been working at only one third capacity. For many of the days, there would not be the children to look after at the level we need. Eventually, the surgeons would start to lose the skills they require because they would not be practising on a wide range of patients, and they would drift away. These surgeons are like gold dust; they are very hard to attract and extremely hard to retain. They would start to drift away to the larger centres. Therefore, the facility would close, and the Royal College would tell us, "You simply can't sustain it."

This is not unusual; it happens elsewhere. We moved all the serious cancer surgery and treatment to the Belfast City Hospital. This means that people from Strabane, Enniskillen, Kilkeel etc are travelling big distances but are doing so in the knowledge that they are far more likely to survive because of the concentration of skills in that unit. Equally, people will be travelling the long distance to Dublin confident that the best possible service on the island of Ireland is there.

The service in Birmingham and Evelina is very good, but parents have told us that it represents far too much of an upheaval for them and the close family network required to support those children. I used to say that there are various shades of grey in this argument, but I have stopped using that phrase for very obvious reasons. It is a choice of the lesser of two evils, to some extent. The option of having full-blown care in Belfast was simply not on the table, and there is no way I can avoid that.

Mr McCallister: As a parent, I would be inclined to want to go to wherever the best care is on offer. The Minister may confirm that children with certain conditions will still have to go to Birmingham or London because the surgery is so complex.

A theme throughout the statement and questions has been that one of the reasons that Dublin has become a viable option is because of the improved infrastructure leading from places like south Down and linking to the

main Belfast-Dublin corridor, and the improvements to the road. What contact has the Minister had, and what work has he and his Department done, with the Department for Regional Development to link other centres and improve our road network to make sure that our hospital network is much more open and accessible to a broader range of people? It is vitally important that that takes place.

12.00 noon

Mr Wells: The crucial issue here is the network from Belfast to Dublin, because many of these children will be brought to Belfast initially and then taken on to Dublin for surgery or acute treatment. Most of us accept that transport links between Belfast and Dublin have improved dramatically, and it is possible, for instance, for an ambulance to get from somewhere like Banbridge to Dublin within the hour. Sometimes escorts will be required and radio contact will have to be made to make certain that, for instance, the toll bridge is open down near Drogheda.

This is an absolutely crucial issue and why we want the parents on board. We want to look constantly at transport arrangements to see whether these children are getting safely and quickly to the new facility. Had it been in Dundrum or Dún Laoghaire — at least I know something about the geography of Dublin, if not Donegal — it would be more difficult, because the child would have to be brought through Dublin city centre or around the ring road. At least we have a facility in Dublin that is to the north of the city, which makes it much more convenient for parents from Northern Ireland.

I guarantee that that will be prominent in the oversight of this entire decision. We want to make certain that the Ambulance Service is up to scratch to get our children there, that we have the correct vehicles and that we can get there as fast as possible. I keep coming back to the point that, if you are from Tralee, you have a much longer journey than you would have from Banbridge or Rathfriland. The outcomes indicate that, even though there is extra distance, the child has a much better outcome by doing that. Some of the roads in the west of Ireland are certainly less superior to our own, yet the children are still getting there as quickly as possible.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his statement, and I welcome it. It is good to hear Mr Allister in his usual positive frame of mind and, indeed, to hear the Minister talk about the North of Ireland in reference to Malin Head.

I will move to my question. Your statement says that:

> *"The model proposed by the IWG means that these children will have their surgery in Dublin within a reasonable travelling distance from their homes with their pre and post operative care being delivered in Belfast."*

I assume that there will be a monitoring process to ensure that the efficacy of this situation will prevail and that it will be monitored on a regular basis.

Mr Wells: Five hundred pounds will go to the Member's favourite charity if the phrase "the North of Ireland" ever crosses my lips from this point on or previously. It is a phrase I do not recognise, because the north of Ireland includes Donegal. I refer to that part of Her Majesty's realm known as Northern Ireland in all my speeches.

Being serious about it, monitoring and keeping an eye on the progress of this entire proposal is absolutely crucial. We are dealing with something that forms a very small part of the health service budget in Northern Ireland but that is highly emotional and emotive and is so important to communities that tend to have a great deal of empathy for parents in this situation. I have heard some heartbreaking stories about what parents have faced. One of the first events that I attended was a fundraising event in Banbridge for children in this position, and some of the stories that I heard there made for pretty difficult listening.

I know that there is a huge public interest in this issue and a huge interest in it in the House. It is interesting that a health statement would normally attract about six MLAs, mostly from the Health Committee. It is very unusual to have a turnout as huge as we have here today and to have so many questions. I know that I am being watched on this, that I have to deliver and that the Member and the Health Committee are watching me, as they should. Therefore, we are going to have to make certain that every i is dotted and every t is crossed.

However, I can say that, since 23 September, things have moved in the right direction and have moved quickly and effectively. We can do no more than that. My officials tell me that they have had full cooperation from their counterparts in the Irish Republic and have done everything possible to move this project forward. It is to the benefit of children not only from Northern Ireland but the Irish Republic. The extra children from Northern Ireland will give Our Lady's the numbers that it needs to maintain a first-rate service for its children from every corner of the Republic of Ireland. Therefore, it is a win-win situation, as it will be when patients from the Irish Republic come up to Northern Ireland for vital treatment in our hospitals. It will definitely be a two-way process.

Mr Speaker: Thank you, Minister. I believe that the Member's favourite charity is presently checking Hansard.

That concludes questions on the statement.

Committee Business

Wind Energy Inquiry Report

Mr Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 30 minutes for the debate. The proposer will have 15 minutes to propose the motion and 15 minutes to wind. All other Members who wish to speak will have five minutes.

Ms Lo (The Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment): I beg to move

> *That this Assembly approves the report of the Committee for the Environment [NIA 226/11-16] on its Inquiry into Wind Energy in Northern Ireland; and calls on the Minister of the Environment to implement the recommendations contained in the report.*

I would like to take the opportunity to express my appreciation to all those who have contributed to the inquiry and to thank the Committee staff, particularly the Clerk, Sheila Mawhinney, who has worked extremely hard to enable the Committee to gather evidence and produce the final report.

I now wish to outline the circumstances that led to the Committee undertaking its inquiry. In June 2013, at an external meeting in Omagh, the Committee for the Environment had briefings from a group that opposes the siting of wind turbines in populated rural areas, and also from the Strabane/Omagh councils working group on wind energy. The Committee subsequently invited representatives from the Northern Ireland Renewables Industry Group to respond to the issues that had been raised. The evidence presented at those two meetings led the Committee to agree to carry out a short review in October and November 2013.

It quickly became clear that issues that were emerging were largely cross-cutting and impacted on the remit of other Departments and the relevant Statutory Committees within the Assembly. Those included economic issues, such as subsidy by consumers of electricity and the impact on tourism of wind developments in areas of great scenic beauty, as well as possible health impacts arising from the proximity of wind turbines to homes. The Environment Committee agreed that economic and health issues may be more properly referred to other Statutory Committees, and that it should focus primarily on concerns raised in relation to environmental and planning matters that are more directly relevant to its remit. That was reflected in the terms of reference that were established for both the review and the inquiry.

The Committee received 98 submissions in response to its call for evidence, and it agreed that the evidence that had been presented during the review should also be considered. The Committee had oral evidence sessions with a range of stakeholders and commissioned the services of a specialist acoustician to assist it with the technical aspects of the inquiry. In addition, the Committee carried out a fact-finding visit to west Tyrone to see a wind farm development at first hand, and it heard from residents who lived close by.

After due consideration of the evidence before it, the Committee agreed on a number of recommendations. The Committee agreed that there was a need for a strategic approach in the siting of wind energy developments. The current policy is set out in planning policy statement (PPS) 18, with a slightly different approach proposed in the draft strategic planning policy statement (SPPS) that would remove the significant weighting of wider environmental, economic and social benefits considerations and urge a cautious approach to the siting of turbines in areas of outstanding natural beauty or other designated landscapes.

The Committee considered whether a strategic approach that advocated zoning or the identification of the most appropriate locations for wind turbines would be effective. It was agreed, however, that it was too late to introduce zoning in Northern Ireland because some areas, notably west Tyrone, have already reached saturation point in the number of wind developments, either operational or planned, for the region. However, the Committee identified a clear need for closer liaison between the strategic planning division and councils to ensure a joined-up approach and more cohesive planning for wind farms and individual turbines. That should be a natural outcome from the development over the next two years of local development plans for each council area. That liaison should also involve all relevant central government Departments and should reflect the aims of the regional development strategy and the strategic energy framework.

The Committee expressed some concern that the term “economic considerations”, which is used in PPS 18 and has been retained in the draft SPPS, has not been clearly defined, and it urges the Department to do so. The Committee acknowledges that some economic impacts may be intangible but believes that planning applications submitted by developers need to be very specific about the measurable economic outcomes of the project so that it is clear whether or not they have been delivered.

The Committee agreed that the Department should carry out an audit of the effectiveness of PPS 18 in determining both the environmental and economic outputs of wind energy. The Committee believes that that exercise would be useful not only in establishing the effectiveness of PPS 18 but in determining future policy and practice.

The Committee found that many submissions to the inquiry focused on the perceived inadequacies of current planning procedures and the cumulative impact of turbines. Members recognised that balancing individual applications against cumulative effect is a wider issue across planning, but the Committee has recommended that procedures be put in place so that a saturation point is clearly defined rather than it being the judgement call of individual planning officials.

The Committee recommends that planning applications for connection to the grid be assessed at the same time as the turbine application and welcomes the Department’s inclusion of that provision in its latest draft of the SPPS.

The Committee believes that the requirement to notify neighbours who occupy buildings on land within 80 metres of the boundary of the application site is inadequate for the latest wind turbines, which may exceed 110 metres in height and have a much greater impact in open countryside than in an urban environment. The Committee recommends that the Department review that distance with a view to extending it beyond the current radius.

The second term of reference of the inquiry focuses on wind turbine noise and separation distances from

dwellings. This has been the most emotive aspect of the inquiry. Many submissions detail the adverse impact that perceived noise from wind turbines is having on respondents' daily lives. From the evidence put before the Committee, it seems apparent that current guidelines for permissible levels of noise are no longer adequate. The Committee, therefore, recommends that the Department urgently review the use of the ETSU-R-97 guidelines with a view to adopting more modern and robust guidance for the measurement of wind turbine noise.

12.15 pm

The Committee was concerned that there did not appear to be continuous, long-term monitoring of noise from wind farms, either by developers or by the relevant public sector organisations. Such information would provide developers and planners with factual evidence and a useful assessment measure for future applications. The Committee has recommended that the Department commission independent research to measure the impact of low-frequency noise on residents living in proximity to individual turbines and wind farms in Northern Ireland.

The Committee has also recommended that the Department specify a minimum separation distance between wind turbines and dwellings. During the inquiry, the Committee received assurances from developers and the Department that wind turbines are generally a safe form of technology. However, the recent collapse of a turbine in Tyrone led to a recommendation that any lessons learned from the investigation, which is ongoing, be implemented as soon as possible.

Mr Allister: Will the Member give way?

Ms Lo: Yes, sure.

Mr Allister: Does the Member agree that, if the turbine collapse that occurred in County Tyrone had occurred at one of the large quasi-urban sites, the consequential loss of life could have been catastrophic? I am thinking of turbines like those located in my constituency near the village of Broughshane, which are surrounded by houses. Is there not a need for a very emphatic distance requirement, given that what happened in Tyrone could, we are told, happen again?

Ms Lo: Yes, I agree with the Member. We will keep a very close eye on the result of the investigation into that turbine collapse. The Committee report recommends a review of the separation distance and that that distance should be longer and wider than what the Department uses as guidance at the moment, particularly given that some turbines are taller now. We look forward to the response of the Department and the Minister to our recommendation on the separation distance.

The final term of reference for the inquiry related to the extent of engagement by wind energy providers with communities and the promotion of such engagement. The Committee found that, although the wind industry is aware that engagement is vital and is moving towards a more robust standardised approach, many residents still feel marginalised in the whole process of siting wind developments near their homes. Often, community concerns about visual amenity, noise and health are not given due regard. The views of residents need to be listened to and considered, and changes need to be made, if possible, to take account of their views. It is not just about preparing reports; there is a need to act on their findings.

The Committee has made a number of recommendations to promote timely and early engagement with communities. These include the mandatory use of a community engagement toolkit, the preparation of pre-application independent community engagement reports, and information events that are properly organised discussion sessions with opportunities for residents to have their questions answered. The Committee recommends that the level of community benefits payable be set at government level and that these should be made a condition of planning permission. A community benefits register, similar to the one in Scotland, should be set up as a public record of all types of benefit arising from wind developments.

The Committee believes that that would enhance transparency and accountability as well as providing a means of assessing the effectiveness of the schemes.

In conclusion, the Committee has made recommendations that it hopes will promote a more inclusive approach and thereby result in a more meaningful and real form of engagement to address the concerns of the communities whose approach to the Committee gave rise to the inquiry.

Lord Morrow: The Committee's findings could probably be summed up under four headings. Those are concerns about safety, about noise, about property values and about the impact on the landscape. Those were certainly the four messages that I got quite clearly from the evidence that we took from those who came to speak to the Committee, or, in some cases, who the Committee had gone to, particularly in west Tyrone.

I also think that is reasonable to say that there are varying degrees of enthusiasm for the concept of wind energy, and I would be surprised if that does not manifest itself in the debate and the discussion that we will have. Without naming any names, I am aware of at least one Member who may not be the most enthusiastic supporter of wind energy. To some degree, I am a bit between the two. I still have to be convinced of the merits of wind energy, but I am not on the extreme side of the issue.

Mr McNarry: Could you repeat that? *[Laughter.]*

Lord Morrow: I might repeat it at some other stage, but not just now.

The wind energy providers are certainly very positive. For the life of me, I cannot think why they would be, but anyway. They outlined in some detail the merits of wind energy. Those who are still to be convinced are, to say the least, a bit sceptical. The Chair has probably already alluded to the fact that there were some 98 or 100 submissions to the inquiry, and I was pleasantly surprised at that in a positive way.

As a result of the Committee's inquiry into wind energy, a number of recommendations were made to the Department of the Environment, including the need for a more strategic approach by the Department when considering planning applications for wind development. The Committee wants to see a closer liaison between planners at council and strategic division levels.

I outlined that I thought that the four headings lay in safety, noise, property values and the impact on the landscape, and I want to say something about those. There are

those who tell us that the whole thing is quite safe, but a large section of the community is still to be convinced of that. In an intervention, Mr Allister alluded to the incident outside Fivemiletown, where one of those monstrosities collapsed. That caused considerable concern among the general public because it could have been in a different setting. It was discovered that parts of that apparatus had left the site and gone some distance. Some photographs were produced, and I showed one of the photographs to a colleague and asked what it reminded him of. He said, "A plane crash". That is exactly what it looked like. Thankfully, it was not as dreadful as that.

The noise impact will have to be taken seriously. There are varying arguments about whether there is a noise element or whether it is people's imagination. I do not believe that it is people's imagination. There are those who live in close proximity to the apparatus who have real and genuine concerns about the noise impact.

I also have real concerns about the negative impact on property prices. Those who are pushing wind energy play that down, and that does a disservice to those with real concerns. I know for sure that, if I had a property in close proximity to a wind farm or one of these apparatus, I would have real concern about the value of my property.

Mr Speaker, I see that you are giving me the nod to get on quickly. Let no one in this House or outside it say that it has no impact on the landscape: it has a detrimental impact on the landscape. I would like to see those particular issues given even more consideration.

The Committee carried out a fairly exhaustive inquiry, but I believe that there is much more work to be done in some detail. I think that this is one issue that will come back to the Floor of this Assembly in the not-too-distant future.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom labhairt i bhfabhar an turascála seo. I welcome the opportunity to speak in favour of the report. First, before I go into detail on the report, I would like to acknowledge the point that Mr Allister raised about the wind turbine that came down in Tyrone. If it had come down in an urban setting, as he indicated, there would have been serious consequences. It raised the issue in Committee about the use of reconditioned wind turbines. Now, I do not know whether that was the case in that instance, nor do I know where we are with the investigation, but it is certainly something that we need to take a look at and follow up on in Committee.

I want to put on record my thanks to all those who contributed in any way to the composition of this report. I want to put on record my thanks to our specialist adviser on acoustics, Ursula Walsh. I want to outline a couple of issues. I want to thank my Tyrone and West Tyrone colleagues, because that is where the whole idea of an inquiry and report came from initially. I want to put that on the record for those people because saturation was the issue that led to the inquiry in the first place.

We must bear in mind that, in 2011, we signed up in the Programme for Government to reach a renewable target by a certain year. That is grand; we have signed up to that, but whether you are for or against wind turbines, we need to seriously look at some of the issues that raise their head in the report. The first that I want to talk about is what is known as the ETSU-R-97. Basically, it is the assessment and rating of wind turbine noise.

Mr Wilson: I thank the Member for giving way. Does he accept that, if we are to meet the target that has been set for 2020, we are probably looking at setting up around another 1,500 of these turbines across Northern Ireland, so the cumulative impact that he has talked about is very important?

Mr Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Boylan: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I take that point on board. That very fact came up in part of the debate on the report. We are looking at that target, which may or may not be achievable, and the damage that it may actually cause on the far side of it, but —

Ms Lo: Will the Member give way?

Mr Boylan: Certainly.

Ms Lo: In answer to that; it does not necessarily mean that renewable energy has to come from wind turbines. We are urging for a mix of different types of renewable energy.

Mr Boylan: Sorry: I was interrupted during the intervention. I apologise to the Member. I will come back to you again. I will try to figure out what was said. With regard to what the previous Member said about the renewables target, we are discussing only wind energy here. There is a load of other renewable energy out there that we could test to meet the target. I want to add that point as well. I am sorry that I was interrupted during the Member's intervention.

I just want to make a couple of points quickly. Certainly, noise was an issue for the Committee. There are question marks over the ETSU-R-97, which was brought out and, I think, followed by a review and guidance in May 2013. The question that needs to be asked is whether that document and those regulations are now fit for purpose. Maybe the Minister will respond to that. How does the Minister propose to deal with that under the new SPPS, or is it part of his thinking?

12.30 pm

Mr Frew: Will the Member give way?

Mr Boylan: Yes, go on ahead.

Mr Frew: I will be brief. He mentions the ETSU-R-97, which was published in 1996; it was to be reviewed two years after its publication. At present, it is handcuffing our environmental health officers to a document that is, basically, ignorant and idiotic.

Mr Boylan: I agree. It was clearly shown as part of the review and the report. I would like the Minister to respond specifically to that point.

I am running out of time, because I have taken so many interventions. The other major point that I want to talk about is community engagement. Throughout, we have heard how the community was engaged in the process. As part of one of the recommendations, they wanted to introduce a community toolkit. I want to read some of it quickly for the record. It provides guidance on the issues needed to consider when planning and designing your community engagement process; it focuses on quality and effective participation in community engagement processes; tools to help to plan and implement community engagement processes; and methods and techniques appropriate to your community engagement process.

If we are to go forward, we need to engage with the community. I know that the process of better and up-front community engagement is part of the new planning regulations. Minister, that is something that I would like to see you take forward in your strategic planning policy statement. Unfortunately, I have run out of time.

Mr Speaker: Thank you very much. The Business Committee has arranged to meet immediately after the lunchtime suspension today. I propose, therefore, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until 2·00 pm. The first item of business when we return will be Question Time.

The debate stood suspended.

The sitting was suspended at 12.32 pm.

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

2.00 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Employment and Learning

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): I have to tell Members that questions 5 and 10 have been withdrawn. We will start with listed questions.

Steps 2 Success

1. **Mr Moutray** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of the Steps 2 Success programme. *(AQO 7705/11-15)*

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): Steps 2 Success is my Department's main programme for assisting unemployed and economically inactive people to find and sustain employment. Contracts were awarded on 8 July 2014, and the programme became operational on 20 October. The three organisations awarded the contracts were as follows: Ingeus in the greater Belfast and surrounding area; Reed in Partnership in the south and south-west; and EOS NI in the north and north-west.

Each organisation has local supply chain partners to provide full geographical coverage and specialist support for all participants. The delivery organisations work with each participant to identify their individual barriers to finding work, and they agree a progression to employment plan. That plan will outline the actions to be taken by the participant and the contractor. They can include job search activity, vocational training, confidence building, preparation of CVs, assistance with health-related issues and short work placements. The progression to employment plan will be updated on a regular basis to take account of improvements in the participant's employability and actions for the future. Contractors also work with local small, medium and large employers to identify job vacancies for job-ready participants. The level of service delivered to each participant is underwritten by a service guarantee that defines the minimum level of service they receive.

My Department has contract management and quality improvement teams that are already monitoring to ensure that a high quality service is delivered to all. Each contractor has into work targets and sustained work targets that are higher than the outcomes attained in Steps to Work. By 20 February, over 13,500 people had started on the programme. Independently verified information on programme performance will be available from the autumn of 2016 onwards once participants have completed the programme and job sustainment can be measured.

Mr Moutray: I thank the Minister for his response. Is he aware of the percentage of people who do not complete the programme for whatever reason, and is there a penalty for failure to complete the programme?

Dr Farry: At this stage, it is too early to have an indication of those who may not complete the programme. Of course, there can be benign reasons for not completing the programme, in that someone is moving into work. On the other hand, there may be those who go through the

programme without progressing into work. The programme is moving more towards incentives; it is not as heavily focused on formal job outward placements compared with the comparative programme in Great Britain but is a combination of job attachment and sustained employment outcomes that will measure success. I think that that is the best way of going. That reflects local design of the programme to reflect the circumstances in Northern Ireland.

Mr F McCann: Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. There were concerns about the previous scheme and this scheme in how it will work and the jobs it will provide. Can the Minister give us an assurance that it will be heavily monitored and that, if there are problems, the Department will move right away to ensure that things are fixed?

Dr Farry: Very much so. One of the key aspects of the new programme is a service guarantee. It is worth referring to the work programme in Great Britain where they have what is termed a "black box" — once someone moves into the work programme, they are effectively out of sight and out of mind in terms of the interaction with the state. That is not the case in Northern Ireland. Again, because of our local circumstances and because of the opportunities of devolution, we did things differently. The service guarantee is there to ensure that there are minimum standards and that there is no temptation for contractors to work with those clients that they perceive could be more readily moved into work. Every person coming forward will have an individually tailored package that addresses their needs.

Of course, the Member rightly identified the fact that we need to invest more in job creation. That is at the heart of everything that the Executive are trying to do. We need to ensure that we have a steady stream of people coming through a whole range of different skill levels into our labour market to take advantage of jobs that are being created. There are inefficiencies within our labour market, and those are long term and structural. Programmes such as this are vital to try to address the vicious circle that we experienced in the past.

Mr Ramsey: Separate from the Steps 2 Success training schemes, the most worrying aspect of this is that the month of February sees the end of any young person joining youth employment schemes. Will the Minister outline what will replace those schemes to ensure that young people in particular have an opportunity for training?

Dr Farry: The Member is quite right to continue to focus on youth unemployment. While our youth unemployment figures in Northern Ireland are improving — we have seen a fairly significant move on that in recent months — they are still a significant challenge, although, of course, not on the same scale as we are experiencing in other parts of Europe. The youth employment scheme has been successful. However, it was funded through a dedicated funding stream that the Executive authorised in spring 2012 and that comes to its natural end in March 2015. Other things being equal in terms of the availability of resources, we would have liked to bid for that scheme to continue, but, sadly, that has not been the case.

We are looking to see what elements of the youth employment scheme can be mainstreamed through our front-line employment service offer. We are looking to see how far, within existing resources, we can go to continue with aspects of the youth employment scheme. I am happy to keep the Member informed of any further developments on that over the coming weeks.

Mr Kinahan: I thank the Minister for his answers so far. Is he aware of any concerns raised by course participants, who are reporting concern at the amount of expenses paid out?

Dr Farry: Like Steps to Work and, indeed, any other scheme, we receive correspondence from participants who raise issues about the delivery of schemes. That is why we place a strong focus on continued monitoring. We do not simply hand out contracts to organisations and then say, "Off you go and address that." The state has a fundamental interest in ensuring that those schemes are delivered correctly and in line with our overarching policy objectives. Where we believe there are situations where rules have been interpreted incorrectly or we see unjust outcomes or situations emerging, we will make representations. I do not want to comment on the particular case that the Member raised, but if he wants to get in touch with me directly, I will be happy to investigate it, rather than to comment on something on the Floor without knowing the full background to the case.

Jobs Fair: Omagh

2. **Mr McElduff** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether his Department plans to hold a jobs fair in the Omagh district during 2015. *(AQO 7706/11-15)*

Dr Farry: My officials work closely with employers and actively pursue opportunities to facilitate job fairs and employer breakfast events to promote the services of my Department, as well as recruitment events for individual employers across Northern Ireland. Bringing job fairs into local communities has proven to be a very successful means of assisting people back into work. When planning to host a job fair, my Department carefully considers the number of job opportunities that employers have made available in any particular location, and it establishes whether there is sufficient interest and demand from local companies to participate.

My officials are extremely proactive in the Omagh area, and I am aware that they are working with Primark to host a customised recruitment event during April this year for a new store that is due to open in the town centre in September. That is good news for jobseekers in that area. Should the opportunity arise this year, based upon sufficient demand from employers to participate in a job fair in the Omagh area, my officials are available to organise and facilitate any such event.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat. I thank the Minister for his answer and welcome the commitment that his people based in Omagh are working with Primark on the matter that he described. Let me say to the Minister that there was recently a detailed list of locations where the Department held job fairs in 2014, and no locations in either Tyrone or Fermanagh were mentioned. I ask the Minister whether he can work with the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to create opportunities for highly qualified and skilled graduates in west Tyrone who are unable to secure employment locally at this time.

Dr Farry: I am very mindful of regional opportunities, and the Member will be aware that the Executive have set up a subcommittee to look at them. That was sparked primarily by issues in the north-west, though I know that, depending

on how you define “the north-west”, you can potentially include Omagh. That working group is not exclusively focused on the north-west; it looks at other aspects of balance across Northern Ireland.

Of course, we are very keen to work as an Executive as a whole — particularly me working with the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment — to ensure that we are creating job opportunities anywhere that we can. My officials stand ready to work with companies to address their skill needs. The Member will also be aware that, with South West College, there is a huge resource in the local community that is there to interact directly with businesses and to ensure that we are bringing forward young people, and indeed people of other ages, with the skills that are relevant to employers in the community.

Mr Campbell: The Minister will be aware that there was a jobs fair in Limavady hosted by the North West Regional College, which I alluded to at the last Question Time. It looked to me, as a person who was asked to go along and help to launch it as the MP for the area, as if it was outstandingly successful, given the numbers that were there. Can the Minister indicate what analysis is done after the event to ensure that future events are equally successful and can be built on in the future?

Dr Farry: I am almost tempted to say that the event was so successful because they knew that the Member was due to attend in his capacity as MP. I am sure that a few others came along for reasons apart from that.

We do seek feedback from these events, both from participants and from the employers, because we have to have a process of continual learning. The feedback that we have received to date about these events from both sides has been very positive. Whether we are talking about Tyrone and Fermanagh or about County Londonderry, we are more than happy to consider further such events based upon a critical mass of demand emerging from employers. Our staff will be very proactive in engaging with employers to try to create those opportunities. We are not sitting here in a passive way waiting for people to come knocking on our door. We will be out working with employers to see whether the opportunities arise. There is a very strong focus upon lessons learned.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Mo bhuíochas leis an Aire chomh maith. I thank the Minister for his answers. Given the number of job fairs that are planned, can the Minister give us an indication of, first, the quantity and, secondly, picking up on Mr McElduff’s point, the location of those for 2015?

Dr Farry: At this stage, we do not have a definitive list of numbers or, indeed, locations for job fairs, but I say to the Member, and indeed others, that this is not something that we are seeking to ration. This is something that is a good thing to do because what we are here to do is to shift people into employment to meet the needs of people who are unemployed and also to address the requirements of employers to fill vacancies or to create jobs where maybe an employer has not yet even identified a vacancy but may be encouraged to take someone on to increase their productivity.

As and when we see the opportunity arising in different parts of Northern Ireland, we will take up those opportunities. It is almost certain that we will have major events in Belfast and Derry once again, given that we have had very successful events in the past 12 months in both of those locations. We are open to working in any part of Northern Ireland where the demand and critical mass is identified to make such an event sustainable.

Zero-hours Contracts: Public Consultation

3. **Mr Nesbitt** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of the outcome of the zero-hours contracts public consultation. *(AQO 7707/11-15)*

Dr Farry: The consultation identified a number of critical issues; in particular, a general acceptance that exclusivity clauses are not appropriate in the majority of employment contracts. There is also a need for a clear, unambiguous legal definition of zero-hours and other non-guaranteed-hours contracts. Although the appropriate use of these contracts can contribute to labour market flexibility, it is clear that they can have an adverse impact on vulnerable workers, particularly in accessing benefits and credit.

The increasing casualisation of the labour market requires a proportionate response to protect the rights of workers. The consultation feedback indicated difficulties experienced by workers in accessing benefits and a desire by many for a move to fixed contracts. In response, I intend using my Department’s forthcoming employment Bill, which is being drafted, to establish a clear, unambiguous definition of zero-hours and non-guaranteed-hours contracts and to prohibit the use of exclusivity clauses.

A total ban could be readily circumvented, so I intend to include enabling provisions to allow for the introduction of anti-avoidance and enforcement measures. Enabling powers will also establish a right for workers to request a fixed-hours contract after a specified period, which an employer will only be able to refuse on objective business grounds.

I am conscious that many vulnerable workers may not feel comfortable in exercising that right, so I propose to include additional provisions that will require an employer to review and justify the continuance of a zero-hours contract after a specified period. I also propose to establish a statutory code of practice that will bring much-needed clarity to employers’ obligations and workers’ rights.

Finally, I have written to the Minister for Social Development to secure his support for a joint departmental project to develop more responsive processes that will assist vulnerable workers in accessing their benefit entitlements.

2.15 pm

Mr Nesbitt: I thank the Minister. If I understand correctly, he is ruling out an outright ban on the use of zero-hours contracts. How does he square that with the Executive’s desire to build a high-tech, high-wage economy in which employees have their rights protected?

Dr Farry: Let me be very clear: I am not here to justify zero-hours contracts. I want an economy that is built on high-level skills and is based on people having security and sustainability in their work. We have to recognise, however, that we are seeing a casualisation of the labour market, and there may be circumstances in which businesses wish to make a case for the continued use of zero-hours contracts. While I am very alert to the demands from a lot of stakeholders and Members for an outright ban on zero-hours contracts, we need to be careful that we do not go for a disproportionate response to what is

nonetheless a clear and difficult problem and that we do not end up inadvertently putting people out of work. We could see a situation in which unscrupulous employers, if they are forced to move people from zero-hours contracts after a specific time into a permanent contract, will simply dismiss those workers, not least because they are outside the qualifying period for unfair dismissal, and seek to hire other people or to rehire people on a different contract. We need to be careful because an outright ban might not be effective. We are proposing a proportionate response, which I believe goes a long way to addressing the needs of vulnerable workers and goes further than what is being legislated for in the UK Parliament for Great Britain.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht a fhreagra. The Minister has accepted that zero-hours contracts have a negative impact on workers, but his proposals fall far short of what is required to protect and promote workers' rights. He says that a total ban could be easily circumvented. I do not agree with using the fact that employers would find some way of continuing to exploit workers as a justification for not banning these things. Will the Minister provide some evidence to justify his claim in a briefing document that a ban on zero-hours contracts would have a disproportionate impact on flexibility in the economy and potentially remove some employment opportunities? I certainly do not agree with that statement.

Dr Farry: The Member is entitled to his view and his analysis. Indeed, in the event that the Executive clear proposals to allow clauses in zero-hours contracts to be a part of a forthcoming employment Bill, the Committee will have the opportunity to scrutinise and to propose amendments, as will other Members, on the Floor of the Assembly. The House will find the natural level of what it believes is appropriate for Northern Ireland. However, we need to be conscious of the fact that a number of businesses in Northern Ireland are using the contracts at present. Am I seeking to justify that? No, I am not. I need to be mindful, however, of the fact that, if the House goes for a disproportionate response to the problem, there is a risk that we will inadvertently force people out of job opportunities.

There may be situations in which employers can provide an objective justification for zero-hours contracts. That is why we have created that potential duty on employers to make the case that that is why it has to be the case, rather than simply casually going for that option. This type of employment contract is not unique to Northern Ireland; it is used increasingly in Great Britain, probably at a higher level and in greater numbers on a per capita basis. It is also used in other jurisdictions. It is important that we move with the times with regulation.

I am fully aware of all the difficulties that zero-hours contracts can pose to many people. In some cases, semi-retired people or students will choose them, but, in the vast bulk of cases, they are the only employment option that is open to people, and there is a danger of exploitation. We need to be careful, however, that, in seeking to address that in a proportionate way, we do not inadvertently create a situation in which we cut off employment opportunities in our economy because employers are prepared only to contemplate creating opportunities in the context of having some flexibility over —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): The Minister's two minutes are up.

Dr Farry: — how often people work during the working week.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Perhaps it is appropriate to suggest that I am not particularly interested in hearing people's views during Question Time, only their questions.

Ms Lo: The Minister said that he will not ban zero-hours contracts but will ban exclusivity clauses. How will he implement and enforce that?

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for her question. I assume, Mr Deputy Speaker, that that diktat does not apply to me giving my opinion in my answers.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): I was going to suggest that the answers could be brief.

Dr Farry: OK, I will be as comprehensive as I can in as short a time as I can.

Enforcement lies in the tried and tested mechanism of tribunals. However, first recourse should always be to the Labour Relations Agency, which has a suite of available dispute resolution techniques.

Let me be clear that I am seeking to facilitate legislation coming to the House. The decision on whether there is to be a ban will be for Members to take collectively on the basis of that legislation and whether any amendments along those lines can carry majority support. Exclusivity, whereby people are tied to one contract or denied opportunities to find work elsewhere, is a problem. It is seen as particularly unjust and a clear-cut example of where we should take action.

Mr McCallister: I welcome the Minister's response so far. Does he have accurate information on the number on zero-hours contracts through choice or necessity? Does he agree that the best way to eliminate zero-hours contracts would be to build a well-educated workforce and extend opportunities in a knowledge-based economy?

Dr Farry: I will start with the Member's last point. In general, yes; the more we invest in higher-level skills, the more the nature of our employment will change. However, we need to be very careful of generalisations. While the bulk of zero-hours contracts may well be for lower-paid positions, which is where there are particular dangers for vulnerable workers, it is important to bear it in mind that they are used in a range of scenarios, including professional and highly skilled areas. Zero-hours contracts may well make sense for those professions or professionals, which is another reason why we need to be a little careful about going for a blanket, one-size-fits-all approach in trying to address the issue.

On extrapolation from the estimates across the UK, we would have an upper limit of about 28,000 people on zero-hours contracts in Northern Ireland. I imagine that, in practice, the figure is lower. We are having a little difficulty in getting precise figures, not least because there is no agreed understanding of what a zero-hours contract is. That is one of the processes that we want to bottom out in any formal legislative process. We are working with organisations including the Office for National Statistics and InterTradeIreland to get a more accurate picture of the numbers in Northern Ireland in advance of that.

Community and Voluntary Groups: Financial Awards

4. **Mr Rogers** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline any financial awards that have been offered to, but not yet transferred to, community and voluntary sector groups. *(AQO 7708/11-15)*

Dr Farry: Funding is provided to community and voluntary sector groups to deliver the community family support programme, the collaboration and innovation fund and the local employment intermediary service throughout Northern Ireland. These programmes were designed to implement the Executive's Pathway to Success strategy to support young people not in employment, education or training. Under the current round, funding is also provided from the European social fund (ESF) to 95 voluntary and community sector organisations.

Mr Rogers: I thank the Minister for his answer. What effect have the learning gaps in the community groups' accounts, which were caused, say, by late payments from his Department, had on the European social fund application process?

Dr Farry: Payment issues in the current process should not have had an impact on the current application process. We have addressed at length the concerns expressed by Members in relation to the current application process and taken action based on the representations that we have received, but it is important to bear it in mind that the Department seeks to make payments promptly. We tend to work towards the standard 10-day turnaround period for payments advocated by Account NI.

It is important to bear in mind the context in which we have to be rigorous in ensuring that we have proper paper trails justifying payments made to organisations, particularly with European money. If we fail to operate within the rules and regulations coming down from the European Commission, we will have interruptions in the delivery of the programmes. An interruption does not just affect the organisation that may have contributed to the situation but can penalise everyone who benefits from the European social fund, so it is important that we go through the rigour of the process. I appreciate that it is hugely frustrating to organisations, and it is no doubt frustrating to my officials, who, maybe despite people's perceptions to the contrary, do not like having to be bureaucrats around these issues. But, if we do not, the damage that will be done to groups accessing much-needed resources will be much greater than the difficulty of processing payments.

Mr Swann: Minister, a number of voluntary and community organisations had their ESF applications rejected due to financial capability, when they were in fact waiting for payments from the Department from the previous ESF round. Will the Minister comment on that? Could he also comment on the complaint that has been made to the European Commission about maladministration of the European social fund by the Department for Employment and Learning?

Dr Farry: First of all, a number of groups were rejected in relation to financial capability assessments. However, some of those groups, due to the fresh opportunity to resubmit management accounts, will go through a second financial capability assessment. That process is ongoing and will hopefully be concluded shortly.

Obviously groups are entitled to make complaints, whether it is directly to the managing authority in DEL or to the Commission. I am satisfied that what we have been doing as a Department has been consistent with the requirements of the European Commission. It is important that Members are aware that, in terms of the rules about access to money, the nature of the forthcoming round of the European social fund is different from the outgoing social fund. It is important for rigour that we have that different approach. I understand that groups may feel aggrieved at a sense of the goalposts being moved, but it is the European Union's money, and it is entitled to set the rules. I welcome the fact that we have access to draw that money down, but in doing so we have to fulfil the requirements of the fund.

Mr Allister: Would the Minister care to comment on the suspicion expressed by some of the groups who have drawn social fund money for many years and now suddenly are disappointed in their application that what really is going on is a budgetary pressure in the Department whereby European social money, in increasing terms, is siphoned off into education colleges and matters of that nature, starving the community and voluntary groups of the funds that hitherto they enjoyed?

Dr Farry: The Member is very good at peddling suspicions and innuendo but not very good at checking the facts before making such comments directly. Let me be very clear: everything the Member said is utterly incorrect.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): I am afraid time is up. You have just been beaten to it. We move to topical questions.

Science Festival: STEM Masterclass Initiative

T1. **Mr Hilditch** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of the Northern Ireland Science Festival, particularly the STEM masterclass initiative that he launched. *(AQT 2201/11-15)*

Dr Farry: The Science Festival has been an outstanding success. This is the first time we have had a science festival in Northern Ireland, and the number of people attending the events over the 10-day period has far exceeded the targets that were set.

That is a real indication of the level of organisation and commitment of the organisers. I give particular credit to Chris McCreery, the director of the festival.

2.30 pm

It is fundamentally about engaging with the people of Northern Ireland, including young people, on the importance of science to our everyday lives and encouraging people to pursue careers in STEM. The two masterclasses that the Member refers to were about crystallising the best practice in that regard, and we were very pleased that we had visitors from the United States: Dr Yvonne Spicer from the Boston Museum of Science and Dr Sue Sontgerath from Worcester Polytechnic Institute in Massachusetts. That aspect was facilitated by the US State Department, which was also very keen to see how we are getting on with the science festival.

As Members will know, the Department was a major funder of the science festival, and, after we do an evaluation of the event — I said to the Member how pleased we were

with the number of participants — we will look forward again to potentially funding a second science festival in 2016 and see it become an established part of the calendar of events in Northern Ireland.

Mr Hilditch: I welcome the Minister's answer. STEM is a major theme in the science festival. I understand that there seems to be under-representation of females. How can encouragement be given to females to participate and increase representation?

Dr Farry: The Member is quite right to identify that as a particular challenge that faces not just Northern Ireland society but those of many other advanced economies. We see a situation where girls and women are progressing better in education generally than boys and men. For example, we have a higher participation rate in higher education among women than men. However, we are seeing a segmentation in the type of subjects that people are choosing. As we look to the future and see, for example, IT, advanced manufacturing and engineering and food science being some of the high-growth sectors in Northern Ireland, it is important that we draw as fully as possible from the talent base that we have. Unless we draw fully from that across both genders, we will not maximise our potential.

How do we address that problem? We need to break down the stereotypes around a lot of the STEM subjects. That is probably the critical issue. We can also work with employers, and I am pleased to see that NACCO signed up last Friday to the STEM charter. A lot of businesses are seeking very overtly to address gender issues in their employment, particularly around STEM. They are looking at how they can do better in attracting more female staff and are working through retention and progression in the workplace.

Antrim Technical College: Status

T2. **Mr Clarke** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on the status of Antrim Technical College, following its abandonment a couple of years ago. *(AQT 2202/11-15)*

Dr Farry: At this stage, my understanding is that the land is still in the ownership of the Northern Regional College and is available for potential purchase. Apart from that, I am not sure whether I can say much more to the Member, though I am aware that there are some issues around the potential use of the site and some different interpretations of what should happen among the local community in Antrim.

Mr Clarke: I thank the Minister for that answer. Given the untimely pull out from Antrim a couple of years ago that left an excellent site vacant, does the Minister believe that his Department is doing enough to fill the void that has been left in post-16 education in Antrim?

Dr Farry: We are very keen to ensure that we have proper coverage across Northern Ireland in access to vocational training and further education. That does not mean that we will have a college in every town, and, sadly, Antrim is one of the towns where there is no college currently. That is replicated elsewhere in Northern Ireland. However, there is provision elsewhere, particularly in Ballymena, and, as part of the emerging business case for the Northern Regional College, that will be a priority area for investment. We also have a good college in Newtownabbey. We will look to see how we can continue to invest in community-based facilities in Antrim, and if the Member has any concerns in that regard, please drop me a line and we will look at the issue in more detail.

Stranmillis University College: Financial Viability

T3. **Mr Spratt** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to explain the future financial viability of Stranmillis University College, now that the Executive have reinstated its premia payment, and taking into account the 2013 Grant Thornton report. *(AQT 2203/11-15)*

Dr Farry: The Executive have, regrettably, overturned my proposed decision on the premia. The teacher training system in Northern Ireland, however, remains financially unsustainable. There is a pressing need for reform, but reform does not need to be based just on finances. We have to look at how we can ensure that we deliver to world-class standards, address equality issues and teach our students in a shared learning environment. The current system is not delivering on all those points as it should.

The two teacher training colleges are heavily subsidised in three ways. First, they are the only teacher training colleges in the UK to receive premia payments. Secondly, they provide non-initial teacher education subjects as part of a conscious decision to give them other business to maintain their viability. Thirdly, the Department of Education essentially increases the teacher demand model to an artificially high level by giving the colleges more business than the local market can sustain. Even with those subsidies, the colleges' financial sustainability will gradually erode over time. The restoration of the premia will lengthen their future prospects, but we cannot escape the issues and the need for reform.

Mr Spratt: I thank the Minister for his answer. Have there been any discussions between the board of governors of Stranmillis University College and his officials, and, indeed, is there still a suggestion of a merger with Queen's University?

Dr Farry: I have not had a direct meeting with Stranmillis in the couple of weeks since the Executive took their decision. We are, however, continuing to engage with other stakeholders about the future system because the process of reform, and seeking consensus on reform, has to continue. I have received correspondence from Stranmillis about its emerging thinking on the way forward, and my officials continue to work with it. The possible merger of Queen's and Stranmillis, which the Member seems to advocate be reconsidered, was on the agenda in 2011. However, at that stage, his party was very clear that it was not prepared to contemplate such a merger outside wider reform of the teacher training system. In that context, if I had moved the legislation to facilitate the review, it would have tabled a petition of concern to block it. If the Member and his party are reconsidering their position, I would be very pleased to meet them to discuss their change of heart.

European Social Fund: Ministerial Priority

T4. **Mr McKay** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning why the European social fund (ESF), for those who are delivering on the ground, is not a priority for him,

especially in light of an awards ceremony this evening in Portglenone at which a number of people will receive awards through a return to employment programme funded by ESF, albeit that it looks quite likely that the group that runs that programme will cease to exist if the ESF funding is discontinued. *(AQT 2204/11-15)*

Dr Farry: The Member is wrong to assume that it is not a priority for me. Indeed, we have probably spent more time on this issue over the past number of weeks than on anything else. To be very clear, one round of funding is coming to its natural end, and the duration of the funding was made very clear to every group bidding in the outgoing round. I am not aware of the precise context of any fresh bid by the organisation that the Member referred to, but no funding decisions have been made; nor will they be until we have the full picture, having scrutinised all the applications. We are oversubscribed by 1.8 times the amount available, so some organisations will be unsuccessful and, no doubt, very disappointed. Others, however, will continue to receive funding for their projects. We are, at this stage, trying to pull out all the stops to ensure that we make decisions on funding before the end of April so that the work of many organisations can continue.

To put it in context — lest people accuse us of running very close to the deadline — we put a lot of focus on getting our European social fund operational programme cleared by the European Commission. We achieved that back in 2014. Our counterparts in England have yet to have their operational programme cleared by the European Commission. We are now in the context where we have the option of ensuring continuity between programmes. In England, that will not be the case; there will be a break for many organisations, which will have a devastating impact on staff and the participants with whom organisations engage.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I am not here to talk about people in England or to discuss what Europe is or is not doing. You can blame Europe all you want, but the message that we are receiving from the community and voluntary sector is that the Department is putting blockages in the way of the groups and putting down criteria that are resulting in the situation where those groups are being put on the line. Does the Minister recognise that fact? What is he going to do to ensure that those groups do not go to the wall? Does he also recognise that the women's sector, in particular, is going to be decimated by his Department's actions?

Dr Farry: There were probably four or five questions in there. I will do my best to pick them up. The Member said that this has nothing to do with England or Europe. It is very much everything to do with Europe given that it is European money that is coming down. We have to abide by the rules coming from the European Union. If the Member wants to do a UDI on this, that is fine; we would have to find the resources locally. We simply do not have those, so let us be sensible about this and use the opportunity that comes from our membership of the European Union to invest and extend what we would otherwise not be able to do with our available resources here in Northern Ireland.

No particular guarantees can be made to any organisations. Our officials are working tirelessly to ensure that we can have decisions made by the end of March. I made the point about England to make the point that we are being far more proactive than others in ensuring that that is the case. Issues of coverage regarding the women's sector may not necessarily be the outworking of the final decisions, but, if that were to be the case, there may well be different ways in which we can reassess the distribution of funds to ensure that we invest in the policy objectives of the Department and that we have proper coverage not just geographically but across the different aspects of engaging with those who are most marginalised from the labour market.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): I call Mr Pat Ramsey. Mr Ramsey, you will not have time for a supplementary.

Ministerial Subgroup: Key Objectives

T5. **Mr Ramsey** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline the key objectives of the ministerial subgroup and how it will achieve regional balance and a reduction in economic inactivity and joblessness in the north-west. *(AQT 2205/11-15)*

Dr Farry: Very briefly, I cannot answer on behalf of the Executive; it is more for the First Minister and deputy First Minister to set out the broad remit and rationale for that. Suffice it to say that I am happy to play my role. Obviously, the issue around investment in university facilities in Derry is a key aspect of that, but economic inactivity is also critical.

We have been joined by the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment. The Member will be pleased to know that we have now formally submitted the final strategy to the Executive for approval. I am sure that he will encourage his Minister to give that strategy its full endorsement when it comes up for discussion at the Executive. Hopefully, that will be this week, but, if not, it will be within the rest of this month.

Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Question 4 has been withdrawn. We will start with listed questions.

Tourism: Increased Awareness

1. **Mr Lynch** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the impact that Tourism Ireland's sponsorship of the Ireland cricket team will have on the awareness of the island of Ireland as a tourist destination. *(AQO 7720/11-15)*

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): The aim of Tourism Ireland's sponsorship is to leverage the popularity of the Ireland cricket team, whose profile has grown in world cricket in recent years, and to support tourism growth from Australia and New Zealand, as well as other key cricket-loving countries, including England, India and South Africa.

Sport-related tourism has emerged as a very significant element in world tourism in recent years. High-profile sporting events such as the ICC Cricket World Cup provide Tourism Ireland with a unique opportunity to highlight the island of Ireland as a holiday destination as well as a top location for sporting events.

2.45 pm

The ICC Cricket World Cup, which is taking place in Australia and New Zealand, is one of the world's biggest sporting events in 2015. It has a global viewing audience

and is being televised in 220 countries to a potential 2·5 billion viewers. May I say that they are being treated to some thrilling exploits by the Ireland team, which, after winning its opening two games, including a victory over the West Indies, came up short in its match against South Africa earlier today?

Mr Lynch: Go raibh maith agat. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht a freagra. I thank the Minister for her answer. I know that the cricket team is not doing so well today against South Africa.

The Minister will be aware that half the world turns green at this time of year for St Patrick's Day, including some landmark buildings around the world, like the leaning tower of Pisa and the Pyramids in Egypt. In response to some of my colleagues at last week's Enterprise Committee meeting —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Order, please. Where is this question going?

Mr Lynch: The CEO of Tourism Ireland, who is responsible for the initiative, said that turning this Building green for the occasion would help the global greening initiative. Will the Minister agree to support that initiative?

Mrs Foster: It is a good jump from Ireland's cricket World Cup chances to the —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Minister, I was waiting on the result.

Mrs Foster: Indeed, and we are still hopeful that we can get to the quarter-finals. We are very much behind the team, particularly those members who are from Northern Ireland, including the captain. We send them all our best wishes.

In respect of the greening of this Building, Tourism Ireland is, of course, concerned with promoting Northern Ireland and the rest of the island outside of the island of Ireland. It has approached many iconic buildings across the world. They light them up green, and it has become an attraction for St Patrick's Day. As regards this Building, which is in Northern Ireland, it is entirely a matter for the Assembly Commission whether it decides to go down this route. I know that it has had discussions about it. I know that there was some commentary last week about the fact that, if you light it up green on St Patrick's Day, other days would also need to be marked.

Mr Dunne: I thank the Minister for her answers today. I think that we all recognise the enormous role that sport plays in promoting a positive image of Northern Ireland, whether it is through our cricket players, our leading golfers like Holywood's Rory McIlroy or, indeed, our latest boxing star, Carl Frampton. What is Tourism Ireland doing to market one of our other sporting gems, our world famous Circuit of Ireland rally, which is now part of the European rally championship?

A Member: Cricket.

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for his question, which is sport related — to answer the Member who is sedentary across the way and who I can hear mention that. *[Interruption.]* The European rally championship —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Order, please. I know that a little bit of banter is to be encouraged at times, but it really can go to excess.

Mrs Foster: I had the great pleasure of being with some colleagues at the Circuit of Ireland rally launch, which Lisburn City Council hosted just last week. Again, we are hoping for a very good Circuit of Ireland, particularly because it is part of the European rally championship, which allows us to publish in media outside Northern Ireland and show off our beautiful scenery across the world. We know that there are many enthusiasts for rallying, not least the Member who asked the question.

Tourism Ireland is promoting this year's event through its commercial relationship with Eurosport. In recent years, it has secured an invitation for the Circuit of Ireland rally to stage and provide footage of the UK and Ireland leg of the European rally championship. As I said, that will allow us to get that global television exposure. I think that that is very important.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): I call Mr Alban Maginness who, no doubt, will choose his sport.

Mr A Maginness: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I thank the Minister for her encouraging remarks about the Irish cricket team. Given that remarkable success and the obvious focus that there is on the island of Ireland, what plans has she to encourage Tourism Ireland to exploit that market opportunity in the near future?

Mrs Foster: In relation to sport, I think we are already exploiting it, but there is always more that we can do, particularly around golf and the fact that we have the Irish Open coming to Northern Ireland — to Royal County Down — in May this year. I know that Tourism Ireland, along with Tourism NI, is working very hard on how they can promote Northern Ireland, particularly in relation to that fabulous event.

The Member will know, of course, that we are working on a joint bid for the Rugby World Cup. Again, we are pushing ahead with that. We are garnering support for that bid. We believe that to bring the Rugby World Cup to the island and to have events up here in Northern Ireland would be a marvellous thing to achieve. I send my congratulations — I am sure that I speak for the whole House — to the Ireland rugby team. At the weekend, we had a marvellous victory over England, and we look forward to the grand slam.

Power Cuts: Emergency Number

2. **Mr Elliott** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline the representations her Department has made to Her Majesty's Government and the Energy Networks Association to ensure the proposed single emergency 105 number, for use in the event of a power cut, is available in Northern Ireland. *(AQO 7721/11-15)*

Mrs Foster: Northern Ireland Electricity has no plans to change its dedicated customer helpline number. The rest of the UK is made up of multiple network operators, whereas, in Northern Ireland, Northern Ireland Electricity is the sole network owner through which all power cuts are reported. Northern Ireland Electricity continues to promote its contact number through a range of channels.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Minister for that update. Does she agree that, given the equal citizenship of Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom, it should be included in that single, simple number throughout the UK right from the start and the inception of the project, as opposed to what

it said in the consultation document — that it may join subsequently?

Mrs Foster: I understand, absolutely, where the Member is coming from in respect of that question, but I say to him that, if you go into a national number like that, you go into a call centre, and there is always the risk that people do not know where you are talking about when you ring up and say, "I have a power cut in Derryloman". Are they going to say, "Where is that?" It causes all sorts of difficulties in that regard.

NIE, given that it is the sole operator of the grid and the network in Northern Ireland, believes that its customer helpline is the one that should be familiar to people. Certainly, if the Member is asking if we can make it more amenable so that everybody knows exactly what number to call, yes, I think that there is always more that could be done in respect of that, but apparently they have provided me with some satisfaction ratings. They say that there is 99% satisfaction with how quickly the calls are answered, 97% satisfaction with the accuracy of information provided and a 99% competency of call handler. I worry that, if we are going into a central call system within the whole of the UK, we might lose a little bit of that.

Mrs Hale: Minister, you will be aware that I have been working with Plastec and its managing director, Thomas Hawthorne, and Avodah Renewable Energies and its owner, Alistair Dickson, who are investing significantly within Lagan Valley. However, they are being obstructed by NIE through a failure to deliver grid connection, which they already paid tens of thousands of pounds for over 18 months ago, and a regulator who appears to be powerless to intervene, and, indeed, said only last week that they could do nothing about it.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Could we have a question, please?

Mrs Hale: Minister, what are you going to do about it?

Mrs Foster: That is an issue that is becoming more and more of an issue. At a constituency level, I have had delegations in of farmers from Fermanagh and west Tyrone who cannot get onto the grid. The Member who asked the question has written to me on numerous occasions in relation to businesses in her constituency. To be quite blunt, I am fed up with the merry-go-round that is going on in relation to grid connection. We have NIE saying that it is not their issue but a System Operator for Northern Ireland (SONI) issue. SONI will say that it is a regulator issue. The regulator will try to pass it to somebody else. Frankly, it cannot go on, so I have called a meeting of all of the parties involved to discuss those issues and to try to get to the bottom of the grid connection issues. If we cannot deal with the matters around the table in a voluntary way, I will have to look at other measures to deal with the issue.

Mr Rogers: Thanks, Minister, for your answers thus far. What recent discussions have you had within your Department to improve the security of electricity supply on the island?

Mrs Foster: I will be concerned, of course, just with security of supply in my own jurisdiction. As the Member will know, in consultation with the system operator and the regulator, we recently put out a contract for more generation because we felt that, in future, there may be a gap. Some have criticised us for that, but I certainly felt that there was a need to make sure that we have security of supply. That is hugely important for the population of Northern Ireland, which is why we took that decision.

Broadband: Enterprise and Business Parks

3. **Mr Beggs** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what action she has taken to ensure that all enterprise and business parks have access to high-speed fibre-optic broadband. *(AQO 7722/11-15)*

Mrs Foster: My Department has just awarded a contract to BT for a new project under the UK superfast roll-out programme, which will further extend access to superfast broadband across Northern Ireland by 2017. The majority of enterprise and business parks in Northern Ireland of which my Department is aware already have access to superfast broadband services, but there remains some in areas that do not. I have indicated my desire that business parks be prioritised under this new service.

Under the SuperConnected Cities programme, which is being led by the UK Government, business premises, including those in business parks in Belfast and Londonderry, are eligible to apply for vouchers with a value of up to £3,000 to cover the cost of high-speed broadband installation. That programme is now being extended to include other areas. That presents an opportunity for our new super-councils to apply for a voucher scheme similar to those that exist in the Belfast and Londonderry council areas.

Mr Beggs: I am aware that, in other parts of the UK where there has been under-provision of superfast broadband, Openreach has facilitated local communities where it has not introduced that service, because of, it says, economic reasons. Has the Minister been in discussion with BT Openreach so that that type of flexible facility will be available to local communities and businesses, which may not be included in the scheme that she mentioned?

Mrs Foster: I just mentioned two schemes. The first is the UK superfast roll-out programme, and the second is the SuperConnected Cities programme. I think that the super-councils should look at the second programme in particular. It was initially rolled out in Belfast, then it was extended to our second city, and now it is going to be available across Northern Ireland. Given that the super-councils will have new powers in April, they should look very closely at doing something together on those voucher schemes. It is a great opportunity to try to infill what has not been filled to date.

Mr Givan: Will the Minister provide more details about the £17 million investment that her Department announced last week?

Mrs Foster: That relates to the first of the schemes, the UK superfast roll-out programme, which is a UK scheme, so it is funded by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, us and, indeed, BT. It is envisaged that the project will begin with the survey and design process, which will take place over a number of months. BT will then begin to re-engineer the infrastructure into a fibre-rich open-access network, enabling more people to enjoy superfast broadband. At the same time, there is also the work of the Northern Ireland broadband improvement fund. I know that Members may say, "Never mind superfast, what about a good broadband service?". The other broadband

intervention is still ongoing and does not finish until near the end of this year.

Mr McGlone: The Minister almost stole my thunder when she said, “Whatever about superfast, what about the rest?”. There are places where the capacity for towns to grow is being inhibited by the under-improvement of broadband. I am wondering whether the Minister or her Department has carried out any audit of those towns to see whether they are being inhibited. I have one example in mind, in Maghera, where a software development and computer company cannot expand because of the lack of broadband capacity. Has any audit been carried out to see where there are broadband hot spots, “not spots” or diminished spots where interventions could be required to facilitate economic development?

3.00 pm

Mrs Foster: There are a couple of things there. First, I do not know whether the Member has furnished me with the postcode to see whether the company will be covered under the Northern Ireland broadband improvement programme that is still ongoing. Secondly, the new super-councils will be able to apply for SuperConnected Cities money, and I hope that that will make a difference locally as well.

I asked Invest NI to audit not towns but business parks to try to establish their connectivity. Of the 80 business parks supported by Invest Northern Ireland or Enterprise Northern Ireland, 66 can get superfast speeds. Of the 14 that cannot, 10 are in the intervention area for the superfast roll-out programme; two are in the Belfast City Council area and so can apply to the SuperConnected Cities fund; and two get between 15 MB and 23 MB. There are a number of funds out there at the moment, which, if I am honest, I find a wee bit confusing. I may put in place an A4 sheet that details all the different interventions that are ongoing, and, hopefully, that will be of assistance to MLAs.

Energy Prices

5. **Mr Wilson** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what representations she has received from local employers regarding the impact of energy prices on their businesses. *(AQO 7724/11-15)*

Mrs Foster: I have received representations from and discussed a range of energy issues, including pricing, with a number of local businesses and their representative bodies. I continue to support businesses through the promotion of competition, innovation and investment.

The recently announced reductions in electricity tariffs is good news for our small business consumers and means that, from April, prices will be lower than the EU 15 median, approximately 5% lower than the Great Britain average and around 19% lower than those in the Republic of Ireland. Large energy users negotiate requirements directly with suppliers. I understand that some of our larger users may already be benefiting from falling electricity bills. Of course, motorists and those using oil for home heating will also have benefited from falling prices. I hope to attend an information event tomorrow on Gas to the West, which will provide up to 40,000 energy consumers, including businesses, with a more efficient, lower-carbon and potentially cheaper choice of fuel.

Mr Wilson: Whilst we must all welcome the impact of the downward turn in energy prices internationally, does the Minister recognise that many firms in Northern Ireland, especially large consumers of energy, admit that one of the problems when it comes to expansion and investment is the cost of energy? Since our grid is increasingly overloaded with expensive electricity from renewable sources, what requests has she made to the Government at Westminster, who seem now to be receptive to this, to reduce the percentage of electricity that has to be produced through expensive renewable sources?

Mrs Foster: I have ongoing discussions with my Westminster counterpart, Ed Davey, the Energy Secretary. Indeed, I had a meeting with him very recently on electricity market reform, which is ongoing, and some very difficult decisions will have to be taken on that.

I have also spoken to the regulator on a number of occasions, most recently just today, about the pricing for large energy users. I hope that there will be some developments from the regulator on that before the end of the month.

Mr McKinney: The Minister referred to actions or measures to improve connectivity. Will she expand on that? What further measures or actions will the Minister put in place to lessen the impact on businesses?

Mrs Foster: I can talk to the regulator and try to point her in the right direction, but, at the end of the day, pricing is a matter for the regulator. As I say, we are having a round-table meeting on grid connection, and I have no doubt that the interconnectivity that we need with the rest of the island and with Great Britain will come up. Unfortunately, neither operates to full capacity at the moment. The Member knows that we need a second interconnector, the North/South interconnector. We also need to ensure that the Moyle interconnector is up to full capacity again, and we hope that that will be the case by next year.

Mr Kinahan: Does the Minister not find that the repeated complaints that renewable energy, in particular wind energy, are driving up prices a little rich and somewhat hypocritical, given that the person who asked the question changed the planning policy and liberalised it so that we could expand and bring in wind farm schemes?

Mrs Foster: I am waiting on an intervention. If there is a spat going on between the Member and the Member for East Antrim, I will allow that to take place elsewhere.

We are looking at a cost-benefit analysis of the strategic energy framework. We are doing that in the context of electricity market reform that is coming at us very quickly and that will cause a huge change in the way electricity comes to us over the next period. The House should be very much aware that electricity market reform will provide a huge challenge for us in Northern Ireland, not least because we are in a single electricity market on this island and will have to bid in for contracts for difference, and renewable obligation certificates will be no more. A lot of change is coming, and the House will need to be very much part of that.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht a freagra. I thank the Minister for her answers.

The Minister might accept that the high price of energy and electricity for large energy users and manufacturing

companies is a barrier to attracting and retaining jobs in the manufacturing sector. What action has she taken to support large energy users that face uncompetitively high energy costs compared with their counterparts around Europe?

Mrs Foster: As he knows, we have consulted the Utility Regulator on that very important issue. Of course, 60% of the cost of energy for large energy users is the wholesale price. As I said, that is moving in a downward direction at the moment, and I hope that that will come through to those large energy users as their contracts start to change in the future. It is important as well that we deal with constraints on the single electricity market, and that includes the North/South interconnector. It is important that we have that in place, because, at the moment, that is costing consumers on the island of Ireland around €20 million. I am sure that he would agree that it is unacceptable for us to proceed in that manner.

Corporation Tax: Silk Commission

6. **Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the conclusion of the Silk commission that, in relation to devolving corporation tax powers to Wales, the "costs would outweigh the benefits". *(AQO 7725/11-15)*

Mrs Foster: Unlike Northern Ireland, the Welsh have not had the same long public debate around the merits of devolving corporation tax, nor have they developed a plan to use such powers for a very clear economic development purpose. It is therefore unsurprising that the Silk commission concluded that income tax was more appropriate to devolve to the Welsh Government than other major UK taxes, including corporation tax.

The case for reducing corporation tax in Northern Ireland is very different from that in Wales. The Silk commission acknowledged that in its report and described corporation tax as a useful policy tool for us because of the fiscal competition that we face from sharing a land border with the Republic of Ireland. The latest research that was commissioned by my Department, which takes into account the costs and benefits of reduced corporation tax, continues to demonstrate a strong economic case for Northern Ireland.

Mr Allister: Is it not quite striking though that another region of the United Kingdom, which is also block-grant dependent, most thoroughly investigated the issue of corporation tax through a proper commission and reached that conclusion, whereas we seem to have rushed to the endgame without any comparable consideration?

On the issue of just how attractive it would be to reduce corporation tax and all the hype about that in the context of the manufacturing industry, is the Minister not struck by the fact that, at the very time when it seems that corporation tax will be reduced, one of our largest manufacturers, alas, JTI, will depart our shores undeterred by the lure —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Mr Allister, I think that we have a question at this stage.

Mr Allister: — that is supposed to exist in reduced corporation tax?

Mrs Foster: On the latter part of the question, we discussed the lowering of corporation tax with JTI Gallaher — he would expect me to do that — but, because of the tax system in Japan, it would not have benefited from the lower rate in Northern Ireland.

We did of course look at that in great detail.

As regards rushing into our support for the lowering of corporation tax, my goodness, this has been around since devolution came back in 2007. I do not call that rushing into a decision. The entire business community, from the Federation of Small Businesses right up to the CBI, is in support of this policy development. I say to the Member that he may not wish to move forward and have ambition for Northern Ireland moving into the future, but I do. I want Northern Ireland to become a powerhouse; I want it to become what I know it can become and has great potential to become. I am sure that other Members have ambition for Northern Ireland as well. That is where I sit.

Mr Ó Muilleoir: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Mo bhuíochas leis an Aire. Diolch yn fawr, as the Welsh would say. As we are talking about our Welsh cousins, and in the context of Mr Cameron's announcing on Friday the next step to devolving income tax power, does the Minister think that income tax is the next tax-raising power that we will seek and that it would also bring benefits to our economy?

Mrs Foster: I think that we need to deal with the power that, hopefully, we will have by the end of this parliamentary term. We know that the Bill is going through its stages in the House of Commons and House of Lords and, as I understand it, should be finished its legislative journey towards the middle of March. Then, we will be able to move forward and make the most of that power when we agree a rate and a date for implementation and we can take forward all the evidence. One of the points that Mr Allister raised was the fact that we had not looked at comparable areas on corporation tax. We have, of course, had that work completed for us. I am sure that if he looks at the work carried out by the Northern Ireland Centre for Economic Policy — now the Ulster Business School — he will see that work there.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): The time for listed questions is up. We now move to topical questions.

Broadband: Rural Improvement Programme

T1. **Mr Boylan** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on the rural broadband improvement programme. *(AQT 2211/11-15)*

Mrs Foster: I know that the Member has a particular interest in this programme; he has always been very faithful in asking me about it. Indeed, it is going very well. Those areas that have already had the intervention report very good successes. If the Member has a particular area that he wants me to look at, I will certainly feed those postcodes in to see whether, first of all, they are on the programme and then what the timescale is for implementation.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her response. It is a welcome programme. The original target was, I think, 48,000 homes. Can the Minister indicate where she is with regard to a percentage of those homes? Does she feel that we will reach the target? Could she intimate how Newry and Armagh is faring on that programme?

Mrs Foster: Unfortunately, I do not have that detail in front of me. We hope to intervene for 45,000 homes. From memory, I think that we are in and around the 30,000 mark for interventions. I am certainly happy to follow it up with the Member in writing if he wishes me to do so.

Tourism Potential: Dungannon

T2. **Ms McGahan** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether she is aware of the huge tourism potential of the Hill of the O'Neill and Ranfurly House Arts and Visitor Centre in Dungannon and, if so, will she work closely with the new Mid Ulster Council and the Dungannon Regeneration Partnership to take forward a strategy to exploit that potential. *(AQT 2212/11-15)*

Mrs Foster: The short answer is that I am, absolutely, given that we share a constituency, aware of the tourism potential of the Hill of the O'Neill and the Ranfurly centre. I have visited on a number of occasions. I am always impressed by the facility and the way in which it has been integrated into the town of Dungannon in a very nice way, I have to say, that can also draw people into the town centre. We know that, often, when large-scale installations are put in, they draw people out of town centres, but this is right in Dungannon town centre. Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council is to be commended for its work. I look forward to working with the Mid Ulster Council in the future.

3.15 pm

Ms McGahan: Go raibh maith agat. I thank the Minister for her response. Does the Minister agree that the growth of the tourism sector in south Tyrone offers the potential for jobs and benefits to the local economy, shops and services?

Mrs Foster: Absolutely, and especially when the facility is in the town centre. Of course, it will bring people into the town centre for the retail experience in Dungannon, as well as to visit coffee shops and what have you. Tourism jobs go right across Northern Ireland, and I think that that is something that we should always be aware of. The sector provides jobs right across Northern Ireland, and, of course, I hope that that will be the case in Dungannon.

Juncker Fund: EU Money

T3. **Mr Cree** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether she has had any discussions about the €315 billion investment fund that the EU is talking about. *(AQT 2213/11-15)*

Mrs Foster: I think that that is the Juncker fund. Am I right about that? As I understand it, my departmental officials are watching very closely what is going on with that. They have not had total clarity on how that is going to be rolled out, but a number of Departments in Northern Ireland will be interested, not least his party's Minister and the Department for Regional Development.

Mr Cree: I thank the Minister for her response. Minister, have you any detail on likely time frames, applications and even areas to be covered?

Mrs Foster: We have talked a lot about the grid today. Certainly, from my perspective, we will be looking at it to see if there is anything in energy infrastructure that we can augment or if there is anything more we can do in relation to the likes of energy storage or the energy grid. I am sure that colleagues will have other priorities.

Air Waves: Northern Ireland Air Show

T4. **Mr Campbell** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how central she believes the Northern Ireland air show at Portrush, which has developed in recent years, to be, not just to the economy of the north coast but of Northern Ireland, as it seeks to develop in the forthcoming years. *(AQT 2214/11-15)*

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for his question. That is a very good example of how a locally organised event has continued to grow, year on year, and brought in international attention and acts to the north coast. I know for sure that it will continue to be an event that we will want to support in a tangible way through funding, but in other ways as well.

Mr Campbell: The Minister will be aware that, last year, the air show moved from one side of Portrush to the other in an attempt to develop and expand, and it did so successfully. How confident is she that it will receive the necessary support to continue to develop this year and in the forthcoming years?

Mrs Foster: I am confident that it will, because it works very closely with Tourism Northern Ireland and, indeed, with Tourism Ireland in marketing outside of the island of Ireland. If the Member has any specific issues that he wants to raise with me, I am very happy to meet him to talk to him about them. However, I know that the air show — I cannot remember its name; is it Air Waves?

Mr Campbell: Air Waves.

Mrs Foster: I know that it will go from strength to strength. It is very much in a lot of people's diaries from year to year.

Bombardier: CSeries Project

T5. **Mr Newton** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to comment on the significance of the very successful CSeries aircraft project to the future prosperity of Bombardier, given its recent job reduction announcement. *(AQT 2215/11-15)*

Mrs Foster: Of course, we were disappointed to hear about further job losses among, what are called, temporary workers at Bombardier. I am looking forward to a meeting with senior management here in east Belfast. The Member had asked me previously if that was going to happen. I can confirm that that meeting is going to take place now. We will have discussions about the future of Bombardier. I do not want to prejudge the meeting, but the future — looking at the flight of the CSeries jet — looks very good. We are delighted to see another major milestone in Bombardier's CSeries aircraft programme because it is critical to the east Belfast plant, particularly in relation to the wings, which are constructed there. We look forward to continuing to work with Bombardier in the future.

Mr Newton: I thank the Minister for that answer. Can the Minister confirm that everything that can be done is being done on a week-to-week, month-to-month basis to support Bombardier as it develops the project?

Mrs Foster: Absolutely. I can confirm that that is the case. Invest Northern Ireland works very closely with Bombardier's senior executives so that, if any issue arises, we are aware of it very quickly and can try to help in any way we can. We believe that Bombardier is a significant and structurally important part not just of east Belfast

but of the Northern Ireland economy. We will continue, therefore, to give it the attention that it deserves.

Industrial Development Land: Omagh

T6. **Mr McElduff** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, given that, some months ago, Invest NI placed a public advertisement seeking expressions of interest from landowners in the Omagh area about the availability of land suitable for industrial development, whether she can give an update on uptake or expressions of interest. *(AQT 2216/11-15)*

Mrs Foster: Absolutely. In mid-September, Invest NI placed an advertisement seeking expressions of interest from landowners. A total of 13 areas of land were offered. Following engagement with the DOE Planning Service, nine of those areas were ruled out due to the distance outside the Omagh settlement limit, a further two have been discounted as they were not received until after the deadline for submissions, and Invest NI is conducting a desktop exercise on the remaining two sites to determine their potential suitability for industrial development.

Mr McElduff: I thank the Minister for the specific answer and the detail contained therein. I hope that the Minister sees a connection with my supplementary question, because I do, although my mind might work in funny ways. Enterprise zone status might appear like a long shot. Coleraine has enterprise zone status. Might there be a case for enterprise zone status for Omagh, the county town of Tyrone, if you have ever heard tell of it?

Mrs Foster: I did hear tell of it. In fact, I was in the county town of Tyrone last night at a celebration with SMEs and the local council for their local economic development programmes, where 300 businesses had taken up council initiatives. I was really very pleased to see some of the work that was going on there, so I am very aware of the county town of Tyrone.

I very much want to have a conversation with MLAs about enterprise zones, because I think that there has been a bit of a misunderstanding. There is a very specific zone in Coleraine. It is a pilot scheme and it has been put in place by Her Majesty's Treasury. It is not in my gift, and we still have to see it brought into full action.

Private Sector: Decline

T7. **Mr McAleer** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline her proposals to address the simultaneous decline in output, new orders and employment in the private sector as reported recently in the purchasing managers' index (PMI). *(AQT 2217/11-15)*

Mrs Foster: The PMI is a snapshot at a particular time. I think that it was Richard Ramsey, the author of the PMI, who said that it was a "blip" at the time because, before that, the trend was upwards. I am very happy to take Richard Ramsey's advice on that matter.

Mr McAleer: Go raibh maith agat. The survey also highlighted the negative implications of the exchange rate for local businesses. If that is taken into account, will the Minister commit to addressing the challenges faced by businesses, particularly those in border areas?

Mrs Foster: It is one of the reasons why we have been encouraging companies to look outside the eurozone for their export markets. We accept that they will still very much want to do business with their closest neighbour, but it is important that they look to new markets, because we realise that there are difficulties with the exchange rate at present.

Broadband: Fermanagh and South Tyrone

T8. **Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline her Department's plans for the development of broadband, particularly in rural areas, not least Fermanagh and South Tyrone, given that she will agree that broadband is vital to the development of businesses in rural areas. *(AQT 2218/11-15)*

Mrs Foster: I am very happy to answer that in relation to Fermanagh and South Tyrone. The Northern Ireland broadband improvement project is being rolled out, we have the superfast roll-out programme, and we also have the SuperConnected Cities programme in conjunction with DCMS. There are three current intervention programmes. I think that we will put more details on an A4 sheet and share that with colleagues so that they are clear about what is going on.

Lord Morrow: I thank the Minister for her answer. I am delighted to hear that there are immediate plans to develop this. What about a 10- to 15-year strategy for the further development of broadband in those rural communities?

Mrs Foster: I am very hopeful that, in 10 to 15 years, the broadband infrastructure will be very mature. I have often said in the House that we should be looking not only at fixed-line broadband but at mobile applications, because the mobile infrastructure needs to be in place. More and more people are using handheld devices as opposed to the traditional fixed-line connection. I note that Vodafone very recently set up three rural connectivity pilots in Donemana, Killeter and Pomeroy. I will meet Vodafone in the very near future and look forward to hearing how broadband is being developed in those three areas.

Economic Inactivity Plans: Update

T9. **Mr Ramsey** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on the progress of the economic inactivity plans for areas of great need. *(AQT 2219/11-15)*

Mrs Foster: The Minister for Employment and Learning and I have signed off on the plans, which will go to the Executive, I hope, this week. If not this week, they will be discussed at the next Executive meeting.

Mr Ramsey: In light of our previous discussion, Minister, are you of a mind to ensure that these are programme-led rather than application-driven plans?

Mrs Foster: I certainly do not want the economic inactivity strategy to be characterised by process. I want it characterised by action, because there is no point in having an inactivity strategy if it is to be characterised by inactivity. So, let us get the actions happening on the ground and try to make a difference to those people.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Time for questions is up. We now return to the debate on —

Mr G Robinson: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Do you realise that Enterprise, Trade and Investment Question Time was reduced by three minutes?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): I am told that we started a couple of minutes early and that the Member listed to ask the final question is not in her place, so no one has been cheated. Now —

Mrs Cameron: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I apologise for not being in my place for a topical question to the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure last week. I was in a meeting with the Health Minister.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Your apology will be noted. Now, for the third time, we will move on to the debate on the report of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment inquiry into wind energy.

Committee Business

Wind Energy Inquiry Report

Debate resumed on motion:

> *That this Assembly approves the report of the Committee for the Environment [NIA 226/11-16] on its Inquiry into Wind Energy in Northern Ireland; and calls on the Minister of the Environment to implement the recommendations contained in the report. — [Ms Lo (The Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment).]*

Mr A Maginness: I will speak as a member of the Environment Committee on the report produced on wind energy.

I am a little bit disturbed and concerned about the way in which the debate is drifting. This is not about wind energy per se; it is about particular aspects of planning, separation distances, community engagement and so forth. So it is a given that we accept that a common good is derived from wind energy. It is important to remember that all parties in the House, without exception, support renewable energy and, indeed, wind energy in particular.

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

We, in this part of Europe, are blessed in having access to a considerable amount of wind, which is free and a source of renewable energy. It is important that we celebrate that —

Mr Wilson: Will the Member give way?

Mr A Maginness: — and I see the Member for East Antrim anxiously waving across the Benches, so I will give way to him.

Mr Wilson: Will the Member accept that, whilst wind is free, the means of turning wind into energy is the most expensive means of generating electricity, and, as a result of our dependence on it, we have added to fuel poverty and made industry less competitive?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): The Member has an extra minute.

3.30 pm

Mr A Maginness: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I thank the Member for his intervention. I think that it is fallacious to say that wind energy is expensive. The fact is that, at this point in the development of wind energy as an alternative source of energy, it has to be subsidised because of the capital costs involved. This is an initial period, and it will, over time, decrease in its cost to the consumer and to society at large. I do accept the point that the Member made about the cost to industry, and, of course, the House is aware of that. The regulator is also aware of that, and, indeed, industry has taken significant steps to address that by also, curiously enough, using alternative renewable sources of energy to create its own in-house source of energy to provide for whatever it is producing. Those are my initial points.

Throughout the inquiry, I think that the Committee worked to try to gauge the views of people who were concerned about different aspects of planning and so forth, and the report self-evidently addresses those issues. I hope that the Minister in due course will look at the report, be

cognisant of the concerns that have been expressed by members of the public and take some action to ameliorate those concerns.

One thing that impressed me was the attempts by those who are building wind farms or turbines to try to engage with the community. I think that that is very important. I think that, sometimes, their efforts are misunderstood and that it is thought that they are bribing a section of the community. I think that that is very unfair. An alternative to that, of course, is to engage the community in proactively developing alternative sources of energy. Indeed, this afternoon, I had the honour of attending the all-party group on co-operatives and mutuals, and the major theme there was using cooperatives or social enterprises of different sorts to involve the local community in the development of renewable energy, be it wind, solar energy or whatever. There is a very good example in Slaughtneil in County Derry, where the local community has come together in a social enterprise and has created wind energy by investing in a turbine. That is a benefit to the community for the next 20 years. The local school will benefit, the local sporting club will benefit and the community at large will benefit from that. That is very important, and I think that we should learn from that — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Can I ask the Member to resume his seat? We are waiting for advice.

Mr Wilson: It is all hot air.

Mr A Maginness: It was your interventions. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): I have been advised that we stay. I ask the Member to continue until we get further advice.

Mr A Maginness: Mr Deputy Speaker, I am nearly at an end. I just want to say to the House that it is very important to have community engagement in all of this. I think that it will solve a lot of problems because the whole community is benefiting, not just some individuals in the community. I believe that that is a way forward in rural areas, and I hope that the good example shown in Slaughtneil can, in fact, be followed —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): I ask the Member to draw his remarks to a close.

Mr A Maginness: — by people in other areas.

Mrs Overend: I am not sure how safe it is to start, but start I will. I too welcome the report and thank the Committee Clerk and the staff for compiling it. It was a massive job. The inquiry started long before I was a member of the Environment Committee. In fact, I think that it started almost a year before I joined it. It is an issue that every MLA can relate to. There is no doubt that every elected represented has been lobbied in support of or against a wind turbine in their constituency or maybe on both sides of the argument, if you are lucky. Unfortunately, in many cases, it has pitted neighbour against neighbour. I therefore welcome the publication of the inquiry's report, as it seeks to bring some clarity to an issue that is becoming increasingly divisive in communities across Northern Ireland.

Turbines are a relatively recent phenomenon. Until relatively recent times, consent for electricity generation was not a particular problem. The Executive set the targets to achieve 40% of electricity from renewable sources. Interestingly, the Member to my left, the Member for East Antrim, claimed that that target was unachievable, even though I understand that, for a year, he was the Minister of the Environment, which was the Department that championed it.

With the development of technology and the increased drive for renewables, it was inevitable that planning consents would become an issue. Instead of Northern Ireland being overloaded with wind turbines, there needs to be an overarching strategic view on the siting of turbines, and planning consent is key to that.

Many people, not least applicants, have criticised the system for taking too long, but it is essential that all factors be taken into consideration before decisions are made. Anything else would expose the Department to undue risk. We trust that the new councils will show the same caution when they take on many of the decisions after 1 April but not necessarily the extended delays that can come with it.

There were problems with planning policy statement (PPS) 18, so the strategic planning policy statement (SPPS) at least presents a useful opportunity to put some of those to bed. That includes more obligations on developers to abide by noise limits and to ensure that all the relevant information is produced in the application process. The noise factor raised an interesting discussion in Committee, with research and evidence, and I am sure that the Minister will seek to take those on board.

Along with noise pollution, one of the regular bones of contention with wind turbines is their proximity to residential properties. The Committee report makes a sensible suggestion, and we should look to extend the distance from the current 90 metres status. The recent fall of a wind turbine in County Tyrone highlighted that need.

As the Committee learned during its evidence sessions, it is not just the noise that you hear standing nearby; often, it is more inconspicuous than that. So, whilst the fleeting observer may hear little, residents, backed up by evidence, talk of invasive noise. That leads to an array of problems, including sleep disturbance and deprivation. It is because of that disturbance that the Committee believes that the Department needs to improve the procedures for measuring that and, eventually, come to its own conclusion as to what an acceptable level of noise pollution is.

I welcome the new cautious approach recommended in the SPPS to the siting of turbines in areas of outstanding natural beauty. In fact, at this stage, I thank the Minister and the Department for working with the Committee on the issue, particularly on the drafting of the SPPS.

An important issue in the report is the call for economic considerations for assessing applications to be better defined, as it is very important not to be ambiguous in this matter. Perhaps that could counteract the presumption of favour in PPS 18.

To conclude, wind turbines draw contention in every art and part of Northern Ireland. Their positioning is key to their success, yet that same point can strike fear and cause annoyance and even have implications for health. The Committee inquiry drew many positive conclusions and recommendations, and I commend them to the Minister.

Mr Wilson: First of all, this is a very important issue because there is increasing alarm in Northern Ireland at the march of the 300-feet-plus steel triffids across the

countryside destroying the natural beauty of Northern Ireland but also having an impact on people's lives and health. When I started reading the report, I was a bit alarmed because, at the very start, the Committee talked about being mindful of the need to have renewable energy. I thought, "Right, what we're going to get here is a report that justifies the way in which the policy is being applied", but I must say I am pleased about a number of the recommendations.

Prompted by yourself, Mr Deputy Speaker, earlier, the Member for South Antrim seemed to think that I was responsible for this liberal policy. The policy was drawn up at the time because there was no policy about wind turbines. Secondly, I was criticised for it being too draconian. I remember many questions in this House as to why the policy was stopping wind turbines being built.

I say that partly in self-defence but also because it is a warning that regardless of what changes may be required in planning policy, it will always have a degree of subjectivity. Therefore, it is often the guidance, instructions or will that come from the Minister's office that direct how the policy is interpreted.

While I was environment Minister, it was probably interpreted in the way in which I hoped it would be, ie, that, as it states in PPS 18, where there was an unacceptable impact on human health, public safety, residential amenity, visual amenity, landscape character etc, these things should not be allowed. As I speak to planning officers in my area, I increasingly find that the answer is, "The Minister is keen on these happening", therefore the policy is interpreted in a way that I believe is much more liberal.

I welcome some of the changes that have been asked for by the Committee. Always bear in mind, however, that if there is an overall drive and policy of pushing a particular aspect, then the policy itself may be interpreted in a way that even its drafters did not intend.

The first aspect of the report that I welcome is the requirement that those who put up or wish to put up wind turbines have to show that they meet the noise standards rather than an environmental health officer having to do that work for them. The noise standards are out of date, and the World Health Organization has highlighted deficiencies in the current standards. We must look to having more up-to-date standards of measuring noise and its impact.

The distance issue is also important. While there is no agreement across jurisdictions, some will have turbines as far as 3,000 metres from residential properties. That is important from not just the point of view of noise and the health impacts but the visual impact of wind turbines.

It was always intended to be the case that the cumulative impact of wind turbines in an area ought to be considered. That means that where the local planning office may decide about an individual turbine, and strategically wind farms might be considered centrally, those two things should not be divorced.

Mr A Maginness: Will the Member give way?

Mr Wilson: Yes, I will.

Mr A Maginness: The Member talks about the over-concentration and saturation point. In accordance with standard planning decision-making, planners look at individual applications. With restaurants or fast-food bars, for example, they do not say there are 20 fast-food bars on the Antrim Road, therefore we will not entertain any further ones. It is the individual applications that the planners look at.

3.45 pm

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Wilson: That may well be the case, but, when you look at the impact of huge 320-feet turbines on a landscape environment, you have to look at the cumulative impact. The proposition always was that there should be a requirement to look at the cumulative impact. If you see the forest of these things in some areas, it makes sense —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Will the Member draw his remarks to a close?

Mr Wilson: — not to look at them individually.

I welcome the report and the thoroughness with which it has been done, though I utter caution that, despite what changes might be made, if the direction comes from the top to —

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

Mr Wilson: — interpret it liberally, any policy —

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

Mr Wilson: — will always be defective.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. At the outset, I, too, want to thank the Clerk and staff of the Committee, as well as our Chairperson, Anna Lo, and Deputy Chairperson, Pamela Cameron, for their leadership throughout the inquiry. I endorse the Chair's statement ahead of today's debate, which essentially calls for a more strategic approach in the siting of wind infrastructure and an urgent review of current noise guidelines.

I suppose that the recommendations contained in the report constitute advice to government, principally to the Minister of the Environment and the Department generally. Yesterday, a Sinn Féin delegation met the Minister and senior planning officials from his Department, and they have undertaken to give full and thorough consideration to the report. They would have liked the timing to be different, as, with the development of the single planning policy statement and the report being almost coincidental, they are unable at this point to take full account of the recommendations in our report.

I refer to paragraph 3 of the report. My party is supportive of Programme for Government targets, but my colleague Cathal Boylan made the point earlier that we cannot ignore the concerns of local residents who have questioned the way in which that target is being achieved through an over-reliance on wind energy and an underemphasis on and underutilisation of other renewable energy sources.

What about the key conclusions and recommendations? In paragraph 18, there is specific mention of my constituency of West Tyrone and the issue of saturation point. In paragraph 22, there is reference to a cumulative impact and saturation point in the number of wind developments that are either operational in or planned for an area. Paragraph 18 highlights the fact that, hitherto, there has been a lack of a strategic approach to zoning or identifying the most appropriate locations for wind turbines.

I am aware of a number of large-scale applications in the pipeline. One of those is described as Doraville, and it has wide implications for communities in the Glenelly valley in south Derry and the part of the Sperrins in Broughderg. Indeed, I helped to facilitate a pre-application hearing for residents in respect of that application, and the scale of it is most worrying. I want to commend the local group of residents from the Lisnaharney area, which is in close proximity to Gortin, who have a very positive and proactive community development agenda for that beautiful part of the Sperrins near Gortin. Their plan for the future to create jobs and build tourism is based largely on exploiting the outdoor recreation potential of that area, and, in their submission, they point to the detrimental impact on visual amenity of a large-scale wind farm application and possible displacement of jobs in the tourism sector.

On the one hand, the industry will emphasise jobs created by wind farms and, on the other hand, groups like Lisnaharney Area Residents Group will emphasise displacement of jobs through lost tourism potential.

Reference is made in paragraphs 10 and 11 to wind turbine regulations — ETSU-97 or ETSU-R-97 — and there is general agreement that these need to be reviewed, that local government authorities and environmental health departments are far too stretched by regularly adjudicating on such matters and that perhaps there should be more of an onus on developers to prove that the noise regulations are being adhered to.

There are many questions for the Minister. For example —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): I ask the Member to draw his remarks to a close.

Mr McElduff: — why are so many non-determination appeals taking place? Why are people not even waiting for a refusal and going straight to appeal? Does the Minister have anything to say about the Screggagh incident?

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

Mr Agnew: I welcome the debate and the Committee's focus on wind energy. As a supporter of wind energy, I want community buy-in for good wind projects based on good consultation. I also want the implementation of many of the measures that are called for in the report to promote community benefit, engagement and, when possible, ownership.

Like Alban Maginness, I was at the launch today of a solar energy cooperative, which will be run very much for community benefit. I welcome the work of the Ulster Community Investment Trust (UCIT) and the Northern Ireland Community Energy (NICE) board on that project. I also declare an interest as a shareholder in Northern Ireland's first wind energy cooperative, Drumlin Wind Energy. Indeed, it was the first example in Northern Ireland of community ownership of energy, and I want people to avail themselves increasingly of such a model.

Despite claims from the Member opposite and from such sources as the 'Daily Mail' and the 'The Daily Telegraph', wind energy is the cheapest form not only of renewable energy but of all forms of energy production. That was borne out by the EU Commission study, which, having looked at all the costs, including subsidies and external costs such as to health and the environment, found that, to generate 1 MW of energy by onshore wind cost roughly €105, compared with €164 for gas and €233 for coal. It is easy to state that wind energy is expensive — it does have upfront costs — but the unit cost is zero, and the life cycle of wind energy generation is cheaper than for other forms of energy. Indeed, the Enterprise, Trade and Investment Committee has heard, on numerous occasions, that, when demand for electricity can be met by renewable energy generation alone, the marginal cost is significantly lower than when gas comes onto the system. The reality is that the price of wind is coming down, and, whilst gas prices have dipped, the overall trend is upward. When we consider the costs of 500 deaths a year related to air pollution and the impacts of climate change, it is clear that the cost of other sources of energy such as gas and coal is significantly greater.

Turning to the report, I think that I am right in saying that the Committee Chair expressed the support of the Committee for the proposal that wider economic, social and environmental impacts should not be taken into account when planning decisions are made on wind farms. I believe that this contradicts the Committee recommendation to take a strategic approach. Inevitably, these projects are regionally significant, and their wider impact must be taken into consideration, as for any major energy project. I do not believe that we would have Kilroot, Ballylumford or, going forward, the North/South interconnector if we looked solely at the local impact of an energy development. They are regionally significant, so we have to look more widely than the local impact.

I certainly welcome further research into and monitoring of the noise impacts, but we need to take an evidence-based approach. The World Health Organization has said about imperceptible noise that there is no reliable evidence that sounds below the hearing threshold produce physiological or psychological effects. We should continue to monitor it, but we have to make decisions based on the evidence available.

I find some of the opposition to wind projects hard —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Will the Member draw his remarks to a close?

Mr Agnew: — to understand. Those providing the objections support unregulated quarrying and gold-mining, but, when it comes to wind turbines, they seem to have an objection to the local impacts.

Mr McNarry: Critics of wind power, like me, believe that granting planning permission for wind turbines has become little more than a rubber-stamping exercise. In some areas, approvals have hit 100%. In County Fermanagh, the county where fracking was outlawed by anoraks in green hats, 106 of 108 applications were given the green light. In the Omagh council area, 88 of 92 were approved. Through my recent research, I found that not one local council had a policy on wind farms — that augurs well for the new powers given to the super-councils, does it not? Yet we see these ghastly monsters mushrooming and destroying the lives of people who live near them.

In the last three years, some £140 million has been paid out in subsidies to the renewables sector in Northern Ireland through the renewables obligation. These subsidies are profoundly regressive: they take money from poor consumers, including pensioners, to give to cash-rich cooperations. We are being asked to adopt a report that has strayed from legal disputes and potential judicial decisions, favouring the placement of turbines where they

simply are not wanted. Owen McMullan, the spokesman of the Tyrone-based Windwatch group, puts it rather neatly:

> *"We were led to believe this would reduce our dependence on fossil fuels, but nobody in Northern Ireland is getting cheaper electricity."*

That is true in all communities, just as it is in County Tyrone. Wind power has already exacted a heavy cost: it has caused divisions in rural communities and done nothing to decrease fuel bills. However, it has given rise to serious health concerns that require a moratorium until the true impacts on people's health are known.

This turbine lobby is yet another example of the arrogance and short-sightedness of those intolerant, self-important people who have few or no ideas except massive cost initiatives that are not about green jobs but green unemployment. UKIP has consistently exposed the failures and the money wasted by plying it into wind energy. Rather than adopting this report to satisfy the tree-huggers, we should get the super-councils to ratify an across-the-country policy of stopping wind power development. In doing so, perhaps the Assembly should urgently address the potential of an energy supply crisis when it next talks so boldly of rebalancing our economy.

The 'Sunday Telegraph', no later than February, dubbed the matter "The Great Wind Farm Farce". It said:

> *"In a free market, no business would want to invest in a wind farm because no customer would want to buy its unreliable produce."*

Today, in our own local farce, we have a Committee recommending the sustainability of wind farms and, regrettably, offering little to give any real assurance to the people and communities directly affected by these monstrosities. The report recommends the sustainability of wind turbines, and, if it does not, the Committee should make it clear that that is its position.

If not, the recommendations are inadequate guidance for planning implications.

4.00 pm

I challenge anyone to deny that the recommendations are in favour of the sustainability of wind farms, and there ends the story. They are not recognising the rights of people, and they will, I believe, be subject to legal challenge. What of the 849 applications still out there awaiting decision? The recommendations do nothing to make a case to refuse them planning permission. Somehow, Members, I feel that the answer is still blowing in the wind. The Assembly should not be tilting at windmills.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): I call Paul Frew. The Member will have three minutes.

Mr Frew: I welcome the opportunity to speak on this important issue, which may even be more important than the debate around corporation tax and the tax-varying powers to decrease or increase the corporation tax rate. It is more important because electricity is the blood that runs through the veins of our industries. We cannot take this lightly, so I welcome the report but, alas, much like the three reports produced by the Enterprise, Trade and Investment Committee, it picks only one part of a massive subject, which is the cost of electricity.

It is true that it is expensive to have wind power, but it is also true that we should have wind power. There is a place for wind power but not every place. I would like people to tell me what a saturation point looks like in a local area or a regional area, because I cannot see it and I do not know anyone who can tell me what it is. We need to get there because it is clear that wind power and wind generation will not solve all our ills. Rather than help, it will, in fact, hinder industry in this country.

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

I will tell you why it will hinder industry in this country. Because of the system marginal price, we have to pay wind generators the same price as we pay for gas generators. That is the system marginal price. The more wind generators that go onto that system, the more we will have to pay. Not only that; we have to pay wind generators capacity payments for being there even though they are not always there and even though, sometimes, they cannot run. Sometimes, then, because of the state of our grid and because it cannot take their energy, we have to pay them constraint charges. That is the reason why we have to get this mix right. It is the reason why, at this moment, we are not getting it right, and that is why it is burdening industry and large employers.

If we do not get this right, we could lose thousands of jobs. That is why this debate is far more important than any debate on corporation tax. The House needs to take the issue of energy costs seriously, or it will be to the detriment of our people, our employees and their children. That is how important the issue is to our people.

Let us look at some of the issues that are at hand. I repeat: what is saturation point? When do we have enough? When do we have enough wind turbines, and when do we produce enough energy through wind? It is not about security of supply, because, if we had the North/South interconnector, we would have enough generation on the island of Ireland to cover security of supply. It is not about creating energy, so what is it about?

Mr Speaker: I ask the Member to bring his remarks to an end.

Mr Frew: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: I call the Minister of the Environment, Mr Mark Durkan.

Mr B McCrea: On a point of order, Mr Speaker, under Standing Order 17(4). Will you inform the House what consultation you had with the Business Committee in order to establish the total time to be allocated to the debate? Having written to you and having much to contribute to the debate, I am extremely disappointed that I am the only Member not to be allowed to speak.

Mr Speaker: I can understand the Member's frustration, but the Business Committee agreed the timings, as it does for all the business that comes to plenary session. They have the authority to do that, and their decision is reflected in the scope for Speakers to accommodate all those who wish to contribute. I have made a particular virtue of attempting to bring in members of the smaller parties and the independents as much as is possible and practical. However, in setting the time limits for a debate, there is a very clear calculation, by which by 4.02 pm we should have already called the Minister to make his contribution.

I can only say that I share and understand the Member's disappointment, but the Business Committee's decision is the guidance that we all apply in the circumstances. I now return to the Minister.

Mr B McCrea: Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. Under Standing Order 17(5), if I may —

Mr Speaker: I think that I have given you a fairly comprehensive explanation. What I suggest, so that we do not end up in a challenge, is that I have to conduct the business of the meeting as determined by the Business Committee. Everyone should have a clear understanding that that in fact is how the Assembly has decided to go about its business. I will reflect on the point that you made and will come back to you if you wish to have a formal response. I have given you my understanding of it, and I will come back to you. I owe you that much. I am sorry that you did not get called to speak, but I think that you would also be the first to acknowledge that we try to involve smaller parties, independents and individuals as well as the bigger parties as much as is practical. Can I now proceed with the debate? I will come back to you. Mark Durkan.

Mr Durkan (The Minister of the Environment): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I have been allocated 15 minutes; I would happily give Basil five or 15.

I begin by thanking Anna Lo, Chairperson of the Environment Committee, for proposing the motion. I also acknowledge the work of the Committee, its research team and all those who provided evidence during the wind energy inquiry. This very useful report is evidently the product of an extensive and thorough inquiry process that is to be commended. I am also grateful to Members for their contributions today.

I welcome the Committee's report and, although I have only recently seen it, I am content to consider further and address the Committee's recommendations that fall within my Department's remit, subject to normal due processes. I will return to those recommendations later, but I first wish to say a little about renewable energy development in Northern Ireland.

Northern Ireland has significant renewable energy resources and a vibrant renewable energy industry that makes an important contribution to achieving sustainable development and is a valuable provider of jobs and investment across the region. Making appropriate use of renewable energy sources is supported by wider government policy, including the regional development strategy 2035.

I turn to an issue raised earlier by Mr Wilson. DETI's strategic energy framework for Northern Ireland sets a target of 40% energy consumption from renewable sources by 2020, which is equivalent to 1,600 megawatts of energy. To date, DOE has consented in excess of 1,100 megawatts from wind farms alone. With five years to go and if all consented proposals are developed, that represents a significant contribution to the 40% target, which would be further supplemented by other forms of renewable energy development.

Northern Ireland produces in the region of 19·6% of energy requirements from renewable sources, the majority from wind energy. Existing planning policy for that form of development is set out in Planning Policy Statement 18 on renewable energy — PPS 18 — which is supported by its supplementary best practice guidance. Following the publication of PPS 18 in August 2009, my Department experienced a significant increase in planning applications for wind energy. For the period 2002-03 until the end of 2014, 89% of planning applications for wind energy development were approved.

I am aware of the strong and contrasting views — we heard some of them today — on renewable energy development. Indeed, they have been reflected here today and through the responses received following the public consultation on the draft SPPS. I recognise, going forward, that it is important that the right balance is struck between facilitating development in appropriate locations to meet renewable energy targets and protecting the exceptional quality of our natural environment. These are matters and issues that I am addressing in finalising the SPPS.

As Members will be aware, the SPPS is a radical new approach to preparing regional planning policy. It will result in a shorter, simpler and more strategic policy framework for all users of the planning system. I will shortly bring the final SPPS before the Executive in time for the transfer of planning powers to councils next month.

Returning to the wind energy report, I would like to address some of its recommendations and some of the comments made today. The recommendations set out in the report are wide-ranging and complex, and several will require further examination. However, where appropriate, I have been able to address some of the recommendations in the final SPPS. For example, the Chair of the Committee, Ms Lo, referred to the importance of properly defining how economic considerations are dealt with in determining planning applications. I deal with that in the final SPPS by setting out further detail on how economic considerations can and should be taken into account.

Ms Lo and Mr Boylan also raised the importance of effective community engagement, which also features in the report. I agree wholeheartedly, and it is an essential part of the new reformed planning system. The final SPPS will also advise on those issues, including pre-application community consultation and the minimum requirements to be placed on a prospective applicant in relation to consultation with the community for major and regionally significant applications.

Another issue that was raised is the importance of safeguarding our sensitive landscapes. I will ensure that the final SPPS brings forward a cautious approach to renewable energy developments in designated landscapes.

Other report recommendations can be taken forward through forthcoming renewable energy guidance that I intend to have in place in time for the transfer of planning powers to councils. For example, the guidance will help to address recommendations on community engagement, the liaison between my Department and councils on wind energy development, information to be submitted with renewable energy applications, assessing cumulative impact and the use of appropriate conditions when considering such developments.

As I recognised earlier, there is more work to be done. Further recommendations are likely to require additional research, policy development and public consultation. For example, several Members emphasised the need to review separation distances between wind farms or turbines

and occupied properties, both from an amenity and a safety perspective. I agree that that needs further urgent consideration. I, too, was shocked and concerned about the recent collapse of the wind turbine in County Tyrone. I will ensure that any implications for my Department's renewable energy policy are fully addressed.

The Chair of the Committee, along with Lord Morrow and others, raised concerns that are also addressed in the Committee's report about the use of the ETSU-R-97 guidance. While I recognise that ETSU is currently the established UK-wide standard, having read the report and listened to the views expressed today, I am minded to investigate further the use of ETSU in Northern Ireland. I do not think I would go so far as to describe it as idiotic, as Mr Frew did, but it certainly warrants further investigation.

There are, however, recommendations that fall outside the responsibility of my Department and may require consideration by other Departments and bodies. For example, there are recommendations in relation to community benefits, which is an important issue that was highlighted by Lord Morrow. Lord Morrow also raised the issue of the potential for property values to drop as a result of nearby wind energy development. The Committee report recommends that the developer gives consideration to providing compensation where there is clear and compelling evidence of that. While this is outwith the remit of my Department, I support that recommendation.

4.15 pm

There were some other interesting points raised by Members throughout the debate. Ms Lo referred to the transfer to councils of planning and responsibility for the vast majority of wind energy applications. We will all be interested to see how councils deal with the metamorphosis that they are undergoing from poacher to gamekeeper and how that might influence some of the very vociferously expressed views that they have had on wind energy to date.

There is more to be done on the economic considerations. I have touched on that and vowed to bring forward more detail on it. A point was also raised about the inadequacies of the current planning policy. Like beauty, inadequacy is in the eye of the beholder. If policy and systems do not give you the outcome that you want, they will be viewed as inadequate.

Mr Wilson: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Durkan: Yes, I will give way.

Mr Wilson: When the Minister is bringing forward recommendations on the economic implications, will he include in those the negative economic impact that wind turbines can have on not only individual households and property values but the cost of electricity in Northern Ireland and the fact that the more of these that go up, the greater the costs to consumers because of the subsidies that have to be paid for them?

Mr Durkan: I thank the Member for his intervention. Anything that I bring forward will be balanced. However, I am not sure that it will reflect the concerns that the Member has expressed there. It will consider them, but it will be balanced, and I am not sure what side it will come down on.

I have acknowledged and do acknowledge that improvements can and should be made to PPS 18. While we have placed a lot of stock in the SPPS, it is more of a vehicle to consolidate existing policy. I have used the opportunity to improve policy in some regards. However, I can give a commitment to the House that this policy and some others that might require further or more serious surgery, shall we say, will be reviewed in full, subsequent to the transfer of planning to councils. Lord Morrow spoke about the four main considerations —

Mr G Robinson: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Durkan: I will see how I get on and maybe let you in during my last minute, thank you.

Lord Morrow spoke of the four major considerations throughout the drawing up of this report. We have touched on safety. There is still a debate about the noise. Is there noise? Is there not noise? How much of an impact might the noise have on individuals? How much of an annoyance might it cause to households? I suppose that it would be difficult to be subjected to a constant drone for hours on end; I am sure that the Speaker could sympathise with that. I have touched on the impact on property values and, indeed, the landscape impact. According to Lord Morrow, people are a bit sceptical. He called for a more strategic approach to dealing with wind energy applications.

Cathal Boylan raised some interesting points as well. Alban Maginness said that we should celebrate and, indeed, exploit the renewable energy sources at our disposal. This will boost not only our environment but our economy. He spoke of the community involvement, as did Mr Agnew, and referred to the project in Slaughtneil, which is a tangible example of how community benefit can and should work.

Mrs Overend, too, made some very interesting points, particularly in expressing the view that this subject causes division and polarises communities. It is strange to have a case where you have not just Nimbyism but "Imbyism". There are people who do not want them in their backyard, and there are others complaining that they are not in their backyard and someone else is getting the economic benefit of hosting a turbine.

Mr Wilson went on his anti-triffid rant, and I would love to ask him what he did in the war against the triffids. *[Laughter.]*

Mr A Maginness: He survived.

Mr Durkan: He said that he came under fire because the policy was too draconian. The policy has not changed, as he quite rightly pointed out. He was also right in what he said about subjectivity.

I have to correct Mr Maginness on his point about the cumulative impact. The cumulative impact of wind turbines and wind farms is a material consideration when it comes to processing a wind energy application.

Barry McElduff spoke about our meeting yesterday, which was very productive. In some respects, I regret the timing of the report, in that it has come so close to the publication of the SPPS. However, the SPPS is not a catch-all, and we will have the opportunity to address some of the more serious or deep issues through a full review.

One of Mr McElduff's other pet favourites is PPS 21. He spoke about separation distances and the need to increase separation distances for wind turbines, but I do

not think that we would have any chance of meeting any separation distances, because he would have a house in every field. He lamented the over-reliance on wind energy and the underutilisation of other renewable sources of energy, so I look forward to his and his party colleagues' support for applications for solar farms and anaerobic digesters as they come forward.

As I said, I welcome the Committee's report into wind energy. Whilst I have only recently seen the report, I am content to consider further and address the Committee's recommendations that fall within my Department's remit, subject to normal due processes.

Mrs Cameron: On behalf of the Committee for the Environment, I support the motion that the Assembly approves the report of the Committee on its inquiry into wind energy in Northern Ireland and calls on the Minister of the Environment to implement the report's recommendations.

The Committee is fully mindful and supportive of the requirement to promote renewable energy and to meet the Executive's Programme for Government target for 2011-15, which includes a commitment to achieve 20% of electricity consumption from renewable sources by 2015. However, the inquiry arose in response to the concerns of local residents who have questioned the way in which that target is being achieved through what they believe to be an over-reliance on wind energy.

The inquiry proved to be an immense piece of work, not just in the scope and volume of evidence that was considered but in the emotive nature of much of that evidence. I believe that the Committee has managed to produce a fair and balanced report, with robust and perhaps challenging recommendations.

Overall, the Committee concluded that the way forward for sustainable as well as renewable energy is one that fully engages those communities that are most closely involved with its production. That is very much reflected in the Committee's recommendations, which call on the Department and wind energy developers to work with communities — to inform, to communicate and to respond — at every level of planning and operation.

I take the opportunity to thank all those who contributed to the debate. Obviously, we first had the Chair, who spoke at length in moving the motion to accept the report. She said that the Committee had received 98 submissions in response to its call for evidence. The Committee also had oral evidence sessions with a range of stakeholders and commissioned the services of a specialist acoustician to assist it with the technical aspects of the inquiry. We also heard that the Committee carried out a fact-finding visit to west Tyrone to see a wind farm development at first hand and to hear from the residents who lived close to the turbines.

The Committee agreed that there was a need for a strategic approach in the siting of wind energy developments. It also considered whether a strategic approach that advocated zoning or the identification of the most appropriate location for wind turbines would be effective. However, as we all know, it was agreed that it is now too late for the introduction of zoning in Northern Ireland as many areas —

Mr Frew: I thank the Member for giving way. Whilst it would be hard to put in a strategic regional scheme or plan, NIE does produce heat maps. If the heat maps were more detailed, they would be able to show developers where the grid is strong and where it is weak. Generators could target those areas and identify whether any of that land was available, instead of what happens now, which is that they go to any available land and try their hand at getting planning permission.

Mrs Cameron: I thank the Member for his intervention. I am sure that the Minister will take those points on board as he looks into the report further.

As I said, in certain places like west Tyrone, the number of operational or planned wind developments has reached saturation point. The Committee identified a clear need for closer liaison between the strategic planning division and councils to ensure a joined-up approach and more cohesive planning for wind farms and individual turbines. The Committee also expressed some concern that the term "economic considerations", which is used in PPS 18 and retained in the draft SPPS, is not clearly defined. The Committee urges the Department to do so.

The Committee found that many submissions to the inquiry focused on perceived inadequacies in the current planning procedures and the cumulative impact of turbines. It recommended that planning applications for connection to the grid be assessed at the same time as turbine applications, which is, I think, a common-sense approach. The Committee believes that the requirement to notify neighbours who occupy buildings on land within 90 metres of the boundary of the application site is inadequate for the latest wind turbines, which may exceed a great height.

The Chair talked about the inquiry's second term of reference, which focused on wind turbine noise and separation distances from dwellings. This was a very emotive part of the inquiry, as many submissions dealt with the adverse impact of perceived noise from wind turbines on respondents' day-to-day lives. It seems that the current guidelines on permissible levels of noise are no longer adequate. The Committee therefore recommended that the Department urgently review the use of the ETSU-R-97 guidelines with a view to adopting more modern and robust guidance for the measurement of wind turbine noise. The Committee also recommended that the Department specify a minimum separation distance between wind turbines and dwellings.

The inquiry's final term of reference, as the Chair informed us, related to the extent of engagement by wind energy providers with communities. Community concerns about visual amenity, noise and health did not always seem to be given due regard. The views of residents need to be listened to, considered and taken into account.

The Committee talked about the mandatory use of the community engagement toolkit and recommended that the level of community benefit be set at government level. It recommended that this be made a condition of planning permission and that a community-benefits register similar to the one in Scotland be set up. That sums up the Chair's remarks.

I will turn now to other Members. Lord Morrow raised concerns about the impacts of wind turbines: the noise, safety, the effect on property values and the detrimental impact on the landscape. He noted that many remain to be convinced of the benefits of wind energy and that there

was a mood for a more strategic approach to be taken to planning.

Cathal Boylan was in favour of the recommendations in the report but concerned about the use of reconditioned turbines. He stated that ETSU-R-97 was unfit for purpose and needed to be reviewed. He said that there needs to be more effective engagement with communities.

Alban Maginness said that it was important to note the contribution made by wind energy and that, over time, its cost will decrease. He was impressed by the efforts made by those building wind turbines with the community, and he said that engagement with communities was essential.

Sandra Overend welcomed the report's seeking to bring some clarity to this issue. She said that there is a need for an overarching strategic approach to the siting of turbines. She was concerned about noise pollution and distance from residential properties, and she wanted the Department to improve its methods of measuring noise pollution.

Sammy Wilson said that there was increasing alarm in Northern Ireland about the impact of wind turbines. He also welcomed the report. He stated that planning policy is often influenced by the guidance from the Minister's office. He also welcomed the recommendation that those putting up wind turbines be responsible for ensuring that they meet standards. He said that the guidance on noise levels needed to be updated and stated that the cumulative impact of wind turbines on an area needed to be taken into account.

4.30 pm

Barry McElduff supported the recommendations in the report. He supports the Programme for Government targets but has concerns about the over-reliance on wind energy. He was concerned about separation distances, the cumulative impact of wind turbines and the displacement of jobs and tourism. He also said that the ETSU-R-97 guidelines need to be reviewed.

Steven Agnew welcomed the Committee focus on wind energy. He called for community involvement in projects. He stated that wind energy is the cheapest form of energy production and that the price of wind energy is coming down while other sources of energy are increasing in cost. He also said that there is a need to look strategically at energy production.

David McNarry believes that the planning approval for wind turbines is a rubber-stamping exercise. He said that £140 million has been paid in subsidies to wind energy producers. He said that wind energy is not producing cheaper electricity, and he was concerned about the health implications of wind turbines. He also said that there should be a halt to wind turbine development.

The last contributor was Paul Frew, who welcomed the report. He said that the report addressed only one part of the cost of electricity and that wind power will not help industry. He stated that wind generators are paid the same as gas generators and that wind power generators have to be paid capacity payments. He also said that the cost of generating energy needs to be taken seriously.

In conclusion, I ask the Assembly to approve the report. At this stage, I thank the Minister for his initial response and look forward to a more detailed response in due course. It is also appropriate at this stage to thank the Committee staff for their hard work in the production of the report and for all their help throughout the inquiry, which turned out to be quite a large inquiry, with a great deal of work for the Committee staff. In particular, I thank Sheila Mawhinney, the Committee Clerk, for the tremendous work that she has put into it.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

> *That this Assembly approves the report of the Committee for the Environment [NIA 226/11-16] on its Inquiry into Wind Energy in Northern Ireland; and calls on the Minister of the Environment to implement the recommendations contained in the report.*

Private Members' Business

McCreesh Park

Mr Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 30 minutes for the debate. The proposer of the motion will have 10 minutes to propose and 10 minutes in which to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who are called to speak will have five minutes. Clerk, please read the motion, and the best of luck.

Mr Irwin: I beg to move

> *That this Assembly expresses its concern at the decision by Newry and Mourne District Council to approve again the naming of the Patrick Street play park in Newry after convicted IRA terrorist Raymond McCreesh; notes that the vote was taken prior to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland making a final formal ruling on the matter; further notes the seemingly lethargic approach of the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland in pursuing this case; and calls on the Minister of the Environment to respond to the vote in light of the requirement for councillors to act in a way that promotes good relations by providing a positive example for the wider community to follow and, crucially, acting in the interest of the whole community.*

It is with great concern that the motion has been brought before the House today, given that we are in 2015 and, still, we have a local council, albeit in its final days, clinging to an outdated, inappropriate and, in every sense of the word, unacceptable decision. Children represent our future. That is a very clear and obvious statement of fact. Therefore, it should be with that in mind that we consider this important issue.

At the outset, I must ask why a significant section of the elected membership of Newry and Mourne District Council continue, even as recently as last night, to perpetuate a situation that should never have been created in the first place. To name a play facility after a convicted terrorist is, I feel, one of the most ridiculous decisions that has ever been taken by a local council. I took it upon myself to raise a complaint with the Equality Commission back in December 2012 following a decision after review by Newry council to maintain the current park name.

Through various meetings with the commission and correspondence back and forth, it was decided that my complaint would be superseded by the commission's investigation, such was the seriousness with which it viewed the situation. However, a couple of years later, we had a recommendation from the commission to Newry council to review its processes and again consult the public on the play park name. The result of that process has been an astounding repeat of previous form and another two votes by Newry and Mourne District Council in support of retaining the McCreesh park name; the latest was last night, when a proposal to discuss the matter was rejected by Sinn Féin. That beggars belief.

I believe that it shows a complete lack of respect for due process and a disregard for any view or recommendation that the Equality Commission may bring forward. Indeed, on that point, I feel that the Equality Commission must respond to the arrogant attitude displayed, chiefly by Sinn Féin councillors in Newry but, it has to be said, no less assisted by the acquiescent nature of the SDLP councillor grouping there. Sadly, all the SDLP councillors, except one, failed to show up last month on the night of the vote, even though they had proposed that the issue should be considered. By their actions, therefore, they failed to carry through the wishes of their party leader in repairing the hurt that he is on record as saying was unwittingly caused.

I remain very concerned that, in this day and age, the Equality Commission has acknowledged that clear breach of section 75, and it appears toothless to challenge that persistent wrong. The flip side of that debate is, of course, the commission's almost speed-of-light approach to dealing with the owners of the Christian bakery over an iced cake. It really does stand in stark contrast. The two issues could not stand more opposed to each other in seriousness and gravity, yet one has been very publicly held aloft and pursued with every available weapon in the arsenal of the Equality Commission, whilst the other trudges along with no apparent urgency at all.

At the core remains the fact that, in Newry city, there is a play facility for kids named after a member of an illegal terrorist organisation — indeed, a convicted terrorist — that conducted a reign of terror, destruction, murder and bloodshed on the people of Northern Ireland. The rifle that McCreesh was found to possess was used in the slaughter of 10 innocent men at Kingsmills — a night that lives on vividly in the hearts and minds of many of us, especially the families affected by that atrocity. It is untenable to think that, only a few miles down the road from Kingsmills, we have a kids' playground named in memory of McCreesh.

I must criticise the Equality Commission because I believe that it is failing to deal with the issue effectively, given the depth of feeling that exists. The situation must change immediately. I challenge the commission to conclude its process and issue its judgement in this case. How can an iced cake end up in the courts and a terrorist-named play facility simply amble along with no clearly defined end in sight? That is what my constituents ask me daily, and that demands an answer from the Equality Commission.

I believe that the SDLP has now seen the error of its way in supporting the naming of the play park and is now publicly repositioning itself — and not before time. However, Sinn Féin predictably remains unmoved and uncaring in every sense of the words towards the wider community, unionist and moderate nationalist, who reject the naming debacle outright.

Local councillor colleagues who have been engaged in setting up the new councils tell me of the importance of the new councillor code of conduct. I understand that many hours of training have been undertaken to ensure that the elected representatives who sit on the 11 councils are fully aware of their responsibilities and the rules governing their participation in local government. That document contains lengthy direction on behaviour and responsibilities and what is acceptable and unacceptable when carrying out council business, and it will be rigorously monitored and enforced, with many councils implementing audio recording of meetings. I do not find any defence in that code of conduct for the actions of those Newry and Mourne councillors who proposed, and who have voted on a number of occasions, to maintain naming the park after Raymond McCreesh.

Indeed, it flies in the face of the code of conduct. Did Newry and Mourne council promote good relations and provide a positive example to the wider community by

doing what it did? Absolutely not. Did it act with the whole community in mind when it made this decision? No, it did not: just ask the minority unionist community in Newry and Mourne, who suffered at the hands of people like Raymond McCreesh.

I ask that Mark Durkan MLA, as Minister with responsibility for local government, address the House today and leave the Northern Ireland rate-paying and voting public in absolutely no doubt as to the aims and objectives of the 'Code of Conduct for Councillors'. I ask him for his comments on the actions of his council colleagues in the SDLP in Newry and Mourne council. I must say that it is poor on the SDLP's part that it was, in fact, that party that asked for the naming of the park to be discussed last month, yet it did not show up for the vote. That must be explained by Mr McDonnell as leader of the SDLP. I want an assurance in the Chamber from the SDLP leader that this matter will be revisited and put right, as anyone with a shred of conscience and credibility would rush to do, given the age in which we live, where, across the world, terrorism rains havoc and brings abject sorrow to hundreds of thousands of people.

I conclude by saying this: Sinn Féin has been very vocal recently in calling for equality. In fact, it tells us that equality is going to be used as a "Trojan horse" to break the DUP and unionism generally. I give Sinn Féin members one small piece of advice: if, by causing outrage in the unionist community, Sinn Féin believes that the republican Trojan horse equality agenda has been advanced one iota, sadly, it is very much mistaken. The decision by Newry and Mourne council to name a play park after a convicted terrorist has only served to reinforce the view of many unionists that pan-nationalism is alive and well. Nothing less is expected from the apologists for terror, Sinn Féin. Shame, however, on the SDLP.

Ms Fearon: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. At the outset, I want to send my solidarity to the McCreesh family, who are in our thoughts at this time, and who continue to be held in huge reverence in our area. I also want to sympathise with all victims of the conflict and express solidarity with them.

In 2011, more than 30,000 people gathered in south Armagh to honour the memory of Raymond McCreesh and his nine comrades who died on hunger strike in 1981. It is not just in Newry and Armagh that they are recognised but around the world. When Raymond's comrade Bobby Sands died on hunger strike, national Parliaments across the world stood in silence. Streets were named in their honour, as a genuinely historic chapter in world politics was written. Indeed, Nelson Mandela and his fellow political prisoners on Robben Island drew strength from Raymond and his comrades in their fight for justice. The late Cardinal Tomás Ó Fiaich said:

> *"Raymond McCreesh was captured bearing arms at the age of 19 and sentenced to 14 years' imprisonment. I have no doubt that he would have never seen the inside of a jail but for the abnormal political situation. Who is entitled to label him a murderer or a suicide?"*

Cardinal O'Fiaich was alluding to the fact that Raymond McCreesh had the misfortune to be born into one of the most heavily militarised areas anywhere in the world, to be born into the Orange state, one-party rule and institutional discrimination. He was, effectively, born into the belly of the beast where the worst excesses of partition were visible daily. Faced with the watchtowers, faced with the British Army patrols and faced with British brutality, Raymond, like generations of Irish republicans before him, decided to face down those conditions.

Raymond was my age when he gave his life on hunger strike. He was just an ordinary young man. It is because of the sacrifice of people like Raymond McCreesh that I was fortunate to be born into an entirely different political dispensation. My generation of young republicans is separated from him only by time. Had Raymond been born when I was, I have no doubt that he would be standing in this Chamber.

Where does the SDLP draw the line between the good old IRA and the so-called bad IRA? The SDLP's position seems to be that nobody who was involved in the conflict should have anything named after them. Beside McCreesh Park is Michael Mallin Park; next to it is James Connolly Park; and across the way is John Martin Gardens. Does the SDLP suggest that we now start to rename those? Does the SDLP now distance itself from the 1916 leaders? Will SDLP members attend centenary events for the men and women who took up arms against the same oppressive regime? I can tell you this: south Armagh was a lot more peaceful in 1916 than it was in the 1970s.

Danny Kennedy has been one of the most vociferous on this issue, and it is my understanding that he was at the council meeting when the original naming took place. Why was it not a problem in 2002? It was not an issue for Danny Kennedy, any UUP councillor, or any DUP councillor for that matter, for six or seven years until the Orange Order made it one. This is nothing more than a cheap stunt. This electioneering and exploitation on the back of victims and their families is nothing short of a disgrace and should be condemned from all corners. Every single morning that I walk into this Building, I am faced with a 7-foot statue of James Craig, the man who brought the gun into Irish politics by establishing a paramilitary force to defy the democratic will of the people;—

4.45 pm

Mr McCausland: Will the Member give way?

Ms Fearon: No.

— the man who boasted of a Protestant parliament for a Protestant people, and the man who built the Orange state brick by brick. Raymond McCreesh played his part in smashing that state, and I think that that is a life worth remembering.

Mr McNarry: You are brainwashed. You are a disgrace.

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr McNarry: You are brainwashed. You are brainwashed. Brainwashed.

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr McNarry: Why do you not call her to order, Mr Speaker, for that kind of speech?

Mr Speaker: Order. Order. This is a very emotive issue. Obviously, this is a touchstone issue for many Members in the Chamber. Bear this in mind: it is a touchstone issue for many people in our community, so the behaviour of

Members here in how they conduct this debate is critical in my view. I remind all Members of that. Let us have a debate. Let us say what has to be said, and then let us make a decision, but let us not be unmindful of the consequences of people losing the rag and losing the head with one another in this discussion, because it does impact on the wider community. I say that to all Members with respect.

Dr McDonnell: I am very glad to be able to speak on the motion. I believe that it focuses primarily on the controversy surrounding the McCreesh play park in Newry, but the issues involved extend far beyond that.

We believe that today's debate is as much about reconciliation in our society as it is about anything else. It is about this Assembly and about the Northern Ireland Executive and how we conduct ourselves, how we advance healing and actively promote reconciliation in a traumatised and post-conflict society. Quite frankly, it is about whether we care about the others or whether we just want to pay lip service to reconciliation.

The absence of violence alone is by no means an indication of peace. My party, the SDLP, fully recognises the hurt, pain and distress that this issue and similar issues can cause however and wherever they present themselves. Pain has no politics, no religion, no shape and no form. We all suffer pain, and we all bleed when we are cut.

The naming of public spaces after individuals or groups involved in state or paramilitary violence can cause, and is often intended to cause, so much further hurt and distress to victims and survivors and their families. It becomes yet another barrier for us to overcome in dealing with the past, and the reconciliation of the past in our society is a core principle of the SDLP, against which we measure what we do and what we say. It is for this reason that the SDLP believes that violence must not be endorsed or glorified, even retrospectively. It is for this reason that the SDLP believes that no public space should be named after any person involved in state or paramilitary violence. It is imperative that, if we are to put conflict behind us and advance together as a shared society, we face up to that.

We regret the pain that this issue has caused to all victims and survivors, and we also recognise the hurt experienced by the McCreesh family. They too are victims; they lost a son, a valued son. This protracted situation will have caused them immense pain, and we do not want in any way to add to that pain. Party politics are being played out around these issues, and they are used continually to open wounds, wounds that we should all be working to repair. We need to move in our society into a situation where we actively promote reconciliation, and that will not be achieved in any shape or form by glorying in violence or by being selective about some violence.

I want to mention our previous speaker's speech, which somebody had obviously written for her. I draw attention to the fact —

Mr G Kelly: Will the Member give way?

Dr McDonnell: No. I want to draw attention to the fact that —

Ms Fearon: Will the Member give way?

Dr McDonnell: — no matter how much —

Ms Ruane: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Is it appropriate for the Member to be disparaging towards the previous speaker in the way that he was? Does he think that she is not capable of writing her own speech? We will discuss gender equality in the Chamber on Monday, and I ask the Member to take that back.

Mr Speaker: I regard the comments as part of the cut and thrust of debate. I am quite confident that Mr McDonnell does not actually know who wrote the speech. Because I know the contributor, I am prepared to accept that it is her own work.

I do not think that that was a point of order. I am certain that other comments will be passed before the debate is finished, but, if people stay within the confines of good order and good temper, we can deal with this delicate and sensitive matter in a way that does not make the situation worse.

Dr McDonnell: I would just like to draw attention to the fact that the previous speaker is no Maud Gonne or Countess Markievicz. Any reference to *[Interruption.]* Michael Mallin or James Connolly is totally inappropriate. This situation — *[Interruption.]* It is obvious that the level of —

Mr Flanagan: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Is there any chance of getting this clock started, because I do not want to listen to him all day?

Mr Speaker: Behave yourselves. Stop going on like schoolchildren. What does that have to do with what I am only after advising the House about? I am not going to put up with that nonsense. Please make your contribution. The rest of you, please listen. If you want to make a contribution, put your name down, and I will call you, time permitting, OK?

Dr McDonnell: It is difficult, Mr Speaker, but anyway. We need to move to a situation where we can actively promote honesty and reconciliation. That will not be achieved by glorifying violence of any sort. We cannot be half in, half out, half up or half down.

Last night, at the final meeting of Newry and Mourne District Council, every SDLP councillor voted to suspend standing orders to accommodate a full, open and honest discussion. Our councillors and the party as a whole are extremely disappointed that the opportunity did not materialise. That signifies that we have got only halfway towards democracy and that, in fact, some people do not want to be engaged in honest debate.

I hope that, if the primary vote had passed, our councillors would have voted to change the name of the park. In fact, they have already made that clear. I have no doubt that incoming SDLP councillors on the new council will seize the opportunity to do just that. The situation desperately needs respectful and open discussion that is free from cheap political point scoring —

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Dr McDonnell: — and jockeying for political advantage.

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Mr Kennedy: I welcome the opportunity to contribute to this important debate, and I thank the sponsors for tabling it. The issue has been the subject of much debate and controversy not just today but for years. Let me take the opportunity to put the record straight, because

some people are clearly trying to play political memory games. I was desperately depressed by Megan Fearon's grossly offensive and factually incorrect contribution in the Chamber this afternoon. I have consistently and vehemently opposed the naming of the play park after the convicted terrorist Raymond McCreesh since it was first proposed. I did so as a member of Newry and Mourne District Council, and I have continually and consistently voiced my opposition as a Member of this House. My reasons for that are straightforward and easily understood: it is just plain wrong. It is deeply offensive to me, it is deeply offensive to my community, and I believe that it is deeply offensive to the vast majority of people not just in Newry and Mourne but much further afield.

People use the expression "democracy" or "democratic" to elicit feelings of freedom and fairness in the same way as they use "majority rule" to elicit feelings of subjugation and domination. In many countries and jurisdictions, people rightly feel comfortable with both, and there is no doubt that that is our long-term objective as a regional Government and regional Assembly. I accept that, in the context of Northern Ireland, many people would be uncomfortable with simple majority government in the Assembly at this time, and I accept that, in the context of Northern Ireland, many people want to see consensus-building at the centre of politics and decision-making, but I am not prepared to accept that the people who argue for power-sharing and consensus-building in this place are supporting and taking decisions in local councils that are divisive, work against community cohesion, run contrary to equality assessments and are calculated deliberately to insult the victims of terrorism. I am not prepared to accept their clear agenda of subjugation and domination of minority communities in councils that they control.

Raymond McCreesh and the like will never be anything other than terrorists, no matter how many times the revisionists try to launder his reputation. Kingsmills and the other terrorist atrocities committed in my constituency over many years will never be anything other than acts of terrorism and genocide. Just as there is absolutely nothing to celebrate in those dreadful acts, there is nothing to celebrate about the people responsible for them. I appeal to those who support retaining the name "McCreesh Park" to think again, just as I have appealed to them over many years from when I opposed this naming in the council to my opposition to the naming in the Assembly today. I appeal to them to think again and to find their conscience, because Northern Ireland cannot move forward when shared public space is named after those linked to or responsible for terrorist atrocities such as Kingsmills. I read an article by a Mr Jude Collins —

Mr McElduff: Will the Member give way?

Mr Kennedy: I will give way.

Mr McElduff: I just want to explain to the House that I have had sight of the HET report on the Kingsmills incident — the murders. Several suspects are named in that document. Raymond McCreesh is not named in that document — 106 pages — as a suspect in relation to the Kingsmills murders. I want to put that on the public record.

Mr Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Kennedy: In spite of what the Member says, there is clear linkage through ballistics that link Raymond McCreesh to weaponry used in the Kingsmills massacre, and that is a fact.

Now, I read an article by a Mr Jude Collins, political commentator and blogger, on this issue, published online yesterday. On Kingsmills, Mr Collins wrote:

> *"Whether McCreesh himself was present at the killing of the workers no one knows."*

That is not true. The other killers know, the people who helped them know and the people who covered for them know. Collins went on to write:

> *"Raymond McCreesh is honoured, not for his IRA activities but for his courage and conviction that resulted in his death on hunger-strike."*

Again, that is simply not true. Raymond McCreesh was only in a position to go on hunger strike because he was a dedicated and convicted terrorist. There is nothing to celebrate in that, and there is no courage in that.

I find it depressing that in Northern Ireland in 2015 it is necessary that my party colleague, Tom Elliott, should have to bring forward a private Member's Bill to deal with this. We should have moved forward much sooner on this for the sake of progress for our community, but because of the regressive attitudes of some —

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

Mr Kennedy: — he does, and I fully support him in so doing.

5.00 pm

Mr Lunn: I have listened with interest so far, and I do not detect very much common ground, which is hardly a surprise. From the republican side, the impression given of Raymond McCreesh is that he was, as Conor Murphy said this morning, a man of integrity, a principled freedom fighter who died on hunger strike rather than die as a political prisoner. That is the republican line. To the other side, Raymond McCreesh was a convicted terrorist who was caught in possession of a gun that was used in connection with the Kingsmills massacre just down the road from where he lived. Ten innocent Protestant people were killed. That was not an act of war or something to further the republican cause; it was just straightforward cold-blooded murder. I do not know if he was directly involved in that or not, but there is a connection between the gun and the massacre that we can hardly deny. I hear Mr McElduff's comment that he is not named in the HET report. I suspect that there are plenty of people, perhaps not too far from here, who would be able to tell us if he was involved in the Kingsmills massacre or not. The republican movement could certainly tell us, but I doubt that it ever will. I know that starving yourself to death is regarded as a huge sacrifice by the republican movement. To me, it is just a complete waste of a life. I will leave it at that.

From the victims' side, if you had lost a relative in the Kingsmills massacre, how could you think of Raymond McCreesh as anything but a terrorist? You would have to assume the worst about him. Whether or not he was involved at Kingsmills, there is a direct relationship. Can you not imagine the hurt that lingers amongst the Protestant population in that area? For that reason, I will

say, before somebody challenges me, that we will support the motion today.

I want to ask the republicans a question: would this man be as revered as he is in the republican movement — he is obviously seen as a hero — if he had confessed to the murder of 10 innocent Protestants who were non-combatants? Would that be a plus point or a minus point for him? If anybody wants to answer that, I will give way.

Mr G Kelly: Will the Member give way?

Mr Lunn: Yes.

Mr G Kelly: I have a question for the Member: does he believe that, for instance, Nelson Mandela — *[Interruption.]* Yes, Nelson Mandela. Can I ask my question? Does he believe that he was a terrorist and therefore should not be revered in life and in death for all that he did? Can he explain the difference that he would make there? All this, including the Bill that is being brought forward by Tom Elliott, is based around this conviction for terrorism. Does he think that James Connolly should be treated as a terrorist in our history?

Mr Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Lunn: We could argue all day about the definition of a terrorist. I heard 'The Stephen Nolan Show' this morning. I do not usually listen to it, but I did this morning. He was challenging people to define a terrorist. Whether Nelson Mandela was a terrorist or otherwise, you have to say that, in his later life, he at least atoned for it in a way that perhaps nobody in history ever did. I will not go into the Nelson Mandela argument, if you do not mind.

I want to talk quickly about the Equality Commission's position in all this. Frankly, words fail me. The Equality Commission was first involved in this in February 2008; it is now March 2015. It became involved seven years ago. I do not need to repeat Mr Irwin's comment about the cake. The motion refers to the Equality Commission as "lethargic"; I think that you are too kind to it. This is inactivity on a grand scale, and it is high time that it got its act together and did something about this formally. It has the powers, so why not use them?

As far as the actions of Newry and Mourne council are concerned, it is fair to say that, as the majority party, I believe, in 2001, the SDLP sided with the decision to endorse the naming of the park because it was not its idea in the first place. It has taken the SDLP 14 years to do what it did last night. I congratulate them on what they did last night. Sometimes, some journeys take a bit longer than others, and, on this one, you have come to the right decision at the last. That is good.

We all know that the council has this responsibility under section 75. The equality and good relations responsibilities of councils and public bodies are very well laid out. I really hope that Newry, Mourne and Down council, where the balance of the electorate may have changed slightly, will be able to do something about this early in its life. We are just talking about doing the right thing. You can argue about the history and the rights and wrongs of it, but there is no doubt that the right thing to do is to rename the park something less contentious. It is odious thing to name a children's play park after a convicted terrorist; it is just not right. We support the motion.

Mr Humphrey: This brings absolutely no credit to Northern Ireland. There is an old adage "Fool me once, shame on you; fool me twice, shame on me". The SDLP leader, Dr McDonnell, said that his councillors in Newry and Mourne were wrong to name a children's play park after an IRA terrorist: I welcome that. However, the difficulty is that actions speak louder than words. I hope that last night's change of heart by the party will not prove to be too late.

Mr McDonnell told the 'Belfast Telegraph':

> *"Sometimes these things take a little bit of time to sort out."*

As Mr Lunn has rightly said, 14 years after the SDLP supported it initially, it is still not sorted out. That is a strange comment to make when his party voted for this in 2012. The SDLP tells us that its policy is to oppose the naming of public spaces after military or paramilitary individuals. There is only one remedy: remove this odious decision and rename the park.

Initially, the SDLP excuse for eight councillors not turning up was that the party thought that the matter was to be deferred: not so. The 'News Letter' revealed on Thursday 26 February that the SDLP could not have been caught out by the importance or lack of importance of the meeting or its status for decision-making because the SDLP requested the meeting and the minutes of a staff and policy equality committee meeting of the council on Monday 19 January record that Councillor Carr of the SDLP proposed and Councillor McArdle of the SDLP seconded a proposal that the council arrange a special meeting of the said committee with full plenary powers. It gave them one week to 10 days to discuss the consultation.

Mrs McKevitt: I thank the Member for giving way. You mentioned a period of 10 days. It was not held within 10 days; otherwise, all our SDLP members would have been available on the date.

Mr Humphrey: Given the import of the decision, the embarrassment it has caused your party and what your leader has said about the issue, I would have made sure, if I was leader of the party or the group, that my councillors were there.

Perhaps the SDLP leader should clarify what he is reported to have said in the 'News Letter' on Monday 23 February:

> *"I will be doing all I can, and applying all the pressures ... nobody's in a position to guarantee anything."*

That is an absolutely pathetic statement for a party leader to make on the issue. If the leader of the party is in a position to guarantee anything, it is an appalling decision. We have to assume, therefore, that either the SDLP cares nothing for community relations and the sensitivities of victims or that it agrees with one of its councillors, Councillor Kate Loughran, who said that she:

> *"would know the McCreesh family personally and they would actually be very good friends of mine ... They had a lot of suffering down through the years ... Basically, I just think the issue should be closed and let the family move on."*

Councillor Loughran continued:

> *"I believe there is a direct correlation between the idea of Raymond's comrade, Bobby Sands, who said, 'let our revenge be the laughter of our children', and the naming of this park."*

Councillor Loughran believed, therefore, that it was entirely appropriate to name a play park after a convicted IRA terrorist. That is surely wrong in the eyes of all right-thinking people.

The decision is odious, wrong and disgusting, and it needs to be changed. It is time for the SDLP to undo this appalling decision, as they should have done in 2012. Failure to do so endorses Councillor Loughran's position and is further evidence that the party has lost its moral compass. It has shamefully campaigned to have dissident terrorists moved from prison. The party gives no credence to the fears, concerns and hurt of victims in Northern Ireland. That is how it looks to people on this side of the Chamber and to the people we represent. Honeyed words in TV and radio interviews or in the columns of newspapers are one thing; actions to remedy the situation are another. Admit that you got it wrong, and, when you have admitted that you got it wrong, do something to put the situation right.

I genuinely hope that, in the interests of community relations in the city of Newry and across Northern Ireland, the new council will take action to prevent this happening again. When I read reports of the potential actions of SDLP and Sinn Féin councillors on the new councils — an Irish-first policy in Newry and Mourne, an Irish-first policy in Mid Ulster and a refusal to allow poppies to be sold in Mid Ulster — I am not convinced that the SDLP is not a hostage to fortune and will not do whatever the Shinners ask it to do at the end of the day.

I welcome and support the motion, and I commend my colleague Mr Irwin for tabling it.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I oppose the motion. As far as my party and I are concerned, Raymond McCreesh was not, is not and never will be a terrorist or criminal. I want to put that on the record.

I was born literally within yards of the play park. I come from the very proud, caring and tolerant Ballybot community that has been vilified by people who should know better. It is a close-knit community that accepts people into it. It is tolerant and caring. I watched in astonishment last night as the SDLP group leader, in his mealy-mouthed fashion, expressed concern for the McCreesh family after giving them dogs' abuse over the past God knows how long. It is about time that they caught themselves on. Why do you not just merge with the Ulster Unionists? You could elect Tom Elliott as your leader and support his Bill. You would not need any excuses. You certainly jumped to Mr Allister's dance —

Mr Speaker: I ask you to direct your remarks through the Chair, please.

Mr Brady: — on the SpAd Bill. Just get over it and get on with it. You have been all over the place on anything that has happened recently.

I will put into context what else happened with the play park — *[Interruption.]* I hear Mrs Kelly laughing.

Mrs D Kelly: Will the Member give way?

Mr Brady: No, the Member will not give way to somebody — *[Interruption.]* — who went on a rant against Sinn Féin yesterday —

Mr Speaker: Order. Resume your seat for a second. All remarks must be made through the Chair. If the Member does not wish to give way, Members should respect that.

This will get to the point where I have to make a very direct intervention. I am seeking to facilitate the debate. There is no purpose whatsoever in allowing our tempers to get away with us. If all remarks are made through the Chair, everyone else will be able to hear the contributions and make their own judgement.

Mr Brady: Apologies, a Cheann Comhairle, but I will not take an intervention from a lady who went on a rant against Sinn Féin yesterday and could not even express concern for someone who was seriously injured in south Armagh.

Mr Maskey: Will the Member give way?

Mr Brady: The Member will give way

Mr Maskey: I thank the Member, because I know that he has very important points to make. Does the Member agree that it is probably very difficult for the SDLP, not that I have any great sympathy, given that its membership is clearly divided on the issue? Not that long ago, when Patsy McCreesh, Raymond's brother, tragically died, I understand that Mr Bradley, when giving his condolences, referred to the McCreesh family as a highly respected family. It is difficult for the SDLP to square the circle, particularly when those who aspire to be leaders — it does not actually have a leadership — are obviously politically spineless.

Mr Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Brady: The council-maintained play facility did not have a name before. I reiterate that: as I said, I grew up within spitting distance of it, and it never had a name. It is a play facility in the Barcroft/Ballybot area of Newry. The name of Raymond McCreesh Park came from within that community in 2001 on the twentieth anniversary of his death. Evidence of support for the proposition in the form of a community survey was presented to the council. The council, in accordance with its policy at that time, conducted its own survey and found 84% support in the Barcroft/Ballybot community for the naming of the play park after Raymond McCreesh, a resident of the council district, who died on hunger strike in 1981.

5.15 pm

In 2001, the council agreed to the naming of the play park and erected its own bilingual signs. No complaint regarding the decision was received by the council between 2001 and 2008, which is a significant factor in the consideration of the issue. I am sure that Mr Kennedy objected vehemently to it, but it took seven years for the Orange Order to come to the conclusion that it objected to Raymond McCreesh Park and that it was some sort of anathema to them. It ill behoves people to make excuses now and turn round and say —

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for giving way. I remind him of an important commandment from scripture:

> *"Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour."*

Mr Brady: I thank Mr Kennedy for that lesson in scripture, but I was not accusing him of bearing false witness. I said that it took from 2001 to 2008 for an objection to be lodged with the council. As far as Sinn Féin is concerned, our position on this issue has been consistent. We and the vast majority of people from the area believe that the name of Raymond McCreesh Park should remain unchanged. I reiterate that the park was named in 2001 under the tutelage of a council dominated by unionists and the SDLP.

Mr Kennedy: It was never dominated by unionists.

Mr Brady: Council procedure was fully followed, and surveys taken by the council indicated clear support for naming the park after Raymond McCreesh.

Mr Kennedy: Will the Member give way?

Mr Brady: No, I will not. I want to finish, and I have a few things to say.

In the seven-year period from the naming of the park in 2001 until 2008, no unionist councillors, SDLP councillors or members of the public raised any concerns or complaints about the decision.

Mr Kennedy: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Is it right that a Member should deliberately mislead the House by pretending that unionists have ever dominated Newry and Mourne District Council since 1973 and reorganisation, when, at the time, it represented five out of 30 of the membership?

Mr Speaker: The Member has succeeded in getting it on the record. It is not a point of order for this debate.

Mr Brady: What I actually said was that the park was named in 2001 under the tutelage of a council dominated by unionists and the SDLP.

Mr Kennedy: Never.

Mr Brady: Well, we are all entitled to our opinion.

After it was made, the complaint was investigated by the council which, after much deliberation, found that the name should be retained. Since then, there has been a very focused and nasty campaign to demonise the area and its community.

The Equality Commission believes that the council may have failed to comply with its undertaking, at paragraph 1.3 of its equality scheme, to discharge its statutory duties as set out in paragraphs 1.1 and 1.2. We have asked for the evidence that brought the Equality Commission to that view, and we are still waiting for it. It has not come back to us. Whatever the Equality Commission has or has not done, it has not answered the relevant and pertinent questions.

Mr Wilson: I started the debate listening to the comments of the Sinn Féin Member and getting angrier and angrier, but, as we got towards the end of her speech, my anger was replaced by sadness. Sinn Féin has deliberately chosen the youngest Member of the Assembly to lead on an issue in a way that must bring great worry to the whole of this society. As I listened to her, I thought of the three wee girls who paddled their way through Heathrow to go and join IS in Syria because their minds had been so poisoned that they could not see beyond the propaganda of IS to the beheadings, the bloody streets, the crucifixions, the hurt and the destruction that they were causing.

As I listened to the first Member from Sinn Féin to speak, that is exactly what I thought. I can understand Mickey Brady, steeped in bigotry, having come through all that we have come through in Northern Ireland, but how could someone born after the Troubles had started to peter out have a mind so poisoned that she could come off with the stuff that she has come off with today?

People will say, "Are you any different?" I lived through it as well, and I carry the baggage. I accept that, but for someone so young, who has not come through it all, to be so steeped in the kind of stuff that we have heard must bring great sadness to people who listen to this debate.

Mr Maskey: Will the Member give way?

Mr Wilson: No, I will not give way.

Outside Northern Ireland, people look upon this with bemusement and horror. I remember the first time that I raised it in the House of Commons and MPs came up to me after and said, "What? A play park named after a terrorist who committed suicide, poisoning the minds of the next generation in Northern Ireland". That is how it is seen outside here. Beyond the closed minds of Sinn Féin, people regard it as some kind of horror. How could grown people want to poison and pollute the minds of young people by naming a play park, which is meant to be a place of fun rather than a place of propaganda, in a council area?

I suppose that we should not be surprised at Sinn Féin, but we do have to be surprised at the SDLP. I admit that, Lot-like, the SDLP has been dragged out of the political cesspit that is now Newry and Mourne Council. Of course, everything that Sinn Féin touch, they pollute, and, unfortunately, everybody who is touched by them gets polluted in one way or another as well. I am glad to see that the SDLP, rather belatedly, have allowed themselves to be dragged out of it, although I have to note that, despite what the leader of the SDLP said, this is what one of the SDLP members used to justify their position: they believed that the naming of the park was a healing process — a healing process — and a compromise. How on earth do they ever see that as a healing process?

We are not going to resolve this issue today in this forum, but one thing that worries me is that, over the next number of months, we are meant to address the issues of the past. If this is Sinn Féin's way of addressing the past, I do not think that we have any chance of putting the past behind us, because they want to put the poison and pollution of the past into the minds of the future generation so that it will be carried out. That is the message that we get from the decision of Newry and Mourne Council last night.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I wish to begin by extending solidarity to the family of Raymond McCreesh. I am very conscious that, in debates like this, some people tend to ignore or disregard his family, their feelings and their loss. I certainly have no desire in this debate, or hopefully in any debate, to add to the grief of any family that bears a loss.

Mr Sheehan: Will the Member give way?

Mr McCartney: I will, yes.

Mr Sheehan: The Member, like me, knew Raymond McCreesh; we knew him to be a man of honour, integrity and immense courage. Do you, like me, believe that many of the comments made in the Chamber today have been gratuitously offensive? Would you also agree with me that no one in this Chamber today will succeed in criminalising Raymond McCreesh? Margaret Thatcher was not able to do it in 1981, and no one here will be able to do it either.

Mr Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr McCartney: Thank you very much, a Cheann Comhairle. I totally and absolutely agree, and I think that any person who knew Raymond McCreesh would know that some of the comments are very offensive.

I have no inclination to indulge myself in pointing out the very obvious contradictions that surround this type of subject. That said, there are some things that need to be said to give this debate some context. Raymond McCreesh died on 21 May 1981 after 61 days on hunger strike. The hunger strike was the culmination of a five-year campaign to defeat the British Government's policy of criminalisation. Central to that campaign was the National H-Block/Armagh movement, which garnered the support of thousands and thousands of people throughout Ireland and beyond. Not all of them were republicans and nationalists; indeed, many of them opposed the use of arms. However, all of them were united in recognising that those imprisoned at that time in Long Kesh, Armagh and Crumlin Road Gaol were political prisoners. They recognised that the conflict that was raging on our streets required a political solution to bring it to an end. The hunger strike dismantled the policy of criminalisation. The recognition in the release of political prisoners in 1998 under the terms of the Good Friday Agreement and all subsequent agreements is the obvious validation that criminalisation failed.

The courage and resolve of Raymond McCreesh and his nine comrades is held in the highest regard in the republican and nationalist community. Indeed, I have heard many others acknowledge their courage and integrity without endorsing their political philosophy. So people cannot and should not be surprised that this manifests itself in places, organisations and events being named and held in their memory. No one should expect us, their friends and comrades, to apologise for doing that. Perhaps, today, some people could ask of themselves, quietly and without the need for a spoken reply, why this is so. Why is it that 94% of the people surveyed all approved that the park should be in Raymond's name? Why was it that 30,493 people voted to make Bobby Sands their MP? Why was it that hundreds of thousands attended their funerals? To the SDLP, I ask: why was it that so many of your councillors did not turn up for the council meeting and the one who did abstained from the vote?

I accept that no one will change their opinion, but it should make you realise that your view of the world is not one shared by all. I certainly accept that my view of the world is not one shared by everyone. In accepting this, I have to play my part in ensuring that we live in a place where different and, indeed, competing views have the space to coexist. That is a challenge we all face, and it is one that we cannot pretend does not exist. Denial or manufactured moral superiority will not make it disappear. Private Member's Bills to ascertain who bangs the drum the loudest will not make it disappear.

The songwriter Mick Hanly could not have known that this debate was about to take place today, but he certainly knew that it is a debate that takes place over and over again in different places at different times. He penned the words:

"The terrorist or the dreamer the savage or the brave?

It depends whose vote you're trying to catch

Whose face you're trying to save".

From where I got my life experience, I reflect on Bloody Sunday and on who were the savage and who were the brave? I reflect on the British state and its allies, who glorified, protected and decorated those who did it. From that day until this day, I will take no lectures on whom I consider the brave. Raymond McCreesh was unbowed and unbroken, and we will be unbowed and unbroken in upholding his memory.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh míle maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I will say at the outset that the history of the DUP contains many examples of that party, to put it mildly, brushing shoulders with loyalist paramilitaries. I could easily document here today a number of those examples, but I do not want the debate to descend totally into a tit-for-tat argument. The DUP is in no position to lecture anyone in that respect. What they should do is remove the plank from their own eye before they point fingers in this direction.

5.30 pm

Mrs D Kelly: I am grateful to the Member for giving way. You know that the party never wants to engage in whataboutery — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mrs D Kelly: — but I want to draw your attention to the fact that, on Craigavon Borough Council, the Ulster Unionist Party and the DUP, some of whom are Members of the House, voted to allow the Fulton family to put a summer seat and a plaque in the garden at Seagoe Cemetery in Portadown, where some of the victims of 'Swinger' Fulton lie.

Mr Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr D Bradley: I thank the Member for that intervention.

I must say that a wry smile crossed my lips when I heard Mr Brady vilify the SDLP. When Mr Brady was a welfare rights officer in Newry, he had no problem whatsoever in referring people who he could not help to Seamus Mallon's office, but perhaps he was more closely aligned to the Worker's Party at that time. Obviously, a conversion has taken place along the way. *[Interruption.]* Yes, Mr Speaker, there is no doubt that the naming of a public space, especially a children's park, has caused considerable hurt to victims and survivors from the unionist and nationalist communities. We need, on all sides, to be mindful of the effects that such actions have on the whole community.

Mr Brady: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Mr Bradley made personal references that I absolutely refute. In 1986, when the Welfare Rights Centre in Newry was looking for funding, the DUP, Sinn Féin and independents all gave their support. I have a recorded vote to show that the SDLP refused. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: First of all, it is not a point of order, but you have succeeded in putting those comments on the record. I am sure that they have been noted by Hansard.

Mr D Bradley: Mr Brady's intervention, of course, in no way refuted anything that I said.

As I said, any public facility should be potentially open to all citizens from across the council area. It is important that we do not set precedents in any location that will make us hostages to fortune in the future. What people do as a majority in one place at a particular time may have repercussions for a minority in another place in the future. Yes, Mr Speaker, that is a rather pragmatic way of looking at things. Whilst it may be a consideration, it is not the only one. As we attempt to move forward in creating a shared future in this society, we must be careful not to curtail public spaces in a way that prevents that very sharing. In creating social cohesion, it makes much more sense to choose names for public places with which the whole community can agree and that underline the concept of common ownership and access to those places.

I recognise that this particular issue is highly emotive for all concerned. I have already mentioned victims and survivors, and my thoughts are with them as I speak here today. We cannot trample on their hurt and loss or ignore their feelings. Mr Maskey quoted me as saying that I regard the McCreesh family highly. I have known the McCreesh family for longer, probably, than anyone in the House. I knew Raymond McCreesh personally. I did not agree with his politics, and I did not agree with his methodology. I have not come here today to in any way increase the hurt or pain of any family, particularly the McCreesh family. However, I have to set my personal acquaintance aside today and look to the common good. I believe that the SDLP decision to back the renaming of the park is not about any individual. It is influenced by a desire to heal our divided society by moving on from the tribal politics and conflicts of the past. Peace and reconciliation is not just the absence of violence. It is a fundamental shift in mindset and approaches to politics.

There are many in the House who need to make that shift.

The SDLP is clear in its policy: no public space should be named after anyone who was involved in state or paramilitary violence. We will continue to pursue that policy because we believe that it is the right policy. Whatever names people have given to public places in the past should not and must not lock us into continuing in that vein in the present.

I know that Mr Elliott will introduce a private Member's Bill. We will examine that carefully, and, if it is comprehensive and covers all those who were involved in violence in the past, including state agents, we will consider supporting it.

Mr Elliott: The debate has been somewhat exercised at times. I want to read a passage first. It states:

> *"Newry and Mourne District Council failed to comply with its own Equality Scheme when deciding to retain the name 'The Raymond McCreesh Park' for a Council-owned children's play park in Newry ... the Council's consideration of the issue was 'more focussed on process and on maintaining the name of the play park than on paying due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity and regard to the desirability of promoting good relations. There is little evidence that the duty was exercised in substance, with rigour and with an open mind in the decision making process.'"*

Those words are not mine but the words of the Equality Commission.

I listened to Mr Lunn and others criticise the Equality Commission, and rightly so. I agree with them. However, more recently, the Equality Commission has taken a more aggressive approach to this, and I hope that it will follow it through. It has a responsibility to take action on it. It realises that there have been shortcomings and that there has been almost purposeful intent against a community, a minority community in the area, and it is clear that it should take action.

I cannot understand why there is such a determination to cause more hurt and suffering to the victims of this society and their families. Was it not bad enough that families had to suffer the callous and brutal murder of a loved one, unexpectedly never seeing that family member again alive, sometimes with many young children in the household? They are now having their noses rubbed in it and are having that trauma re-established by the renaming or the naming of a play park or, indeed, any other facility after that terrorist. I just cannot understand the mentality of people who want to do that and who want to carry that through. Surely those individuals have suffered enough.

It has already been said that naming a children's play park after a terrorist goes that extra mile. It makes it even more difficult when young people are the subject of this behaviour and that past behaviour.

I listened to the Sinn Féin Members' aggressive attitude. They were aggressive to most of us, including those on this side of the House and the SDLP. I saw them turning their attention on many of us to try to divert attention away from the real subject. They tried to divert attention away from their misdemeanours in this society over the last generation. They tried to divert attention away from their misdemeanours, even in the naming of the Raymond McCreesh play park. Why can they not just hold their hands up and say, "Look, folks, we were wrong"?

I have a warning for Members and for general society. These are the people who we have heard talking about building consensus, who said that there should be no more majority rule and that we want to live in a reconciled society. I have this warning for you people out there: this is what it would be like under Sinn Féin rule. This is what you would get —

Mr Humphrey: I thank the Member for giving way. He is making a very salient point, so I welcome his giving way. I just want to say that Mr McElduff, one of Sinn Féin's Members for West Tyrone, claimed that Mr McCreesh is actually more deserving of international recognition than many of those who have received the Nobel peace prize. Does the Member agree that that is an absolutely heinous thing to say?

Mr Elliott: I suppose that it is one of those ridiculous suggestions that we hear from some Sinn Féin members on a regular basis. I just wish that they would take into account victims' feelings in all this, which they have not. I hear the nice, pleasant words coming from them that they want to respect victims. Show it. Demonstrate it by your actions, not by your words. I come back to my warning:

that is what it would be like for general society — not just people in the unionist community, but people in the broad nationalist community — to live under Sinn Féin control. You would not have a say. You would do as it does and do as it says. That is exactly what it wants.

On the point of Raymond McCreesh, I have to say that he had a choice. He had a choice whether to go on hunger strike and whether to live or die. He chose to die. Those people who were brutally murdered at Kingsmills and other areas did not have that choice. They were cut down in the prime of their life without that choice by those callous and brutal murderers.

Mr Allister: Who was Raymond McCreesh? He was a young man who chose to be a terrorist and take up the gun. He was born and lived at a time when there was a free franchise; when, if his political aspiration was an all-Ireland republic, under the 1973 Act, there was the availability of a referendum to deliver that. Rather, he chose to be a terrorist. In due course, he was duly convicted of conspiracy to murder and possession of weapons. We know that one of those weapons relates to one of the most heinous crimes ever committed in this Province. Raymond McCreesh knew what he was doing, wanted to do it and, as Mr Elliott said, unlike so many victims of the IRA, had a choice. He chose the path of terror and violence.

Then, he went into prison and went on hunger strike. We hear much lauding of him today by Sinn Féin, but is it the truth that the Sinn Féin leadership wanted him to die? Is the truth that they needed and wanted the martyrdom of the hunger strikers? They lament today about their love for Raymond McCreesh. Did they not love him enough to want him to live? Did they want him to die? I suspect that they did, such is their callousness. Indeed, today's debate has been a timely reminder of the real Sinn Féin in this House.

Of course, if Raymond McCreesh had been a failed hunger striker, like another speaker in this debate, maybe, today, he would have been a Member of this House. Maybe, in fact, he would have been a partner of the DUP in government in this House. He chose to die. Those who justify, honour and clamour to bestow sainthood upon those of that terrorist ilk have stooped to the very depths of saying that, for this vile terrorist — because that is what he was — we must name a children's play park after him, to honour him and to deliver to his victims the most unmistakable message that, as for their lives, they were nothing.

5.45 pm

Mr McNarry: I thank the Member for giving way. Does he agree that, in our time here, we have come through some crises, none more so than the recent one at Christmas? Are we now hearing of a new crisis developing over the naming of a children's park and, having heard what has been said by the Sinn Féin Members, one that is putting the future of the Assembly in jeopardy?

Mr Allister: What I am hearing today is a reminder to me of why I think that Sinn Féin is so unfit for government. It is a very timely reminder indeed. That is what I am hearing. I share the view that someone else expressed: if this is the Sinn Féin attachment to the past, for all their fine, honeyed words about dealing with the past, it will not be dealt with in a manner that is acceptable to any self-respecting individual. That is abundantly clear today. I think that the debate also makes clear —

Mr Maskey: Will the Member give way?

Mr Allister: Sorry, I was told from the Chair that I am not getting any extra time.

This debate also makes clear and underscores the necessity — a necessity that should not be required in a normal society that is peopled by normal politicians — of Tom Elliott's Bill to make it clear beyond doubt that you cannot name shared spaces after those who tore this community apart.

Mr Durkan (The Minister of the Environment): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. At the outset, I want to make it clear that I will respond only to those elements of the motion that relate to the Minister of the Environment. When the motion was put down, I advised the Business Office that, while I could deal with those aspects of the motion, I could not deal with the other points concerning the role and performance of the Equality Commission, which, in my view, fall to OFMDFM. In fairness, having sat through the debate and listened to it, I do not think that many, if any, of the points raised fall within the remit of the Minister of the Environment.

The debate has been emotive and extremely divisive, and it shows exactly why we need to move on from this type of debate. In responding to the debate, I am not going to spend time going through the arguments and, indeed, the insults that have been aired this afternoon. It is my personal view that the McCreesh park decision makes a mockery of councils' responsibilities to reach out to and serve all the community. It certainly does not promote good relations.

While I recognise the right of local people to make local decisions, with that right comes the responsibility to respect the needs and rights of others. Decisions based on an attitude of, "It's our area, and we have the right to do in it or with it as we wish" do nothing to promote relationships of respect and tolerance. Psychological walls around areas are every bit as bad as physical walls, which, unfortunately, we all still see. We need to change that mindset and bring these walls down.

District councils are independent bodies that are elected to represent their constituents and, in law, are bodies corporate that have the functions that are conferred on them by statutory provision. The decisions on the discharge of those functions, including the naming of any facilities that are owned by the council, are a matter for that council, subject to any relevant statutory provisions.

As public authorities, district councils are subject to the section 75 duties in the Northern Ireland Act 1998 to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity and, without prejudice to this obligation, to have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations in carrying out their functions. Councillors, when acting as a district council, also have a responsibility to represent the interests of all the residents in that local government district.

Mr Humphrey: I thank the Minister for giving way. I welcome the Minister's point about community relations. We very much wanted to hear that, and I am pleased that we heard it.

The new super-councils are about to take authority next month. Given what the Minister just said, does the decision of councils like Newry and Mourne and Mid Ulster to have the Irish language first not damage the good community relations in those areas? The unionist community there feels that this is yet further damage to the areas' community relations. That is the very point that the Minister just made, yet his party is playing a role in it.

Mr Durkan: Mr Humphrey has a very long memory when it suits and a very short memory at other times. I am not sure whether he recalls a debate in the Chamber last Tuesday, when I put forward regulations that would have enshrined in the standing orders of the new councils protections for the minorities living there. Perhaps Mr Humphrey, having spent the five minutes that he was allocated in this debate on a diatribe solely against my party, might ask for another intervention to explain to the House why he signed a petition of concern against regulations that would have protected him and his constituents from the very hurt that he purports that these policy decisions have caused.

Mr Speaker: Carry on.

Mr Durkan: OK. Provisions in the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 for certain council decisions to be taken by a qualified majority and for 15% of the members of a council to request the reconsideration of a decision are designed to provide protections for the interests of minority communities in the decision-making of the new councils. Whilst these provisions do not apply to the decision taken by Newry and Mourne District Council on the naming of the play park, they were designed to provide a mechanism to address similar issues if they arise — hopefully they will not, but more than likely they will — in the new councils.

Mr Devenney: I thank the Member for giving way. I appreciate what he said. Does he agree that an attempt to use this mechanism in Londonderry to change the name of the council failed because 25% of people on that council disagreed with the name that was agreed? That is probably why there was a petition of concern. It does not protect the minority, as you say that it does, and you know that from your constituency.

Mr Durkan: The mechanism was introduced to deal with decisions taken by a council: a change of existing policy or an existing name, as in the Derry City and Strabane District Council example cited by Mr Devenney today and by Mr Campbell ad nauseam. That name was given by the commissioner, so the decision of the new council to continue with that name was not determined to be a change of name.

The provisions that I brought before the House last week in the draft Local Government (Standing Orders) Regulations were designed to copper-fasten provisions in the 2014 Act for the protection of the interests of minority communities in council decision-making. The absence of the approval of the draft regulations as a result of the tabling of a petition of concern means that the protections that the House approved when it passed the 2014 Act may not now be delivered in regulations in time for the new councils taking over on 1 April. It is unfortunate and, indeed, very disappointing that these regulations were not approved by the Assembly. However, over the next few weeks, I intend to work with other parties to find a way to have the regulations made as a matter of urgency, and I hope that all parties will support me in that.

Of course, regulations alone cannot substitute for strong local leadership and the demonstrable commitment to equality, respect and good relations that the motion calls for. I sincerely hope that the new Newry and Mourne council and all of us will rise to the challenge: to find a way to move on from this, to break down the barriers and to build a united community, one where there will be no more "our area" and "your area", but everyone's area.

Mr McCausland: We had an initial proposal this afternoon from Willie Irwin, who reminded us that this matter had been raised with the Equality Commission back in December 2012. He reflected on the fact that, whilst the Equality Commission had pursued a bakery with the speed of light, it had been somewhat ineffective in regard to its dealings with Newry and Mourne District Council. He also pointed out that there was a lack of respect shown by those who supported the name McCreesh park, and that the weapon that was identified with McCreesh was one that had also been used in that appalling murder of 10 Protestant workmen at Kingsmills. We were also reminded that this name was put up in 2001 under a Newry and Mourne District Council that was dominated by the SDLP. That was referred to by a number of other Members.

Megan Fearon from Sinn Féin eulogised Raymond McCreesh and, as was pointed out by another Member, it was quite appalling to find the youngest Member of this Assembly, someone from a younger generation, pouring out the same poison that has been passed down from generation to generation by murderous militant republicanism. Someone asked who had written her speech. I do not know who wrote it, but I will say this much: she certainly managed to regurgitate quite a bit of what Conor Murphy said on 'The Stephen Nolan Show' this morning. It was almost word-for-word perfect. She referred to Sir James Craig and said that he was:

"the man who brought the gun into Irish politics".

The first time I heard that was from a civil servant from Dublin, but I heard it today from Megan Fearon. It was not true when the Dublin civil servant said it, and it is no more true when Megan Fearon says it. It is as though, somehow or other, the Irish Republican Brotherhood and its murderous campaigns in the 19th century, long before Sir James Craig was even born, can be simply written out of history. Not only did it bring the gun into Irish politics, it certainly also brought the bomb into Irish politics big style, when it organised its dynamite campaign on the British mainland and murdered quite a number of people in the course of it. So it was disappointing — very disappointing — and alarming to hear those words from Megan Fearon and this attempt to rewrite history. Interestingly enough, the points that she makes are obviously part of a narrative that has been worked out by Sinn Féin, as they try to rewrite history and excuse and explain away what they have done.

Alasdair McDonnell said that "pain has no politics". As we have been reminded, this name was put up under an SDLP-dominated council. He said:

"We regret the pain that this issue has caused".

I welcome the fact that there seems to have been a change of heart by the SDLP, but I would have preferred

him to say, "We regret the pain that we — the SDLP — have caused".

I was also interested in Megan Fearon's references to the names of people. She talked about John Martin and various places in Newry that are named after earlier republicans of the 19th century: John Martin; John Mitchel; and others. This year, the republican movement will be celebrating the bicentenary of John Mitchel, who was not only an Irish republican but an advocate of slavery. Although, since Sinn Féin can manage to celebrate, eulogise and glorify a Nazi collaborator in Dublin, dealing with somebody who was an advocate of slavery should not be too much of a problem for them.

Danny Kennedy spoke as a former councillor and said that he had long opposed —

Mr Humphrey: They all look puzzled.

Mr McCausland: The story of Nazi collaboration and the IRA's collaboration with Adolf Hitler is well known.

Danny Kennedy reminded us how, as a councillor, he had long opposed this in Newry and Mourne and said, quite rightly, that it is just plain wrong and deeply offensive, and it is deeply offensive to decent people. IRA actions were murder and terrorism. There is nothing there to celebrate, and all true democrats will endorse those words.

Trevor Lunn referred to Kingsmills. In 1976, 10 innocent Protestant people were murdered there by the IRA, and there was linkage to Raymond McCreesh and the weapon that he was carrying. There was also criticism of the Equality Commission, which he described as being worse than lethargic, its inactivity on a grand scale. It took the SDLP 14 years to do the right thing, but, like Trevor Lunn, I welcome the fact that it is now in a better place.

6.00 pm

My colleague William Humphrey referred to a number of issues. He highlighted the weakness of the SDLP and the comments of one of its councillors Kate Loughran who previously backed the name "McCreesh". It was an odious decision, he said, and he said that the party had lost its moral compass. Actions speak louder than words, and, hopefully now, the moral compass is starting maybe to come back.

Mickey Brady told us that Raymond McCreesh is not, was not and never will be a terrorist. However, I think that most people will take the view that, if someone acts like a terrorist and if someone murders like a terrorist, he probably is a terrorist.

Sammy Wilson referred to the youngest Member of the Assembly, and asked, "Is this what our society has come to?". He drew the parallel with the actions of the three teenage girls from England who have gone to join Islamic State. Outside Northern Ireland, he said, people will look on in horror, and he described Newry and Mourne as a political cesspit. The SDLP is belatedly allowing itself to be dragged on, and he referred to the fact that one SDLP councillor said that it was a "healing process" to name the park after a terrorist.

Raymond McCartney expressed solidarity with Raymond McCreesh's family; he had known them, and he said that republicans were unbowed and unbroken. I wonder: did Raymond McCreesh and other hunger strikers really die so that Sinn Féin Members could administer British rule in a devolved Assembly under a sovereign Parliament at Westminster where they have to send every Bill for the Royal Assent of Her Majesty the Queen? We are still in the United Kingdom, so I wonder whether that is really what those folk died for.

Dominic Bradley, in a wide-ranging speech, gave us a little bit about Mickey Brady's history and then spoke about a shared future. He said that it is time to move on and that no public space should be named after someone who has been guilty of unlawful violence. It is good that he is there; there is just therefore the difficulty that it took the SDLP 14 years to get there.

Mr D Bradley: Will the Member give way?

Mr McCausland: No, I will not. I am running out of time.

Tom Elliott referred to the Equality Commission and said that Newry and Mourne District Council had failed to comply with its own equality scheme. That was the decision of the Equality Commission, yet Newry and Mourne councillors threw the Equality Commission recommendation aside. When I thought about it, it occurred to me that, when it comes to Ashers bakery, the Equality Commission behaves like a salivating Rottweiler, and, when it comes to McCreesh park in Newry and Mourne, it is tentative at best and behaves more like a little lapdog. Tom Elliott also reminded us that Raymond McCreesh had a choice; his victims had none.

Jim Allister said that Raymond McCreesh chose to be a terrorist. He was guilty of conspiracy to murder and possession of weapons, and there is the link to the Kingsmills massacre. He knew what he was doing and wanted to do it. Sinn Féin needed and wanted martyrs, and, therefore, the leadership of Sinn Féin provided the hunger strike.

Mark Durkan, as Minister of the Environment, said that we need to move on. How do we do it? We can move on, first, by renaming McCreesh park. We can also move on by not maintaining a liturgical calendar of murderous republicanism. Last Sunday, Gerry Adams was in south Armagh, the same area, glorifying Brendan Burns and Brendan Moley, two IRA terrorists who managed to blow themselves up when they were handling a bomb and putting it into a car. It turned out that one of them, Brendan Burns, had also had a connection, it seems, with the Narrow Water massacre, where 18 soldiers were murdered by the IRA, the worst single atrocity directed against the British Army in the Troubles. That is the sort of person who was eulogised and glorified by Gerry Adams on Sunday.

Castlederg is another example. We seem to have week after week after week after week of the Sinn Féin leadership keeping faith with the past, bound to the past and bound into that republican philosophy that, somehow or other, in certain circumstances, it is all right to kill. They seem to be unable to break free from the past and move forward, and the danger with all of this is that those who look and those who listen are from a younger generation. We have already heard from a younger generation today, and some in that younger generation will say. "If it was all right for them to do it, why can we not do it?". In my constituency, we have the case of a plaque for Thomas Begley being put up in Ardoyne.

I was at a debate not so long ago with Declan Kearney. He talked about national reconciliation. Actions speak louder than words. That is not the way to get national reconciliation.

Question put.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 65; Noes 26.

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Attwood, Mr Beggs, Mr D Bradley, Ms P Bradley, Mr Buchanan, Mrs Cameron, Mr Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dallat, Mr Devenney, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Durkan, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mrs D Kelly, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCallister, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Dr McDonnell, Mr McGlone, Miss M McIlveen, Mrs McKevitt, Mr McKinney, Mr McNarry, Mr McQuillan, Mr A Maginness, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr Ramsey, Mr G Robinson, Mr Rogers, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr McQuillan and Mr G Robinson.

NOES

Mr Boylan, Mr Brady, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Hazzard, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McKay, Ms Maeve McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr Ó Muilleoir, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr McCartney and Ms Ruane.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved:

> *That this Assembly expresses its concern at the decision by Newry and Mourne District Council to approve again the naming of the Patrick Street play park in Newry after convicted IRA terrorist Raymond McCreesh; notes that the vote was taken prior to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland making a final formal ruling on the matter; further notes the seemingly lethargic approach of the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland in pursuing this case; and calls on the Minister of the Environment to respond to the vote in light of the requirement for councillors to act in a way that promotes good relations by providing a positive example for the wider community to follow and, crucially, acting in the interest of the whole community.*

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

Motion made:

> *That the Assembly do now adjourn. — [Mr Principal Deputy Speaker.]*

Adjournment

East Antrim Coastal Corridor: Industry Development and Investment

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The proposer of the topic will have 15 minutes, and all other speakers will have approximately four minutes.

Mr McMullan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Before I start, I thank the Minister for attending the debate this evening.

In April this year, Members will see the new councils come in and a new era of local government begin. The new councils of Mid and East Antrim and Causeway Coast and Glens will have responsibility for the coastal corridor and economic development along and within that route. To put both councils in perspective, together they have 21% of the Northern Ireland land mass and 15% of the total population. In 2013, they showed an average upward trend in population of 7%. In the same period, the Northern Ireland average was 8%. In both councils, the average working population is at 63%. That is a very small snapshot of the main parts of the two councils.

The purpose of my Adjournment debate is to look at how development and investment in the coastal corridor can be maintained and improved. The Port of Larne is the second largest port and a vital outlet for industry and inward investment, but we are not using its potential. For example, the tourist industry is one of our biggest assets. We do very little other than put up signs, in most cases in the wrong place. The Port of Larne does not have a tourist office. When you leave the ferry, you find that it is a straight run to Belfast. There is no mention of the coastal route. Those are just some of the minor points for the new council and P&O. Last week, I met the new manager of P&O in Larne, and they agreed that there was a lot to do to promote the coastal corridor, as we both called it.

The new Tourism Northern Ireland must come up with a plan that will promote the coast to the visitor. If that can be delivered successfully, it will increase the visitor spend and help the tourist industry to be confident enough to expand and create much-needed jobs. There will be help from the Executive, as the Causeway Coast and Glens is one of the nine key destinations in the tourism Minister's programme for government.

For the business sector to thrive, we must look at what we have and be honest enough to answer the question about whether we are doing enough. The A8 is nearing completion, and with that comes a great opportunity to have a business corridor from Larne. You will be able to connect with Belfast in less than 30 minutes and with Ballymena and Antrim in less than 20 minutes. You also have the rail link from Larne to Belfast, with links to the rest of the island of Ireland. You can now leave Larne and stay on the motorway to Cork.

At Executive level, the Northern Ireland economic strategy is focused on five rebalancing themes. Under the heading of "promoting enterprise", it clearly states that DETI and Invest NI will:

> *"Develop, in partnership with Councils, enterprise led initiatives targeted toward increasing the ... business base, in terms of marketing, management, skills, networking, product development".*

The new councils will have transferred to them from central government powers such as urban regeneration and community development, powers to provide businesses with support and start-up advice, planning powers and neighbourhood renewal. Those new powers will be important for the existing small and medium-sized businesses already operating. In rural areas, they are the backbone of employment and community regeneration. It is also vital that the new councils secure the maximum funding from the rural development programme (RDP). That funding can be used to start up rural businesses and for the sustainability and growth of existing rural businesses. The fund will also be important for our farming industry and their businesses. At present, the sector is under severe pressure. That is why the RDP will be vital for farm diversification and farm incomes. In the last programme, we saw the benefit of diversification into light engineering, renewable energy and tourism. Councils must make the RDP one of their prime objectives.

Another element that must be prime in the new councils is the European funding structure. Up to now, the only councils with dedicated European officers were Derry and Belfast. From an initial talk to the chief executives of the Mid and East Antrim and the Causeway Coast and Glens councils, I think that that will be something that they will put in place, but they must have dedicated European officers to look at pulling down funding.

Another element for improvement is more high-speed broadband. The Minister answered some of that for me. For rural businesses to survive or expand, they must have modern broadband. Otherwise, they will be at a severe disadvantage when competing for contracts. Today's farmer relies on the single farm payment for income. More and more, Europe insists on online applications for nearly all farming businesses.

Development and investment in the rural areas of East Antrim and its coastal corridor is vital if we are to sustain our rural way of life. At present, those communities are disadvantaged by virtue of their remote location from essential facilities and services such as natural gas. The providers have stated that providing gas to rural east Antrim would not be profitable. That disadvantage can be addressed through the innovative use of existing services, such as community halls and schools for use in outreach and mobile services and for the benefit of new developments. The coastal corridor and rural areas of east Antrim must be connected to all aspects of the urban economic base. We cannot have urban and rural communities working independently.

I grew up in rural east Antrim and went to school there. At 15, I had to leave home to serve my apprenticeship. When we look at what we have today, we see that we really have not moved forward that much. Public transport has not improved, and more and more we see the centralisation of services that leaves rural dwellers more and more isolated. Community plans, which councils have to put in place, must have these issues embedded in them. In the entire rural area between Larne and Ballycastle, for example, we do not have one business park. How are we expected to encourage inward investment when we do not have the benefits of a park for new small and medium-sized enterprises to start up in? Any young entrepreneurs will have to leave the rural setting to avail themselves of any business space in an urban environment. If they leave, as we all know, a good percentage of them do not come back. We will lose that entrepreneurship and their craft and skills.

Recently, the Minister for Employment and Learning cut the funding for the learner access and engagement programme, which has been successfully tended by the Larne Enterprise Development Company (Ledcom) since 2013 for three years with an option of a further two years. The programme was a lifeline for those who are aged 16 and over and are hard to reach, not in work, hold no more than one qualification at level 2 or above, may have barriers to learning and will declare an intention to become economically active at a future date. These young people, without the programme that has now been taken away, have no other choice or venue to be economically active. That whole area of the glens now depends on these programmes. It is all right stating that they can go to a programme in Ballymena or Coleraine, but the transport to take them to those places is not there. They are in a catch-22 situation and fall between two stools. I ask the Minister to look at this. She has been looking at doing programmes, but this really has to be looked at. Perhaps she can get talking to the new councils so that they can put programmes in.

When the programme was running, it was a success in Larne, Carrick, Moyle and Newtownabbey, with a total enrolment over two years of 2,620. DEL's actions have left little or no provision for supported community further education. This is further evidence of rural isolation. Where will all those young people go? We need those young people to come back in the future, and we need the regeneration of rural areas. We have an opportunity now with the new councils, both of which are drawing up community plans. The Ministers now have the opportunity to sit down with the councils and draw up plans for rural areas. I ask the Minister to look at that.

Mr Ross: Over the last number of months, I have read pieces by Mr McMullan in the local press in which he has made similar claims about a lack of investment. One would have imagined that he was quite passionate about the issue, but I am not sure that that quite came across in the presentation of his speech. I have also read his comments in the local press, in common with other Sinn Féin representatives across the country, about how many young people are emigrating from Northern Ireland to find jobs. However, I must say that Mr McMullan's diatribe of negativity does nothing to help the area that he purports to wish to help. I have yet to meet an investor or potential tourist who reacts well to that sort of negativity. He should highlight the opportunities in East Antrim rather than continually —

Mr McMullan: Will the Member give way?

Mr Ross: I will give way very briefly.

Mr McMullan: Can the Member tell me where the tourist office is in Larne?

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member has another minute.

Mr Ross: I appreciate that, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker.

When tourists come to Northern Ireland, they will look at the tourist website, which will point them right the way across every little place in Northern Ireland, including in east Antrim and on the coastal route, which I will talk about later in my contribution. The narrative that Invest Northern Ireland is not attracting enough businesses to invest in this area may, I am afraid, be a nice sound bite for the local press, but it fails to recognise how investment happens and how investors take decisions. Invest Northern Ireland does not decide where an investor goes; it facilitates visits and encourages people to come to Northern Ireland. Investors ultimately decide where they set up the business.

6.30 pm

Geographical position is important — Mr McMullan talked about that — but Northern Ireland is not such a big place that people cannot avail themselves of job opportunities close by. There is no doubt that there is concern among the working population about opportunities for employment. It is not unique to East Antrim or to Northern Ireland. I know that there is a lot of concern about the job losses in JTI, which will impact not just on North Antrim but on East Antrim. There is continued concern about some of the productivity lines in Caterpillar as well, although I know that the Minister has been proactive in meeting with the owners in Chicago to try to ensure that we get additional lines to East Antrim.

There are also examples close to the rural areas in East Antrim of businesses exporting all around the world. Ryobi and Schrader, to name but two, provide job opportunities for people throughout the area. Even on the coastal corridor that Mr McMullan talked about, we have the example of Glenarm Organic Salmon. I was chatting to the guys in that business not so long ago at an InterTradeIreland event here in Parliament Buildings, and they told me how they have travelled the world. They have been to the west coast of the States, China and the Middle East on trade missions with Invest Northern Ireland, exporting their products around the world. That is exactly the sort of thing that we should highlight. It is the sort of story that we should champion: the successes in East Antrim and, indeed, in the rural areas of East Antrim. Of course, we have the Ballygally Hotel, which recently put a lot of money into expanding its operation and attracting more tourists to the area.

The area has never had greater exposure. In May last year, the Giro d'Italia — I was very close to that and very enthusiastic about it — went through Moyle, Larne, Carrick and Newtownabbey. It was very fortunate that that was the route that it took, but it showcased the absolute splendour of the coast to viewers right across the world. Some 165 countries watched the coverage of the Giro d'Italia, which reached almost 800 million people and showcased the beauty of the coast. Who could forget the vision of the horses racing along the beach at Carnlough alongside the riders? It was an image used by the Giro d'Italia throughout the entire race. It will be used to promote this year's race as well and, I suggest, for some years to come. That is a prime opportunity to capitalise on cycling tourism. The Gran Fondo is coming this summer, and, already, the number of registrations from across the world show that it is a massive opportunity, and, of course, the coast road is a prime place where that could happen.

The project to restore the Gobbins path, which will hopefully be open again this summer, is a massive opportunity to bring lots of people to the coast. From Islandmagee, they will travel right up the coast road towards the Giant's Causeway and the Carrick-a-Rede rope bridge. Tourists will visit the coastal corridor to visit the film sets of 'Game of Thrones'. There is huge potential at Curran Castle and Magheramorne. If there are entrepreneurs willing to welcome visitors to East Antrim, there are business opportunities for people willing to embrace them. I point also to the all-Ireland lighthouse trail, which is an exciting project.

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

Mr Ross: Last year, I joined the Minister and her counterpart at the time, Leo Varadkar, at that. There are huge opportunities there and massive opportunities coming with the new council, if it works with Invest Northern Ireland and Tourism Northern Ireland. I hope that Members champion East Antrim and talk about the opportunities there, rather than just being negative about it.

Mr Beggs: I thank the Member for raising the topic in the Assembly. It is important that we talk about the opportunities for employers to come to East Antrim and for visitors to come and enjoy an experience that is not available in many other parts of the Province or, indeed, the world. I certainly view the east Antrim coastline as something very special, and any visitors who have travelled it with me have also found it very special.

We have limited natural resources. Apart from our natural environment, our main resource is our people. I noticed in recent claimant counts that the figures for 2014 show that unemployment in Carrickfergus and Newtownabbey is below the Northern Ireland average, and that has to be welcomed. We have an industrious people. It is surprising, when you go into some of the details, that, while we have a low unemployment rate, we have one of the lowest levels of employee jobs in any constituency in Northern Ireland. Why is that? It is because we have industrious people who get on their bike, get into their car, on the bus, on the train and go to work where the jobs are. For any employer out there who is listening, those people would be good, local, committed employees should that employer choose to locate somewhere more convenient in East Antrim. We have to recognise that, sometimes, you have to travel to the jobs, but we hope in future that more jobs will be provided locally. I commend our people who travel.

There are other interesting statistics. We have a very healthy number of apprenticeships operating between level 2 and level 3, some 357 I noted from a recent Assembly answer. I have to praise Larne Skills Development, which is drawing in young people from the entire East Antrim coastal area. I am aware that it provides a high success rate in providing long-term placement and, ultimately, employment. That must be commended as well. That is despite the fact that there is a very weak presence of further education opportunities locally in Larne. As has been mentioned —

Mr Wilson: Will the Member give way on that point?

Mr Beggs: I certainly will.

Mr Wilson: I am sure that, like me, the Member has been around the Larne Skills project. Does he agree that the idea is to get all those skills under one roof so that young people can experience a wide range of skills? The suggestion that has been made of having small units located all round East Antrim would not be a way of ensuring that people get experience of the range of skills that might be available to them.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member has an additional minute.

Mr Beggs: Thank you. Ultimately, if there is demand, you have to provide an opportunity. It would be nice if more employment could be provided locally, but we have to assess whether there is demand. There is no point in building empty buildings; there must be the demand. Certainly, I see great opportunities in the East Antrim area in the future. As others mentioned, with the A8 dual carriageway nearing completion, it will be easier for those who wish to come to Northern Ireland and East Antrim to visit. Equally, it will be easier and more attractive for employers to locate in East Antrim, whether it be in Larne or, indeed, Carrickfergus, with the A2 also nearing completion later this year. That will open up business areas that were previously deemed too difficult to access. Wonderful opportunities will arise from that, and there is a high likelihood that more jobs will arise in East Antrim as a result of both those developments.

Of course, on top of that infrastructure, we are quite close to both airports: the international airport and the city airport. As others have said, we have a natural gas supply available in our main areas. Generally, we have a good broadband infrastructure, although it has to be acknowledged that there are still gaps in urban areas and in some rural areas. I certainly wish, as I indicated earlier, that all our business parks would have access to superfast broadband in order to allow our companies to develop.

We must praise the work that goes on in our local enterprise centres. Ledcom has a wonderful record of encouraging new employment and people to take up self-employment.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Would the Member draw his remarks to a close?

Mr Beggs: I should also mention Carrick Enterprise. Ledcom helps in a wide range of other activities throughout the community to make Larne a better place.

Mr Dickson: It is perhaps worth reminding ourselves that the A2 corridor runs all the way from Whiteabbey, Jordanstown and Greenisland through Carrickfergus, Whitehead and Larne and extends all the way to Cushendun in the far north of the constituency. We are a constituency of contrasts, but I am always relentlessly positive when it comes to East Antrim. I believe that East Antrim should and does have a can-do rather than a can't-do attitude. We are a constituency of learning and skills development, with an exceptional university and further education colleges. We also have an amazing coastline and a unique and rich history, accompanied by tourism and traditional industries.

Of course, we have not escaped the effects of the recent economic storms, and our high streets have suffered the effects of economically straitened times and require meaningful support and reinvigoration. However, I believe that we can build on our previous successes, our shared history and our industry to create a truly dynamic and united and prosperous area of enterprise where everyone has the chance for employment and gaining skills in a safe and socially just community.

East Antrim has much to offer by way of infrastructure, skills and knowledge. All MLAs from East Antrim must work tirelessly to market east Antrim plc to the world.

Mr Beggs: Will the Member give way?

Mr Dickson: I will.

Mr Beggs: Would the Member acknowledge that it is very disappointing that the programme that was, for the first time, drawing in large numbers of people to develop their basic numeracy and literacy skills, which Ledcom provided in Larne, Carrickfergus and Moyle, has come to an end; that, to date, no one else has succeeded in providing that service; and that it is important that that service be continued?

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member has an additional minute.

Mr Dickson: I acknowledge that. I also acknowledge the changing environment in which many of those programmes are delivered.

We need to access efficient and reliable energy sources, which includes electricity but, crucially, mains gas supply. Investors from around the world do not want to look at dirty fuels. Since the 1990s, east Antrim has benefited from a natural gas supply, an innovation that, as the Minister announced today, much of Northern Ireland is only starting to see. Larne is exceptionally placed in this regard, only miles from the main gas interconnector to Scotland. However, there are parts of east Antrim and the A2 corridor that still lose out. Towns like Whitehead have to rely on oil and other fuels rather than benefit from natural gas. I will continue to press the case for gas to Whitehead and beyond into other rural areas. I call on the Utility Regulator to look into this.

Tourism represents one of the biggest opportunities for jobs in east Antrim, and, therefore, we need to completely reinvigorate our towns to attract tourists. Attractions such as Carrickfergus Castle, the new Gobbins pathway and the glens are exceptional assets. The Enterprise Minister must ensure that they are developed and marketed to their fullest potential. Our ferry connection to Scotland through Larne is an enviable strength, bringing tourists and business to our doorstep. However, constituents have expressed to me their concerns about the high cost of travel to and from Scotland. This is hurting our potential as a tourist destination. DETI needs to investigate what can be done to encourage lower pricing and more competition on the North Channel routes. In the end, we will all benefit from attracting greater numbers of people to the area.

One of the more transformative projects is, of course, the upgrade of the Shore Road and a dual carriageway all the way to Carrickfergus. People and businesses will genuinely be able to benefit from this in their journey into east Antrim. I hope that this will also eventually dovetail with the planned upgrade of the York Street interchange. In addition, the A8 marks a significant milestone of development of the port of Larne, one that will contribute to the development of a prosperous Northern Ireland. Traffic will flow more efficiently from the port. However, we need

to deal with the issue at Sandyknowes. The Minister needs to investigate the possibility of a free-flowing junction in the Larne to Belfast direction to provide access from the port right across the island of Ireland. The Regional Development Minister needs to look at the utilisation of the Larne railway line for more than just passenger services.

Infrastructure is important. Others have made reference to communication technologies, particularly broadband. Ledcom has impressed upon me the need for us to keep ahead. Although 90% of Northern Ireland has access to fibre-optic broadband and is one of the best connected regions in Europe, we must not fall behind in that. That is a message that Ledcom has been pressing home to me. In the area of digital communication, we must not rest on our laurels; technology is forever changing. We must continue to lobby DETI and relevant infrastructure companies to ensure that we are keeping pace.

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

Mr Dickson: Ultimately, achieving a prosperous east Antrim relies on us all working together to attract business investment into the area. That requires action at council level, Stormont and Westminster. We must act to create a united, cohesive and highly skilled community that is ready to face the challenges and seize the opportunities of the 21st century.

Mr Hilditch: While I would normally acknowledge the Member who brought the topic of the Adjournment debate to the House, when I saw this one listed, I was not sure how wide or narrow it was intended to be. Sometimes a little prior engagement on these matters is good.

Having done some research, I noticed that Mr McMullan raised an issue in the 'Larne Times' last October on tackling underinvestment in the Causeway coastal corridor and questioning the role of Invest NI in the lack of enterprise or business parks north of Larne. The criticism of Invest NI by members of Sinn Féin is nothing new. While it was levelled during the creative industries inquiry by the same Member, it was clear that Invest NI was playing a crucial role.

One area that I would like to cover is the work of the local economic development units. Until my departure from local government, I was the chairman of Carrickfergus Borough Council's economic development committee. That gave me an opportunity to work closely with the LED unit at Carrickfergus Enterprise and Ledcom in Larne. Supported by Invest NI and in conjunction with the North East Partnership, those units have delivered a large range of programmes that have supported local businesses and industry from Whiteabbey to Moyle, including in raising finance for small firms, procurement, efficiency, energy, digital, build your business, step up to export and, importantly, family business programmes. Those local economic development units are playing a critical role not only in supporting existing businesses and industry in east Antrim but in encouraging the smaller indigenous family-type start-ups that came to the fore during the inquiry into the creative industries.

6.45 pm

We will, hopefully, begin to witness an upturn in business growth with the new super councils of Causeway Coast and Glens District Council and Mid and East Antrim Borough Council. They will have to be ready to hit the ground running next month and ensure the continuity of the business support, particularly in the coastal area, with a key priority of building a strong and vibrant economy. An opportunity in mirroring Belfast's success in leveraging European support exists and should be grasped.

The further development of the tourist industry is also important in moving forward towards a better economic climate. With many thousands of people engaged in the hospitality and service industries in the constituency, there are many more opportunities for further employment and business creation around the heritage and cultural developments at Carrickfergus, with the Gobbins path coming on stream and with improvements in the coastal towns of Whitehead, Glenarm and Carnlough leading to the Causeway costal route and the scenic beauty of the glens. Local government and central government must seize the opportunity for the tourism industry.

Infrastructure is crucial to any industrial investment in the area. While we can cite the well-placed position of the constituency to the Province's airports and sea ports and look with enthusiasm at the developing road infrastructure via the A2 and A8 projects, the one necessity is a better broadband service. I would certainly join with other colleagues who have raised that matter previously. While it is usually envisaged as a rural problem, the east Antrim coastal area is not without its problems with broadband.

I acknowledge the Member for securing the Adjournment debate. It has been a tremendous advert for east Antrim, and I look forward to the Minister's response.

Mr Dallat: Why on earth would somebody from East Derry be taking part in this Adjournment debate here? There are no votes in it for me, so anything that I say is absolutely honest and comes straight from the heart.

I am pleased that the Minister is here to respond, and I am sure that she will remind us that there was a recent announcement of 400 jobs in two pharmaceutical companies. If Danny Kennedy was here, I am sure that he would remind us of the £113 million that has been put into the A8. Oh, how I envy that place called east Antrim.

Clearly, you cannot talk about the subject without talking about the glens. To me, the glens of Antrim is the most wonderful place on earth. That is not because my ancestors come from there but because I serve in a coastal area. I am a frequent visitor to Cork and Kerry, and that coastline is out of this world. I would love to see the master plan for Glenarm published. Glenarm is not exactly Kinsale at the moment, but it has the potential to be like it, if we have the vision.

I do not want to make too many references to the Minister, but she is a woman who has her sleeves rolled up. There is another woman in Glenarm called Margaret Anne McKillop, a local councillor, who also has her sleeves rolled up, and it is local people like that who we need to talk to. People who have a vision of the area for the future, and they will make it work.

The glens of Antrim were largely left alone during the Troubles. That was not exclusively the case, and I can think of Sergeant Joe Campbell and others who lost their lives. That violence has now abated and there is every opportunity to create long-term sustainable jobs in tourism that will retain young people and make sure that there is

a vision for them. The people there are clever enough to be above party politics and not to engage in them-and-us disputes and all that nonsense that has destroyed tourist areas elsewhere. What the Assembly needs to do is engage with those people and give them the support and vision they need to make not only Glenarm, which I mentioned, work, but all the other glens work.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, I am not sure whether you realise that there are nine glens in all. I will recite a little poem, because I think that it tells the story:

> *"There are nine glens in Antrim; nine great glens in all.*
> *Glenarm is the first one, and near Cushendall,*
> *There is lovely Glenariff, Glenaan and Glendun.*
> *And nestling between them, Glenballyemon,*
> *Glencorp and Glenshesk. Come on, don't be lazy.*
> *There is only Glencloy and the last one, Glentaisie."*

Let us roll up our sleeves, as the Minister does, and help Margaret Anne McKillop and other local councillors over there who are engaging, day and daily, with local community groups and enterprise groups. They are the people who will make this happen. While it is late in the evening, and we have had a particular focus perhaps on Larne, with all those new jobs, I think that the glens of Antrim are the jewel in the crown. I hope that when the Minister responds, she will take comfort from the fact that even somebody from outside the area can see the positive side of this part of Ireland and its potential for the future to portray Northern Ireland in such a light that our visitors will not just be local, from Kilrea, but from all over the world.

Mr Wilson: I do not know whether, after the poetry presentation, I am expected to sing or dance my speech. I think I will desist from that. I will say that I am glad that we have had the opportunity to have a debate about the potential there is in east Antrim, though I have to say to the proposer of the Adjournment topic — and I know that Mr Ross has already mentioned it — that if you want to promote an area, you certainly do not go around denigrating it, talking it down, describing some of the towns as being run by mob rule or calling into question the future of some of the main facilities, such as the harbour at Larne. I think that that is the first rule. If you want to promote an area, talk it up; do not talk it down.

The second thing I would like to say is that there has already been significant public investment. I want to pay tribute to the Minister for the work she has done. I remember that when Caterpillar lost so many jobs, she undertook to work with it through Invest NI to see what opportunities there might be. A lot of the job losses at Caterpillar were replaced by additional work that was brought into Northern Ireland. Of course, we have seen the successes of investment in Ryobi, Schrader, Terumo BCT and a lot of other major employers in the area, as well of course as the jobs fund and many of the other jobs that have been produced as a result of help for small businesses.

Whilst I have, on occasion, upbraided the Minister about the broadband provision, it has improved. I do not want her to take too much comfort from that: there are still big gaps. Nevertheless, progress has been made. With regard to the point that Mr McMullan made, if we are going to promote small businesses in rural areas, that is one of the important parts of the infrastructure that we need to have in place. I believe that this is one way of retaining people, although I am not allied to the idea that you provide employment opportunities and training facilities in every small village and hamlet. For a start, it is not practical. We want to broaden people's horizons as well. If they have to travel 15 or 20 miles to find those opportunities and get quality training, that has to happen.

There are things that are not within the Minister's remit, such as the railway and roads. I am glad that we have got two new roads being built in east Antrim.

I give some credit to the Minister in the Republic who pulled the plug on the A5 and, therefore, made funds available for us to spend in Northern Ireland. Of course, I was fortunate enough to be Finance Minister at the time and was able to encourage funds to be redirected in certain ways.

There is huge tourist potential, which David Hilditch mentioned. Take Carrickfergus, for instance, and now the Gobbins project, which I believe will rival the Giant's Causeway. I know that the Minister will be lobbied on the development of the Magheramorne quarry area. There is huge tourism and sports potential there, and, with some tourist money to kick-start the some of the development, it could link in. Of course, the Railway Preservation Society in Whitehead wants to run old railway trains to the site.

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

Mr Wilson: It wants to take people right up to Larne — to the gateway to the glens.

Mr Dallat: Will the Member give way?

Mr Wilson: I will give way, yes.

Mr Dallat: He will get an extra minute. Will the Member be careful to remember Red Bay Boats, which is about to launch its new model? It is famous throughout the world. I am sure that he, as someone who loves his potato, eats the Glens of Antrim brand. If he is thinking of buying jewellery, there is no better place to go than Steensons; it is world-famous.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member has an additional minute.

Mr Wilson: I went up to see the launch of one of Red Bay Boats' new craft. In fact, I got a bit seasick just sitting on it in the harbour, to be quite truthful. Again, there is huge employment potential there in a small village along the coast.

The Member is right: there is huge tourism potential, even in the rural part of East Antrim. There is also industrial potential for local entrepreneurs who are developing a product locally and want to stay local. Those are the opportunities that I think we have to look out for in the future.

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak about such a lovely area as East Antrim. I know that many in the Chamber are very passionate about their constituency area, and even people who are not from the constituency are passionate about the area. Mr Dallat, you have made me want to go and discover Glentaisie; it sounds absolutely fabulous.

Over the past five years, Invest Northern Ireland has made 733 offers of support to businesses in the constituency. That support amounted to £38 million in assistance and will lead to an associated total investment of £137 million. It has also led to the promotion of over 1,250 new jobs across the constituency, including those from the regional start initiative. Many people living in the region have benefited directly or indirectly from the new employment opportunities that Invest Northern Ireland is creating in conjunction with the companies. One example is Schrader Electronics, which is investing over £56 million, creating 240 new jobs in Carrickfergus and Antrim. Further, in June 2013, Terumo BCT, which is a global medical device manufacturer and a member of the Japanese-based Terumo Group family of companies, announced plans to create more than 400 new jobs in Larne.

Of course, Invest's help goes beyond job creation. It has many programmes and interventions aimed at improving the overall competitiveness of the economy right across Northern Ireland. In East Antrim, for example, we have had 88 offers totalling £25 million of assistance to help companies to engage in research and development. That is a very important figure, because an area that engages in research and development is looking to the future for a sustainable economy. That is an important marker for that.

In relation to available land for economic development in East Antrim, Invest Northern Ireland holds approximately 144 acres of land. Just 21 acres remain available to support economic development in Carrick and Larne. Perhaps that is an issue that Members might want to look at in the future in conjunction with Invest Northern Ireland, and we are very willing to do so. We also proactively market the sites in Carrick and Larne to foreign and indigenous investors as investment locations. As with most —

Mr Beggs: Will the Minister give way?

Mrs Foster: Yes.

7.00 pm

Mr Beggs: The figures for visitors to the constituency, looking at possible locations, are better than the Northern Ireland average but are still relatively low. Has the Minister noticed any increased interest since the development of the new dual carriageways to Larne and Carrickfergus?

Mrs Foster: It is probably too early to assess that, but the Member's point about having the appropriate infrastructure is very well made. Any constituency should not just look at the activities of Invest Northern Ireland to promote the constituency; people should look at the infrastructure to support the constituency. East Antrim is very blessed with the A2 and A8 works. I know that the Member sitting behind me has made comments about broadband recently, but broadband is an absolutely critical piece of infrastructure for moving into the 21st-century economy, and I will set out in clear terms the interventions that we are making on broadband as a Government so that everybody can assess how we are moving forward in that respect.

Mr Dallat: Will the Minister give way?

Mrs Foster: Yes.

Mr Dallat: Perhaps after saying all those nice things, will the Minister please focus particularly on Glenarm and that area? In recent times, I was over at an event to save the Dal Hospital, and it is just impossible to get a signal?

Mrs Foster: That is more a telecoms issue — a mobile issue. I am more than happy to look at that issue. Indeed, I had a meeting with Vodafone, one of the mobile phone operators, today, and we talked about small communities not being able to access telecoms. Vodafone has rolled out a programme for small communities, and perhaps I could share that information with any of the Members here, so that they can approach Vodafone to take that forward.

The jobs fund has played its part in East Antrim as well; it has promoted 481 jobs. Some of the indigenous companies have been very strong. We have talked a little about foreign direct investment, but I have to mention Glenarm Organic Salmon. I have been with them on trade missions, and the last one was in the Middle East last year. I was proud to be with them and proud to support them because of their innovative way of doing business. The provenance and the story behind their salmon is very strong, and they are now exploring new markets in Hong Kong, Dubai, North America and China, and we will continue to support them to grow into the future.

Mr Wilson: Will the Minister give way?

Mrs Foster: Yes, I will.

Mr Wilson: Mr Dallat also mentioned Steensons, the jewellery company in Glenarm. Would the Minister accept from me that, had it not been for some of the help from her Department and the Tourist Board, the grant aid that went into the Star of the Sea school, which will give Steensons a new platform from which to present their goods, would not have happened?

Mrs Foster: I thought that the Member was going to say, "Would I accept from him a gift from Steensons?" *[Laughter.]* I was going to ask how I could possibly do that; I would have to declare it. He is right: he have been trying to work on that issue as well.

In relation to Mr McMullan's point about local economic development, there have been 10 initiatives undertaken by the local councils in conjunction with Invest Northern Ireland. They have made quite an impact right across that region. In fact, an investment of £1·5 million has gone into those local economic development initiatives, and I am hopeful that, again, when SEUPB brings out its new programme, the local economic development part will be able to develop as well. I say to the new super-council that it needs to step forward on economic development and make sure that it works alongside Invest Northern Ireland.

Mr McMullan: Will the Minister give way?

Mrs Foster: Yes, I am happy to give way.

Mr McMullan: I agree with the Minister in all that she has said so far — even with the rest of the people, the poets and all. We are talking here about the whole of the coast road from the mid glens right up into Carrickfergus, not just down to Steensons or Ballygally Castle. You have the mid glens, and you have Glenariff Forest Park. We need employment. What I said tonight is what came out of talking to people at a public meeting that Margaret Anne McKillop was not at. Minister, what I am bringing to you came from a public meeting. I know exactly what you are talking about with regard to Invest NI. Tomorrow, I am meeting Invest NI, but we need jobs on the ground for young people to come back to work in the area. We have no ground for a small business park, for example, and that is really lost, as it would attract SMEs into the area.

Mrs Foster: I say to the Member that I agree with other Members who spoke tonight: it is important to portray the area positively. Yes, we have to deal with challenges in all our constituencies, but it is important that we talk about the positive parts of them.

I do not have much time left, but I want to talk about the tourism offering of the whole glens and the whole coastal road. The successful implementation of the Causeway Coast and Glens signature project includes developments all along that road. Obviously, the Giant's Causeway visitor centre is included; it is world-class. I agree with Mr Wilson when he says that the Gobbins path will be an outstanding tourism attraction for the area. It is something new, but, apart from that, it is absolutely stunning. I recall going to the edge of a cliff with Mr Wilson to launch the Gobbins path. You may say that that was a very dangerous thing to do *[Laughter.]* , but I did it. That is what a Minister has to do: take risks. Anyway, I believe that it will be a tremendous enhancement to the offering. When tourists come for the Gobbins path or the Giant's Causeway, they will experience the other fabulous sights along the glens. I have to say that there is more to be done in promoting the glens, and I hope that the new super-council will do that in conjunction with Invest Northern Ireland and Tourism NI.

I want to mention screen tourism quickly. It is, of course, a niche market for tourism in Northern Ireland, but East Antrim has very much played its part in that. The Magheramorne quarry was mentioned in relation to future tourism projects, but it has really played its part in screen tourism.

My goodness, what a fabulous event the Giro d'Italia was, right along the Causeway Coast and glens.

I make this plain: Mr Dickson said that we needed to work in a collaborative way to do all that is best for East Antrim, and I could not agree more. There really is a need for MLAs, the new super-councils, the MP and all the bodies to work collaboratively to make the most of East Antrim. It has a very good story to tell, and I am pleased that we were able to talk a little about it today.

Adjourned at 7.07 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 this ministerial statement is as received at the time from the Minister. It has not been subject to the Official Report (Hansard) process.

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Age Discrimination Legislation

Published at 1.30 pm on Thursday 19 February 2015

Mr Robinson and Mr McGuinness (The First Minister and the deputy First Minister): While we have an extensive body of anti-discrimination law in place here, there is one major gap– legal protection from unjustifiable age discrimination by those providing goods, facilities and services. The Programme for Government contains a commitment to extend age discrimination legislation to close this gap. We remain committed to eradicating harmful and unjustifiable age discrimination in this area and we are today, announcing our decision to take forward proposals to prohibit unjustifiable age - differentiated practices against people aged 16 and over by those providing goods, facilities and services.

The proposals and subsequent legislation will put age discrimination outside work on a similar footing to discrimination in the workplace. It will give individuals confidence that it is their right to be treated fairly. It will also help service providers to eliminate harmful age discrimination by providing them with a clear legal framework within which to deliver services.

While the intention is to outlaw age discrimination in the provision of goods, facilities and services, we recognise that there are times when it is justified and indeed beneficial to treat people differently because of their age, for example age based state benefits or the prohibition on the sale of alcohol to people under 18. Therefore the proposals will not affect other legislation which currently imposes statutory age limits.

The aim of the new legislation is to protect young people aged 16 and 17 and adults from discrimination because of their age. We recognise this may come as a disappointment to some.

We intend to bring forward a consultation document in the Spring which will set out our policy proposals, taking account of the current legislation in Great Britain and Ireland and submissions made to date by the Children's Commissioner, the Older People's Commissioner, the Equality Commission and members of the children's and older people's sector. We will want to ensure the policy document has robust rationale for exceptions to any anti-age discrimination legislation.

When we have concluded our policy consultation and agreed a robust policy position we will then consider all the options available to us for bringing this legislation before the Assembly.

Committee Stages

Northern Ireland Assembly

Committee for the Environment
5 March 2015

Road Traffic (Amendment) Bill [NIA 35/11-15]

Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Ms Anna Lo (Chairperson)
Mrs Pam Cameron (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Cathal Boylan
Mr Colum Eastwood
Mr Alban Maginness
Mr Ian McCrea
Mr Ian Milne
Lord Morrow
Mr Peter Weir

The Chairperson (Ms Lo): Members, you will recall that we looked at all the clauses, but then the Department came back to us and said that, in view of what we suggested, it is bringing forward amendments, so we have not produced our final report. You now have a number of tabled papers that you need to look at. I think we have to go through them. I will let you have a quick read of them, and then we will do the formal consideration. I remind you that the session is being recorded by Hansard.

Clause 3 ("The prescribed limit": further provision)

The Chairperson (Ms Lo): Clause 3 amends article 19 of the Road Traffic (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 to retain the option — commonly called the "statutory option" — at the new lower prescribed limits. The Committee was previously content with a small technical amendment to clause 3 to comply with the recommendation of the Examiner of Statutory Rules on the delegated powers memorandum that the regulation-making power should be subject to draft affirmative resolution rather than affirmative resolution as it is currently drafted. In addition, the Committee asked the Department to bring forward an amendment to remove the statutory option, which was agreed by the Minister. Consequently, the Committee formally agreed that it was content with clause 3, subject to those two amendments. The following amendment has now been put forward by the Department:

"Clause 3, page 3, line 36

Leave out clause 3".

Are members content with that amendment? If so, I will put the Question that the Committee agrees to rescind its previous decision that it was content with clause 3 as amended and that the Committee is content with the departmental amendment to leave out clause 3.

Members indicated assent.

Clause 6 (Evidential breath test without preliminary breath test or check-point breath test)

The Chairperson (Ms Lo): The next one is a miscellaneous amendment to clause 6. The Department has brought forward the following minor amendment to clause 6, which is a technical drafting refinement made by the Office of the Legislative Counsel (OLC) for consistency elsewhere in the Bill:

"Clause 6, page 7, line 13

Leave out 'repealed' and insert 'omitted'"

You will wish to consider if you are content with that amendment and, if so, I put the Question that the Committee agrees to rescind its previous decision that it was content with clause 6 as drafted and that the Committee is content with clause 6, subject to the proposed departmental amendment.

Members indicated assent.

New Clause

The Chairperson (Ms Lo): The next one is an amendment on the removal of the statutory option from the Order of 1995, which is a consequential amendment of the deletion of clause 3 and the insertion of new clause 6A. The Department has provided the following wording for the new clause:

"After clause 6 insert —

'Choice of specimens

6A. Article 19 of the Order of 1995 (choice of specimens of breath) is amended as follows —

(a) for the title, substitute 'Lower of 2 specimens of breath to be used',

(b) in paragraph (1), the words 'Subject to paragraph (2),' are omitted,

(c) paragraphs (2), (2A) and (3) are omitted.'"

You will wish to consider if you are content with that amendment and, if so, I put the Question that the Committee is content with the departmental amendment to introduce new clause 6A.

Members indicated assent.

Clause 16 (Minimum age for licence: small vehicle)

The Chairperson (Ms Lo): Next, we have amendments on the minimum age for holding a provisional licence and the

mandatory minimum learning period. Clause 16 reduces the minimum age for obtaining a provisional licence from 17 to 16 and a half. Members asked the Department to bring forward an amendment to remove the clause so that the minimum age remains at the current statutory age of 17. The Department has provided the following amendment:

"Clause 16, page 15, line 4

Leave out clause 16".

Members will wish to consider whether they are content with this amendment. If so, I will put the Question —

Mr Boylan: Before you put the Question, Chair, I am not saying that I will push this to the vote, but we were content with 16 and a half. Obviously, the majority of the Committee is content to change the clause. I am not going to force it to a vote or anything; I just want to put it on record that I thought that 16 and a half was reasonable.

The Chairperson (Ms Lo): OK. The Question is that the Committee agrees to rescind its previous decision that it was not content with clause 16 as drafted and that the Committee is content with the departmental amendment to leave out clause 16. Are we agreed?

Members indicated assent.

Clause 17 (Provisional licence to be held for minimum period in certain cases)

The Chairperson (Ms Lo): The next one is clause 17, which makes it a requirement for a person to hold a provisional licence for at least one year before being able to take the practical driving test. The Committee asked the Department to bring forward an amendment to reduce the minimum required period of learning to six months. The Department has provided the following amendment:

"Clause 17, page 15, line 17

Leave out '12' and insert '6'".

Members will wish to consider whether you are content with this amendment. If so, I put the Question that the Committee agrees to rescind its previous decision that it was content with clause 17 as amended and that the Committee is content with clause 17 subject to the proposed departmental amendment.

Members indicated assent.

Clause 18 (Approved programmes of training: category B motor vehicles and motor bicycles)

The Chairperson (Ms Lo): Next, we have miscellaneous amendments. The Department is proposing a number of technical amendments to clause 18 due to the Immigration Act 2014 having inserted a new article 13A to the Road Traffic (NI) Order 1981: residence requirement. As a new article 13A is also proposed in the Bill, amendments are necessary to avoid duplication. The amendments state:

"Clause 18, page 17, line 17

Leave out '13 (grant of licences)' and insert '13A (residence requirement for grant of licences)'."

"Clause 18, page 17, line 20

Leave out '13A.' and insert '13B'."

"Clause 18, page 17, line 37

Leave out '13B.' and insert '13C'."

"Clause 18, page 19, line 17

Leave out '13A' and insert '13B'."

"Clause 18, page 19, line 19

Leave out '13B' and insert '13C'."

"Clause 18, page 19, line 27

Leave out '13B' and insert '13C'."

The Committee previously indicated that it was content for the Department to bring forward the amendments. If members are content with the wording of the amendment, I put the Question that the Committee agrees to rescind its previous decision that it was content with clause 18 as amended and that the Committee is content with clause 18 subject to the proposed departmental amendments.

Members indicated assent.

New Clause

The Chairperson (Ms Lo): Next is miscellaneous amendments and new clause 22A. The Department proposes to insert a new clause after clause 22 on the recommendation of the Examiner of Statutory Rules. It provides that subordinate legislation made under the 1995 Order should be subject to draft affirmative procedure rather than affirmative procedure.

The new clause also includes, at (a) and (b), provision that was originally part of clause 3. Since clause 3 has now been removed, the draftsman has relocated the provision in clause 22A. The Department has provided the following wording for the new clause:

"Before clause 23 insert —

'Further amendment of the Order of 1995

22A. Article 110 of the Order of 1995 is amended as follows —

a) in paragraph (1) (exception from requirement for orders to be subject —"

[Inaudible due to mobile phone interference.] Someone's phone is on. I am sorry, but you need to check your phones. Who is guilty?

Mr Eastwood: Mine was on, but it is off.

The Chairperson (Ms Lo): I can hear it. *[Inaudible due to mobile phone interference.]* I will read it again:

"Before clause 23 insert —

'Further amendment of the Order of 1995

22A. Article 110 of the Order of 1995 is amended as follows —

a) in paragraph (1) (exception from requirement for orders to be subject to negative resolution), for 'this Order', where it first occurs, substitute 'paragraph (3A)',

(b) after paragraph (3) insert —

(3A) An order made under —

(a) Article 13A(4) or (7), or

(b) Article 63(9),

shall not be made unless a draft has been laid before, and approved by a resolution of, the Assembly.

(c) in paragraph (4) (procedure for certain regulations), for 'shall be subject to affirmative resolution' substitute

'shall not be made unless a draft has been laid before, and approved by a resolution of, the Assembly'".

Members will wish to consider whether they are content with the amendment. If so, I put the Question that the Committee is content with the departmental amendment to introduce new clause 22A.

Members indicated assent.

Clause 23 (Supplementary, incidental and consequential etc. provision)

The Chairperson (Ms Lo): The Department has brought forward a technical amendment to clause 23. Its purpose is to clarify that draft affirmative procedure will apply to any subordinate legislation that amends primary legislation. It is a drafting refinement that is being applied generally to Northern Ireland Bills. The Department has provided the following wording for the amendment:

"a. Clause 23, page 28, line 11

Leave out 'a statutory provision' and insert 'Northern Ireland legislation or an Act of Parliament'."

Members will wish to consider whether they are content with the amendment. If so, I put the Question that the Committee agrees to rescind its previous decision that it was content with clause 23 as drafted and that the Committee is content with clause 23 subject to the proposed departmental amendment.

This is a bit of a nuisance, isn't it? Are members content?

Members indicated assent.

Schedule 1 (Transitional and saving provisions)

The Chairperson (Ms Lo): For schedule 1, a number of consequential amendments have arisen as a result of the previous amendments. The Department is proposing the following amendments to schedule 1 in relation to the removal of the "statutory option":

"Schedule 1, page 29, line 7

Leave out 'sections 2 and 3' and insert 'section 2'"

"Schedule 1, page 29, line 17

At end insert —

'Choice of specimens

2A. The amendments of the Order of 1995 made by section 6A do not apply in relation to an offence committed before the commencement of the amendments.'"

The Department is also proposing the following amendments to the same schedule in relation to the minimum age for holding a provisional licence and the mandatory minimum learning period:

"Schedule 1, page 31, line 30

Leave out paragraph 12"

"Schedule 1, page 31, line 35

Leave out '12' and insert '6'"

"Schedule 1, page 31, line 40

Leave out '12' and insert '6'"

"Schedule 1, page 32, line 28

Leave out '12' and insert '6'"

The third and final amendment to schedule 1 relates to the definitions of "taxi" and "taxi drivers' licence". It was a transitional measure that was only required:

"until the commencement of sections 22 and 23 of the Taxis Act (Northern Ireland) 2008".

Those provisions have now commenced, and paragraph 2 is therefore no longer required.

"Schedule 1, page 29, line 10

Leave out paragraph 2"

Members will wish to consider whether they are content with the amendments, and, if so, I will put the Question that the Committee agrees to rescind its previous decision that it was content with schedule 1 as amended and that the Committee is content with schedule 1 subject to the proposed departmental amendments.

Members indicated assent.

Schedule 2 (Repeals)

The Chairperson (Ms Lo): The Department is proposing the following consequential amendments in relation to the removal of the "statutory option":

"Schedule 2, page 33, line 31

In column 2, leave out 'In Article 19, paragraph (2).' and insert 'In Article 19(1), the words 'subject to paragraph (2),'"

"Schedule 2, page 33, line 31

In column 2, at end insert —

'Article 19(2), (2A) and (3).'"

Members will wish to consider whether they are content with this amendment, and, if so, I will put the Question that the Committee agrees to rescind its previous decision that it was content with schedule 2 as amended and that the Committee is content with schedule 2 subject to the proposed departmental amendments.

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson (Ms Lo): This stage of the Bill is due to end on 27 March 2015, so members will wish to finalise the Committee's report and order it to be printed as soon as possible. The draft final report will be put before you on 19 March. There is really very little; we have only to add in those amendments.

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 13 February 2015

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Mr Hussey asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister why they have not answered AQO 5995/11-15 which was due for answer on 3 March 2014; and AQW 33966/11-15 which was due for answer on 11 June 2014.
(AQW 38020/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness (The First Minister and deputy First Minister): We would refer the member to the answer to AQO 5995/11-15 which was provided on 17 November 2014. We would refer the member to the answer to AQW 33966/11-15 which was provided on 16 December 2014.

Ms Sugden asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what proportion of the Shackleton site at Ballykelly will be designated to the community voluntary sector.
(AQW 38522/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Any plans for the future development of the Shackleton site will be expected to demonstrate how community needs have been identified and will be met.

Mr Eastwood asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the establishment of the Civic Forum.
(AQW 39480/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Civic Forum which acted as a consultative mechanism on social, economic and cultural issues and functioned from 2000 to 2002, when devolution was suspended, has not since been reconvened.

Following the restoration of devolution in 2007, the then First Minister and deputy First Minister commissioned a review of the effectiveness and appropriateness of the Civic Forum, which had operated between 2000 and 2002. In addition, the review was to make recommendations on the most appropriate mechanism for engaging with civic society.

A public consultation was held in 2008. Inputs to the consultation did not suggest a widespread desire for a return to a structure of the size and expense of the Forum, as it had previously operated.

The participants to the recent Stormont House Agreement agreed the importance of having civic voices heard and civic views considered in relation to key social, cultural and economic issues. They envisaged that a new engagement model could be achieved, by June 2015, through the establishment of a compact civic advisory panel which would meet regularly to consider key social, cultural and economic issues and to advise the Executive.

Mr Rogers asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister why the officially recorded minutes of meetings of the Northern Ireland Executive are not made available to non-Executive MLAs or published for public transparency.
(AQW 39865/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: It is essential for the Executive to be able to conduct its work in an environment where Ministers can be confident that the content of their papers and their views are protected. We do not, therefore, release information, including minutes of meetings which provide details of Executive business or its decision making processes. The Executive may, however, where it considers it appropriate, make a statement on its decisions or views on a particular issue.

Ms Sugden asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the Early Intervention Transformation Programme, as part of the framework for Delivering Social Change.
(AQW 39946/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Early Intervention Transformation Programme is one of three Delivering Social Change Signature Programmes co-funded by Atlantic Philanthropies which we announced in September 2014.

A Programme Board has been established and three initial work-streams have been identified, as follows:

- Work-stream 1 to focus on equipping all parents with the skills needed to give their child the best start in life;

- Work-stream 2 to focus on supporting families locally when problems first emerge and before they become embedded; and
- Work-stream 3 to focus on addressing the impact of adversity on children, by intervening both earlier and more effectively to reduce the risk of poor outcomes later in life.

Whilst the projects within Work-streams 1 and 2 are currently being developed via a broad engagement process, three initial projects from Work-stream 3 have been approved by the Programme Board and are actively being pursued. These relate to earlier intervention in the lives of children living in particularly adverse circumstances.

Mr Eastwood asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQW 39470/11-15, to detail (i) the total funding; and (ii) the date funding will be made available to REACH Across.
(AQW 40575/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The 2014/15 Central Good Relations Funding scheme closed for applications on 10 February 2014. There was a very significant demand for funding. Thirty-two applicants have been awarded funding totalling around £1.6M.

Funding has been released in phases as it has become available. REACH Across has not been successful in the previous tranche. However, by keeping applications live, there is still an opportunity for funding further groups if funding becomes available in year. The organisation will, along with the other remaining applicants, be advised of the outcome of their application as soon as possible.

Ms Boyle asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what funding streams are available within their Department for community groups to apply for in 2015.
(AQW 40650/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Department provides funding through a range of funding schemes and programmes. Community groups may apply to these where their applications meet the specific criteria for the schemes.

For 2014/15, Community groups whose applications meet the criteria, may apply for small grants of up to £500 through the Central Good Relations Fund.

All other community related funding streams for 2014/15 are now fully committed.

Now that the 2015/16 budget has been agreed by the Executive, the Department will be able to finalise funding allocations for the new financial year.

Ms Sugden asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQW 38521/11-15, what proportion of this site is likely to be designated for use by the community voluntary sector.
(AQW 40856/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Our aim is that community needs should be identified and taken into account in the future disposal of the Shackleton site. Any plans for the future development of the site will be expected to demonstrate how this would be done.

Ms Sugden asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQW 39389/11-15, whether it is likely that findings of the stakeholder review of the North West Gateway Initiative, and material relating to further consultation with relevant Departments, will be published in due course.
(AQW 40902/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We refer you to our answer of 9 December 2014.

The publication of the Stakeholder consultation is a matter for the North South Ministerial Council to consider at a future meeting.

Ms Sugden asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for their assessment of the role and effectiveness of the One Plan Interdepartmental Coordination Group.
(AQW 40904/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The One Plan Interdepartmental Coordination Group provides strategic analysis and advice to the Executive, departments and the Derry/Londonderry Strategy Board on the most appropriate means through which the policies, programmes and projects of Executive Departments can positively impact the One Plan. The Group meets twice a year to monitor progress and it also provides a forum for the discussion and resolution of cross cutting issues. Individual departments remain, however, responsible for the implementation of their own policies, programmes and projects.

Progress continues to be made on the implementation of the One Plan across each of the Catalyst Programmes to grow the local economy, and provide more jobs.

Mr F McCann asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the United Youth element of Together: Building a United Community.
(AQO 7345/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: One of the seven core headline actions committed to within Together: Building a United Community is the development of the United Youth Programme.

To date there has been comprehensive and detailed engagement with youth related organisations and young people themselves to ensure the programme has maximum buy-in and consensus.

The co-design process begun by OFMDFM is being continued by the Department for Employment and Learning and is being supported by a Design Team which includes representation from the Department for Employment and Learning, OFMDFM, the Department for Social Development, the Department of Education, Community Relations Council, Youthnet, Youth Council, International Fund for Ireland, Public Health Agency and Education and Library Boards.

OFMDFM successfully ran the first pilot through Springboard called “Headstart”.

A call for concept proposals to deliver pilot projects was issued in early September. Following a development phase in the Autumn, over 150 pilot applications were submitted in December. An assessment of these proposals was completed with assistance from the programme’s Design Team.

As a result, 50 organisations (57 proposals) have been selected to go through to the next co-design development stage. Following this development phase, a number of pilot schemes will be operational during the 2015/16 financial year.

It is expected that the selected pilot projects will be aimed at the 16 – 24 age group who are not in education, employment or training and offered to approximately 300 young people. By summer 2016 the programme will extend the eligible age range to the 14-24 age group.

Ms Sugden asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how much funding has been allocated through the Social Investment Fund to deprived areas within the Northern Zone since 2011.
(AQW 41488/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Social Investment Fund selection criteria meant that projects must address deprivation or dereliction. Six projects, fulfilling these criteria are being taken forward in the Northern Zone. They are as follows:

Coleraine Rural and Urban Network (CRUN) and Fuel Poverty had funding of £0.46 million and £1.83 million respectively, committed in 2014. CRUN has contractors on site.

A letter of offer has issued to Community Capacity Hubs for £1.13 million and a letter of offer will issue shortly for Employment through Education for £3.54 million.

Capacity for Health and Access to Employment and Health are estimated at £1.7 million and £0.8 million respectively. These figures are approximate as both projects are currently going through the internal approvals process.

Ms Sugden asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the Social Protection Fund as outlined in the Programme for Government 2011-15.
(AQW 41551/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Social Protection Fund was designed to help individuals and families facing hardship due to the ongoing economic downturn.

During 2012 some £22 million was distributed by the Department for Social Development and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety as Winter Fuel Payments for benefit recipients and cancer patients. However, no funding was explicitly allocated to the Social Protection Fund over the remaining three years of the budget period.

In 2013 we decided to subsume the Social Protection Fund into one consolidated and integrated ‘Delivering Social Change Fund’ which affords us the opportunity to respond quickly, and in a flexible manner, to urgent social needs as they arise and address the specific needs of some of our most vulnerable individuals and families.

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (i) what discussions she has had with the Minister of the Environment on the environmental damage caused to rivers by fuel launderers; (ii) to detail the rivers concerned; and (iii) to detail any fish kills attributed to fuel laundering over the last five years.
(AQW 41182/11-15)

Mrs O’Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): I have had no discussions with the Minister of the Environment regarding environmental damage caused to rivers by fuel launderers. Information relating to environmental damage caused to rivers and any fish kills attributed to fuel laundering should be sought from the Department of the Environment.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to AQW 40427/11-15, why Countryside Management Scheme payments will be delayed, despite farm businesses declaring their intention to claim in May 2014.
(AQW 41329/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The NI Countryside Management Scheme (NICMS) is administered according to the rules set down in EU and National Legislation. Under these rules, claims for all agri-environment agreements entering into force after 01 January 2007 must be made via the Single Application Form (SAF) and be received by 15 May of that year.

Agri-environment scheme participants must comply with the terms and conditions of the scheme and have the full calendar year in which to observe required prescriptions and complete any claimed work. Therefore, my Department may be unable to complete some required control checks prior to the end of the calendar year. Furthermore, by issuing the second stage claims in early 2015 my Department is able to provide the scheme participant with the most up to date information available on their pre-populated form thus assisting them to make an accurate claim. My Department is currently on schedule to commence payment of the 2014 NICMS claims in May 2015, which is in line with the issue of the 2013 payments.

As with all payments to farmers I will continue to press for NICMS payments to be made as early as possible.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to AQW 40427/11-15, why claim forms will not be available until the end of February 2015.
(AQW 41330/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The issuing of the NI Countryside Management Scheme (NICMS) Second stage claim forms commenced on 26 January 2015 and will continue over the next 6-8 weeks.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to AQW 40427/11-15, how practical the two week window will be for farmers.
(AQW 41331/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: For the 2014 NI Countryside Management Scheme participants have been asked to return their completed second stage claim within two weeks of receipt. This will allow DARD to begin processing of the forms and ensure payments are made as soon as possible. Late claims may result in a delay to payments for all participants.

This year the second stage claim form is pre-populated. This will mean for the majority of claimants they will have little or no changes to make, so allowing for a quicker return. My Department consulted with farmer representative groups on this issue and no concerns were received regarding the two week return period.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to AQW 40427/11-15, whether the two week window is to allow her Department to facilitate the administration of the Countryside Management Scheme; and what appeal process is in place for an application which falls outside the two week window.
(AQW 41332/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: All farm businesses which declared their intention to claim for the NICMS on the 2014 Single Application Form (SAF), will receive a claim pack, including a pre-populated claim form and a guide on how to complete the form. Farm businesses have been asked to return the form within two weeks of receipt. This will allow DARD to begin processing of the forms and ensure payments are made as soon as possible.

The Review of Decision Process is available to applicants who may wish to request a formal review of a decision made by DARD. To request a Stage One review applicants must contact the Countryside Management Development Branch at Loughry Campus and request a Review of Decisions Stage 1 application form (AP1). The completed application form must be received by the Department no later than 42 calendar days of the date on the decision letter. I wish to encourage all farmers to return their claim as promptly as possible as this will enable the processing of the claim towards payment.

Ms Ruane asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the the financial investment in fisheries in (i) Kilkeel; (ii) Annalong; and (iii) Ardglass, in each year since 2007.
(AQW 41420/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: From 2007 to 2009 grant funding was made available to the fishing communities of Kilkeel, Annalong and Ardglass through the EU Financial Instrument for Fisheries Guidance (FIFG). This fund was succeeded by the European Fisheries Fund which provided the investment from 2009.

Details of the level of investment (up to and including 31st December 2014) are set out in the table below:

	Annalong	Ardglass	Kilkeel
2007	£0	£0	£943,373
2008	£0	£0	£217,964
2009	£0	£0	£0

	Annalong	Ardglass	Kilkeel
2010	£0	£467,662	£807,835
2011	£141,921	£399,124	£1,334,899
2012	£32,437	£122,821	£1,238,897
2013	£41,584	£294,719	£268,585
2014	£142,678	£135,400	£2,587,808

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether the latest farm maps issued to farmers in 2014 contain all the previous information supplied by farmers and the inspections considered and included in the re-mapping exercise; and whether these changes or amendments can be audited.
(AQW 41424/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: In November 2014 farmers were sent an updated 2015 Scheme map and field information table to assist completion of the 2015 Single Application Form. These maps only showed the fields declared by a business in its 2014 Single Application Form. Field boundaries had been reassessed and ineligible areas had been captured to lower levels than in previous maps.

As this information will be used to pre-print the 2015 Single Application Form, DARD asked businesses to check their map carefully and to advise us of any necessary changes. If a farmer advised us of changes to their map or if we make any further changes, for example, as a result of an on-the-spot inspection, we will issue a replacement map in early 2015.

In order to produce the final map, we have to combine information from a variety of sources. These include the ongoing wider DARD review of maps, farmer reported changes and inspection findings.

These changes are applied in a priority order. In practice this means that an inspection change may override a change indicated by a review of aerial photography if the inspection was more recent. Farmer reported changes may similarly be over-ridden in certain circumstances due to greater accuracy of the inspection. In this case it is possible that a farmer change reported before an inspection is carried out may not have been applied.

All inspection information will be applied to DARD's mapping dataset to assist with the 2015 scheme year, but due to the lengthy process of inspection review and appeal, some of these have not yet been applied. These will be applied at the earliest opportunity and if possible a map issued to farm businesses in April. If it is not possible to provide a revised map in advance of the May SAF deadline, my staff will communicate directly with these farmers and advise them on how to complete their 2015 SAF.

If a farmer identifies an error in the maps received, it is important that the farmer lets the Department know and adjusts the claim accordingly.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she will extend the legislation banning fox hunting to Northern Ireland.
(AQW 41460/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department has no powers to regulate, or ban, hunting or coursing with dogs. Hunting is not regarded as an agricultural activity. It is not exclusively carried out on agricultural land and the fox is not regarded as an agricultural animal. DARD has responsibility for the Welfare of Animals Act 2011 (the 2011 Act), but its responsibilities towards animals in the wild are very limited and do not include any controls over the hunting, or taking, of wild animals and birds, or powers of entry for their protection.

Section 53 of the 2011 Act specifically exempts from its provisions the coursing or hunting of any animal, other than a protected animal, except under certain circumstances such as the animal being released in an injured state or into a confined space from which it has no reasonable chance of escape.

As the hunting issue cuts across the responsibilities of two or more Ministers any introduction of legislation to ban hunting with dogs is a matter for the Executive.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what process has been put in place to appoint the Chairperson for the Agri-Food Strategy Board for the next term.
(AQW 41503/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Chair and industry Members of the Agri-Food Strategy Board (AFSB) were appointed on merit following an open and transparent competition conducted in accordance with the spirit of the Commissioner for Public Appointments NI Code of Practice.

The DETI Minister and I are currently considering future arrangements for strategic advice to government on development of the agri-food sector. I expect decisions on future arrangements to be communicated to stakeholders in the very near future.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether any measures are in place to increase the representation of primary producers on the Agri-Food Strategy Board.
(AQW 41504/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Chair and 8 industry members of the Agri-Food Strategy Board (AFSB) were appointed on merit following an open and transparent competition which was conducted in the spirit of the Commissioner for Public Appointments NI Code of Practice.

Those appointed to the Board were selected, not to represent specific sectors or elements of the supply chain, but because Minister Foster and I believed collectively they had the appropriate skills and experience to develop a strategic vision for the agri-food sector and a plan to achieve that vision.

As a result of this competitive process, two producers were appointed to the AFSB, and in addition two employees of producer-led co-operatives were also appointed. In addition, there was significant primary producer representation on the Board's sectoral sub-groups, which ensured that the views of farmers, growers and fishermen fed directly into the development of the Board's Going for Growth report. Stakeholder organisations, including producers, also had an opportunity to contribute their views via a public Call for Evidence.

It is envisaged that producers will continue to play a key role in implementation of the agreed actions in response to Going for Growth.

Mr Boylan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the funding her Department has awarded to the Newry and Armagh constituency since 2007, broken down by the (i) amount awarded; and (ii) the scheme from which the funding was awarded.
(AQW 41608/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The table below provides an overview of the funding awarded to the Newry and Armagh constituency:

Year	Amount
2007/08	£29,518,888
2008/09	£30,125,871
2009/10	£35,126,008
2010/11	£32,918,348
2011/12	£34,152,911
2012/13	£35,879,817
2013/14	£34,006,898
2014/15	£26,769,409
Total	**£258,498,150**

Further detailed information has been provided in the attached table, a copy of which has been placed in the Assembly Library.

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what percentage of the Military Covenant her Department has adopted as policy; and what percentage has been implemented.
(AQW 40637/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): My Department and its associated arm's length bodies ensure equality of opportunity for all individuals and groups in accessing services across the culture, arts and leisure sector.

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what funding streams are available within her Department for sports groups to apply for in 2015.
(AQW 40647/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: To sustain and increase participation, and improve performances in sport, Sport NI, an arms length body of my Department, invests in a range of projects throughout the north of Ireland. Sport NI is a Lottery award distributor and also provides exchequer funding to sports groups and clubs seeking funding in the north.

Sport NI's Active Awards for Sport programme is a Lottery funded small grants programme primarily aimed at grassroots community based sport. Round two of this programme is currently being assessed and will be completed at the end January 2015. The next funding round of Active Awards for Sport programme will open in March 2015.

In addition, new funding streams will be developed should other funding become available. Sports groups and clubs can register with Sport NI via its website, so that they are informed of these new funding programmes as they are launched.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the projects in East Londonderry which will benefit from the additional resources and capital funding received by her Department in the October monitoring round.
(AQW 40652/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The attached table lists projects in your constituency where funding is confirmed or has already been provided from the additional allocations. It is possible that further projects may be funded: if so, these will be announced in due course.

Projects in East Londonderry benefiting from the additional resource and capital funding received by the Department in the October monitoring round 14/15.

Funded Entity	Project Name / Description of Funding	Amount Allocated(£)	Capital / Resource
Stendhal Festival Ltd	Stendhal Festival – Outreach Programme	30,000	Resource
Limavady Borough Council	Limavady Cultural Programme	20,000	Resource
Coleraine Borough Council	WOMAD Coleraine 'Culture of Peace' Legacy Programme	20,000	Resource
Coleraine Borough Council	North Coast Sports Village	1,262,000	Capital

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the outcomes from the report of the elver fish kill at Ballyshannon Power Station in 2014; and whether the Electricity Supply Board will be prosecuted for this incident.
(AQW 40700/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) has undertaken an investigation of the fish kill in April 2014 at Ballyshannon and has referred the matter for legal opinion.

No details of the findings of the investigation have been released as yet and as such it would be inappropriate for me to comment further on the matter at this time. I will keep you advised of developments.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to list the (i) recipients; and (ii) relevant awards from Sports NI since May 2011.
(AQW 40710/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: To sustain and increase participation, and improve performances in sport, Sport NI, an arm's-length body of my Department, invests in a range of projects throughout the north of Ireland. Sport NI is a Lottery award distributor and also provides exchequer funding to a number of Sport NI recognised Governing Bodies of Sport and sports groups and clubs seeking funding in the north.

Details of investments awarded by Sport NI since May 2011 to March 2014 can be accessed on the Sport NI website at http://www.sportni.net/funding/funding-guidance/ I have arranged for details of awards granted since April 2014 to date to be placed in the Assembly library.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much money had been profiled for spend on the redevelopment of Casement Park between January 2015 and March 2016.
(AQW 40727/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The spend profile for the redevelopment of Casement Park between January 2015 and March 2016, prior to the outcome of the Judicial Review, was circa £53.0m.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure when she first became aware of the scale of the opposition to the GAA proposal for the redevelopment of Casement Park.
(AQW 40728/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: A local residents group, Mooreland and Owenvarragh Residents' Association (MORA), first made contact with me in November 2012 to raise their concerns regarding the redevelopment of Casement Park.

Extensive community consultation was an essential element of the planning process. The UCGAA were fully committed to fully consulting all the community including MORA and therefore a number of community consultation events took place. My Department was fully supportive to the UCGAA during the community consultation process for the redevelopment of the Casement Park.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure why her Department made no contingency plans to ensure that, if there was a delay in the redevelopment of Casement Park, the funding could be used for other parts of the overall three-sports

stadiums package which were ready to move forward, in particular the football sub-regional stadiums, and so that no funding would be handed back by her Department.
(AQW 40729/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: DCAL has been allocated £110 million by the Executive to deliver the Stadia projects which include the redevelopment of Casement Park. The redevelopment of Casement Park is an Executive Programme for Government pledge and therefore remains a key priority.

The funding cannot be used by the Department for other capital projects. It is part of a decision that was made by the Executive going back as far as March 2011. I remain fully committed to ensuring this project is delivered and I will do all that I can to ensure funds are made available in the event that planning permission is granted at a later date.

The Executive endorsed a proposal to provide an additional c. £36m for sub-regional stadium development for football as a priority area of spend in the next CSR period (2015).

DCAL has developed a Strategic Outline Case for the Sub Regional Programme and following the Assembly's approval of the 2015/16 budget, this programme will now proceed and commence it next stages.

I am optimistic that the remaining full funding will be approved in due course to allow construction work to commence in 2016/17.

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on the Casement Park redevelopment project.
(AQW 40808/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Funding Agreement was issued to the UCGAA and the successful contractor (Heron Buckingham JV) was appointed in December 2013.

Planning permission for a 38,000 all-seater stadium at Casement Park was granted by the Department of Environment in January 2014.

A local residents group, Mooreland and Owenvarragh Residents' Association, (MORA) applied for a Judicial review into the decision and this was granted. The case was heard over 13 days between 9 September and 13 October 2014. On 18th December 2014 Mr Justice Horner quashed the existing planning approval for the Casement Park project.

There is a strong resolve within the Ulster GAA to submit a new planning application in 2015 to develop a regional stadium in Ulster at Casement Park. Any new planning application will take account of the learning points raised in the judgment and DCAL will fully support Ulster GAA during the new planning process.

The redevelopment of Casement Park is an Executive Programme for Government pledge and therefore will remain a key priority.

DCAL is committed to the re-development of Casement Park and will work with all parties to facilitate this becoming a reality.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail any operations by bailiffs on the stretch of the Braid River from Curls Avenue to Railway Street and to Sainsbury's supermarket in Ballymena, in the last twelve months.
(AQW 40913/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: In the last twelve months there have been sixteen patrols by DCAL Fisheries Protection Officers on the stretch of the Braid River in question.

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on her Department's future plans for the management of Seagahan Dam, Armagh.
(AQW 40922/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My Department has entered into a new leasing arrangement with NI Water (NIW) for an additional 14 waters which includes Seagahan Reservoir. My Department will manage the Seagahan fishery directly in 2015.

In accordance with the approach for the other NIW waters it is my Department's intention to invite interested parties, through a public tender process, to manage and develop Seagahan Reservoir in the future.

Ms Ruane asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail her Department's financial investment in South Down in each year since 2007, including the (i) organisations that have received funding; and (b) investment they received.
(AQW 41423/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The information you requested is provided in the attached table. For the purposes of this response, investment is understood to include capital and resource funding since 2007: it is reported on a financial year basis except in the case of North/ South Bodies where expenditure is reported on a calendar year basis.

Financial investment in South Down in each year since 2007, including the (i) organisations that have received funding; and (b) investment they received.

Year	Source	Organisation	Amount
2007	Foras na Gaeilge	Cumann Gaelach Áit Thí Chathail	£2,941
2007	Foras na Gaeilge	Glór na nGael Uachtar Tíre	£2,941
2007	Foras na Gaeilge	Cumann Gaelach Leath Chathail	£22,508
2007	Foras na Gaeilge	Cumann Gaelach Áit Thí Chathail	£1,670
2007	Foras na Gaeilge	Conradh na Gaeilge Boirche Íochtar	£3,500
2007	Foras na Gaeilge	Cumann Gaelach Áit Thí Chathail	£1,400
2007	Foras na Gaeilge	Fís 2008	£14,925
2007	Ulster-Scots Agency	Altnaveigh House Cultural Society	£8,492
2007	Ulster-Scots Agency	Ballymageough Rural Development Association	£4,290
2007	Ulster-Scots Agency	Hollymount Rural Community Association	£7,103
2007	Ulster-Scots Agency	Kilmegan & Aughlisnafin Rural Community Group	£7,818
2007	Ulster-Scots Agency	Newry Heritage & Development Association Youth Group “Kidiscape”	£17,025
2007	Ulster-Scots Agency	Schomberg Festival Committee	£11,247
2007	Ulster-Scots Agency	South Down Action for Healing Wounds	£3,500
2007	Ulster-Scots Agency	Ballinran Summer Scheme	£3,500
2007	Ulster-Scots Agency	Cranfield Cultural Society Summer Scheme	£3,500
2007	Ulster-Scots Agency	Mourne Young Defenders	£3,500
2007	Ulster-Scots Agency	Newry Heritage & Development Association Youth Group	£3,500
2007	Ulster-Scots Agency	Schomberg Fife & Drum	£3,500
2007	Ulster-Scots Agency	Altnaveigh House School of Dance	£5,498
2007	Ulster-Scots Agency	Aughnagurgan Scottish Dance Association	£3,995
2007	Ulster-Scots Agency	Kilbroney Integrated Primary School	£720
2007	Ulster-Scots Agency	Kirknarra School of Dance	£2,668
2007	Ulster-Scots Agency	Ballymartin Pipe Band	£2,325
2007	Ulster-Scots Agency	Closkelt Pipe Band	£1,800
2007	Ulster-Scots Agency	Grallagh Part Flute Band	£1,913
2007	Ulster-Scots Agency	Roden Accordion Band	£2,100
2007	Ulster-Scots Agency	Schomberg Fife & Drum	£2,250
2007	Ulster-Scots Agency	Schomberg Fife & Drum	£2,250
2007	Ulster-Scots Agency	Aughnagurgan Rural Development Association	£900
2007	Ulster-Scots Agency	Ballymageough Rural Development Association	£3,173
2007	Ulster-Scots Agency	Moneygore Rural Development Association	£4,860
2007	Ulster-Scots Agency	Schomberg Folk Orchestra	£2,025
2007	Ulster-Scots Agency	Valley Heritage Society	£2,363
2007	Ulster-Scots Agency	Mourne Young Defenders Flute Band	£1,200
2007	Ulster-Scots Agency	Donaghmore Development Association	£250
2007	Ulster-Scots Agency	Donaghmore Development Association	£250
2007	Ulster-Scots Agency	Friends of Slieve Roe House	£400
2007	Ulster-Scots Agency	Drumlough & Ballygorian Rural Development Association	£250
2007	Ulster-Scots Agency	Hollymount Rural Community Association	£250

Year	Source	Organisation	Amount
2007	Ulster-Scots Agency	Kirknarra School of Dance	£678
2007	Ulster-Scots Agency	Kirknarra School of Dance	£250
2007	Ulster-Scots Agency	Schomberg Folk Orchestra	£167
2007	Ulster-Scots Agency	Waringsford & Tullyniskey Rural Community Association	£250
2007/08	Arts Council NI	Down District Council	£5,000
2007/08	Department	Banbridge district Council	£5,000
2007/08	Department	Down district Council	£2,820
2007/08	Department	Newry & Mourne District Council	£28,278
2007/08	Sport NI	Mourne Mountain Rescue Team	£47,855
2007/08	Northern Ireland Museums Council	Down County Museum	£3,185
2007/08	Northern Ireland Museums Council	Downpatrick and Co. Down Railway	£5,284
2008	Foras na Gaeilge	Glór na nGael Uachtar Tíre	£1,740
2008	Foras na Gaeilge	Cumann Gaelach Leath Chathail	£35,786
2008	Foras na Gaeilge	Cumann Gaelach Áit Thí Chathail	£1,900
2008	Foras na Gaeilge	Conradh na Gaeilge Boirche Íochtar	£3,000
2008	Foras na Gaeilge	St. Patrick's Youth Club	£3,500
2008	Foras na Gaeilge	Cumann Gaelach Ait Thí Chathal	£3,000
2008	Foras na Gaeilge	Conradh na Gaeilge Boirche Íochtar	£3,500
2008	Foras na Gaeilge	Cumann Staire Shéamúis Uí Néill	£4,478
2008	Foras na Gaeilge	Scoil Samhraidh Shéamúis Uí Dhuinn (Kairos)	£1,194
2008	Ulster-Scots Agency	Ballymageough Rural Development Association	£4,500
2008	Ulster-Scots Agency	Altnaveigh House Ltd	£6,550
2008	Ulster-Scots Agency	Ballinran Community Association	£2,837
2008	Ulster-Scots Agency	Ballyvea Rural Development Association	£700
2008	Ulster-Scots Agency	Newry Hertiage & Development Association Youth Group	£8,975
2008	Ulster-Scots Agency	Schomberg Festival Committee	£8,150
2008	Ulster-Scots Agency	Mourne Young Defenders Flute Band	£2,400
2008	Ulster-Scots Agency	Newry Heritage & Development Association - Kidiscape	£2,180
2008	Ulster-Scots Agency	Schomberg Fife & Drum	£2,800
2008	Ulster-Scots Agency	Altnaveigh House School of Dance	£713
2008	Ulster-Scots Agency	Finnard Rural Development Association	£250
2008	Ulster-Scots Agency	Heart of Down Highland Dancers	£770
2008	Ulster-Scots Agency	Kirknarra School of Dance	£778
2008	Ulster-Scots Agency	Kirknarra School of Dance	£250
2008	Ulster-Scots Agency	Lisnamulligan Rural Association	£250
2008	Ulster-Scots Agency	Waringsford & Tullyniskey Rural Community	£250
2008	Ulster-Scots Agency	Altnaveigh School of Dance	£6,000
2008	Ulster-Scots Agency	Aughnagurgan Scottish Dance Association	£3,364
2008	Ulster-Scots Agency	Closkelt Highland Dancers	£1,360
2008	Ulster-Scots Agency	Closkelt Highland Dancers	£1,950

Year	Source	Organisation	Amount
2008	Ulster-Scots Agency	Finnard Rural Development Association	£1,800
2008	Ulster-Scots Agency	Kirknarra School of Dance	£3,449
2008	Ulster-Scots Agency	Heart of Down Highland Dancers	£2,604
2008	Ulster-Scots Agency	Heart of Down Highland Dancers	£2,088
2008	Ulster-Scots Agency	Kirknarra School of Dance	£2,492
2008	Ulster-Scots Agency	Ballymartin Pipe Band	£2,325
2008	Ulster-Scots Agency	Brunswick Accordion Band	£2,100
2008	Ulster-Scots Agency	Derryogue Flute Band	£2,850
2008	Ulster-Scots Agency	Hunter Memorial Flute Band	£3,750
2008	Ulster-Scots Agency	Legananny Accordion Band	£2,175
2008	Ulster-Scots Agency	Mourne Young Defenders Flute Band	£3,840
2008	Ulster-Scots Agency	Roden Accordion Band	£2,100
2008	Ulster-Scots Agency	Ballymageough Rural Development Association	£2,700
2008	Ulster-Scots Agency	Ballyvea Rural Development Association	£2,850
2008	Ulster-Scots Agency	Cranfield Cultural Society	£2,625
2008	Ulster-Scots Agency	Cranfield Cultural Society	£1,750
2008	Ulster-Scots Agency	Moneygore Rural Development Association	£3,600
2008	Ulster-Scots Agency	Schomberg Fife & Drum	£1,275
2008	Ulster-Scots Agency	Schomberg Fife & Drum	£700
2008	Ulster-Scots Agency	Schomberg Fife & Drum	£850
2008	Ulster-Scots Agency	Schomberg Folk Orchestra	£2,025
2008	Ulster-Scots Agency	Schomberg Folk Orchestra	£1,400
2008	Ulster-Scots Agency	Schomberg Folk Orchestra	£540
2008	Department	Public Angling Estate – Car park at Spelga Dam	£43,000
2008/09	Northern Ireland Museums Council	Down County Museum	£11,178
2008/09	Northern Ireland Museums Council	Downpatrick and Co. Down Railway	£2,294
2008/09	Sport NI	Outdoor Recreation NI	£34,430
2008/09	Sport NI	Eventing Ireland (Northern Region)	£6,000
2008/09	Sport NI	Newry Olympic Hockey Club	£308,305
2008/09	Sport NI	Dromara GAC	£245,000
2008/09	Sport NI	Mourne Mountain Rescue Team	£16,154
2008/09	Sport NI	Mourne Mountain Rescue Team	£13,031
2008/09	Arts Council NI	Ballymartin Pipe Band	£4,999
2008/09	Department	Banbridge district Council	£10,600
2008/09	Department	Down district Council	£16,500
2008/09	Department	Newry & Mourne District Council	£25,400
2009	Foras na Gaeilge	Cumann Gaelach Leath Chathail	£35,333
2009	Foras na Gaeilge	Conradh na Gaeilge Boirche Íochtar	£3,200
2009	Foras na Gaeilge	St Patricks Youth Club	£3,500
2009	Foras na Gaeilge	St Patricks Youth Club	£3,500

Year	Source	Organisation	Amount
2009	Ulster-Scots Agency	Ballymageough Rural Dev Association	£2,831
2009	Ulster-Scots Agency	South Down Defenders Flute Band	£3,590
2009	Ulster-Scots Agency	Banbridge Orange Hall Committee	£5,448
2009	Ulster-Scots Agency	Drumadonald Rural Dev Associatiom	£1,275
2009	Ulster-Scots Agency	Schomberg Festival Committee	£5,095
2009	Ulster-Scots Agency	Ballinran Summer Scheme	£2,811
2009	Ulster-Scots Agency	Curley Rural Community Association	£1,830
2009	Ulster-Scots Agency	Ballinran Summer Scheme	£2,740
2009	Ulster-Scots Agency	Philip Crawford - Happenstance	£7,500
2009	Ulster-Scots Agency	Closkelt Highland Dancers	£638
2009	Ulster-Scots Agency	Curley Rural Community Association	£2,272
2009	Ulster-Scots Agency	Donaghmore Development Association	£250
2009	Ulster-Scots Agency	Finnard Rural Dev Association	£250
2009	Ulster-Scots Agency	Altnaveigh House School of Dance	£803
2009	Ulster-Scots Agency	Finnard Rural Dev Association	£1,441
2009	Ulster-Scots Agency	Kirknarra School of Dance	£900
2009	Ulster-Scots Agency	Kirknarra School of Dance	£180
2009	Ulster-Scots Agency	Kirknarra School of Dance	£250
2009	Ulster-Scots Agency	Lisnamulligan Pipe Band	£200
2009	Ulster-Scots Agency	Aughlisnafin Accordion Band	£1,213
2009	Ulster-Scots Agency	Ballymageough Rural Dev Association	£1,950
2009	Ulster-Scots Agency	Flutes of Mourne	£2,066
2009	Ulster-Scots Agency	Kilkeel Silver Band	£735
2009	Ulster-Scots Agency	Lisnaward Rural Association	£1,800
2009	Ulster-Scots Agency	Pride of Ballinran	£2,080
2009	Ulster-Scots Agency	Skeogh Flute Band	£2,400
2009	Ulster-Scots Agency	Skeogh Flute Band	£1,040
2009	Ulster-Scots Agency	South Down Defenders Flute Band	£1,650
2009	Ulster-Scots Agency	Geoghegan Memorial Pipe Band	£3,593
2009/10	Department	Banbridge District Council	£10,700
2009/10	Department	Down District Council	£16,500
2009/10	Department	Newry & Mourne District Council	£25,058
2009/10	Department	Fish Counter at Shimna River	£45,000
2009/10	Northern Ireland Museums Council	Down County Museum	£2,188
2009/10	Northern Ireland Museums Council	Downpatrick and Co. Down Railway	£3,025
2009/10	Libraries NI	Library HQ, Ballynahinch	£633,943
2009/10	Libraries NI	Ballynahinch Library	£105,630
2009/10	Libraries NI	Castlewellan Library	£66,189
2009/10	Libraries NI	Downpatrick Library	£379,123
2009/10	Libraries NI	Newcastle Library	£122,663

Year	Source	Organisation	Amount
2009/10	Libraries NI	Kilkeel Library	£77,188
2009/10	Libraries NI	Warrenpoint Library	£133,765
2009/10	Libraries NI	Rathfriland Library	£46,923
2009/10	Arts Council NI	Belfast Music Society	£4,000
2009/10	Arts Council NI	Down Community Arts Ltd	£30,000
2009/10	Arts Council NI	Fringe Performances Ltd	£30,000
2009/10	Arts Council NI	Down District Council Arts Service	£600,510
2009/10	Arts Council NI	Newcastle Glees Musical Society	£80,424
2009/10	Arts Council NI	Elfire Architectural and Sculptural Ceramics	£8,621
2009/10	Arts Council NI	LitNet-NI	£32,233
2009/10	Arts Council NI	Melting Pot Candle Co	£6,029
2009/10	Arts Council NI	Penny Distribution	£10,000
2009/10	Arts Council NI	Referalot Ltd	£33,944
2009/10	Arts Council NI	Vectorfunk	£9,840
2009/10	Arts Council NI	Closkelt Highland Pipe Band	£3,663
2009/10	Arts Council NI	Schomberg Fife and Drum Band	£2,741
2009/10	Arts Council NI	South Down Defenders Flute Band	£5,000
2009/10	Sport NI	Glenn GAC	£4,700
2009/10	Sport NI	Kingdom Youth Club	£6,000
2009/10	Sport NI	Banbridge Amateur Boxing Club	£7,394
2009/10	Sport NI	Banbridge Amateur Boxing Club	£1,964
2009/10	Sport NI	Blazing Paddles Canoe Club	£5,200
2009/10	Sport NI	Down GAA County Board	£149,168
2009/10	Sport NI	Blazing Paddles Canoe Club	£3,400
2009/10	Sport NI	Clanrye Group	£6,961
2009/10	Sport NI	Down GAA County Board	£5,300
2009/10	Sport NI	Mourne Gymnastics Club	£4,301
2009/10	Sport NI	Newry & Mourne WATCH Club	£8,000
2009/10	Sport NI	Newry & Mourne Carers Limited	£5,750
2009/10	Sport NI	Newry City FC	£8,500
2009/10	Sport NI	Newry Wheelers Cycling Club	£3,161
2009/10	Sport NI	Quoile Yacht Club	£9,700
2009/10	Sport NI	Saval GAC	£5,799
2009/10	Sport NI	Tollymore United FC	£2,707
2009/10	Sport NI	Newry City FC	£231,500
2009/10	Sport NI	Tullyvallen Rangers FC	£192,494
2009/10	Sport NI	Craigavon Borough Council	£13,941
2009/10	Sport NI	Belleeks GFC	£241,688
2009/10	Sport NI	Carrickcruppen GAC	£68,958
2009/10	Sport NI	Drumgath GAC	£245,000
2009/10	Sport NI	An Riocht GAC	£233,340

Year	Source	Organisation	Amount
2009/10	Sport NI	St Malachy's GAC (Castlewellan)	£245,000
2009/10	Sport NI	Clonduff GAC	£245,000
2009/10	Sport NI	Down Club Mark Ltd	£72,000
2009/10	Sport NI	Down District Council (sports hall)	£1,294,000
2009/10	Sport NI	Kilcoo GAC	£245,000
2009/10	Sport NI	Warrenpoint Town FC	£245,000
2009/10	Sport NI	Mourne Mountain Rescue Team	£15,490
2009/10	Sport NI	Mourne Mountain Rescue Team	£11,109
2010	Foras na Gaeilge	East Down Rural Community Network	£1,600
2010	Foras na Gaeilge	Cumann Gaelach Leath Chathail	£36,304
2010	Foras na Gaeilge	Conradh na Gaeilge, Boirche Íochtar	£800
2010	Foras na Gaeilge	Glór na nGael Uachtar Tíre	£533
2010	Foras na Gaeilge	Conradh na Gaeilge Boirche Íochtar	£3,400
2010	Foras na Gaeilge	Cumann Gaelach Ait Thí Chathal	£3,000
2010	Foras na Gaeilge	Bunscoil Bheanna Boirche	£3,260
2010	Foras na Gaeilge	Conradh na Gaeilge Boirche Íochtar	£3,500
2010	Foras na Gaeilge	Conradh na Gaeilge Boirche Íochtar	£3,500
2010	Foras na Gaeilge	Bunscoil Bheanna Boirche	£3,350
2010	Foras na Gaeilge	Coiste Campa Chormaic an Dúin	£3,500
2010	Foras na Gaeilge	Cumann Gaelach Ait Thí Chathal	£3,500
2010	Foras na Gaeilge	Cumann Gaelach Leath Chathail (Colmcille)	£610
2010	Ulster-Scots Agency	Banbridge Orange Hall Committee	£4,775
2010	Ulster-Scots Agency	Banbridge Orange Hall Committee	£2,047
2010	Ulster-Scots Agency	Banbridge Orange Hall Committee	£250
2010	Ulster-Scots Agency	Schomberg Festival Committee	£5,226
2010	Ulster-Scots Agency	Kirknarra School of Dance	£520
2010	Ulster-Scots Agency	Lisnamulligan Pipe Band	£250
2010	Ulster-Scots Agency	Kilmegan & Aughlisnafin Rural Comm Group	£250
2010	Ulster-Scots Agency	Kilmacrew & District Rural Comm Group	£250
2010	Ulster-Scots Agency	Donaghmore Development Association	£250
2010	Ulster-Scots Agency	Annalong Single Star Flute Band	£1,680
2010	Ulster-Scots Agency	Aughlisnafin Accordion Band	£2,415
2010	Ulster-Scots Agency	Brunswick Accordion Band	£3,612
2010	Ulster-Scots Agency	Closkelt Pipe Band	£1,680
2010	Ulster-Scots Agency	Grallagh Unionist Flute Band	£2,478
2010	Ulster-Scots Agency	Harry Ferguson Memorial Pipe Band	£3,290
2010	Ulster-Scots Agency	Legananny Accordion Band	£2,562
2010	Ulster-Scots Agency	Lisnamulligan Pipe Band	£3,640
2010	Ulster-Scots Agency	Loyal Sons of Benagh Flute Band	£3,255
2010	Ulster-Scots Agency	Star of Down Flute Band Maghera	£2,079
2010	Ulster-Scots Agency	Mourne Young Defenders	£1,960

Year	Source	Organisation	Amount
2010	Ulster-Scots Agency	Orangefield Flute Band	£3,549
2010	Ulster-Scots Agency	Pride of the Hill Flute Band Rathfriland	£3,150
2010	Ulster-Scots Agency	Skeogh Flute Band	£3,640
2010	Ulster-Scots Agency	South Down Defenders Flute Band	£3,402
2010	Ulster-Scots Agency	St Patrick Pipe Band	£2,240
2010	Ulster-Scots Agency	Altnaveigh House School of Dance	£2,640
2010	Ulster-Scots Agency	Closkelt Highland Dancers	£2,100
2010	Ulster-Scots Agency	Curley Rural Community Association	£4,165
2010	Ulster-Scots Agency	Finnard Rural Dev Association	£2,421
2010	Ulster-Scots Agency	Kirknarra School of Dance	£375
2010	Ulster-Scots Agency	Kirknarra School of Dance	£3,247
2010	Ulster-Scots Agency	Ballymageough Rural Dev Association	£2,240
2010	Ulster-Scots Agency	Ballyvea Rural Development Association	£2,520
2010	Ulster-Scots Agency	Ballyvea Rural Development Association	£2,100
2010	Ulster-Scots Agency	Banbridge Orange Hall Committee	£1,400
2010	Ulster-Scots Agency	Schomberg Fife & Drum	£611
2010	Ulster-Scots Agency	Schomberg Folk Ochestra	£1,710
2010	Ulster-Scots Agency	Schomberg Society Kilkeel Ltd.	£15,711
2010/11	Northern Ireland Museums Council	Down County Museum	£3,000
2010/11	Northern Ireland Museums Council	Downpatrick and Co. Down Railway	£3,061
2010/11	Department	Banbridge district Council	£6037
2010/11	Department	Down Council	£17,948
2010/11	Department	Newry & Mourne District Council	£24,802
2010/11	Arts Council NI	Belfast Music Society	£5,000
2010/11	Arts Council NI	Down Community Arts Ltd	£30,000
2010/11	Arts Council NI	Annalong Single Star Flute Band	£2,775
2010/11	Arts Council NI	Benraw Highland Pipe Band	£4,950
2010/11	Arts Council NI	Brunswick Accordion Band	£3,279
2010/11	Arts Council NI	Derryogue Flute Band	£4,402
2010/11	Arts Council NI	Hunter Moore Memorial Flute Band	£4,762
2010/11	Arts Council NI	Johnston Memorial Accordion Band	£4,569
2010/11	Arts Council NI	Pride of the Hill Flute Band	£5,000
2010/11	Arts Council NI	Down District Council	£41,892
2010/11	Arts Council NI	Mourne Heritage Trust	£25,000
2010/11	Libraries NI	Library HQ, Ballynahinch	£241,866
2010/11	Libraries NI	Ballynahinch Library	£120,526
2010/11	Libraries NI	Castlewellan Library	£64,021
2010/11	Libraries NI	Downpatrick Library	£233,336
2010/11	Libraries NI	Newcastle Library	£123,763

Year	Source	Organisation	Amount
2010/11	Libraries NI	Kilkeel Library	£84,837
2010/11	Libraries NI	Warrenpoint Library	£84,330
2010/11	Libraries NI	Rathfriland Library	£49,117
2010/11	Libraries NI	Ballynahinch Library	£3,424
2010/11	Sport NI	Newry City FC	£28,737
2010/11	Libraries NI	Downpatrick Library	£15,862
2010/11	Libraries NI	Ballynahinch Library	£107,979
2010/11	Libraries NI	Castlewellan Library	£53,695
2010/11	Sport NI	Newry & Mourne District Council	£100,000
2010/11	Sport NI	Newry City FC	£29,950
2010/11	Sport NI	Southern Sports Partnership	£1,000
2010/11	Sport NI	Shinken Shobu Ryu	£4,075
2010/11	Sport NI	Down District Council	£250,000
2010/11	Sport NI	Outdoor Recreation NI	£12,627
2010/11	Sport NI	Crossmaglen Rangers GFC	£29,925
2010/11	Sport NI	Mayobridge Community Association	£27,797
2010/11	Sport NI	Russell Gaelic Union	£29,633
2010/11	Sport NI	Russell Gaelic Union	£29,803
2010/11	Sport NI	The Iveagh Branch Of The Pony Club	£7,010
2010/11	Sport NI	Atticall Community Association	£3,756
2010/11	Sport NI	Dundrum Cricket Club	£24,324
2010/11	Sport NI	Friends of Millview	£1,337
2010/11	Sport NI	Silverbridge Boxing Club	£1,700
2010/11	Sport NI	St Colman's College (pitches and athletics track)	£1,378,165
2010/11	Sport NI	Down Basketball	£23,207
2010/11	Sport NI	Carlingford Lough Yacht Club	£29,923
2010/11	Sport NI	East Down Yacht Club	£28,331
2010/11	Sport NI	Newry City FC	£29,950
2010/11	Sport NI	Newcastle Yacht Club	£15,000
2010/11	Sport NI	Down District Council	£1,000
2010/11	Sport NI	Down District Council	£192,562
2010/11	Sport NI	Down GAA County Board	£658,832
2010/11	Sport NI	Craigavon Borough Council	£288,484
2010/11	Sport NI	Mourne Mountain Rescue Team	£15,750
2010/11	Sport NI	Mourne Mountain Rescue Team	£8,417
2011	Foras na Gaeilge	Cumann Gaelach Leath Chathail	£1,310
2011	Foras na Gaeilge	Conradh na Gaeilge, Boirche Íochtar	£39,322
2011	Foras na Gaeilge	Glór na nGael Uachtar Tíre	£47,878
2011	Foras na Gaeilge	2011 Conradh na Gaeilge Boirche Íochtar	£3,500
2011	Foras na Gaeilge	Cumann Gaelach Ait Thí Chathal	£3,500
2011	Foras na Gaeilge	St Patricks Youth Club	£3,500

Year	Source	Organisation	Amount
2011	Foras na Gaeilge	Conradh na Gaeilge Boirche Íochtar	£3,500
2011	Foras na Gaeilge	Cumann Gaelach Ait Thí Chathal	£3,500
2011	Foras na Gaeilge	Ballyholland Primary School	£3,250
2011	Foras na Gaeilge	St Marys Primary School	£3,211
2011	Foras na Gaeilge	Grúpa Tuismitheoirí agus Tachráin	£3,500
2011	Foras na Gaeilge	St Patrick's Community Centre Mayobridge	£3,500
2011	Ulster-Scots Agency	Schomberg Fife & Drum	£1,115
2011	Foras na Gaeilge	Bunscoil na mBeann	£11,777
2011	Foras na Gaeilge	Cumann Gaelach Leath Chathail (Colmcille)	£1,308
2011	Ulster-Scots Agency	South Down Defenders Flute Band	£2,150
2011	Ulster-Scots Agency	Banbridge Orange Hall Committee	£5,075
2011	Ulster-Scots Agency	Banbridge Orange Hall Committee	£1,763
2011	Ulster-Scots Agency	Banbridge Orange Hall Committee	£250
2011	Ulster-Scots Agency	Banbridge Orange Hall Committee	£250
2011	Ulster-Scots Agency	Schomberg Festival Committee	£4,157
2011	Ulster-Scots Agency	Donaghmore Dev Association	£215
2011	Ulster-Scots Agency	Donaghmore Dev Association	£1,650
2011	Ulster-Scots Agency	Finnard Rural Dev Association	£225
2011	Ulster-Scots Agency	Finnard Rural Dev Association	£249
2011	Ulster-Scots Agency	Kirknarra School of Dance	£333
2011	Ulster-Scots Agency	Kirknarra School of Dance	£2,205
2011	Ulster-Scots Agency	Annalong Single Star Flute Band	£1,650
2011	Ulster-Scots Agency	Aughlisnafin Accordion Band	£998
2011	Ulster-Scots Agency	Ballymageough Rural Dev Association	£165
2011	Ulster-Scots Agency	Ballyvea Rural Development Association	£1,568
2011	Ulster-Scots Agency	Benraw Highland Pipe Band	£1,650
2011	Ulster-Scots Agency	Brunswick Accordion Band	£1,050
2011	Ulster-Scots Agency	Closkelt Pipe Band	£1,238
2011	Ulster-Scots Agency	Crimsom Arrow Pipe Band	£659
2011	Ulster-Scots Agency	Schomberg Folk Ochestra	£1,050
2011	Ulster-Scots Agency	Crimsom Arrow Pipe Band	£480
2011	Ulster-Scots Agency	Crossgar Young Defenders	£1,650
2011	Ulster-Scots Agency	Drumlough Highland Pipe Band	£1,050
2011	Ulster-Scots Agency	Lisnamulligan Pipe Band	£1,650
2011	Ulster-Scots Agency	Moneygore Rural Development Association	£1,650
2011	Ulster-Scots Agency	Orangefield Flute Band	£1,650
2011	Ulster-Scots Agency	Pride of the Hill Flute Band Rathfriland	£1,650
2011	Ulster-Scots Agency	Closkelt Highland Dancers	£1,553
2011	Ulster-Scots Agency	Cranfield Cultural Society	£1,647
2011	Ulster-Scots Agency	Curley Rural Community Association	£2,565
2011	Ulster-Scots Agency	Finnard Rural Dev Association	£1,971

Year	Source	Organisation	Amount
2011	Ulster-Scots Agency	Mourne School of Dance	£2,421
2011	Ulster-Scots Agency	Schomberg Society Kilkeel Ltd.	£15,885
2011/12	Northern Ireland Museums Council	Down County Museum	£7,403
2011/12	Department	Banbridge district Council	£10,000
2011/12	Department	Down district Council	£20,320
2011/12	Department	Newry & Mourne District Council	£25,807
2011/12	Arts Council NI	Belfast Music Society	£1,250
2011/12	Arts Council NI	Down Community Arts Ltd	£30,000
2011/12	Arts Council NI	Discovery Publications	£10,000
2011/12	Arts Council NI	Ballyvea Flute Band	£3,567
2011/12	Arts Council NI	Pride of Ballinran Flute Band	£4,680
2011/12	Arts Council NI	Pride of the Hill Auld Boys	£5,000
2011/12	Arts Council NI	Roden Accordion Band	£5,000
2011/12	Arts Council NI	Upper Crossgare Pipe Band	£4,890
2011/12	Arts Council NI	Newcastle Arts Festival Committee	£5,000
2011/12	Arts Council NI	The Beacon Association	£5,000
2011/12	Department	River restoration at Annacloy River	£33,000
2011/12	Libraries NI	Library HQ, Ballynahinch	£143,424
2011/12	Libraries NI	Ballynahinch Library	£117,532
2011/12	Libraries NI	Castlewellan Library	£64,571
2011/12	Libraries NI	Downpatrick Library	£260,714
2011/12	Libraries NI	Newcastle Library	£119,296
2011/12	Libraries NI	Kilkeel Library	£88,042
2011/12	Libraries NI	Warrenpoint Library	£89,907
2011/12	Libraries NI	Rathfriland Library	£46,006
2011/12	Sport NI	Clearsky Adventure Centre	£750
2011/12	Sport NI	Life Adventure	£750
2011/12	Sport NI	Mourne Heritage Trust	£5,000
2011/12	Sport NI	Greenhill YMCA	£750
2011/12	Sport NI	Castlewellan FC	£1,126
2011/12	Sport NI	Down Camogie Association	£3,150
2011/12	Sport NI	Friends of St Dallan's	£2,765
2011/12	Sport NI	Headway Newry Limited	£4,369
2011/12	Sport NI	Mayobridge Community Association	£5,130
2011/12	Sport NI	Newry Ladies Netball Club	£3,717
2011/12	Sport NI	Newry Sports Partnership C.I.C	6250
2011/12	Sport NI	St Brigids Cross Community Boxing Club	£2,024
2011/12	Sport NI	Moneyslane Football Club	£245,000
2011/12	Sport NI	Mourne Mountain Rescue Team	£16,300
2011/12	Sport NI	Mourne Mountain Rescue Team	£19,565

Year	Source	Organisation	Amount
2011/12	Sport NI	Mourne Mountain Rescue Team	£18,833
2011/12	Sport NI	Mourne Mountain Rescue Team	£18,000
2011/12	Sport NI	Down District Council	£282,651
2011/12	Sport NI	Craigavon Borough Council	£292,963
2012	Foras na Gaeilge	Conradh na Gaeilge, Boirche Íochtar	£39,497
2012	Foras na Gaeilge	Glór na nGael Uachtar Tíre	£45,864
2012	Foras na Gaeilge	Campa Chormaic an Dúin	£3,500
2012	Foras na Gaeilge	Conradh na Gaeilge Boirche Íochtar	£3,500
2012	Foras na Gaeilge	Mayobridge Community Centre	£3,500
2012	Foras na Gaeilge	Ballyholland Primary School	£3,500
2012	Foras na Gaeilge	Grúpa Tuismitheoirí agus Tachráin	£2,690
2012	Foras na Gaeilge	Conradh na Gaeilge Boirche Íochtar	£3,500
2012	Foras na Gaeilge	Mayobridge Community Centre	£3,500
2012	Foras na Gaeilge	Ballyholland Primary School	£3,400
2012	Foras na Gaeilge	St Marys Primary School	£3,245
2012	Foras na Gaeilge	Scoil Samhraidh an Dúin (Glór na nGael Uachtar Tíre)	£3,900
2012	Ulster-Scots Agency	Schomberg Festival Committee	£6,422
2012	Ulster-Scots Agency	Finnard Rural Dev Association	£250
2012	Ulster-Scots Agency	Kilnacrew & District Rural Community Group	£250
2012	Ulster-Scots Agency	Kirknarra School of Dance	£706
2012	Ulster-Scots Agency	Lisnamulligan Rural Association	£250
2012	Ulster-Scots Agency	Kirknarra School of Dance	£706
2012	Ulster-Scots Agency	Lisnamulligan Rural Association	£250
2012	Ulster-Scots Agency	Schomberg Folk Ochestra	£250
2012	Ulster-Scots Agency	Schomberg Folk Ochestra	£926
2012	Ulster-Scots Agency	Benraw Highland Pipe Band	£1,140
2012	Ulster-Scots Agency	St Patrick Pipe Band	£1,650
2012	Ulster-Scots Agency	Pride of the Hill Flute Band Rathfriland	£1,193
2012	Ulster-Scots Agency	Closkelt Pipe Band	£1,035
2012	Ulster-Scots Agency	Drumlough Highland Pipe Band	£1,478
2012	Ulster-Scots Agency	Grallagh Part Flute Band	£1,620
2012	Ulster-Scots Agency	Legananny Accordion Band	£1,500
2012	Ulster-Scots Agency	Ballymageough Rural Dev Association	£1,350
2012	Ulster-Scots Agency	Ballyvea Rural Development Association	£1,170
2012	Ulster-Scots Agency	Kirknarra School of Dance	£2,169
2012	Ulster-Scots Agency	Mourne School of Dance	£2,361
2012	Ulster-Scots Agency	Mourne School of Dance	£1,054
2012	Ulster-Scots Agency	Mourne School of Dance	£1,984
2012	Ulster-Scots Agency	Cranfield Cultural Society	£1,656
2012	Ulster-Scots Agency	Finnard Rural Dev Association	£1,338
2012	Ulster-Scots Agency	Cloughskelt Rural & Cultural Association	£1,551

Year	Source	Organisation	Amount
2012	Ulster-Scots Agency	Schomberg Society Kilkeel Ltd.	£15,829
2012/13	Northern Ireland Museums Council	Down County Museum	£2,964
2012/13	Northern Ireland Museums Council	Downpatrick and Co. Down Railway	£510
2012/13	Libraries NI	Library HQ, Ballynahinch	£99,192
2012/13	Libraries NI	Ballynahinch Library	£109,080
2012/13	Libraries NI	Castlewellan Library	£62,224
2012/13	Libraries NI	Downpatrick Library	£204,370
2012/13	Libraries NI	Newcastle Library	£106,815
2012/13	Libraries NI	Kilkeel Library	£83,379
2012/13	Libraries NI	Warrenpoint Library	£105,693
2012/13	Libraries NI	Rathfriland Library	£47,178
2012/13	Libraries NI	Rathfriland Library	£30,380
2012/13	Libraries NI	Rathfriland Library	£77,463
2012/13	Arts Council NI	Down Community Arts Ltd	£25,030
2012/13	Arts Council NI	Happenstance Theatre Company	£10,000
2012/13	Arts Council NI	Dphisound	£9,990
2012/13	Arts Council NI	Mighty Sprite Productions Ltd	£10,000
2012/13	Arts Council NI	Down District Council	£27,000
2012/13	Arts Council NI	Aughlisnafin Accordion Band	£4,698
2012/13	Arts Council NI	Ballymageough Accordion Band	£4,500
2012/13	Arts Council NI	Castlewellan Victoria Accordion Band	£3,045
2012/13	Arts Council NI	Glenloughan Flute Band	£3,600
2012/13	Arts Council NI	Holy Cross Accordion Band Atticall	£5,000
2012/13	Arts Council NI	Legananny Accordion Band	£4,993
2012/13	Arts Council NI	Atticall Youth Club	£5,000
2012/13	Department	Banbridge district Council	£10,700
2012/13	Department	Down district Council	£17,925
2012/13	Department	Newry & Mourne District Council	£25,000
2012/13	Sport NI	Clearsky Adventure Centre	£150
2012/13	Sport NI	East Coast Adventure	£750
2012/13	Sport NI	Greenhill YMCA	£150
2012/13	Sport NI	Mourne Heritage Trust	£245,000
2012/13	Sport NI	Action Outdoors	£750
2012/13	Sport NI	Banbridge Amateur Boxing Club	£10,000
2012/13	Sport NI	Swim Ireland	£3,000
2012/13	Sport NI	Cycling Ireland	£9,000
2012/13	Sport NI	Disability Sport NI	£4,500
2012/13	Sport NI	Horse Sport Ireland	£13,500
2012/13	Sport NI	Motorcycle Racing Association	£9,000
2012/13	Sport NI	NI Archery Society	£9,000

Year	Source	Organisation	Amount
2012/13	Sport NI	Paralympics Ireland	£10,685
2012/13	Sport NI	Royal Yachting Association (NI)	£12,000
2012/13	Sport NI	Swim Ireland	£9,000
2012/13	Sport NI	Swim Ireland	£3,000
2012/13	Sport NI	Ulster Squash	£15,000
2012/13	Sport NI	Down District Council	£287,556
2012/13	Sport NI	Craigavon Borough Council	£308,174
2013	Foras na Gaeilge	Conradh na Gaeilge, Boirche Íochtar	£39,700
2013	Foras na Gaeilge	Glór na nGael Uachtar Tíre	£49,358
2013	Foras na Gaeilge	Campa Chormaic an Dúin	£1,750
2013	Foras na Gaeilge	Campa Chormaic an Dúin	£1,750
2013	Foras na Gaeilge	Mayobridge Community Centre	£1,750
2013	Foras na Gaeilge	Conradh na Gaeilge Boirche Íochtar	£3,500
2013	Foras na Gaeilge	Grúpa Tuismitheoirí agus Tachráin	£3,025
2013	Foras na Gaeilge	Conradh na Gaeilge Boirche Íochtar	£3,450
2013	Foras na Gaeilge	Ballyholland Primary School	£3,400
2013	Foras na Gaeilge	Glór Uachtar Tíre (Colmcille)	£1,485
2013	Foras na Gaeilge	Cumann Gaelach Leath Chathail (Colmcille)	£1,000
2013	Foras na Gaeilge	Scoil Samhraidh Shéamúis Uí Néill (Glór na nGael Uachtar Tíre)	£2,000
2013	Ulster-Scots Agency	Ardarragh Accordion Band	£1,650
2013	Ulster-Scots Agency	Schomberg Festival Committee	£8,204
2013	Ulster-Scots Agency	Finnard Rural Dev Association	£3,193
2013	Ulster-Scots Agency	Loughbrickland & District Rural Dev Association	£4,840
2013	Ulster-Scots Agency	Kirknarra School of Dance	£647
2013	Ulster-Scots Agency	Kirknarra School of Dance	£2,194
2013	Ulster-Scots Agency	St Patrick Pipe Band	£1,650
2013	Ulster-Scots Agency	Orangefield Flute Band	£1,650
2013	Ulster-Scots Agency	Brunswick Accordion Band	£1,650
2013	Ulster-Scots Agency	Benraw Highland Pipe Band	£1,650
2013	Ulster-Scots Agency	Aughlisnafin Accordion Band	£375
2013	Ulster-Scots Agency	Ballyvea Rural Development Association	£1,448
2013	Ulster-Scots Agency	Ballymageough Rural Dev Association	£1,650
2013	Ulster-Scots Agency	Schomberg Fife & Drum	£1,500
2013	Ulster-Scots Agency	Schomberg Folk Ochestra	£975
2013	Ulster-Scots Agency	Closkelt Highland Dancers	£1,093
2013	Ulster-Scots Agency	Cranfield Cultural Society	£1,656
2013	Ulster-Scots Agency	Schomberg Society Kilkeel Ltd.	£3,948
2013	Ulster-Scots Agency	Schomberg Society Kilkeel Ltd.	£950
2013/14	Libraries NI	Library HQ, Ballynahinch	£204,455
2013/14	Libraries NI	Ballynahinch Library	£103,407
2013/14	Libraries NI	Castlewellan Library	£72,779

Year	Source	Organisation	Amount
2013/14	Libraries NI	Downpatrick Library	£230,218
2013/14	Libraries NI	Newcastle Library	£150,427
2013/14	Libraries NI	Kilkeel Library	£106,613
2013/14	Libraries NI	Warrenpoint Library	£102,267
2013/14	Libraries NI	Rathfriland Library	£45,085
2013/14	Libraries NI	Kilkeel Library	£805,780
2013/14	Libraries NI	Kilkeel Library	£109,896
2013/14	Department	Banbridge district Council	£10,000
2013/14	Department	Down district Council	£15,400
2013/14	Department	Newry & Mourne District Council	£25,000
2013/14	Northern Ireland Museums Council	Down County Museum	£2,641
2013/14	Northern Ireland Museums Council	Downpatrick and Co. Down Railway	£4,739
2013/14	Arts Council NI	Down Community Arts Ltd	£10,250
2013/14	Arts Council NI	Digital Circle (NI) Ltd	£9,995
2013/14	Arts Council NI	Dphisound	£9,600
2013/14	Arts Council NI	Mourne Textiles Ltd	£10,000
2013/14	Arts Council NI	Dunmore Silver Band	£4,920
2013/14	Arts Council NI	Kilkeel Silver Band	£4,515
2013/14	Arts Council NI	Loyal Sons of Benagh	£5,000
2013/14	Arts Council NI	Orangefield Flute Band	£3,892
2013/14	Arts Council NI	Spa Accordion Band	£4,920
2013/14	Sport NI	Ballymartin GFC	£245,000
2013/14	Sport NI	Cedar Integrated Primary School (Crossgar)	£1,874
2013/14	Sport NI	Christ The King Primary School (Drumaness)	£5,493
2013/14	Sport NI	Magherabeg Rural Community Association	£193,559
2013/14	Sport NI	Banbridge Amateur Boxing Club	£294,000
2013/14	Sport NI	Castlewellan FC	£131,394
2013/14	Sport NI	Practitioner Development Programme	£10,150
2013/14	Sport NI	Practitioner Development Programme	£6,162
2013/14	Sport NI	Crossmaglen Rangers GFC	£245,000
2013/14	Sport NI	Mountain Sojourns	£750
2013/14	Sport NI	Down District Council	£293,617
2013/14	Sport NI	Craigavon Borough Council	£324,154
2014	Ulster-Scots Agency	Annalong Cultural Education Society	£4,436
2014	Ulster-Scots Agency	Aughnavollog Ulster Scots Cultural Society	£1,950
2014	Foras na Gaeilge	Conradh na Gaeilge, Boirche Íochtar	£39,700
2014	Foras na Gaeilge	Glór na nGael Uachtar Tíre	£49,358
2014	Foras na Gaeilge	Conradh na Gaeilge Boirche Íochtar	£3,500
2014	Foras na Gaeilge	Grúpa Tuismitheoirí agus Tachráin	£3,500
2014	Foras na Gaeilge	Ógras an Dúin	£3,500

Year	Source	Organisation	Amount
2014	Foras na Gaeilge	Campa Chormaic An Dúin	£1,750
2014	Foras na Gaeilge	Campa Chormaic An Dúin	£1,750
2014	Foras na Gaeilge	Conradh na Gaeilge Boirche Íochtar	£1,750
2014	Foras na Gaeilge	Cumann Gaelach Leath Chathail	£1,750
2014	Foras na Gaeilge	Glór Uachtar Tíre	£1,750
2014	Foras na Gaeilge	Mayobridge Community Centre	£1,750
2014	Foras na Gaeilge	Glór Uachtar Tíre (Colmcille)	£800
2014	Foras na Gaeilge	Scoil Samhraidh Shéamuis Uí Néill (Glór na nGael Uachtar Tíre)	£2,000
2014	Ulster-Scots Agency	Ballynahinch Protestant Boys Flute Band	£1,950
2014	Ulster-Scots Agency	Brunswick Accordion Band	£1,950
2014	Ulster-Scots Agency	Closkelt Highland Dancers	£1,122
2014	Ulster-Scots Agency	Closkelt Pipe Band	£208
2014	Ulster-Scots Agency	Closkelt Pipe Band	£1,575
2014	Ulster-Scots Agency	Cranfield Accordion Band	£1,950
2014	Ulster-Scots Agency	Drumlough Highland Pipe Band	£1,943
2014	Ulster-Scots Agency	Finnard Rural Development Association	£2,094
2014	Ulster-Scots Agency	Finnard Rural Development Association	£242
2014	Ulster-Scots Agency	Kirknarra School of Dance	£2,259
2014	Ulster-Scots Agency	Kirknarra School of Dance	£1,925
2014	Ulster-Scots Agency	Loughbrickland & District Rural Development Association	£4,125
2014	Ulster-Scots Agency	Moneygore Rural Development Association	£1,913
2014	Ulster-Scots Agency	Schomberg Folk Orchestra	£250
2014	Ulster-Scots Agency	Schomberg Folk Orchestra	£1,125
2014	Ulster-Scots Agency	Schomberg Society Kilkeel Ltd.	£21,235
2014	Ulster-Scots Agency	Schomberg Society Kilkeel Ltd.	£2,745
2014/15	Libraries NI	Ballynahinch Library	£81,765
2014/15	Libraries NI	Castlewellan Library	£46,210
2014/15	Libraries NI	Downpatrick Library	£136,994
2014/15	Libraries NI	Newcastle Library	£93,545
2014/15	Libraries NI	Kilkeel Library	£81,784
2014/15	Libraries NI	Warrenpoint Library	£75,232
2014/15	Libraries NI	Rathfriland Library	£38,296
2014/15	Arts Council NI	Happenstance Theatre Company	£2,000
2014/15	Arts Council NI	Marie-Claire Ferguson Bespoke Millinery	£9,548
2014/15	Arts Council NI	Mary Callan Knitwear	£10,000
2014/15	Arts Council NI	Mourne Textiles Ltd	£10,000
2014/15	Arts Council NI	Ballyrea Flute Band	£4,725
2014/15	Department	Down District Council	£6,001
2014/15	Department	Glór Uachtar Tíre	£1,000
2014/15	Department	Craobh an Iúir	£1,000
2014/15	Department	Banbridge district Council	£6564

Year	Source	Organisation	Amount
2014/15	Department	Down district Council	£3850
2014/15	Sport NI	Chung Do Kwan NI	£4,738
2014/15	Sport NI	Friends of St Patricks Primary School	£2,120
2014/15	Sport NI	Mourne Gymnastics Club	£4,509
2014/15	Sport NI	Newry & Mourne Sub Aqua Club	£10,000
2014/15	Sport NI	Newry Basketball Club	£2,520
2014/15	Sport NI	St Patrick's Cullyhanna Camogie Club	£7,788
2014/15	Sport NI	Down District Council	£293,617
2014/15	Sport NI	Craigavon Borough Council	£324,154
2014/15	Sport NI	Down District Council	£262,596
2014/15	Sport NI	Atticall Youth Club	£3,988
2014/15	Sport NI	Ballela GAC	£4,625
2014/15	Sport NI	Celtic Bhoys FC	£5,601
2014/15	Sport NI	Kilcoo GAC	£9,113
2014/15	Sport NI	Donaghadee Cricket Club	£1,200
2014/15	Sport NI	Annaclone Summer Scheme	£1,434
2014/15	Sport NI	Camlough Lake Water Festival	£3,210
2014/15	Sport NI	Newry City FC	£8,654
2014/15	Sport NI	Tollymore United FC	£10,000
2014/15	Sport NI	St Patrick's GAC (Cullyhanna)	£3,736
2014/15	Sport NI	UB Irish Table Tennis Association	£5,178
2014/15	Department	Walkway at Lough Money and fishing stands at Lough Money and River Quoile.	£42,000

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to list the projects funded by NI Screen since May 2011; and the extent of funding in each case.
(AQW 41443/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My Department provides funding to NI Screen towards educational projects, the development of the Creative Industries sector and the running costs of the Creative Learning Centres. The following table illustrates the level of funding provided by NI Screen for work of this nature since 2011.

	2011/12 £	2012/13 £	2013/14 £	2014/15 (to date) £
Creative Learning Centres	751,677	803,927	1,374,999	1,015,392
Third Party Organisations (e.g. festivals)	420,210	455,300	596,500	350,000
After School Film Clubs	131,250	365,000	422,611	312,000
Education & Digital Archive	44,349	48,147	65,430	45,000
Creative Industries Innovation Fund	39,997	40,000	40,000	40,000
BFI Film Academy	-	-	-	28,000
Total	**1,387,483**	**1,712,374**	**2,499,540**	**1,790,392**

(Please note that due to the annual nature of the funding the figures above include April 2011.)

In addition, although funding is not provided by DCAL, NI Screen also administers the Ulster-Scots Broadcast Fund, the Irish Language Broadcast Fund and is responsible for distributing lottery funds through the Lottery Film Funding Programme. An overview of this funding is provided in the table below. A detailed breakdown of projects is provided at Annex A.

2011-12

Fund	Total awarded £	Number of awards
Ulster-Scots Broadcast Fund	175,965	11
Lottery	3,750	80
ILBF	3,250,261	43

2012-13

Fund	Total awarded £	Number of awards
Ulster-Scots Broadcast Fund	0	9
Lottery	4,500	80
ILBF	1,290,418	21

2013-14

Fund	Total awarded £	Number of awards
Ulster-Scots Broadcast Fund	0	7
Lottery	7,500	67
ILBF	2,587,978	30

2014-15 to date

Fund	Total awarded £	Number of awards
Ulster-Scots Broadcast Fund	0	8
Lottery	0	56
ILBF	2,071,885	25

Annex A

Ulster-Scots Broadcast Fund

2011-12

Project	Company	Award £
Mapping Ulster	Hardy Pictures	105,200
Written in Stone	Doubleband Films Films	100,000
Ingenious Mr hutcheson	Below the radar	80,250
An Independent People	Below the Radar	296,250
Interactive Ulster-Scots Heritage Trail	Lagan Media	13,000
Ulster's Forgotten Radical	Below the Radar	37,500
An Ode to Burns	Doubleband Films	44,965
The Extraordinary Life of Castlereagh	Doubleband Films	86,538
12 Miles - The Narrow Sea	Tern TV	86,030
Kelvin's Cable	Tern TV	30,000
Reader of Rabbie	Tern TV	67,500
	Total	**947,233**

2012-13

Project	Company	Award £
Ulster Unearthed	Televisionary	160,243
Santer Series 3	Barking Films	157,500
The Santer Sessions	Barking Films	67,500

Project	Company	Award £
Paul and Nicks Big Food Trip Series 2	Waddell Media	250,000
In Search of Ulster Scots	Tern TV	98,490
Five Fables	Flickerpix Ltd	300,000
Tim McGarrys Ulster Scots Journey	HITWG	60,000
Life Stories Amy Carmichael	Ian Webster Ltd	45,000
Brave New World	Doubleband Films	153,000
	Total	**1,291,733**

2013-14

Project	Company	Award £
Stumpy's Brae	Six Mile Hill Productions	73,275
In Search of Richard Hayward	Doubleband Films Films	71,250
Then Sings My Soul	Erica Starling Productions	62,500
The Gaitherin (formerly Homelands)	Tern Television	220,000
The History of An Idea	Below the Radar	236,250
Paul and Nick's Big American Food Trip	Waddell Media	175,965
Five Fables app	Flickerpix Ltd	49,799
	Total	**889,039**

2014-15 to date

Project	Company	Award £
Brave New World: Canada	Doubleband Films	130,500
The Radical World of William Tennent	Doubleband Films	82,500
Minding our Language	Hole in the Wall Gang	63,750
A Rebel Heart: Mary-Ann McCracken	Below the Radar	41,250
Out of Africa	Erica Starling Productions	90,000
Paul and Nicks Big American Food Trip Series 2	Waddell Media	175,965
Burns Night Concert	Barking Films	60,000
The Castle Session	Barking Films	67,500
	Total	**711,465**

Irish Language Broadcast Fund

2011-12

Funded Programme	Production Company	Amount funded
2011 Round 2 June		
An Bronntanas	De Facto Films	£200,000.00
Scup	Stirling	£400,000.00
Wolfland	Steadipix/Clean Slate	£42,000.00
Paisti na Reabhloide	Picturehouse	£28,397.00
An Feidir Linn	Bóthar Ard	£46,793.00
Og & Aerach	Solas Productions	£40,448.00
Mo Ghra Gael 2	Waddell Media	£131,034.00

Funded Programme	Production Company	Amount funded
Ard Albert	Tobar Productions	£22,319.00
Animal Mechanicals 2	Zoogon	£28,684.00
Ice Trail	Zoogon	£3,320.00
Extinctions	Zoogon	£20,884.00
Love in the Wild	Zoogon	£11,464.00

2011 Round 3 October

Funded Programme	Production Company	Amount funded
Filíocht Nua	Lagan Media	£46,263.00
Filíocht Nua Phone App	Lagan Media	£15,315.00
Aistear na nGael	Sequin & Imagine	£53,966.00
Amhráin Uladh	Clean Slate Ltd	£93,475.00
Meon Eile	Below the Radar	£120,000.00
Ceol na Tuaithe	Big Mountain	£217,731.00
Scéal an Mharthanóra	Below the Radar	£22,283.00
Michaela Mo dheirfiúr	Below the Radar	£32,824.50
Niall Óg	Bóthar Ard	£41,160.00
40 Bliain ag Fás	Tobar Productions	£22,488.00
Aniar Aduaidh	Independent Pictures & Tobar	£142,500.00
Bealach na mBusanna	Waddell Media	£123,746.00

2012 Round 1 March

Funded Programme	Production Company	Amount funded
The Story of British Pathé in Ireland	Waddell Media	£51,024.00
Deartháireacha	Waddell Media	£25,000.00
Nollaig in Éirinn	Waddell Media	£43,699.00
Luí na Talún 3	Below The Radar	£145,590.75
It's a Blas!	Below The Radar	£32,720.25
Taobh Thair Den Bhóna	Below The Radar	£50,000.00
Ceiliúradh Ceoil - Philomena Begley	Big Mountain	£54,239.10
Wwoofing	Stirling	£148,500.00
Fiacc	Stirling	£25,000.00
Bia Linn	Indee Productions	£102,418.47
Na Clamairí	Indee Productions	£22,330.00
Tiny Tobar Tootie Tobar	Tobar Productions	£55,132.00
Tóirse Don Táin	Tobar Productions	£22,410.00
Bliain I Saol na Cultúrlainne (Féilte is Fleadh)	Lagan Media	£90,000.00
An Béal Bocht	Raw Nerve	£110,600.00
An Chultúrlann (Cuisle)	Imagine Media	£141,892.00
Voyage to Iona	Imagine Media	£65,000.00
Na Firéin	Bóthar Ard	£40,995.00

Raidió Fáilte	Raidió Fáilte	£60,000.00
Robert Burns	Dearcan Media	£56,616.00
	Total for period	**£3,250,261.07**

2012-13

Funded Programme	**Production Company**	**Amount funded**
2012 Round 2 June		
Driver Dan (1)	Zoogon	£116,111.00
Joseph Campbell	Bóthar Ard	£45,960.00
Bangor Monks	Clean Slate Ltd	£45,560.00
Rónán ar Bhóthar Santiago	Waddell Media	£90,404.00
Taisce Tí	Stirling	£112,500.00
Ceol na Tuaithe Daniel O Donnell	Big Mountain	£54,145.00
Tomaí agus Art san Eoraip	Tern TV	£120,000.00

2012 Round 3 October

Funded Programme	**Production Company**	**Amount funded**
Things You Need to Know	360 Productions	£51,819.00
Dlí Rory	Below the Radar	£24,531.00
The Lost Village (1)	Big Mountain	£120,000.00
Cogar x 3 (Seirbhís)	Bóthar Ard	£55,862.00
Na Sufraigéidí	Dearcan Media	£55,118.00
Ar Thóir an tSean Uladh	Doubleband	£120,000.00
Marcaíocht	Imagine Media	£100,470.00
Wolftone (Imagining the Republic)	Imagine Media	£6,035.00
Bia Linn App	Indee Productions	£5,587.00
Raidió Fáilte (Radio Broadcast Training)	Raidió Fáilte	£60,000.00
Scúp (Sraith a 2)	Stirling	£10,000.00
Aistrúchán Ar Ais	Tobar Productions	£52,171.00
Caillte sa Chogadh	Tobar Productions	£23,273.00
Deirfiúr le Dia	Waddell Media	£20,872.00
	Total for period	**£1,290,418.00**

2013-14

Funded Programme	**Production Company**	**Amount funded**
2013 Round 1 April		
Na Píobairí Uillinn	Dearcan Media	£49,421.25
Bualadh Busk	Below the Radar	£25,000.00
Meon Eile TWO	Below the Radar	£150,000.00
An Trucaillín Donn	Imagine Media	£42,246.00
Ar Bhealach na Gaeltachta	Imagine Media	£90,000.00
Wolfetone	Imagine Media	£35,000.00
Grá sa Ghaeltacht	Imagine Media	£25,000.00
Scúp (Series TWO)	Stirling	£400,000.00

Funded Programme	Production Company	Amount funded
Uncail Sean agus Uncail Joe	Macha Media	£54,626.25
Lá Dár Saol	Macha Media	£60,000.00
Opry an Iúir (SERIES TWO)	Big Mountain	£156,101.00
Ar Thóir an Cheoil	Sonas Productions	£129,217.00
Éagóir (TWO)	Indee Productions	£139,000.00
Taiscí Ceilte na hÉireann	Waddell Media	£117,000.00

2013 Round 2 June

Funded Programme	Production Company	Amount funded
Cónaí I gCarn	Indee Productions	£42,000.00
Bia Linn 2	Indee Productions	£85,857.71
Holland agus an Lusitania	Bóthar Ard	£37,693.00
Hunting the Hound of Ulster	Below the Radar	£40,000.00
I Lár an Aonaigh	Below the Radar	£135,000.00
Imirce	Clean Slate Ltd	£55,816.00
Creafóg Dhearg na hAfraice	Waddell Media	£95,000.00
Wwoofáil (Sraith a 2)	Stirling	£135,000.00
Oíche na Gaoithe Móire	Lagan Media	£40,000.00
Lomax	Tobar Productions	£35,000.00
2013 Round 3 October		
Fiche Bliain le Bréag	Sonas Productions	£50,000.00
Mná na gCurach	Imagine Media	£83,500.00
Gafa sa Túr	Macha Media	£127,000.00
Bronntanas na Beatha	Below the Radar	£40,000.00
Gaeilgeoirí an Chogaidh Mhóir	Big Mountain	£49,000.00
Radio Training & Broadcasting Scheme	Raidió Fáilte	£64,500.00
	Total for period	**£2,587,978.21**

2014-15 to date

Funded Programme	Production Company	Amount funded
2014 Round 1 May		
Coláistí na nGael san	Tern TV	£135,000.00
Eoraip		
Ar Shlí na Fírinne	Imagine Media	£134,238.00
Áilleacht na Sléibhte	Doubleband	£128,333.25
Wwoofáil 3	Stirling	£141,925.00
I Lár an Aonaigh 2	Below the Radar	£157,500.00
Opry an Iúir 3	Big Mountain	£147,110.00
Thuas Seal Thíos Seal	Below the Radar	£25,000.00
Lily's Driftwood Bay	Sixteen South	£38,588.00
Meon Eile 3	Below the Radar	£170,000.00
Gaeilgeoirí an Chogaidh Mhóir (additional funding)	Big Mountain	£16,000.00

2014 Round 2 August

Funded Programme	Production Company	Amount funded
Bás Síocháiní	Dearcán Media	£52,770.75
Múinteoirí DEV	Big Mountain	£9,295.00
Scéal Folk Aduaidh	Sonas Productions	£146,315.25
Craic na nAinmhithe DEV	Waddell	£4,125.00
Lá Dár Saol 2 – Lá Fhéile Pádraig	Macha Media	£79,020.75
Scaredy Squirrel	zoogon	£128,186.59
Díoltas	Indee Productions	£134,760.00
Na Dúlradóirí DEV	Indee Productions	£5,950.00
Radio Broadcast Training Scheme	Raidió Fáilte	£60,000.00
2014 Round 3 October		
Ceol Ón Chlann 2	Stirling	£137,745.00
Saol Eoin Mhic Néill	Doubleband	£56,250.00
As Radharc na Súl	Dearcán Media	£55,439.58
An t-Amhrán Gaeilge	Below the Radar	£48,333.30
Faoi Gheall ag Éirinn	Imagine Media	£60,000.00
	Total for period	**£2,071,885.47**

Lottery

2011-12

Project	Award £
Priests And Robbers	2,250
15 Second film Festival	15,000
A Wake For A Wedding	10,000
Sisters	9,500
Knights IN Shining Armour	2,250
The Mulberry Project (Stage 2)	10,000
Primetime	2,000
Best	15,000
The Wrath	2,250
Land Of The Giants	12,500
Hurricane	15,000
The Weatherbies 2nd Stage	5,000
The Maze Escape 2nd Stage	15,000
Six Degrees	70,000
The Men In White Coats	5,000
Faultline	20,000
The Prisoner of Zenda 2nd Stage	7,500
Tout	2,250
The Theorem Of Love	4,500
Paddy Blair Mayne-Guns and Roses	4,500
Havanna Blades	2,250

2011-12

Project	Award £
Sent by an Angel	2,250
Shoot for Socrates	20,000
Gentle Rise and Fall	2,250
From Boy to Wo(man)	4,500
New Beginings	4,500
Minds Eye	2,250
The Rough Diamond	3,500
A Short Film About Fear	3,500
She Sells Her Love	2,250
High Lows	2,250
The Wandering Star	2,250
The Photograph	2,250
The Good Man	25,000
The Prisioner of Zenda	10,000
The Sacred Island	10,000
3 Days in August	5,000
Another Day	5,000
Badwater	5,000
Looking For Robert	5,000
My Big Fat Irish Dancing Dress	5,000
Road	5,000
The Milk Cup	5,000
Stones in His Pockets	20,000
The Gift	20,000
SCALP	2,250
Two Dogs Caged	2,250
6.2	2,250
Happy Birthday Dad	2,250
We were Here	2,250
Hearth	2,250
Control	4,500
A Second Chance	4,500
Pennyinch	4,500
All Or None	5,000
Don Eugenio	2,250
Vampire Dawn	2,250
Stroke City	2,250
Even	2,250
Gregory Burke Belfast Project	20,050
The Shore completion fund	5,000

Project	Award £
3 FOR 5	5,000
Titanic Born in Belfast	11,000

2011-12

Project	Award £
The Long Way Home	2,250
Boys From County Hell	7,500
The Emigrant's Farewell	2,250
The Dinosaur Room	10,000
The Weatherbies	6,000
Shelter (Me) From The Rain	10,000
Beyond The Ropes	2,250
Made In Belfast	10,000
Exposure	4500
The Attendant	7,500
The Legenderrys	25,000
Stroke City	7,500
The Cause Of Progress 3rd stage	10,000
A Wake For A Wedding 2nd stage	10000
The Road To Narnia	10,000
Woolly Faces	15,000
My Thai	5,000
Total	**630,300**

2012-13

Project	Award £
Moonshine	7,500
Life As an Interface	2,750
The Vows	2,250
The Job	2,250
Absolution	2,250
The Sorcerer	2,250
Short Steps Production	50,000
Road	100,000
Joe and the Rocket - Colin McIvor	2,250
The King	2,250
Back of Beyond	2,250
Dog Days/Animations - Corrina Askin	2,250
KISS	1,038
Mr Kelly	2,250
I Cant Stop My Dream	2,250
The Rip	2,250

Man, Woman, Love	4,500
Vultures	4,500
The Dissenter	4,500
Faultine 2nd stage	20,000
Border Post	7,500

2012-13

Project	**Award £**
The Dinosaur Room 2nd stage	15,000
Billy: A Reasonable Request	2,250
Weight	2,250
Good As Gold	3,750
The gentlemen's Tea Drinking Society	5,000
The Upside/A Wake For A Wedding	6,000
Ridealong	7,500
The Boys From County Hell 2nd Stage	3,000
Patriot Traitor 2nd Stage	3,750
My Thai 3rd Stage	2,500
Animal Caravan	2,250
6 Degrees Series 2	80,000
Kill Me Now	2,250
Crater Lake	2,250
The Maze	2,250
Pris O'Driscoll	2,250
Georgie	7,500
Vicky Draper and the Carmody Caper	7,500
A Western Song	10,000
A Simple Farmer's Son	32,200
Creggan: The Sequel	7,475
Fog	12,500
A True Love Story	4,500
Imagining Narnia	5,000
Father Des - The People's Priest	5,000
The Man Who Shot the Great War	5,000
How the Irish Change Football	5,000
Giant	2,250
The Road Wife	2,250
The Cyclist	5,025
I'll Tell Me Ma	5,000
Pursuit	7,500
The King	10,000
A Day in the Life	5,001
Mother Love	4,489

Project	Award £
Light of my Eyes	4,500
See	2,250
Zoo (2nd stage)	8,000
Mulbury project (3rd Stage)	5,000
A Wake for A Wedding/the Upside (4th stage)	11,050
Hurlit	2,250
The Septic Tiger	2,250

2012-13

Project	Award £
Cast A Cold Eye	2,250
The Donegal Woman	5,000
Bubbleheads	7,500
The Captors	6,975
The Colony	5,051
Vampires Vs Leprechauns	5,300
The Survivalist	7,500
Joe and Jack (Series 2)	7,500
The Longest Wave	2,250
Portmanteau project	60,000
Murmurations	2,250
The Twinkling Tree	2,250
Victoria and the Kaiser's Arm	1,750
The Mongol Rally!	3,000
Stroke City	100,000
Diamond Chasers	2,250
Miss Derry	22,500
Total	**791,104**

2013-14

Project	Award £
X - Moor	5,000
Camp Fear	5,000
Eamonn in Conversation	10,000
Thetrialoflundy.com	12,500
The Labyrinth	2,250
Trespasses	1,500
On The Road Home	4,500
Cleansed	4,500
Noirland	2,000
Leaving the Village	4,500
Fr. Malachi Martin	5,000

Project	Award £
Made in Belfast	10,000
Spinners	2,250
The Last Giant	2,250
Boys From County hell	2,750
Run Silent, Run Deep	7,500
The Wall	20,000
Thumb Wars	4,500
Normality	2,250
The Platform	2,250
Tides	2,250

2013-14

Project	Award £
I Am Blood	2,250
Georgie - 2nd Stage	5,000
Stranger with a Camera	7,500
Magennis VC	4,500
For Another Country	3,500
Doting	2,250
Kick The Bucket (God is Land)	4,500
Hollyoaks in Derry	50,000
Offsides	4,500
Nine Inches	2,250
Heroes in Green	2,250
The Morrigan	3,000
The Cottage	2,250
The Projectionist	5,000
Fishbowl City	4,000
Aisha's Communion	12,000
ORO2: Warlords	12,500
Here Before	7,500
Vindication	3,000
Unarmed	10,000
Mir Friends (2nd Stage)	6,000
Stranger with a Camera (2nd Stage)	3,000
Wolf Bastards 2	7,500
An Inquiry into Masculinity	4,500
The Man who Shot the Great War	50,000
Being AP	50,000
Woman of the House	2,250
The Archivist	2,250
For the Love of Mod	2,250

Project	Award £
Georgie Stage 3	6,200
Don't Let Go (Cast a Cold Eye)	7,500
The Rising Mastermind	3,000
Creggan - The Sequel	10,000
Dance Belfast	4,500
Jump	10,000
6 Degrees Series 3	105,000
The Rise and Fall of a Country Star	5,000
Kick Me	5,000
Best: The Legend	5,000
Bada Been	2,250
Man in the Moon	2,250
Virgin of Las Vegas	10,000
2013-14	
Project	Award £
Her Majesty's Spiffing	2,000
Hyperduck Video Promo	3,000
The Dinosaur Room Stage 3	15,000
The Confidence Trick	2,798
Total	**586,748**

2014-15 to date

Project	Award £
Vindication - 2nd Stage	7,500
Shooting Santa	10,600
Gladiators. A Different World	10,000
Stranger with a Camera 3rd stage	10,000
Re-Energize	7,500
66 Days	11,000
Time	2,250
Surrogate	2,250
Sisters- Stage 4	14,750
Joe & Jack Series 2 - Stage 2	10,000
Don't Let Go - 2nd stage	5,000
H-Blocks: Unlocking the Future	5,000
Noobs	7,500
Henry Roscoe, Detective, Sort Of	2,250
The Silence	2,250
Inez: A Challenging Woman	4,950
Kill	2,250
The Rising - 2nd stage	5,000

Project	Award £
The Morrigan - 2nd stage	4,500
Jack & Mrs Moore	2,500
Bus Pass Road Trip	5,000
Priest Hunter	3,000
The Journey	10,000
Borrowed Time	2,250
All for Show	4,500
A Forgotten Life	4,500
Introducing Brian	5,625
Death of a Projectionist	7,500
Good Boy	4,500
The Resident's Bar	7,500
Brewbirds	2,250
Spitball	5,625
Girona	7,500
No Stone Unturned	80,000

2014-15 to date

Project	Award £
The Jazz King of No Man's Land	5,000
Victoria	5,000
Anna Lo	5,000
Political Animal	2,250
Paracusis	2,250
The Damned	2,250
A New Day at Midnight	5,000
Werner	5,000
Surrogate	5,000
Fog	7,500
The Captors - 2nd Stage	5,000
The Dig	5,000
Maze - 3rd stage	5,000
The End of Troubles	5,000
Short, Sharp Shocks	2,250
Dust	2,250
Unhappy Endings	7,500
The Way Back	10,000
The Man who Dared to Dream	10,000
Boneyard Boys	7,500
Boys from County Hell - 3rd Stage	8,000
The Morrigan - 3rd Stage	5,000
Total	**393,550**

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the projects supported by her Department in West Tyrone in each year since 2010.
(AQW 41468/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The value of projects funded in the West Tyrone Constituency is detailed the attached table (Annex A). The table shows resource and capital project spend since 2010.

Spend excludes the running costs of Museums sites and Libraries. Spend is reported on a financial year basis except in the case of North South Bodies where it is reported on a calendar year basis.

Resource and Capital Projects supported by DCAL in West Tyrone in each year since 2010.

Funding Body	Funded Entity	Description of funding	Amount Paid £	Financial Year	Capital/ Resource
Foras na Gaeilge	Pushkin Trust	Creative Educational Workshops through Irish	2,700	2010	Resource
Foras na Gaeilge	Gaelphobal an tSratha Báin	Scéim Phobail Gaeilge 2008-2010	41,690	2010	Resource
Department	Mellon Centre for Migration Studies	Grant Funding - Administration costs and Programme events	15,982	2010/11	Resource
NMNI	Ulster American Folk Park	Capital Investment	1,418,173	2010/11	Capital
Department	Omagh District Council	Community Festivals Funding	13,600	2010/11	Resource
Department	Strabane District Council	Community Festivals Funding	13,198	2010/11	Resource
Libraries NI	Castlederg	CCTV	3,721	2010/11	Capital
Libraries NI	Omagh Library	Refurbishment of C2k suite	27,492	2010/11	Capital
Sport NI	Derry City Council	Clubmark NI / Derry & Strabane Start Up	1,000	2010/11	Resource
Sport NI	Derg Valley Ladies Hockey Club	Equipment - Hockey	2,720	2010/11	Capital
Sport NI	St Enda's (Omagh)	Safety Equipment from Stadia Safety Urgent Works Programme	6,460	2010/11	Capital
Sport NI	Newtownstewart Golf Club	Construction of natural turf short games skills practice area	8,490	2010/11	Capital
Sport NI	Omagh Riding For The Disabled Association	Upgrade and relaying of riding arena from sand to rubber surface and purchase of show jumps.	9,024	2010/11	Capital
Sport NI	Dromore Education & Community Partnership	Equipment - Provision of Spin Bikes for schools programme and community programme	9,432	2010/11	Capital
Sport NI	St Enda's (Omagh)	Infrastructure Works from Stadia Safety Urgent Works Programme	24,856	2010/11	Capital
Sport NI	Omagh Academicals RFC	Upgrade of changing facilities to include 2 female changing	29,234	2010/11	Capital
Sport NI	Omagh Golf Club	Golf teaching bays, ball dispenser	29,959	2010/11	Capital
Sport NI	Cricket Ireland	Development of a 2 lane outdoor net facility and purchasing of performance analysis equipment to develop a Regional Centre of Excellence in the North West Cricket Union.	30,000	2010/11	Capital
Sport NI	Aghyaran Development Association	Community GYM project.	30,000	2010/11	Capital

Funding Body	Funded Entity	Description of funding	Amount Paid £	Financial Year	Capital/ Resource
Sport NI	Strabane District Council	Active Communities (Year 2) 2010-11	339,496	2010/11	Resource
Arts Council NI	Border Arts 2000	Youth forum	13,000	2010/11	Capital
Arts Council NI	Gortaclare Pipe Band	Musical Instruments	4,515	2010/11	Capital
Arts Council NI	Trillick Pipe Band	Musical Instruments for Bands 2010	3,675	2010/11	Capital
Arts Council NI	Omagh District Council	Omagh Towards A City Vision 2025 - Public Art Feature (Belfast / Dublin Gateway)	4,070	2010/11	Capital
Arts Council NI	Western Health & Social Care Trust	New Acute Hospital for the South West Public Art Project	11,500	2010/11	Capital
Arts Council NI	Mr Eugene Monteith	International Master classes for Orchestral Conducting with the Berlin Sinfonietta and Maestro Kenneth Kiesler 17th-22nd May 2010 Berlin	250	2010/11	Resource
Arts Council NI	Saturday Club	Theatre Programme with Kids In Control	5,000	2010/11	Resource
Foras na Gaeilge	Greencastle Youth Club	Summer Camp Scheme	2,790	2011	Resource
Foras na Gaeilge	Gaelphobal an tSratha Báin	Scéim Phobail Gaeilge 2011-2013	55,488	2011	Resource
NMNI	Ulster American Folk Park	Capital Investment	297,000	2011/12	Capital
Department	Omagh District Council	Community Festivals Funding	13,900	2011/12	Resource
Department	Strabane District Council	Community Festivals Funding	10,836	2011/12	Resource
Foras na Gaeilge	Club Óige na Carraige Móire	Youth Events Scheme	3,500	2011/12	Resource
Libraries NI	Castlederg Library	Part payments re CCTV	388	2011/12	Capital
Libraries NI	Newtownstewart Library	Refurbishment of library	1,799	2011/12	Capital
Libraries NI	Omagh Library	Replacement Furniture and Equipment	43,930	2011/12	Capital
Sport NI	Four Elements Adventure	Adventure Activities Accreditation	750	2011/12	Resource
Sport NI	St Joseph's Ladies GFC (Glenelly)	Health and Fitness to Beat the Winter Blues	3,525	2011/12	Resource
Sport NI	Omagh Ladies Netball Club	Omagh Junior Netball: Equipment, venue hire, coaching fees	3,780	2011/12	Resource
Sport NI	Altamuskin Community Association Ltd	Be Active, Be Fit, Have Fun - applying for coaching, venue hire and equipment	4,472	2011/12	Resource
Sport NI	North West Coaching Network	The North West Coaching Week - Coach Development	9,000	2011/12	Resource
Sport NI	Omagh District Council	Active Communities (Year 3) 2011-12	218,519	2011/12	Resource

Funding Body	Funded Entity	Description of funding	Amount Paid £	Financial Year	Capital/ Resource
Sport NI	Strabane District Council	Active Communities (Year 3) 2011-12	342,813	2011/12	Resource
Arts Council NI	Newtownstewart Flute Band	Musical Instruments	5,000	2011/12	Capital
Arts Council NI	Blossomhill Pipe Band	Musical Instruments	5,000	2011/12	Capital
Arts Council NI	Miss Emma McFarline	Talent 2012 Arts Competition sponsorship	220	2011/12	Resource
Foras na Gaeilge	Cumann Iarscoil na gCrann	Summer Camp Scheme	3,018	2012	Resource
Foras na Gaeilge	Greencastle Youth Club	Summer Camp Scheme	3,476	2012	Resource
Foras na Gaeilge	Omagh District Council	Promotion of Irish Language through programme of creative, educational and artistic events	3,000	2012	Resource
Foras na Gaeilge	Gaelphobal an tSratha Báin	Scéim Phobail Gaeilge 2011-2013	56,996	2012	Resource
Department	Tyrone GAA	Construction of 3G pitches and 3G Multi Use Games	289,530	2012/13	Capital
Department	Tyrone GAA	IFI Gym Equipment	93,793	2012/13	Capital
NMNI	Ulster American Folk Park	Capital Investment	317,859	2012/13	Capital
Department	Omagh District Council	Community Festivals Funding	13,000	2012/13	Resource
Department	Strabane District Council	Community Festivals Funding	12,134	2012/13	Resource
Foras na Gaeilge	Club Óige na Carraige Móire	Youth Events Scheme	3,500	2012/13	Resource
Foras na Gaeilge	Ógras na Carraige Móire	Youth Events Scheme	3,500	2012/13	Resource
Foras na Gaeilge	Ógras na hÓmaí	Youth Events Scheme	3,300	2012/13	Resource
Libraries NI	Castlederg Library	Part payments re CCTV	676	2012/13	Capital
Sport NI	Omagh District Council	Omagh & Fermanagh - Consortia ClubMark NI Accreditation Start up	1,000	2012/13	Resource
Sport NI	Horse Sport Ireland	Hannah Smyth	3,000	2012/13	Resource
Sport NI	Association of NI Car Clubs	Alastair Fisher	9,000	2012/13	Resource
Sport NI	Omagh District Council	Active Communities (Year 4)	209,497	2012/13	Resource
Sport NI	Strabane District Council	Active Communities (Year 4) 2012-13	354,267	2012/13	Resource
Arts Council NI	Cowan Memorial Flute Band	Musical Instruments for Bands 2012/13	4,540	2012/13	Capital
Arts Council NI	9th Battalion Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers Corps of Drums Band	Musical Instruments for Bands 2012/13	3,330	2012/13	Capital

Funding Body	Funded Entity	Description of funding	Amount Paid £	Financial Year	Capital/ Resource
Arts Council NI	Mountfield Pipe Band	Musical Instruments for Bands 2012/13	4,392	2012/13	Capital
Arts Council NI	Castlederg Young Loyalists Flute Band	Musical Instruments for Bands 2012/13	4,846	2012/13	Capital
Arts Council NI	Plumbridge Brien Boru Pipe Band	Musical Instruments for Bands 2012/13	4,947	2012/13	Capital
Arts Council NI	Skyzdalimit	Artistic programming development	5,000	2012/13	Resource
Arts Council NI	Strabane and Lifford LGBT	Our story - A programme of storytelling, glass and ceramics	5,000	2012/13	Resource
Arts Council NI	Care for Cancer	Arts for leisure programme	5,000	2012/13	Resource
Arts Council NI	Fountain Street Community Development Association	Winter wonderland	5,000	2012/13	Resource
Foras na Gaeilge	Greencastle Youth Club	Summer Camp Scheme	3,388	2013	Resource
Foras na Gaeilge	Gaelphobal an tSratha Báin	Scéim Phobail Gaeilge 2011-2013	58,008	2013	Resource
Department	Tyrone GAA	Construction of 3G pitches and 3G Multi Use Games	36,018	2013/14	Capital
Department	Tyrone GAA	Construction of trim trial and skills wall and alterations to gym	73,094	2013/14	Capital
Department	Sollus Cultural Promotions (based in Bready, Strabane)	Walled City Tattoo	100,000	2013/14	Resource
NMNI	Ulster American Folk Park	Capital Investment	290,717	2013/14	Capital
Department	Omagh District Council	Community Festivals Funding	13,000	2013/14	Resource
Department	Strabane District Council	Community Festivals Funding	10,700	2013/14	Resource
Foras na Gaeilge	Cairde Bunscoil na Deirge	Youth Events Scheme	2,772	2013/14	Resource
Foras na Gaeilge	Club Óige na Carraige Móire	Youth Events Scheme	2,900	2013/14	Resource
Foras na Gaeilge	Greencastle Youth Club	Youth Events Scheme	3,260	2013/14	Resource
Foras na Gaeilge	Óg-Ógras na hÓmaí	Youth Events Scheme	2,000	2013/14	Resource
Foras na Gaeilge	Cairde Bunscoil na Deirge	Youth Events Scheme	3,480	2013/14	Resource
Foras na Gaeilge	Club Óige na Carraige Móire	Youth Events Scheme	3,500	2013/14	Resource
Foras na Gaeilge	Greencastle Youth Club	Youth Events Scheme	3,500	2013/14	Resource
Libraries NI	Fintona Library	Replacement Furniture and Equipment	27,916	2013/14	Resource

Funding Body	Funded Entity	Description of funding	Amount Paid £	Financial Year	Capital/ Resource
Sport NI	Four Elements Adventure	Adventure Activities Accreditation	150	2013/14	Resource
Sport NI	Barrack Street Boys' Primary School (Strabane)	Barrack Street boys' Cricket Programme	1,644	2013/14	Resource
Sport NI	Altishane Primary School (Donemanagh)	Altishane Active Achievers	1,836	2013/14	Resource
Sport NI	Holy Family Primary School (Omagh)	Individual sport Programme	2,963	2013/14	Resource
Sport NI	Practitioner Development Programme	Roger Keenan	3,400	2013/14	Resource
Sport NI	Strabane District Council	Development of pilot walking route in partnership with Strabane District Council	3,500	2013/14	Resource
Sport NI	Gaelscoil Ui Dhochartaigh (Strabane)	Introducing new and extending Gaelic Games	3,520	2013/14	Resource
Sport NI	Gibson Primary School (Omagh)	Multi Sports Programme	4,466	2013/14	Resource
Sport NI	Drumlish Primary School (Dromore)	Multi-Sports After School Programme	4,537	2013/14	Resource
Sport NI	Castlederg High School	Castlederg High School Football Club	6,527	2013/14	Resource
Sport NI	Killycurragh Regeneration Group	3G Pitch, flood lighting & equipment	207,914	2013/14	Capital
Sport NI	Omagh District Council	Active Communities (Year 5)	214,567	2013/14	Resource
Sport NI	Strabane District Council	Active Communities (Year 5) 2013-14	366,165	2013/14	Resource
Department	Omagh District Council	WF Marshall County Trail	2,972	2013/14	Resource
Arts Council NI	Strabane District Council	Arts for the Third Age	21,846	2013/14	Resource
Arts Council NI	ROCO Magazine	Fully Interactive Magazine for all tablets and Smartphones.	9,850	2013/14	Resource
Arts Council NI	Omagh District Council	Purchase new equipment to upgrade our current lighting, sound, exhibition and conference facilities and multi-media capabilities.	7,000	2013/14	Capital
Arts Council NI	Blair Memorial Flute Band	Musical instruments	5,000	2013/14	Capital
Arts Council NI	Strawhill Voluntary Independent Pipe Band	Musical Instruments	2,295	2013/14	Capital
Arts Council NI	Claire Fox	Arteles Creative Residency	250	2013/14	Resource
Arts Council NI	Emily McFarland	Gold Is Where You Find It.	800	2013/14	Resource

Funding Body	Funded Entity	Description of funding	Amount Paid £	Financial Year	Capital/ Resource
Foras na Gaeilge	Greencastle Youth Club	Summer Camp Scheme	1,750	2014	Resource
Foras na Gaeilge	Greencastle Youth Club	Summer Camp Scheme	1,750	2014	Resource
Foras na Gaeilge	Club Óige na Carraige Móire	Summer Camp Scheme	1,750	2014	Resource
Foras na Gaeilge	Gaelscoil Uí Dhochartaigh	Match-funding for library books	386	2014	Resource
Foras na Gaeilge	Gaelphobal an tSratha Báin	Scéim Phobail Gaeilge (extension of funding)	58,008	2014	Resource
Ulster-Scots Agency	Ardbarron Pipe Band	Music Tuition	1,950	2014	Resource
Ulster-Scots Agency	Ardstraw & Barroncourt Youth Council	Dance Tuition	1,762	2014	Resource
Ulster-Scots Agency	Ardstraw & Barroncourt Youth Council	Burns Night	250	2014	Resource
Ulster-Scots Agency	Augharonan Pipe Band	Music Tuition	1,950	2014	Resource
Ulster-Scots Agency	Bready & District U-S Dev Association	Music Tuition	2,339	2014	Resource
Ulster-Scots Agency	Bready & District U-S Dev Association	Music Tuition	2,126	2014	Resource
Ulster-Scots Agency	Bready & District U-S Dev Association	Dance Tuition	1,606	2014	Resource
Ulster-Scots Agency	Bready & District U-S Dev Association	Music Tuition	2,325	2014	Resource
Ulster-Scots Agency	Bready & District U-S Dev Association	Music Tuition	2,301	2014	Resource
Ulster-Scots Agency	Castlederg Young Loyalist Flute Band	Music Tuition	1,950	2014	Resource
Ulster-Scots Agency	Clogherny Scottish Country Dancers	Dance Tuition	2,458	2014	Resource
Ulster-Scots Agency	Cowan Memorial Flute Band	Music Tuition	1,650	2014	Resource
Ulster-Scots Agency	Derry & Raphoe Action	Community Workers Scheme	10,122	2014	Resource
Ulster-Scots Agency	Derry & Raphoe Action	Community Impact Programme	11,617	2014	Resource
Ulster-Scots Agency	Donemana Cultural Association	Summer School	1,523	2014	Resource
Ulster-Scots Agency	Dromore Controlled PS Parent Support Group	Dance Tuition	1,051	2014	Resource
Ulster-Scots Agency	Drumquin Pipe Band	Music Tuition	1,815	2014	Resource
Ulster-Scots Agency	Killen Pipe Band	Music Tuition	960	2014	Resource

Funding Body	Funded Entity	Description of funding	Amount Paid £	Financial Year	Capital/ Resource
Ulster-Scots Agency	Lislaird Pipe Band	Dance Tuition	2,084	2014	Resource
Ulster-Scots Agency	Lislaird Pipe Band	Music Tuition	1,950	2014	Resource
Ulster-Scots Agency	McClintock Parents Support Group	Dance Tuition	2,025	2014	Resource
Ulster-Scots Agency	Mountfield Scottish Country Dancers	Dance Tuition	2,020	2014	Resource
Ulster-Scots Agency	Mountfield Scottish Country Dancers	Summer School	2,448	2014	Resource
Ulster-Scots Agency	Mountfield Ulster Scots Association	Hogmany Event	500	2014	Resource
Ulster-Scots Agency	Mullinagoagh Pipe Band	Music Tuition	1,388	2014	Resource
Ulster-Scots Agency	Omagh Protestant Boys Melody Flute Band	Music Tuition	1,950	2014	Resource
Ulster-Scots Agency	Omagh Library	Community Showcase: Burns Event	672	2014	Resource
Ulster-Scots Agency	Pride of the Derg Flute Band	Music Tuition	1,838	2014	Resource
Ulster-Scots Agency	Red Hand Defenders (Newtownstewart Flute Band)	Music Tuition	1,650	2014	Resource
Ulster-Scots Agency	Sollus School of Highland Dance	Dance Tuition	2,976	2014	Resource
Ulster-Scots Agency	Sollus School of Highland Dance	Dance Tuition	2,332	2014	Resource
Ulster-Scots Agency	Strabane Alley Theatre	Community Showcase: 3 World Meet (Drama)	972	2014	Resource
Ulster-Scots Agency	Strawhill Voluntary Independent Pipe Band	Music Tuition	1,650	2014	Resource
Ulster-Scots Agency	Trillick Pipe Band	Music Tuition	1,900	2014	Resource
Ulster-Scots Agency	Langfield & Newtownstewart PS	After School Clubs	1,131	2014	Resource
Ulster-Scots Agency	Omagh Academy	School Music & Dance Tuition	1,000	2014	Resource
Ulster-Scots Agency	Castlederg High Scool	School Music & Dance Tuition	1,000	2014	Resource
Ulster-Scots Agency	Omagh High School	School Music & Dance Tuition	1,000	2014	Resource
Ulster-Scots Agency	Langfield PS	School Music & Dance Tuition	1,000	2014	Resource
Ulster-Scots Agency	Ardstraw Jubilee primary School	School Music & Dance Tuition	1,000	2014	Resource
Ulster-Scots Agency	Newtownstewart Model PS	School Music & Dance Tuition	1,000	2014	Resource

Funding Body	Funded Entity	Description of funding	Amount Paid £	Financial Year	Capital/ Resource
Ulster-Scots Agency	Killen PS	School Music & Dance Tuition	1,000	2014	Resource
Ulster-Scots Agency	Cooley PS	School Music & Dance Tuition	1,000	2014	Resource
Ulster-Scots Agency	McClintock PS	School Music & Dance Tuition	1,000	2014	Resource
Ulster-Scots Agency	Strabane Controlled PS	School Music & Dance Tuition	1,000	2014	Resource
Ulster-Scots Agency	Bready Jubilee PS	School Music & Dance Tuition	1,000	2014	Resource
Ulster-Scots Agency	Knockavoe Scool & Resource Centre	School Music & Dance Tuition	1,000	2014	Resource
Department	Sollus Cultural Promotions (based in Bready, Strabane)	Walled City Tattoo	20,000	2014/15	Resource
Department	Strabane District Council	Strabane U3A Group - Community Theatre Production	3,950	2014/15	Resource
Department	Strabane District Council	Artisans, Crafters and Creative Artists Project	6,000	2014/15	Resource
NMNI	Ulster American Folk Park	Capital Investment	358,000	2014/15	Capital
Department	Tyrone GAA	Construction of 3G pitches and 3G Multi Use Games	6,525	2014/15	Capital
Sport NI	Strabane Cricket and Bowls Club	Cricket for Ladies 2014 and beyond	1,400	2014/15	Resource
Sport NI	Youth Sport Omagh Ltd	Multi-Sport Activity Programme	1,490	2014/15	Resource
Sport NI	Omagh District Council	Active Communities (Year 6)	107,284	2014/15	Resource
Sport NI	Strabane District Council	Active Communities (Year 6) 2014-15	183,083	2014/15	Resource
Arts Council NI	Loughlion Design	Frogjaw Crafty	9,028	2014/15	Resource
Arts Council NI	Killen Pipe Band	Musical Instruments	4,825	2014/15	Capital
Arts Council NI	Pride of William Auld Boys	Musical instruments.	3,375	2014/15	Capital
Arts Council NI	Laurence Roman	Performance in San Juan/Puerto Rico of my Concertino for Flute and Orchestra	750	2014/15	Resource

Mr Ó hOisín asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what progress has been made on the Ulster-Scots dictionary and glossary; (ii) how much it has cost to date; (iii) how many people are working on the project; and (iv) when it is expected to be delivered.
(AQW 41496/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín:

(i) An Ulster-Scots “Spelling and Pronunciation Guide” and “Word Glossary” was published by the Ulster-Scots Language Society in March 2013. This publication resulted from work largely undertaken by the Ulster-Scots Academy Implementation Group. These documents will make an important contribution to the aim of the Ministerial Advisory Group – Ulster Scots Academy to develop an Ulster-Scots dictionary. This will first require agreement on the orthography of Ulster Scots.

To this end in October 2013 my Department appointed an Orthography panel of linguistic experts to advise the Ministerial Advisory Group (MAG) – Ulster Scots Academy on the implementation and development of Ulster Scots Orthography. The Orthography Panel is due to deliver its first Interim Report March 2015.

(ii) To date my Department has spent £25,673 on preparatory work for an Ulster-Scots dictionary. £20,673 was for the development of an Ulster-Scots "Spelling and Pronunciation Guide" and "Word Glossary" under the auspices of the Ulster-Scots Academy Implementation Group in 2011, £13,523 of this money was spent by the Ulster-Scots Academy Implementation Group and £7,150 by the Ulster-Scots Agency. The Ministerial Advisory Group Ulster Scots Academy has provided a further £5,000 to the Ulster Scots Language Society for completion and publication of the "Spelling and Pronunciation Guide" and "Word Glossary" and their subsequent launch in March 2013.

(iii) There are 3 Expert Advisors on the Orthography Panel engaged on an Ad Hoc basis.

(iv) The development of an Ulster-Scots Dictionary will be a step by step process based on consensus across the Ulster Scots sector. As with dictionary projects for other languages, this will require a long term commitment and will take some time to deliver. The next step as identified by the MAG Ulster-Scots Academy is the development of an Ulster-Scots lexicographical database. The MAG Ulster-Scots Academy has been in discussion with sectoral representatives and other key potential partners about how to now progress the Dictionary Project. An Ulster-Scots dictionary is an important piece of work to be taken forward by the Ulster-Scots Academy.

Mr Ó hOisín asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what efforts have been made to develop a Líofa type initiative for Ulster-Scots by the Ulster-Scots Agency and the Ministerial Advisory Group on the Ulster-Scots Academy.
(AQW 41497/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Work is progressing well to scope and develop proposals for a four to five year language and culture development initiative for Ulster Scots with strong community and lifelong learning elements. All main sector bodies, including the MAG Ulster-Scots Academy and Ulster-Scots Agency, are participating in the work on a collaborative basis. An initiative programme, along with costings, delivery mechanisms, programme management arrangements and funding options will be prepared and a business case completed by end of March 2015, as the basis of a bid for additional funding.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether there is a recycling policy for local libraries.
(AQW 41509/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Libraries NI has informed me that its policy and approach to recycling is set out within its 'Environmental Policy 2013/15'.

The policy states that 'Libraries NI are committed to minimising the environmental impacts of our activities and recognises the need to deliver sustainable development' and specifically to 'Reduce the amount of waste produced and minimise its environmental impact by following the waste hierarchy of reduce, reuse and recycle'.

In implementing this policy Libraries NI avails of a range of waste management arrangements with local Councils, other Government bodies and the private sector. This policy has been published on its website.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the (i) resource; and (ii) capital grants paid out to boxing clubs for each of the last three years, including (a) the name of the club; (b) the amount of the grant; (c) the funding stream from which it was drawn; and (d) whether the grant was from (i) her Department; or (ii) Sport NI.
(AQW 41522/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I have arranged for details of Exchequer and Lottery funding awarded by Sport NI to boxing clubs directly and also indirectly through the Irish Amateur Boxing Association from April 2011 to date, to be placed in the Assembly Library. This information includes the names of the individual clubs and the amounts awarded.

To sustain and increase participation, and improve performances in sport, Sport NI, an arms length body of my Department, invests in a range of projects throughout the north of Ireland. Sport NI is a Lottery award distributor and also provides exchequer funding to a number of Sport NI recognised Governing Bodies of Sport, sports groups and clubs seeking funding in the north, including boxing.

Boxing clubs have benefited from a number of funding streams from both my Department and Sport NI from April 2011 to date. These include:

1 DCAL funded – Sport Matters Community Capital Programme, Equipment Pre Games Training Camps and City of Culture Legacy.

2 Sport NI funded – Boxing Investment Programme, Active Clubs Programme and Awards for Sport Programme.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what streams of funding for capital works are available to boxing clubs, including (i) opening date; (ii) closing date; (iii) amount available; and (iv) how the stream has been advertised.
(AQW 41523/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Sport NI has no funding programmes currently available for capital works to which boxing clubs may apply. However, Sport NI has provided Lottery funding of £3.27 million to develop the sport, to include the provision of equipment and capital works to improve club premises under the Boxing Investment Programme. Under this Programme the Governing Body of boxing, the Irish Amateur Boxing Association, received almost £170,000 to provide ninety four clubs across the north of Ireland with new equipment. This was delivered to clubs between August 2013 and February 2014.

Funding of £2.5 million was allocated under the Programme for capital works. A call for Stage 1 applications for capital awards was made on 10 September 2013 and closed on 4 October 2013. A call for Stage 2 applications for the capital awards was made on 18 November 2013 with a closing date of 9 December 2013. Indicative Letters of Offer were provided on 31 January 2014 and 3 February 2014 to forty applicants.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the funding provided by NI Screen to television programmes to mark the centenary of the Ulster Covenant, along with the names of the programmes and the production companies.
(AQW 41529/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Ulster-Scots Broadcast Fund made an award of £65,000 on 11 March 2011 to Double Band Films for the programme entitled "The Covenant Trail". The title of the programme was subsequently changed to "The Ulster Covenant" and was broadcast on BBC 1 NI on 27th September 2012.

Mr Humphrey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the money contributed by her Department to community festivals, on the basis of approved business cases, prior to the creation of the Community Festival fund in April 2006, including the names of the festivals and the amount allocated to each festival in each year.
(AQW 41558/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The information requested is not readily available and may only be obtained at disproportionate cost. In addition, it is possible that some records may have been disposed of in line with the Department's disposal of records schedule where there is no requirement, in many instances, to retain records for a period of more than seven years.

Mrs McKevitt asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether LibrariesNI, in support of a family friendly policy, intend to continue to offer job-share opportunities to staff, including front line employees.
(AQW 41572/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Libraries NI has informed me that it intends to continue to offer job share opportunities to staff, including frontline employees, in support of a family friendly policy, in line with business need and budget availability.

Mrs McKevitt asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether LibrariesNI intend to only employ staff on part-time contracts.
(AQW 41573/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Libraries NI has informed me that it does not intend to only employ staff on part-time contracts. Libraries NI currently employ staff on both full-time and part-time contacts and this will continue to be the case.

Mrs McKevitt asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for a breakdown of the number of staff employed by LibrariesNI who have a (i) full-time permanent contract; (ii) part-time permanent contract; (iii) a full-time temporary contract; and (iv) a part-time temporary contract.
(AQW 41574/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Libraries NI has informed me that the number of staff it currently employs who have a full-time permanent contract; part-time permanent contract; a full-time temporary contract and a part-time temporary contract is as follows:

Contract Type	**Number of Staff**
(i) Full-time permanent	320
(ii) Part-time permanent	446
(iii) Full-time temporary	7
(iv) Part-time temporary	2
Total	**775**

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how her Department and its agencies have helped in the efforts to find Kieran McAree in Enniskillen.
(AQW 41655/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Whilst Waterways Ireland has to date had no direct involvement in the search and rescue efforts relating to Kieran McAree it has maintained a liaison with the PSNI and is aware of their operation and the extent of their current findings. Waterways Ireland has offered to provide whatever assistance it can to the PSNI official search, on their request, depending on available resources. The PSNI has not as yet made any request of Waterways Ireland, nor have they required the closure of the Navigation.

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on the Casement Park redevelopment project.
(AQW 41668/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I refer member to the answer to AQW 40808/11-15
http://aims.niassembly.gov.uk/questions/printquestionsummary.aspx?docid=220029

No further update at this stage.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether her Department's proposal on an Irish language strategy was approved by the Executive; and if so, when.
(AQW 41737/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I have informed Executive Ministers and the Assembly on a number of occasions of my intention to publish the following Strategies:

- Strategy to Enhance and Protect the Development of the Irish Language 2015-2035.
- Strategy to Enhance and Develop the Ulster-Scots Language, Heritage and Culture 2015-2035.

Executive approval was not sought. I consulted with and shared both draft Strategies with Executive Ministers for feedback and comment on two occasions.

In June 2013 I gave Executive Ministers the opportunity to comment on the first draft of the Strategies and the responses from the public consultations.

During July 2014 I provided Executive Ministers with a further opportunity to comment on a revised version of both Strategies and advised them that I intended to publish both.

I am very grateful to Ministerial colleagues for their comments and feedback on both occasions.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure when the Arts Council will open the fund for instruments for bands.
(AQW 41793/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: In 2015/16 the Department has inescapable capital commitments in excess of the capital budget allocation and is working closely with DFP to manage the situation. The Department is not in a position to confirm any other capital allocations at this time.

Mrs McKevitt asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether the Programme for Government 2011-15 target, to support 200 projects through the Creative Industries Innovation Fund, will be achieved by March 2015.
(AQW 41839/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: 203 projects have been supported by the Creative Industries Innovation Fund as of February 2015. This achieves the Programme for Government target and exceeds the anticipated number of supported projects by three.

The fund has catalysed new ideas, products, networks and collaborations and has played a significant role in developing the north of Ireland as a vibrant hub for the creative industries.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the number of staff employed by Waterways Ireland, broken down by religion.
(AQW 41886/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The total number of staff employed by Waterways Ireland is 312. There is no legal requirement for Waterways Ireland to monitor the religion of the 230 staff working in the South. Currently Waterways Ireland employs 82 staff in the North.

Of those 82 employees, 28 are Protestant, 50 are Roman Catholic and 4 declared as other.

Department of Education

Mr Newton asked the Minister of Education what percentage of his 2015/16 Budget that will be allocated to administration.
(AQW 40992/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): Administration costs are a subset of the total resource budget, and reflect the resources consumed directly in providing central government services. These costs include pay, superannuation, travel and subsistence, current expenditure on back office accommodation etc.

During 2014-15, that part of my overall Resource Budget, used to fund Administration costs was 0.9%. While I am still finalising the 2015-16 Final DE Budget, I do not envisage the percentage increasing in 2015-16.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education how much funding the Ulster-Scots Agency received from his Department in the last three financial years.
(AQW 40999/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department has not received any funding applications from the Ulster-Scots Agency or provided it with any funding in the last three financial years.

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Education to detail the percentage of schools meeting the Entitlement Framework requirements for (i) Key Stage 4; and (ii) post-16 in the current academic year, broken down by (a) sector; and (b) Education and Library Board.
(AQW 41103/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The 2014/15 Entitlement Framework Audit data is not yet available. However, based on the 2013/14 data the percentage of schools meeting the Entitlement Framework requirements at (i) Key Stage 4 of 21 courses; and (ii) post-16 of 24 courses, broken down by (a) sector and (b) Education and Library Board are set out in the tables below.

(i) Schools at Key Stage 4 meeting the 2014 requirements of 21 courses, of which one third are general and one third applied

Board Area	Total Schools	Total Schools Meeting	%	Maintained	Controlled			Irish Medium	Grant Maintained Integrated	Voluntary Grammar
					S'dary	Integrated	Gram.			
BELB	33	31	94%	80%	100%	-	100%	100%	100%	100%
WELB	39	30	77%	89%	100%	-	75%	-	100%	78%
NEELB	48	39	81%	83%	87%	50%	75%	-	100%	70%
SEELB	36	34	94%	94%	91%	100%	100%	-	75%	100%
SELB	48	45	94%	94%	100%	100%	67%	-	100%	100%
Total	**204**	**179**	**88%**							

(ii) Schools at Post-16 meeting the 2014 requirements of 24 courses, of which one third are general and one third applied

Board Area	Total Schools	Total Schools Meeting	%	Maintained	Controlled			Irish Medium	Grant Maintained Integrated	Voluntary Grammar
					S'dary	Integrated	Gram.			
BELB	33	20	61%	40%	25%	-	67%	0%	100%	85%
WELB	36	23	64%	53%	40%	-	100%	-	67%	78%
NEELB	39	24	62%	56%	36%	-	100%	-	75%	70%
SEELB	27	18	67%	57%	20%	50%	100%	-	67%	100%
SELB	34	20	59%	60%	25%	-	100%	-	50%	78%
Total	**169**	**105**	**62%**							

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Education how much of the £2.5 million restored to his Department will be allocated to the statutory pre-school sector.
(AQW 41159/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department's Pre-School Education Programme offers places in statutory settings in nursery schools and units attached to primary schools and in non-statutory voluntary playgroups and private settings.

The £2.5m restored to the Education budget related to the funding of pre-school education offered in voluntary and private settings.

Pre-school pupils in grant-aided nursery schools and nursery classes within primary schools are funded under the Local Management of Schools formula funding arrangements, as detailed in the Common Funding Scheme www.deni.gov.uk/schools and infrastructure/schools finance/common funding scheme 2014-15

The restoration of the draft budget reduction will ensure that sufficient funding is available to meet the projected need for pre-school places across the north for the 2015-16 academic year.

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Education how his Department will work to negate the long term damage that cuts will have on the future for schools.
(AQW 41163/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: As part of the 2015-16 Final Budget outcome, my Department received an additional £64.9million funding in recognition of the inescapable pressures facing education and the overwhelming response to the consultation.

Throughout the budget process my aim was to protect as far as possible funding to schools. Therefore, following this final budget allocation and my wider education budget review I allocated £80 million to the Aggregated Schools Budget. This allocation means that there has been no reduction in cash terms to schools delegated budgets, although in real terms, schools will still face pay and inflationary pressures in 2015-16.

My focus remains on raising standards and closing the achievement gap. This continuous improvement will best be achieved when schools are supported and trusted to develop their own school improvement strategies.

Also, by working with the Boards, CCMS and others, my objective through the area planning process is to develop a network of sustainable and financially viable schools; right sized and in the right places and able to maximise the use of available resources so that they focus on providing the quality of education that pupils deserve.

I acknowledge the demanding financial position still facing the education sector in 2015-16. It must be recognised that this constrained financial context is set to continue for the foreseeable future. Let me be clear that I will continue to make the case for increased investment in education.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education, pursuant AQW 40341/11-15, to detail (i) the services rendered; and (ii) the amount spent.
(AQW 41298/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: In pursuant of AQW 40341/11-15, (i) services rendered relate to the NICCE's role in establishing a Catholic schools' sectoral support body; and (ii) the amount spent in this respect was £43k, paid in the 2013-14 financial year.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail the maintenance costs of each Education and Library Board headquarter building, in each of the last five years.
(AQW 41305/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The following table details the maintenance costs of each of the Education and Library Board headquarter buildings, in each of the last five financial years.

Board	2009/2010 £000's	2010/2011 £000's	2011/2012 £000's	2012/2013 £000's	2013/2014 £000's	Overall Total £000's
BELB	157	286	122	138	140	843
WELB	41	108	35	120	365	669
NEELB	83	73	61	152	109	478
SEELB	122	91	67	201	155	636
SELB	58	73	203	126	146	606

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 40753/11-15, why the post-primary role within the Jigsaw project was not maintained to support pupils when they moved to new schools.
(AQW 41399/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The North Eastern Education and Library Board have advised that Jigsaw is a Barnardos service funded by the Department for Social Development (DSD) with contributions from Extended Schools and Barnardos voluntary funds.

I understand that discussions took place between Barnardos, DSD and community representatives with regards the possibility of Barnardos continuing to support former Ballee Community High School (CHS) pupils when the pupils moved to other post primary schools following the closure of Ballee CHS in August 2014.

The Board have advised that the decision not to continue with the Jigsaw project was taken by Barnardos due to the resignation of the post-primary Jigsaw worker. The recruitment and induction of a new worker was viewed by Barnardos as not viable for the remainder of the funding period up to 31 March 2015.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 40753/11-15, to detail the additional (i) Education Psychology; (ii) Education Welfare Service; and (iii) Behaviour Support provided to each post-primary school that received pupils from Ballee Community High School following its closure.
(AQW 41400/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The North Eastern Education and Library Board (NEELB) have advised as follows:-

(i) Education Psychology - An Educational Psychologist from the Board attended School Based Care Team meetings in advance of the closure of Ballee CHS to identify potentially vulnerable pupils. All identified pupils were then followed up by the Educational Psychologist through consultation with the receiving schools. The educational psychology time allocated to Ballee CHS has also been made available to the receiving schools in addition to their existing time allocation.

(ii) Education Welfare Service – A project officer from the EWS provided peer support to year 9 and 10 pupils identified as in need of support in managing change and relationships. The Education and Welfare Officer worked with other Board services to ensure a smooth transition from Ballee CHS to the receiving schools. This included meetings with the schools, individual work with young people and home visits to ensure the welfare and educational needs of the pupils were met.

(iii) Behaviour Support – All pupils in receipt of Behaviour Support from Ballee CHS were supported in their new schools with 6 pupils continuing to access support. All schools receive advice and support as requested through links with Behaviour Support Service staff or School Based Care Teams.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of nursery school (i) applications; and (ii) places available in each of the last five years.
(AQW 41432/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The number of applications for pre-school places

Year	Applications	Number of children in places*
2010/11	22382	21940
2011/12	22570	22668
2012/13	22955	23023
2013/14	22898	23164
2014/15	23437	23667

* The process is demand lead and the number of available places varies from year to year. The number of places provided is the actual number of children in funded pre-school places taken from School Census for each year.

The number of applications provided is the number received during the pre-school admissions process and recorded with the Education and Library Boards (ELBs). Once the admissions process has ended parents may apply direct to pre-school providers which have funded places available hence more children can attend than applications received in the ELBs.

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Education for an update on the proposed new build for Strabane Academy, including details of the (i) work undertaken by the Department to progress this project; and (ii) interaction between his Department, the Western Education and Library Board and the Governors of Strabane Academy since the amalgamation of the two schools to form the Academy.
(AQW 41461/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The new school for Strabane Academy was included in my Capital Announcement of January 2013. The Western Education and Library Board are responsible for taking this project forward. However my Department continues to liaise with them during this planning process

The Design Stage 2 (C) documentation for the Strabane Academy project was sent to my Department in mid November 2014 Academy project was sent to DE in mid November 2014. Unfortunately the documentation indicated that there was a significant increase in the anticipated construction costs for the project compared with those identified in the business case. When changes in cost of the magnitude indicated occur at any stage in a project it is necessary for a comprehensive review of the project to be carried out by DE's professional advisors and economists to understand the reason for the change and ensure that the project provides value for money.

This work, which was undertaken through December and January, concluded that on this occasion the increase was justified given the restrictive nature and topography of the site. A letter approving the design team to continue to Stage 3 of the design was sent to the Western Education and Library Board on 28 January 2015.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education how many maintained sector school new builds he has authorised since May 2011.
(AQW 41471/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd:

(i) Since 2011 I have announced the following new builds in the controlled sector.

Year Announced	Name of School
2012	Dromore Central Primary School
	Ebrington Primary School, Derry
	Eglinton Primary School,
2012	Enniskillen Primary School
	Victoria Park Primary School, Belfast
	Ardnashee Special School, Derry
	Arvalee Special School, Omagh
	Castle Tower Special School, Ballymena
	Rossmar Special School, Limavady
2013	Edenderry Nursery School, Belfast
	Elmgrove/Avoniel Primary School, Belfast
	Glenwood Primary School, Belfast
	Devenish College, Derrychara, Enniskillen
	Down High School, Downpatrick
	Parkhall Controlled Integrated College, Antrim
	Strabane Academy
2014	Iveagh Primary School, Rathfriland
	Woodburn Primary School, Carrickfergus
	Abbey Community College, Newtownabbey
	Breda High School, Belfast
	Cullybackey High School
	Dunclug High School, Ballymena

(ii) Since 2011 I have announced the following new builds in the maintained sector.

Year Announced	Name of School
2012	St Clare's Abbey Primary School, Newry
	St Joseph's Convent Primary School, Newry
	St Mary's Primary School, Banbridge
	St Theresa's Primary School, Lurgan
	Tannaghmore Primary School, Lurgan
	St Gerard's Resource Centre Belfast
2013	Craigbrack PS/Mullabuoy PS/ Listress PS, Derry
	Edendork Primary School, Dungannon
	St Joseph's & St James PS, Poyntzpass
	St Mary's PS/Glenravel PS, Ballymena
	Holy Trinity College, Cookstown
	St Ronan's College, Lurgan
	St Bronaghs PS, Rostrevor
2014	St Mark's & St Luke's PS, Twinbrook
	St Patrick's Primary School, Belfast

Year Announced	Name of School
	Lismore Comprehensive, Craigavon
	St Joseph's High School, Crossmaglen
	St Killian's College, Carnlough

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education how many controlled sector school new builds he has authorised since May 2011. **(AQW 41472/11-15)**

Mr O'Dowd:

(iii) Since 2011 I have announced the following new builds in the controlled sector.

Year Announced	Name of School
2012	Dromore Central Primary School
	Ebrington Primary School, Derry
	Eglinton Primary School,
2012	Enniskillen Primary School
	Victoria Park Primary School, Belfast
	Ardnashee Special School, Derry
	Arvalee Special School, Omagh
	Castle Tower Special School, Ballymena
	Rossmar Special School, Limavady
2013	Edenderry Nursery School, Belfast
	Elmgrove/Avoniel Primary School, Belfast
	Glenwood Primary School, Belfast
	Devenish College, Derrychara, Enniskillen
	Down High School, Downpatrick
	Parkhall Controlled Integrated College, Antrim
	Strabane Academy
2014	Iveagh Primary School, Rathfriland
	Woodburn Primary School, Carrickfergus
	Abbey Community College, Newtownabbey
	Breda High School, Belfast
	Cullybackey High School
	Dunclug High School, Ballymena

(iv) Since 2011 I have announced the following new builds in the maintained sector.

Year Announced	Name of School
2012	St Clare's Abbey Primary School, Newry
	St Joseph's Convent Primary School, Newry
	St Mary's Primary School, Banbridge
	St Theresa's Primary School, Lurgan
	Tannaghmore Primary School, Lurgan
	St Gerard's Resource Centre Belfast
2013	Craigbrack PS/Mullabuoy PS/ Listress PS, Derry

Year Announced	Name of School
	Edendork Primary School, Dungannon
	St Joseph's & St James PS, Poyntzpass
	St Mary's PS/Glenravel PS, Ballymena
	Holy Trinity College, Cookstown
	St Ronan's College, Lurgan
	St Bronaghs PS, Rostrevor
2014	St Mark's & St Luke's PS, Twinbrook
	St Patrick's Primary School, Belfast
	Lismore Comprehensive, Craigavon
	St Joseph's High School, Crossmaglen
	St Killian's College, Carnlough

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Education whether he plans to continue funding outreach and detached youth services through earmarked additional funding, or whether the cost can be met under the core youth work budget.
(AQW 41479/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I am currently finalising my 2015-16 spending plans and detailed decisions on allocations for local youth services will be determined in due course.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) what training exists to encourage teachers to identify child victims of domestic abuse; and (ii) the correct link-up process with other relevant bodies if a child is identified, or suspected.
(AQW 41550/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: In schools, domestic abuse comes within the overall child protection agenda.

All schools have a named Designated Teacher (DT) for Child Protection and a named Deputy Designated Teacher. The DT acts as a focal point for child protection within the school through providing advice and support to staff and by liaising with agencies outside the school as appropriate.

All grant-aided schools are required by law to have a child protection policy and to implement it. When preparing its policy a school must take account of advice from the Department, relevant Education and Library Board (ELB) and, in the case of Catholic maintained schools, the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS).

All advice issued from the Department is consistent with the 'Co-Operating to Safeguard Children' document and the Area Child Protection Committee Regional Policies and Procedures.

Training on child protection matters is organised by the ELBs and is available to members of Boards of Governors, school principals, DTs and their deputies.

There are clear procedures under the UNOCINI (Understanding the Needs of Children in the North of Ireland) assessment framework to facilitate referral from schools to social services and onward to other agencies such as PSNI, as appropriate.

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Education what information was provided to parents, specifically transport arrangements, to enable them to make an informed decision regarding their choice of post-primary school for September 2015 enrolment by the Southern Education and Library Board and Council for Catholic Maintained Schools.
(AQW 41561/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: In advance of selecting a post-primary school for their child for September 2015, all parents were issued by the Education and Library Boards with a copy of "Transfer 2015 – A Guide for Parents – Admission to Post-Primary Schools". The guidance includes information on applying for transport assistance. Information regarding transport is provided by the Education and Library Boards on behalf of the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools.

Additionally, the Department of Education provided an advice leaflet to parents of pupils in Year 6 (Primary 6) in the 2013/14 school year ahead of their transfer in September 2015. The leaflet is entitled, "The Transfer Process to Post-Primary School: Advice for Parents of Children in Primary Six". The leaflet contains advice with respect to school transport, inter alia.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail the process for the appointment of school leaders under the new single education authority.
(AQW 41562/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Work on developing a Teaching Appointments Scheme (TAS) for the Education Authority (EA) is underway. An interim scheme will be developed in the first instance to make provision for those appointments that must be made in the first months following the establishment of the EA. This will allow time for a longer-term TAS to be agreed once the EA has been established.

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 40592/11-15, how many pupils in each Education and Library Board did not have a decision to carry out a statutory assessment within a ten week period as of 31 December 2014.
(AQW 41585/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Education and Library Boards have advised that the number of pupils for whom a statutory assessment was requested and the decision to turn down the request issued during the ten week period from 23 October – 31 December 2014 was as follows:

BELB	*
NEELB	8
SEELB	25
SELB	8
WELB	29

* denotes fewer than five pupils suppressed due to potential identification of individual pupils.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Education for an update on the recruitment of a principal for St Mary's High School, Brollagh.
(AQW 41589/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department is not the employer of teachers. In this case, the relevant employing authority is the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS).

CCMS have advised that the Board of Governors carried out interviews at the end of January 2015. Such appointments are subject to ratification from CCMS followed by negotiation regarding a release date.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Education for an update on the involvement of his Department and that of the Department of Education and Skills in supporting the establishment of a pilot cross-border partnership with St Mary's High School, Brollagh.
(AQW 41590/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Both Education Ministers have discussed and agreed that the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) and the Western Education and Library Board (WELB) should work with education providers in Donegal to develop a pilot proposal. The CCMS has confirmed that a draft plan will be completed to my Department for consideration by the end of February 2015.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) when he expects the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) to produce a plan on the proposed pilot cross-border partnership with St Mary's High School, Brollagh; (ii) what level of engagement he expects CCMS to have with local community and political representatives in formulating a plan; and (iii) whether any plan will be made public.
(AQW 41591/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: CCMS has confirmed that a draft plan will be provided to my Department by the end of February 2015.

I and my officials will need to see the plan before decisions are taken on the way forward but I expect community engagement to be part of the process.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Education to detail the percentage of pupils achieving five or more GCSEs at grades A-C in each of the last three years, broken down by (i) gender; and (ii) pupils entitled to free school meals.
(AQW 41628/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information contained in the following table refers to the achievement of pupils leaving mainstream grant aided post-primary schools during the academic years 2010/11 to 2012/13.

Data covering the academic year 2012/13 are the most recent available. Equivalent figures for 2013/14 school leavers are scheduled for release in May 2015.

Percentage of school leavers achieving five or more GCSEs at grades A*-C (including equivalents) by gender and pupils entitled to free school meals, 2010/11 to 2012/13

	Boy	**Girl**	**Entitled to free school meals**
2010/11	67.7	78.9	48.8

	Boy	Girl	Entitled to free school meals
2011/12	71.0	82.1	53.4
2012/13	74.5	82.8	58.5

Source: School Leavers Survey

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Education what policy exists for the recognition in Northern Ireland of a Statement of Special Educational Needs that has been made elsewhere in the United Kingdom.
(AQW 41631/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Although there are a number of similarities between the assessment process in the north of Ireland and England, Wales and Scotland, there are also substantial differences in the administration of education and in the funding of Statements of Special Educational Needs (SEN). It is not possible, therefore, to have reciprocal arrangements between the separate jurisdictions which would allow Statements to be accepted when a family moves from one jurisdiction to another.

Prior to a pupil receiving a Statement of SEN, a statutory assessment must be completed within this jurisdiction by the relevant Education and Library Board (ELB). As part of that process the Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs (COP) advises that the educational psychologist (EP) from whom the ELB seeks psychological advice must be employed by the Board. The EP must, however, consult and record any advice received from any other psychologist who may have relevant knowledge of or information about the child.

The COP also requires ELBs to consider any advice which parents may submit independently and, as far as possible, follow up suggestions from other agencies or individuals who might be able to provide relevant advice.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 41246/11-15, for his assessment of whether a policy, or legally binding document, should be in place to eliminate any potential concerns or issues.
(AQW 41658/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I am content that the Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs clearly documents procedures regarding privately obtained psychologists' assessments in a manner that ensures equitable treatment for all pupils.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 41363/11-15, whether a mechanism exists to ensure that Education and Library Boards and schools provide appropriate support during the transition period for young people with Special Education Needs who do not have a statement.
(AQW 41684/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Under Article 4(2) of the Education (NI) Order 1996, Education and Library Boards and Boards of Governors of grant-aided schools are required to have regard to the provisions of the Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs (SEN).

Paragraph 6.51 of the Code recognises that, in some instances, a pupil approaching the age of 16 may have SEN which do not call for a statement, but which are nevertheless likely to require some support during the transition process. The Code makes clear that Boards and schools should seek to provide such support. This may include the provision of school/FE college link courses or work placements. Schools may also wish to prepare their own transition plans for non-statemented students with SEN.

In addition, the Department for Employment and Learning's Careers Service is available in post-primary schools for all young people with SEN, regardless of whether or not they have a statement.

I am satisfied that the Code, which is underpinned by legislation, together with the intervention of the Careers Service, provide the mechanism for appropriate support during the transition period for those young people with Special Education Needs who do not have a statement.

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Education what percentage of newly qualified teachers have obtained full time teaching posts within Northern Ireland, in each of the last four years.
(AQW 41706/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department does not hold the information in the format requested. The General Teaching Council (GTCNI) collects information on teacher employment on an annual basis. The tables below set out the number of teachers whose employment is of a permanent or a significant temporary nature (ie. one term or more), at the date specified, and includes full-time and part-time teachers:

Year of Graduation	North of Ireland Graduates registered with GTCNI at December 2010	North of Ireland Graduates employed on a permanent or a significant temporary nature at December 2010
2010	576	126 (22%)

Source: GTCNI (December 2010)

Year of Graduation	North of Ireland Graduates registered with GTCNI at January 2012	North of Ireland Graduates employed on a permanent or a significant temporary nature at January 2012
2010	576	206 (36%)
2011	525	119 (23%)

Source: GTCNI (January 2012)

Year of Graduation	North of Ireland Graduates registered with GTCNI at January 2013	North of Ireland Graduates employed on a permanent or a significant temporary nature at January 2013
2010	542	243 (45%)
2011	524	160 (31%)
2012	475	79 (17%)

Source: GTCNI (January 2013)

Year of Graduation	North of Ireland Graduates registered with GTCNI at February 2014	North of Ireland Graduates employed on a permanent or a significant temporary nature at February 2014
2010	527	299 (57%)
2011	509	254 (50%)
2012	485	196 (40%)
2013	476	110 (23%)

Source: GTCNI (February 2014)

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of teacher training places he and his predecessor was advised to allocate as the optimum number to ensure properly regulated supply for (i) 2012/13; (ii) 2013/14; and (iii) 2014/15.
(AQW 41707/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The number of initial teacher education places allocated in each of the years specified reflects the number of places advised. Details of the allocations which I made in respect of these years are routinely published and are available on the Department's website at the following web link:

www.deni.gov.uk/index/school-staff/teachers-teachinginnorthernireland_pg/teachers_-_teaching_in_northern_ireland-4_approved_intakes.htm

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Education how many teacher training places he and his predecessor decided to allocate for (i) 2012/13; (ii) 2013/14; and (iii) 2014/15.
(AQW 41708/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The number of initial teacher education places allocated in each of the years specified reflects the number of places advised. Details of the allocations which I made in respect of these years are routinely published and are available on the Department's website at the following web link:

www.deni.gov.uk/index/school-staff/teachers-teachinginnorthernireland_pg/teachers_-_teaching_in_northern_ireland-4_approved_intakes.htm

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education what actions his Department is taking to standardise the systems and practices in each Education and Library Board in relation to employment of school principals as they approach becoming a single Education Authority.
(AQW 41721/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department does not employ teachers, and is not responsible for the appointment of school Principals; this is the role of the employer/employing authority. However, the Education Authority Implementation Team is currently developing a Teaching Appointments Scheme (TAS) for the Education Authority (EA). An interim scheme will be developed in the first instance to make provision for those appointments that must be made in the first months following the establishment of the EA. This will allow time for a longer-term TAS to be agreed once the EA has been established.

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Education for an update on the Holywood Multi-Schools Project.
(AQW 41723/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I refer the member to my response to his earlier question AQW 37263/11-15 which was published on 17 October 2014.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 40818/11-15 and given that withdrawal of crossing patrols has been increasing, for his assessment of the impact of the withdrawal of patrols on pupil safety when walking or cycling to and from school.
(AQW 41746/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The provision of school crossing patrols is a discretionary function. Patrols are, therefore, provided in support of the parental duty to ensure the safety of their child(ren) when walking to school. Patrols are provided where a location has been assessed as exceeding the threshold(s) set out in assessment guidelines. The guidelines are based on those of Road Safety GB, previously Local Authority Road Safety Officers Association (LARSOA). These guidelines incorporate elements from the existing widely adopted criteria for the assessment of potential zebra and pelican crossing sites, and consider factors such as traffic flow and the number of pupils crossing. Therefore, patrols are usually established at locations where there are high numbers of pupils and a heavy volume of traffic. Additionally, school crossing patrols are only permitted to marshal pedestrians and not cyclists.

Reassessments of patrols are routinely conducted when a patrol person leaves their post. School crossing patrols may be removed where a location no longer exceeds the threshold(s) set out in the guidelines.

With regard to the impact upon pupils following the removal of a patrol, Boards ensure that the reassessed crossing point is within tolerances experienced by pupils on any other route without a crossing patrol.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Education to detail the dates of any meetings he has held, or arranged, with the Ulster-Scots Agency, as referred to by the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure in the Assembly on 2 February 2015.
(AQW 41778/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Since coming into office as Minister for Education I have met with the Ministerial Advisory Group on Ulster Scots on 6 December 2011 and I also met with representatives of the Ulster Scots Agency on 26 March 2012 to discuss Ulster Scots in schools.

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Education what progress has been made on the appointment of members to the new Education Authority.
(AQW 41781/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The processes to appoint the Chair and the 20 members to the Board of the Education Authority (EA) are at an advanced stage and the full membership will be appointed in advance of the establishment of the EA on 1 April 2015. A press release announcing the appointments will issue at the appropriate time.

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Education what steps he has taken to recoup money spent on the Education and Skills Authority; and how much of that money will relate to work of the new Education Authority.
(AQW 41782/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: In preparation for ESA significant progress was made in planning the delivery of services on a consistent regional basis. This work, which will now support the creation of the Education Authority, included the development of common procedures and policies for a single organisation.

A significant part of the money spent on ESA will therefore support the delivery of the Education Authority and allow it to move forward more rapidly once established. However, it is not possible to quantify the proportion.

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Education where the different services operated by the new Education Authority will be sited.
(AQW 41783/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The location of Education Authority services and associated staff will be a matter for the Board of the Authority to consider in consultation with Trades Unions. As a regional organisation with a strong local presence, the Authority will wish to ensure that it is accessible to the schools and communities it serves.

Decisions of this nature will be subject to Rural Proofing and Equality Impact Assessment, if required.

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Education what impact the creation of one education authority will have on the staff of the five former boards.
(AQW 41784/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The staff of the five education and library boards will transfer to the Education Authority. Staff will be afforded protection of their existing contractual terms and conditions in accordance with the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006, as provided for by Schedule 2 of the Education Act (NI) 2014. This will also extend to the protection of pension arrangements.

Significant reductions in staff have already been made in anticipation of the establishment of the Education and Skills Authority. Nevertheless, the new Authority is expected to employ fewer staff in senior and middle management grades than are currently employed by the education and library boards. It is my expectation that the remaining reductions will be achieved through voluntary redundancy, retirement and resignation.

The location of Education Authority staff and functions will be determined by the new Authority through the development of a location strategy in consultation with trades unions. It will take time for the Education Authority to arrive at a "steady state" and so issues around location of staff and functions will be implemented incrementally. These will need to be reviewed at the appropriate time to determine their equality impact as well as conducting other screening processes such as rural proofing.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Education what evidence schools are expected to provide of community support for a project seeking support through the Together: Building a United Community – Shared Education Campuses programme.
(AQW 41787/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Each application to the Shared Education Campuses Programme is unique and therefore the evidence of community support will vary from project to project.

My Department has not been prescriptive about what is required. Evidence can be provided in the form of surveys, letters from local community organisations, elected representatives, churches and other schools in the locality.

Mr Rogers asked the Minister of Education to outline the procedure to review a decision that a school is zero-rated for reception provision.
(AQW 41849/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: In accordance with the 'Local Management of Schools – Common Funding Scheme 2014-15' pupils in reception provision may be weighted zero where the school:

- has not previously had reception provision;
- where reception provision is not provided for within the school's admission criteria; or
- where the reception class has been replaced by nursery provision under the pre-school expansion programme and the Pre-school Education Advisory Group (PEAG) has recommended to the Department that this is the case and the Department accepts the recommendation.

Pupils in Reception provision at Grammar schools are zero rated.

Any school which has concerns about its financial position, including zero-rating of reception provision, should contact the appropriate Funding Authority for advice in the first instance.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Education whether he has reconsidered his proposal to impose a twenty per cent cut on the budget of the Youth Council, in view of his decision to restore the reduction that he made in the budget of Education and Library Board Youth Services at draft budget stage.
(AQW 41851/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I am currently finalising my 2015-16 spending plans and detailed decisions on allocations will be determined in due course.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) any strategy or policy on improving the provision of sex education in schools; (ii) whether sex education is contained within the statutory curriculum; and (iii) his assessment of the importance of appropriate sex education.
(AQW 41890/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) is a policy which is devolved to schools. All schools are required to have in place a RSE policy which sets out how the school will address RSE within the curriculum. A school's policy should be subject to consultation with parents and it should be endorsed by the Board of Governors of the school. While it is a devolved

policy, the Department does provide guidance to support schools, which emphasises the need for pupils to have the opportunity to provide feedback about the contents of the RSE programme delivered by the school, so that it can be responsive to their needs. CCEA has been working to review current guidance and it is expected that new guidance will be issued to all schools before the end of the current academic year.

RSE is an integral part of the curriculum in both primary and post-primary schools and it must be delivered in a sensitive manner which is appropriate to the age and understanding of pupils and the ethos of the school. The minimum to be taught is detailed in legislation as Areas of Learning (AOLs) for each Key Stage. The main Areas of Learning within the revised curriculum for the delivery of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) is Personal Development and Mutual Understanding (PDMU) at primary level and the Personal Development strand of the Learning for Life and Work Area of Learning at post-primary level. A survey of RSE provision in Primary Schools is to be conducted by the Education and Training Inspectorate towards the end of 2015.

Effective RSE provision is essential if our children are to value themselves as individuals and make responsible and well-informed decisions about their lives.

Mr Humphrey asked the Minister of Education when the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment posted the letters dated 28 January 2015 to non-Irish Medium primary schools inviting expressions of interest in the teaching of the Irish language.
(AQW 41899/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The letters dated 28 January 2015 were posted in the afternoon of 28 January 2015.

Mr Humphrey asked the Minister of Education whether the Board of Governors is responsible for setting the cultural ethos of a school.
(AQW 41901/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The role of the Board of Governors is to manage a school with a view to helping the staff provide the best possible education for all of the pupils. This involves setting the school's vision and aims and establishing and maintaining the school's ethos.

The ethos of a school should promote the moral, spiritual, intellectual, social and personal development of all its pupils and should contribute to the wider goals of the school.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education what changes have been made to the criteria for deciding whether there should be a crossing patrol at a school, in the last five years.
(AQW 41921/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Education and Library Boards inform me that there have been no changes in the last five years to the assessment criteria used for determining the need for school crossing patrols.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Education, in relation to the 'previous [Irish language] survey' mentioned in a letter of 28 January 2015 from the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment to primary school principals, to detail (i) the date that survey was carried out; (ii) the question asked; and (iii) the response received.
(AQW 41964/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd:

(i) The online survey was carried out between 12 November 2012 and 12 December 2012.

(ii) The questions asked were as follows:

- Do you currently teach languages in your school? Yes/No
- If yes which language(s)? (Comment Box)…and what year group(s)? (Select all that apply)
- If no, why not? (Comment Box)
- Would you be interested in introducing Irish language teaching? Yes/No (Comment)
- Do you have the capacity to provide Irish language instruction? Yes/No (Comment)
- Do existing members of staff have any experience of Irish? Yes/No/Don't Know
- How would you deliver Irish language instruction? (Comment Box)
- What support could CCEA provide to assist with Irish language teaching? (Comment Box)
- What, if any resources do you currently have? (Comment Box)
- What resources do you think you would need? (Comment Box)
- How could Irish language provision be made more attractive/relevant to you? (Comment Box)
- Additional Comments (Comment Box)

(iii) A total of 127 respondents completed the questionnaire.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) pupil numbers; and (ii) the number of schools in (a) 2007; and (b) 2014.
(AQW 42032/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information below is taken from the annual school census. The figures for 2014/15 are currently provisional and will be finalised at the end of February.

Number of schools and pupils by school type, 2007/08 and 2014/15

	2007/08		2014/15	
	No of schools	No of pupils	No of schools	No of pupils[1]
Voluntary and private pre-schools	366	6,535	401	8,621
Nursery schools	98	5,855	96	5,882
Primary schools	885	166,587	836	175,040
Post-primary schools	226	147,942	208	142,547
Special schools	43	4,611	39	5,063
Total	**1,618**	**331,530**	**1,580**	**337,153**

Source: NI school census

Notes:

1 Figures for number of pupils in 2014/15 are currently provisional.

2 Figures include funded children in voluntary and private pre-school centres, nursery schools, primary (including nursery, reception and year 1-7 classes), post primary and special schools.

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Education how many temporary posts of Senior Executive Officer and above were created in each Education and Library Board in 2014; and of these posts, how many were awarded permanent status up to 31 December 2014, broken down by religious background.
(AQW 42098/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The table below details the number of temporary posts at Senior Executive Officer and above which were created in each Education and Library Board in 2014 and the number of these temporary posts which were awarded permanent status, up to 31 December 2014. The figures are broken down by perceived religious background.

ELB	No of Temporary posts at SEO & above created in 2014	No of posts made permanent (Perceived to be from Protestant background)	No of posts made permanent (Perceived to be from Roman Catholic background)	No of posts made permanent (Neither from Roman Catholic nor Protestant background)
NEELB	26	9	*	0
BELB	28	8	7	*
SEELB	11	0	0	0
WELB	21	*	*	0
SELB	33	0	*	0

* Unable to provide the information requested as the number of staff in these instances is relatively small. Given this fact, release of the information requested may lead to an individual being identified which would constitute a breach of the Data Protection Act 1998

The ELB's do not hold employees' religious background, hence this information is based on Community Background as monitored under the Fair Employment Monitoring Regulations 1999.

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of recommendation 4.2.6 of the Report of the Ministerial Advisory Group on the Strategic Development of Irish-medium Post-primary Education.
(AQO 7511/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I concur with the conclusions of the Ministerial Advisory Group that new schools face significant challenges in their initial years of operation, including attracting sufficient enrolments.

In taking forward implementation of the review recommendations, my officials will undertake further work to determine the appropriateness of the levels of intake proposed by the Ministerial Advisory Group in Recommendation 4.2.6.

The key aim must be to ensure that we ultimately deliver a viable and sustainable school providing high quality Irish-medium education.

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Education to outline the number and progress of development proposals submitted to his Department by schools in Upper Bann.
(AQO 7512/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: There are currently two development proposals for schools in the Upper Bann area under consideration.

DP 320 proposes an increase in the enrolment at St Mary's Primary School, Derrymore, from 145 to 175 pupils and DP 321 proposes an increase in the enrolment at St Patrick's Primary School, Magheralin, from 129 to 175 pupils.

Both proposals were published on 20 November 2014 and the statutory objection period ended recently, on 20 January 2015.

My officials are currently collating all the relevant information in relation to these proposals and I hope to be in a position to make decisions in the near future.

A record of all current development proposals and recent decisions are listed on my Department's website. These records are updated following my decision on a proposal.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education for an update on the proposed new build for St Columbanus' College, Bangor.
(AQO 7513/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: No timescale has been set for the delivery of a new build for St Columbanus College, Bangor. Any decision on this matter has been subject to ongoing area planning considerations.

By way of update I can advise that the South Eastern Education & Library Board published Development Proposal No 254 on 2 October 2014. The 2-month consultation period ended on 2 December 2014 and my officials are currently considering responses received. A decision on the Development Proposal will issue in due course.

I will continue to examine the case for Capital Investment across the estate and subject to the structure of maintained provision in the area being clear, any proposal for the school will be considered alongside other priorities, as part of any future capital announcement.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Education to outline what representation he has had in relation to Belfast Education and Library Board's proposed closure of Malvern Primary School.
(AQO 7514/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Belfast Education and Library Board published a proposal for the closure of Malvern Primary School on 28 January 2015. Publication triggered a statutory two-month period for comments and objections which will end on 30 March 2015.

During this two-month period, anyone interested in the proposal can write directly to my Department. Account will be taken of all representations made during the two-month period and these views will be included in advice to me from my officials. In due course I will decide whether the proposal should be approved. As I am the final decision maker I cannot discuss the details of the proposal at this stage.

You should note that the advice from my officials and my decision will subsequently be published on my Department's website.

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education to outline the capital budget for new school builds in the next 12 months.
(AQO 7515/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: A total capital budget of over £23 million has been allocated for spend on Major Works in the current financial year.

The department's gross capital budget for FY15/16 is significantly below the 2014/15 allocation. While spending plans for capital in 2015/16 are currently being reviewed, the Major Works budget will be prioritised in order to minimise the impact on longer term projects. It is anticipated that the number of major works on-site will increase in FY15/16 and an initial indicative allocation of £50m has been made for these projects, however this figure will be subject to revision following review of the overall capital budget position.

Mr Cree asked the Minister of Education to ouline his position on minimum enrolment numbers for secondary schools as set out in his Department's Sustainable Schools Policy.
(AQO 7516/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Sustainable Schools Policy sets out six criteria and associated indicators to be used in assessing the sustainability of a school.

One of the criteria is 'stable enrolment trends' which sets out minimum enrolment thresholds for Post-primary schools of 500 for Years 8-12 and 100 for Sixth Forms.

However, this is not intended to be used in a mechanistic fashion. Sustainability is not assessed simply on the number of pupils, but rather across the full range of criteria in the policy on a casebycase basis, taking account of local circumstances.

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Education whether the £2 million allocated to Education and Library Board youth services includes funding for outreach and detached youth work delivered via the area projects.
(AQO 7517/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: On 19 January I announced that I was allocating £2million to Education and Library Board youth services to restore the reduction made at draft budget stage. I am currently finalising my 2015-16 spending plans and a detailed decision on allocations for youth services will be determined in due course.

Mr Anderson asked the Minister of Education why he approved a new Irish-medium school when other local primary and post-primary schools are facing severe cuts to their budgets.
(AQO 7518/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I consider the individual merits and circumstances of each Development Proposal in reaching my decision whether or not to approve.

In the case of Coláiste Dhoire, I recognised the demand for Post-primary education through the medium of Irish and believe that the new school will be capable of delivering a high quality education. My decision to approve the proposal is entirely consistent with my statutory duty to encourage and facilitate the provision of Irish-medium education.

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Education why he approved an Irish medium school in Dungiven.
(AQO 7519/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have a statutory duty to encourage and facilitate the provision of Irish-medium education and I take that duty seriously. I recognise the demand for post-primary education through the medium of Irish and believe that Coláiste Dhoire is capable of delivering a high quality education for the benefit of all young people in Dungiven and the surrounding areas.

Department for Employment and Learning

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many applications for funding from the European Social Fund were received from the East Londonderry area.
(AQW 41009/11-15)

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): A total of 135 applications were submitted to the European Social Fund by the closing date of 9 January 2015 with 4 of the applications from the East Londonderry constituency.

Mrs Hale asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what support is given to the private sector independent training providers to help enable employers have their choice of delivery partners.
(AQW 41037/11-15)

Dr Farry: When the employer alone is paying for the training, the choice of training provider lies with the employer; where there is a contribution in funding from government to the training then the training provider must be agreed by government.

By far the greatest contribution made by government to training for employers is through the Apprenticeship NI programme and in this instance the range of available training providers is determined by a Northern-Ireland wide contract and procurement process. The Central Procurement Directorate (CPD) website contains a range of procurement guidance notes including a guide specifically drafted to help Small and Medium sized Enterprises increase their knowledge and understanding of public sector procurement.

Training suppliers deliver a range of training programmes across Northern Ireland. Through various marketing activities, my Department aims to provide employers with comprehensive information on all the training opportunities that attract a government subsidy.

Relevant information can be found by visiting the nidirect website - http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/skills-to-succeed.

Should an employer require further information, helpline numbers are also listed against each service.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many jobs resulted from the Kilcooley Jobs Fair.
(AQW 41172/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Jobs Fair took place at Kilcooley Community Centre, Bangor on 13 November 2014.

The target audience was unemployed young people aged between 18 and 24 and local employers in the Bangor and Holywood areas. Ten employers and 93 young jobseekers from Bangor and Holywood attended the event. One hundred and ten placement/job opportunities were confirmed as available on the day by participating employers. I am delighted to report that, following the event, 45 Work Placement Opportunities were secured by clients and a further eight clients found work (See Annex A for further details).

My Department continues to monitor those clients on work placement with the aim of developing these opportunities into employment.

Annex A

Employer	Number offered placement opportunity	Number started on Work Experience	Number started on Skills Development	Number of Job Outcomes
Salty Dog	2	0	2	0
FP McCann	0	1	0	0
O'Hare McGovern	4	0	0	0
Kelly Brothers	2	0	1	0
SE Trust	6	0	0	4 started +2 more due to start
Crossroads Care	0	0	0	1
Eventsec	15	0	0	1
Teleperformance	8	0	0	0
Firstsource	8	0	0	0
Convergys	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Totals	**45**	**1**	**3**	**8**

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on funding availability for the United Youth Programme; and when organisations will receive notification of the outcome of their pilot concept proposals.
(AQW 41199/11-15)

Dr Farry: Funding has been secured via the Change Fund to deliver a number of pilots for the United Youth Programme during the 2015/16 financial year. All of the organisations who submitted concept proposals were advised of the outcome of their applications by 26 January 2015.

Of the 130 organisations who submitted a concept proposal, 50 are being taken forward to the development phase.

Mr Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, pursuant to AQO 7354/11-15, for further details of the three joint bids.
(AQW 41273/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department and the Department for Social Development submitted three joint bids to the Department of Finance and Personnel Change Fund.

The first bid, led by the Department for Employment and Learning, was for £600,000 to fund a pre-commercial procurement competitive pilot model. The aim of this project was to identify a range of new and innovative solutions to the complex problems arising from economic inactivity and test a range of approaches on their potential to reduce inactivity amongst a number of specific economically inactive client groups. This bid was unsuccessful.

The Department for Social Development led on two joint bids (with the Department for Employment and Learning and Department of Enterprise Trade and Investment) to the Change Fund. These were aimed at testing new models of early intervention/intensive support to effect a long term reduction in economic inactivity. One of these bids was successful with £300,000 allocated in the Executive's 2015/16 budget to test one or more new models of delivering work focused support in areas with significant levels of economic inactivity.

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on the collaborative skills funding awarded to his Department in the Budget 2015-16, including (i) how; and (ii) when groups can bid for this funding.
(AQW 41306/11-15)

Dr Farry: Invest Northern Ireland provides funding for collaborative skills projects. Industry-led groups can, however, apply for funding under the Collaborative Network Programme and use this support to collectively scope and/or address skills issues.

Recent examples of networks adopting this approach include the Align IT Network (led by Liberty IT); the Align IT Tech Partnership (led by Equiniti ICS); the Energy Skills Training Network (led by John Burke Shipping) and the Engineering Skills Training Network(led by NuPrint Ltd).

The Collaborative Network Programme is open for applications on an ongoing basis. Networks must consist of a minimum of four Northern Ireland companies, one of which must be an Invest NI client company. Application forms are available from Invest NI.

My Department collaborates with Invest NI to ensure that any focus on skills development is aligned with cross-departmental objectives. The Assured Skills Programme is the primary vehicle through which my Department and Invest NI jointly provide skills support. The Programme is available on an ongoing basis and support is provided on a case by case basis.

Blended projects are run jointly between my Department and Invest NI and consist of 100% funded, bespoke training programmes available to both Foreign Direct Investment companies and expanding indigenous companies. Recent examples include Academy-style training models in Data Analytics, Cloud Computing and Software Testing.

The 2015/16 budgets within Invest NI and DEL for collaborative skills support are still in the process of being finalised.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what support exists in Regional Colleges, beyond work preparation programmes, to facilitate young people with disabilities' entry to employment.
(AQW 41367/11-15)

Dr Farry: Further Education (FE) provision is delivered to all students, including young people with learning difficulties and/or a disability, with the aim of providing them with the necessary skills to help prepare them for future employment. Provision is focussed on helping them complete their course of study and gain the qualifications, confidence and ability to progress to further study or employment.

Additional support is provided, beyond FE provision and work preparation programmes, to help colleges assist young people with learning difficulties and/or a disability in their preparation for success in their course of study and to progress.

FE colleges offer a wide range of support to these young people through their student services; learning support units; and careers guidance. In addition my Department provides funding to colleges to help them meet the cost of providing additional support to students with learning difficulties and /or disabilities to help them overcome barriers to learning and enable successful completion of their courses and progression to further provision or employment. This funding is provided from a number of sources:

- **Additional Support Fund (ASF)** - £4.5 million per annum to help colleges provide additional technical and personal support to students with learning difficulties and / or disabilities enrolled in FE provision, as well as helping colleges meet the cost of providing smaller class sizes and classroom assistants for those students who, by nature of their learning difficulty or disability are unable to participate in mainstream provision.
- **Training for Success (TfS)** - funding allocated to engage Disability Support Suppliers such as Disability Action, Sensory Learning Support, Cedar Foundation and Ulster Supported Employment Limited to work in conjunction with training suppliers, including FE colleges, in providing a wide range of support, including work focussed elements, to facilitate participants progression to employment, such as job coaching, advocacy with potential employers and disability awareness training for employers and colleagues of people with a disability.
- **Disabled Students Allowance (DSA)** – to provide support for students with a disability or learning difficulty participating in higher education (HE) provision in either HE institutions or FE colleges. This funding helps meet the extra costs which may be incurred in attending a course of study, as a direct result of a disability, mental health condition or specific learning difficulty. This will ultimately improve the students' chances of success in their course of study and help position them in securing employment.

Employment and Skills Strategy for People with Disabilities

My Department is currently developing an overarching 'Employment and Skills Strategy for People with Disabilities' in conjunction with key stakeholders from the local disability sector and FE colleges. The purpose of the new strategy is to improve the skills, employability, job prospects and working careers of people with disabilities in Northern Ireland. The aim of the strategy is to improve transition into and out of the various departmental services, including FE colleges and to result in more young people with disabilities achieving their employment goals.

Disability Employment Service pilot projects

In addition, in 2012 my Department's Disability Employment Service established a two year pilot project with three regional colleges to improve relationships between respective departmental services, and enhance the transition between the college's vocational programmes for young people with the labour market. The majority of the students involved have a learning disability, with others having Autistic Spectrum Disorder and other conditions. Since 2012, 132 students have been referred to the project. Forty eight students have secured paid employment with the assistance of departmental provision, including the Youth Employment Scheme, Workable (NI) and Access to Work (NI).

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what employment support is given to people who have been unemployed for nine months or less.
(AQW 41375/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Employment Service offers a wide range of assistance to clients to help them to move towards and into work through the network of 35 Jobs & Benefits Offices and Jobcentres.

A wide range of job search support is offered, including work readiness assessments, CV building, advice, interview and job application techniques. Advisers also offer individually-tailored advice, provide information and support to clients, and refer

clients to specialist provision when appropriate. Support for eligible clients also includes Jobclubs and a comprehensive package of financial incentives.

The Youth Employment Scheme is available for young unemployed people aged 18 to 24 years old and aims to provide the skills to compete for jobs and sustain employment. Participants can currently access a short period of work experience lasting between three to eight weeks or a longer period of up to 26 weeks during which they will have the opportunity to achieve a relevant vocational qualification. In addition, an Employer Subsidy is available for the first 52 weeks of permanent employment.

Steps 2 Success is the Department's main employment programme to assist unemployed people move from unemployment into work and to sustain that work. JSA claimants aged between 18 and 24 years will become eligible for referral to Steps 2 Success if they have failed to find work after nine months on benefit, and claimants aged 25 and over will become eligible after 12 months on benefit. Early entry to the programme is also available for defined groups of clients. Steps 2 Success Contractors will agree with each participant a Progression to Employment Plan that identifies how they will work together to find and keep employment. The service delivered by Contractors to participants is underwritten by a service guarantee.

Priority 1 of the Northern Ireland European Social Fund Programme 2007-2013, is entitled 'Helping people into sustainable employment' and assists unemployed and economically inactive people to enter sustained employment. There are currently 95 projects operating across Northern Ireland that assist people who have experienced varying durations of unemployment, including nine months or less.

Mr Newton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether there are any shortages of lecturers within the further education system; and if so, in which subject areas there is a skills and knowledge gap.
(AQW 41394/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Department does not hold information regarding shortages in the lecturing workforce in the further education sector. Colleges are the employers of lecturers and are individually responsible for ensuring that the lecturers they employ are collectively able to deliver the curriculum that each college offers.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what independence attends the appointment of The Visitor to a university; and how this compares with the arrangements under the Office of Independent Adjudicators in the rest of the United Kingdom.
(AQW 41474/11-15)

Dr Farry:

a) The universities are autonomous institutions responsible for the management of their own policies and procedures, including the appointment of the Visitor and the Board of Visitors. The Department does not have any responsibility in this regard. The Higher Education Act 2004 required the appointment of an independent body to run a student complaints scheme in England and Wales. The Office of the Independent Adjudicator was chosen to operate this scheme, to which all universities in England and Wales must subscribe. In Scotland, Higher Education complaints fall within the remit of the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman.

b) As stated above the Department has no role in the appointment of the Visitor or the Board of Visitors. However, the Office of the First and deputy First Minister Committee plan to introduce a Northern Ireland Public Service Ombudsman Bill to the Assembly in 2015 which will include Higher Education complaints within its remit.

c) In the five years up to and including the 2013/14 academic year the Queen's University Belfast Board of Visitors determined 14 cases of which two were adverse to the university. For the same period the Ulster University Visitor determined 19 cases of which ten were adverse to the university.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of the current arrangements for the appointment of The Visitor to a university in Northern Ireland; and what plans he has to bring such controls into line with the situation prevailing throughout the rest of the UK.
(AQW 41475/11-15)

Dr Farry:

a) The universities are autonomous institutions responsible for the management of their own policies and procedures, including the appointment of the Visitor and the Board of Visitors. The Department does not have any responsibility in this regard. The Higher Education Act 2004 required the appointment of an independent body to run a student complaints scheme in England and Wales. The Office of the Independent Adjudicator was chosen to operate this scheme, to which all universities in England and Wales must subscribe. In Scotland, Higher Education complaints fall within the remit of the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman.

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c) In the five years up to and including the 2013/14 academic year the Queen's University Belfast Board of Visitors determined 14 cases of which two were adverse to the university. For the same period the Ulster University Visitor determined 19 cases of which ten were adverse to the university.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many determinations The Visitor has made in each local universities in each of the last five years; and how many of these have been adverse to the universities.
(AQW 41476/11-15)

Dr Farry:

a) The universities are autonomous institutions responsible for the management of their own policies and procedures, including the appointment of the Visitor and the Board of Visitors. The Department does not have any responsibility in this regard. The Higher Education Act 2004 required the appointment of an independent body to run a student complaints scheme in England and Wales. The Office of the Independent Adjudicator was chosen to operate this scheme, to which all universities in England and Wales must subscribe. In Scotland, Higher Education complaints fall within the remit of the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman.

b) As stated above the Department has no role in the appointment of the Visitor or the Board of Visitors. However, the Office of the First and deputy First Minister Committee plan to introduce a Northern Ireland Public Service Ombudsman Bill to the Assembly in 2015 which will include Higher Education complaints within its remit.

c) In the five years up to and including the 2013/14 academic year the Queen's University Belfast Board of Visitors determined 14 cases of which two were adverse to the university. For the same period the Ulster University Visitor determined 19 cases of which ten were adverse to the university.

Mr Douglas asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for a progress report on the pilot Welding Academy which he announced in July 2014 to address specialist welding needs for Harland and Wolff.
(AQO 7525/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department worked with Harland and Wolff and local Further Education colleges to set up a Welding Academy, beginning in September 2014, as a first step to upskill local unemployed welders to the Harland and Wolff specification.

The Welding Academy, facilitated by Belfast Metropolitan College and Northern Regional College, had an intake of eighteen people.

Of the eighteen Welding Academy trainees who successfully completed training, six are now employed by Harland and Wolff, with five of these on probationary contracts with a view to extending, if satisfactory.

A further cohort of five trainees from the eighteen is expected to commence a two week placement shortly, leading to contracted employment thereafter. My Department awaits confirmation of this from Harland and Wolff.

This is an important first step in addressing the welding skills need identified by the engineering sector and its success will determine further initiatives. The skills and certification these individuals have gained through the Welding Academy will allow the local skills base to grow with highly skilled welders that can support not only Harland and Wolff, but other specialist manufacturers.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of the future of St Mary's University College in its current form.
(AQO 7526/11-15)

Dr Farry: Members will be aware that I am considering withdrawing the Small and Specialist Institution premia from the teacher training colleges.

Any decision would be taken in the context that my Department faces an unprecedented level of cuts which have necessitated difficult choices to protect frontline services and the needs of the wider economy.

The two reports I commissioned on Initial Teacher Education infrastructure, Grant Thornton and Aspiring to Excellence, confirm that the status quo is unsustainable from both a financial and qualitative perspective.

Aspiring to Excellence provides alternatives to the current structure which could enable Initial Teacher Education to be delivered more cost-effectively and to a world-class standard.

In my view, the options which best achieve these criteria are Options B, a two-university approach, or D, a single institution, though I remain open to alternatives that are financially sustainable, increase sharing and integration and provide a research-rich environment in line with best international practice.

I would also stress that any new structure will include provision for the respective ethos of the colleges to be not only accommodated, but embraced.

I have recently met with the four providers - Queen's, Stranmillis, St Mary's and Ulster University - to discuss the way forward.

Three of the four support the Aspiring to Excellence report and are willing to engage to reach a consensus. Unfortunately, the fourth, St Mary's, has rejected all the options put forward.

St Mary's have also advised that removal of the premia will likely make the college unviable as a going concern and, as an autonomous institution, it is a matter for the Board of Governors to determine how to address this.

However, I remain committed to engagement with all the providers on finding an agreed way forward and the issues arising from the potential removal of the premia.

Mr Dickson asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how he will balance his budget in 2015/16.
(AQO 7527/11-15)

Dr Farry: The final Executive Budget leaves me with a pressure of £62m to find. The Department's Budget Consultation paper set out proposed reductions of £33.2m , current advanced thinking is that these will be confirmed.

The remaining budget pressure, including European Social Fund match funding pressure of £1.8m, totals £30.1 m.

It is proposed that this will come from a reduction to higher education of £14 million, further education £12 million and additional Departmental efficiency savings and reductions of £4.1 million.

To mitigate these reductions as far as possible I have agreed to relax the minimum required level of reinvestment of additional student fee income on widening participation measures to 10%. This change could free up to £8 million in spending powers for the higher education providers.

In addition, the further education reduction will be partially mitigated by the use of £6 million in End Year Flexibility, subject to agreement of the Executive. However, this is effectively reducing the colleges' level of reserves.

It is my hope to confirm the final budget position for the Department over the coming days.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on his efforts to address the remaining barriers to cross border mobility at undergraduate level.
(AQO 7528/11-15)

Dr Farry: I have made a commitment in my Department's higher education strategy, to facilitate cross-border co-operation and student mobility and a project group which includes representation from the Higher Education Authority and the Institutes of Technology has been established to take this forward.

Recent press articles highlighted the decline in the number of students from the south coming north. If we look specifically at undergraduates, recent figures show a drop from 2945 in 2010/11 to 2247 in 2012/13. The figures also include details of students studying higher education courses at further education colleges which have, in fact, risen during this period. This coincides with the introduction of the £9,000 fees in England and a period of debate in relation to student fees in Northern Ireland.

It should be noted that the number of undergraduate students from Northern Ireland enrolled in institutions in the Republic of Ireland has also declined between 2010/11 and 2012/13 from 855 to 755.

This is a complex area influenced by many factors including, student awareness, institutional attractiveness, admissions procedures and requirements, fees, cost of living and options available in other parts of the UK and further afield.

My Department's Careers Service continues to build the knowledge of its advisers to ensure that students are fully informed about opportunities in the UK and the Republic of Ireland.

My officials are working with officials in the Department for Education and Skills to research and analyse cross border student flows. A joint report, which will inform policy development, is being finalised and will be published early in 2015.

Mr Devenney asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what assistance his Department will provide to the new local councils to help people who are not currently in education, training or employment.
(AQO 7530/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department leads the Executive's work helping those people who are not in education, training or employment under the inter-departmental 'Pathways to Success' strategy.

The strategy contains an Action Plan with responsibilities stretching across Departments and monitored by the NEET Advisory Group chaired by my Department.

This Group includes key decision makers including

Local Government Officials who help monitor the effectiveness and implementation of the Pathways to Success Strategy.

My Department is committed to working with the new Councils to help those young people who fall into the NEET category through a refreshed approach over the next few years.

After the initial funding for programmes under the strategy ceases at the end of March 2015, my department will continue to support young people through the new European Social Fund (ESF) Programme commencing in April 2015.

Taking the 40% ESF funding, 25% contribution from my department and the required 35% match funding together, almost £21 million will be made available to support this group of young people from April 2015 to March 2018.

Sourcing match funding for the new Programme is the responsibility of potential applicants, who were encouraged to engage with possible match funders, including local councils.

The Department also engaged with potential match funders, including councils, to inform them of the new ESF Programme and ensure that they were open to such approaches.

I expect the new set of ESF projects to cover all areas of Northern Ireland and particularly those that have the greatest level of objectively identified need.

Mr Frew asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what impact the Budget 2015/16 will have on Farm Lodge and Trostan Avenue Northern Regional College campuses in Ballymena, as well as the Ballymoney campus.
(AQO 7531/11-15)

Dr Farry: I have given priority to the development of new campuses for the Northern Regional College and have agreed the funding to initiate the procurement of a design team. This team will take forward the detailed design for the preferred estate option once the business is fully agreed. However, as you will appreciate I am unable to commit to any capital investment beyond 2015/16 as this falls within a new comprehensive spending review period for which capital funding has yet to be agreed.

In terms of the overall recurrent budget the Executive has now approved an additional allocation of £20 million for my Department but it still faces an unprecedented level of budget reductions. Colleges are currently working through the implications of these cuts for staffing and courses.

Ms McGahan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on his efforts to increase the number of women involved in science, technology, engineering and mathematics related careers.
(AQO 7532/11-15)

Dr Farry: I am very conscious of the need to promote careers in science, technology, engineering and mathematics to women. The STEM Strategy, 'Success through STEM' includes a recommendation to "address gender bias".

My Department's careers advisers provide advice and guidance to pupils in school when they are making subject choices, underpinned by up-to-date labour market information on job opportunities both now and in the future, including those opportunities in STEM related areas.

In addition, since November 2012 I have funded a STEM Business Co-ordinator who has worked with businesses to encourage the promotion of females in STEM careers. Successes to date include the publication of a Report entitled 'Addressing Gender Balance – Reaping the Gender Dividend in STEM', a good practice guide to assist businesses to address the gender issue. Following this in June 2014, the Co-ordinator in conjunction with the Equality Commission, launched the 'STEM Charter', to enable organisations to demonstrate their commitment to change. To date 31 employers have signed the charter. A 'STEM Employers Equality Network' is now in place to support employers in implementing good practice. Three 'STEM supplements' have also been published in regional newspapers to promote STEM opportunities particularly to females.

I also work with employers, academia and other Government departments for example through sectoral groups in ICT, Advanced Manufacturing and Engineering Services, and Food and Drink Manufacturing Skills, to raise career attractiveness of these important sectors and to address skills needs.

These Groups recognise the need to attract more females into STEM related careers and to this end I have funded interventions to raise awareness and encourage young women to study STEM subjects.

There is no doubt that STEM skills will continue to be highly sought after in the future and a mix of people is essential to meet the demands for jobs in this important area.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on any recent engagement he has had with the Minister for Education and Skills.
(AQO 7533/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department works closely with the Department for Education in Skills and I met with the former Minister for Education and Skills, Ruairi Quinn, regularly. I have continued this close working relationship with his successor, Minister Jan O'Sullivan. I met with Minister O'Sullivan on 5th December 2014 to discuss areas of mutual interest to both our Departments.

At our meeting we discussed the issue of student flows, particularly in the North West region. I have followed this up by writing to Minister O'Sullivan and I hope we can come to a mutual agreement on how best to address the issue.

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether setting the future strategic direction for Tourism, as outlined in her statement on 20 January 2015, will include specific targets for visitor numbers and tourist spend for each new council area.
(AQW 41020/11-15)

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): I will work with local and central government and the tourism industry to bring forward a new strategic plan for tourism which will set challenging targets for tourism growth in Northern Ireland and identify key priorities for action to ensure that we deliver on my and the industry's aspiration to make tourism a £1billion industry by 2020.

In order to meet our overarching targets, tourism growth must be realised right across Northern Ireland and Tourism Northern Ireland has been engaging with the 11 new Council Chief Executives to determine tourism development priorities in each of the new Local Authority areas.

In terms of setting specific targets for visitors and spend in each new Council area, this will be a role for the new Councils as the tourism product offering obviously differs across each of the Local Authority areas and as such so will the volume and value of visitors.

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what action her Department is taking to secure funding from the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund to support workers at JTI Gallaher.
(AQW 41132/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The European Globalisation Adjustment Fund does not fall within the remit of my Department, however it is my understanding that; as JTI has advised that they are planning to relocate some jobs to Eastern Europe; these jobs would not be eligible for funding as jobs relocated to other Member States do not qualify for funding under the EGF.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how her Department is providing support for hotels.
(AQW 41269/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department, through Invest NI, provides a wide range of support schemes for hotels. This support includes support towards the expansion of existing hotels and development of new hotels, the delivery of tailored programmes and support to help with competitiveness, management development, people excellence, marketing, e-commerce and ICT, and the provision of information and business advice.

In the last three full financial years Invest NI has made 189 offers of assistance totalling over £2.8 million to the hotel sector. Examples of support offered during this period include grant for the addition of new rooms at the City Hotel in Londonderry, support for market repositioning at the White Horse Hotel in Campsie and assistance for management development and marketing provided to the Roe Park Resort in Limavady.

DETI is currently reviewing its policy regarding the provision of support for all tourism accommodation with a view to ensuring that accommodation stock meets the future growth needs of the tourism sector.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on the collaborative skills funding awarded to her Department in the Budget 2015-16, including (i) how; and (ii) when groups can bid for this funding.
(AQW 41307/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The 2015/16 budgets within Invest NI and Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) for collaborative skills support are still in the process of being finalised.

Invest NI provides funding for collaborative skills projects through a range of support programmes, including Skills Growth programme and Assured Skills programme. Industry-led groups can also apply for funding under the Collaborative Network Programme and use this support to collectively scope and/or address skills issues.

Recent examples of networks adopting this approach include the Align IT Network (led by Liberty IT); the Align IT Tech Partnership (led by Equiniti ICS); the Energy Skills Training Network (led by John Burke Shipping) and the Engineering Skills Training Network (led by NuPrint Ltd).

The Collaborative Network Programme is open for applications on an ongoing basis. Networks must consist of a minimum of four Northern Ireland companies, one of which must be an Invest NI customer. Application forms are available on the Invest NI website.

Invest NI also works collaboratively with DEL to ensure that any focus on skills development is aligned with cross-departmental objectives.

The Assured Skills Programme and Skills Growth programmes are the principal vehicles through which DEL and Invest NI jointly provide skills support. The Programmes are available on an ongoing basis, providing assistance in implementing bespoke company skills development solutions.

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on the Northern Ireland Sustainable Energy Programme (NISEP); and what mechanism will be implemented to replace NISEP in 2016.
(AQW 41376/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Northern Ireland Sustainable Energy Programme (NISEP) is delivered by the Utility Regulator and funded by consumers. NISEP is due to end in March 2016 but I have recently asked the Utility Regulator to consider extending the scheme until such times as an appropriate replacement is in place.

A number of schemes, either available or planned, could promote energy efficiency. These include DSD's Affordable Warmth Scheme and OFMDFM's proposed HEaT programme. To allow informed and joined-up decisions to be taken, DETI is working with others, including OFMDFM, DSD and the Regulator, to come up with options for meeting the Energy Efficiency Directive and delivering sustainable and affordable energy policies.

Ms McGahan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how engineering companies can access European funding.
(AQW 41382/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The European Commission recently approved the Northern Ireland ERDF Operational Programme for the Investment for Growth and Jobs Programme 2014-2020. The funding secured will be used to support all companies, including engineering companies, that meet Invest NI's strategic objectives and the objectives identified by the European Commission for the Programme, namely, strengthening research, technological development and innovation and/or enhancing the competitiveness of SMEs.

The schemes through which Invest NI will utilize the ERDF funding include the Grant for Research and Development scheme, the Design Development Programme and the Access to Finance strategy.

Horizon 2020 is the EU's competitive programme for research and innovation, which funds a range of research from blue-skies right through to near-market activity. Horizon 2020 is open to all organisations across most sectors including engineering.

The Northern Ireland Contact Point (NICP) Network, which includes Invest NI, has been established to support applicants into Horizon 2020. There is a NICP specialist dedicated to assisting the engineering sector and Invest NI supports SMEs to participate in the programme. Free advice and guidance is also available through the Office of the Northern Ireland Executive in Brussels.

Invest NI offers financial support of up to £15,000 to help towards the costs associated with the development of a Horizon 2020 application. In addition, InterTradeIreland can provide financial assistance towards the costs of meeting North/South partners or attending Horizon 2020-related events in Europe.

Engineering companies can also avail of European funding accessed directly through relevant calls for proposals and, in view of the complexity of the application process, Invest NI can provide guidance and support to companies seeking to access such funding.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the dates on which meetings of the Shale Gas Regulators Forum have taken place; and when minutes from these meetings will be available online.
(AQW 41444/11-15)

Mrs Foster: To date there have been seven meetings of the Shale Gas Regulators' Forum as follows:

- 18 October 2012
- 14 March 2013
- 28 June 2013
- 25 October 2013
- 20 February 2014
- 28 July 2014
- 14 January 2015

The minutes of the first six meetings are available on the DETI website.

The draft minutes of the 14 January 2015 meeting require to be ratified at the next meeting of the Forum before they can be published. A date for this meeting has not yet been determined.

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (i) for the breakdown of applications received by Invest NI for support for new or expanded hotels in each council area, in each year since 2010; to detail the grants (i) approved; (ii) rejected; and (iii) still under consideration.
(AQW 41466/11-15)

Mrs Foster: In the period specified in the request Invest NI received 20 applications for financial support for development of new, or expansion of existing hotels.

In 2010 there was one application in Armagh, one in Lisburn and two in Londonderry council areas.

In 2011 there was one application in Dungannon, one in Coleraine, two in Londonderry and two in Ballymena council areas.

In 2012 there was one application in Armagh, one in Larne, one in Moyle and three in Londonderry council areas.

In 2014 there was one application in Newry & Mourne, one in Omagh and two in Moyle council areas.

There were no applications received by Invest NI in 2013.

Of the 20 applications 7 have resulted in an offer of support and 1 has been formally rejected. The remaining 12 applications have not as yet progressed to submission of a business plan for formal consideration.

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the proposals (i) supported; and (ii) rejected by Invest NI in each year since 2010, broken down by constituency.
(AQW 41467/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The tables below detail the proposals, or applications for support, that were either (i) supported or (ii) did not reach formal approval status in each financial year since 2010/11, broken down by constituency.

Invest NI cannot easily determine the number of applications that it rejected as this information is held in paper files and the work required to so identify this would constitute disproportionate cost. However, we can supply information on the number of applications that did not reach formal approval status, which can be as a result of the application being withdrawn by the applicant or rejected by Invest NI.

The table also contains the number of proposals, or applications, that are still under consideration.

Invest NI Applications Received and their Outcomes (2010-11)

PCA	Approved	Did Not Reach Approval Status	Still undergoing Approval Process	Total
Belfast East	132	1		133
Belfast North	43			43
Belfast South	143	3	1	147
Belfast West	54	1		55
East Antrim	44	3	1	48
East Londonderry	58	2		60
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	104	4		108
Foyle	76	2		78
Lagan Valley	81	2		83
Mid Ulster	150	5		155
Newry & Armagh	98	8		106
North Antrim	52	1		53
North Down	31			31
South Antrim	80	3		83
South Down	65	1	1	67
Strangford	42	1		43
Upper Bann	82	2		84
West Tyrone	74	2		76

Invest NI Applications Received and their Outcomes (2011-12)

PCA	Approved	Did Not Reach Approval Status	Still undergoing Approval Process	Total
Belfast East	221	15		236
Belfast North	157	2	4	163
Belfast South	324	14	4	342
Belfast West	157	1	3	161
East Antrim	101	4	2	107
East Londonderry	121	4	1	126
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	183	11	4	198
Foyle	279	8	2	289
Lagan Valley	163	8	4	175

PCA	Approved	Did Not Reach Approval Status	Still undergoing Approval Process	Total
Mid Ulster	309	10	6	325
Newry & Armagh	212	6	5	223
North Antrim	135	5	3	143
North Down	79	2	2	83
South Antrim	194	1	6	201
South Down	162	3	1	166
Strangford	88	2	2	92
Upper Bann	189	3	2	194
West Tyrone	125	6		131

Invest NI Applications Received and Their Outcomes (2012-13)

PCA	Approved	Did Not Reach Approval Status	Still undergoing Approval Process	Total
Belfast East	227	19	3	249
Belfast North	174	12		186
Belfast South	395	40	1	436
Belfast West	161	11		172
East Antrim	114	22	1	137
East Londonderry	141	10		151
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	252	24	1	277
Foyle	302	12	1	315
Lagan Valley	230	26	1	257
Mid Ulster	327	23	2	352
Newry & Armagh	227	18	1	246
North Antrim	162	12	1	175
North Down	94	7	2	103
South Antrim	187	21	1	209
South Down	181	6	2	189
Strangford	109	4		113
Upper Bann	204	18	1	223
West Tyrone	158	9	1	168

Invest NI Applications Received and Their Outcomes (2013-14)

PCA	Approved	Did Not Reach Approval Status	Still undergoing Approval Process	Total
Belfast East	328	20	3	351
Belfast North	311	13	11	335
Belfast South	406	48	11	465
Belfast West	258	8	2	268
East Antrim	85	10	4	99

PCA	Approved	Did Not Reach Approval Status	Still undergoing Approval Process	Total
East Londonderry	174	9		183
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	302	16	14	332
Foyle	418	13	4	435
Lagan Valley	223	23	9	255
Mid Ulster	384	33	10	427
Newry & Armagh	222	16	7	245
North Antrim	153	12	4	169
North Down	137	10	3	150
South Antrim	223	26	19	268
South Down	246	16	4	266
Strangford	125	6	1	132
Upper Bann	226	11	3	240
West Tyrone	209	13	3	225

Note: Tables above do not include those schemes without a formal application process.

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of Northern Ireland Science Park's Springboard Programme.
(AQW 41492/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Springboard is one of a suite of successful initiatives being delivered by the Northern Ireland Science Park through its CONNECT Programme. This Programme is designed to provide potential entrepreneurs and fledgling companies in the high technology sector with access to the necessary resources and knowledge to bring their product to market. The Springboard initiative is an integral part of that programme. It provides free assistance from experienced entrepreneurs to high growth potential start ups and early stage high tech companies to help get their ideas to market.

Latest figures from the Science Park show that 25 start ups have successfully progressed through the programme with a further 16 in progress. These start ups have attracted investment of over £13.9 million and directly created over 103 new jobs.

The programme is currently expanding and is set to develop further through the new North West Regional Science Park.

I welcome the continuing success of Springboard and the CONNECT Programme. The Programme's development has and will play an important role for high tech companies to develop and grow here and to help achieve Northern Ireland's vision to become a leading entrepreneurial knowledge economy.

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the mentorship and advice available to digital and tech start ups in Northern Ireland.
(AQW 41493/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI provides an extensive portfolio of support to start-up businesses in Northern Ireland including grant and mentoring support in a number of specific areas available to digital and technology starts ups. Access is available to a qualified pool of highly experienced industry mentors, as well as Invest NI staff with sector specific experience.

Invest NI's Business Support Team (BST) provides a centralised service responding to enquiries from all types of businesses in Northern Ireland. The BST provides information and support to businesses via telephone, web, email and social media.

nibusinessinfo.co.uk is an online resource for business support in Northern Ireland, providing free practical advice, information and support to businesses.

The Regional Start Initiative (RSI) is designed to support entrepreneurs into self employment providing advice on developing a business plan and mentoring throughout the process.

'Export Starts' is dedicated to entrepreneurs who are starting an export focused business or who have an established business who are seeking to enter export markets for the first time. These businesses are typically supported with advice and assistance in areas of job creation, marketing, ICT, skills and strategy and R&D.

Other programmes available include:

- The Propel Programme - available to high calibre, innovative entrepreneurs with potential for international success;

- The Leader Programme - aimed at Managing Directors/Owners/Chief Executives who can demonstrate clear strategic need and willingness to enhance their leadership
- The Mentor Programme - open to business start-ups and SMEs who are Invest NI customers.

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what peer-coaching is available to tech and digital start-ups in Northern Ireland.
(AQW 41494/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI offers the following support programmes, which incorporate an element of peer-coaching (none of these are specific to tech and digital start-ups):

The Propel Programme, which is available to high calibre, innovative entrepreneurs who have potential for international success. As well as mentoring, the programme includes financial support, high quality training workshops, investor-ready business plan support, shared workspace and support to make overseas market visits.

The Leader Programme is aimed at Managing Directors/Owners/Chief Executives who can demonstrate a clear strategic need and willingness to make changes to their leadership performance. The programme includes business mentoring, leadership coaching and shared learning through peer networks.

The Mentor Programme is open to business start-ups and SMEs who are Invest NI customers. The programme offers up to £1500 or 49% of eligible costs, whichever is the lesser, over a 12 month period.

The Export Start programme offers a series of workshops focusing on key business disciplines. There is a peer learning element to this offering with participants engaged in a shared learning process. This support is available to export start companies, including technology and digital start-ups.

In addition, mentorship and advice is also available from a range of other organisations outside of Invest NI including TechStart NI, HALO, the Northern Ireland Science Park and Momentum.

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what links Northern Ireland has with the recently established Tech City in London.
(AQW 41495/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Northern Ireland Science Park (NISP) through NISP Connect has strong links with Tech City UK. It is a member of Tech City's Cluster Alliance which has as a strategic objective to accelerate the growth of digital businesses in cities around the UK. NISP Connect has played a key role in the Northern Ireland research underpinning the recently published Tech Nation report. Alastair Hamilton, CEO, Invest NI visited Tech City in September 2014. In collaboration with NISP Connect, Invest NI is committed to building its links with Tech City, to share best practice, drive opportunities and ultimately accelerate the growth of local digital businesses.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what process has been put in place to appoint the Chairperson for the Agri-Food Strategy Board for the next term.
(AQW 41505/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The current term of the Chair and Members of the Agri-Food Strategy Board expires on 19 February 2015.

The Agriculture Minister and I are currently considering future arrangements in accordance with the spirit of the Code of Practice of the Commissioner for Public Appointments Northern Ireland.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether any measures are in place to increase the representation of primary producers on the Agri-Food Strategy Board.
(AQW 41506/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Agri-Food Strategy Board (AFSB) comprises a Chair and 8 industry members, appointed by myself and the Agriculture Minister following an open and transparent competition which was conducted in the spirit of the Commissioner for Public Appointments Northern Ireland Code of Practice.

The Chair and industry members were selected in respect of their appropriate skills and experience and not in their capacity as representatives of any specific sub-sector or element of the agri-food supply chain.

As a result of this competitive process, two producers were appointed to the AFSB, and in addition two employees of producer-led co-operatives were also appointed. Primary producers were also significantly represented on the AFSB's sectoral sub-groups whose input was crucial to the development of Going for Growth. As such I believe that the primary production sector has been well represented in the deliberations of the AFSB.

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline any recent discussions she has had with the Irish Government on the proposed budget cuts to Tourism Ireland and InterTrade Ireland.
(AQO 7540/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I wrote to Minister Donohoe and Minister Bruton on 24 November 2014 about the proposed reductions to Tourism Ireland and InterTradeIreland's 2015-16 budgets.

I met with Minister Donohoe on 27 November 2014 in Dublin and discussed Tourism Ireland's budget cuts.

I also met with Minister Bruton on 5 December 2014, at the offices of the North South Ministerial Council in Armagh and discussed InterTradeIreland's budget.

My officials have been working with officials in Tourism Ireland, InterTradeIreland, the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport and the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, and have agreed the reductions in the 2015 Business Plans.

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline how the newly branded Tourism Northern Ireland will benefit local tourism.
(AQO 7541/11-15)

Mrs Foster: As a named Statutory Partner in the Community Planning process Tourism Northern Ireland has been engaging with the eleven new Council Chief Executives to determine tourism development priorities in each of the new Local Authority areas.

These development priorities will be reflected in the respective Council Community Plans as they are progressed.

New Councils will play a leading role in the development of local tourism priorities.

Through the community planning process Tourism Northern Ireland will work with them to define the role of tourism as an investment opportunity within each of their districts.

Mr McAleer asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on the work of the Agri-Food Strategy Board.
(AQO 7542/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Successful implementation of Going for Growth, the Strategic Plan developed by the Agri-Food Strategy Board, will require the commitment of both Government and industry.

My Department is working in partnership with the agri-food industry to take forward a number of actions arising from Going for Growth. These range from facilitating the development of sustainable solutions to deal with poultry litter, to extending a major review of business red tape to include the agri-food sector.

The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development is also progressing work on the Farm Business Improvement Scheme. Implementation of this Scheme will benefit the entire agri-food sector by improving the competitiveness and productivity of the producer base.

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of how the impact of Foreign Direct Investment on newly started indigenous technology businesses sits with Invest NI's published digital strategy.
(AQO 7543/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Attracting Foreign Direct Investment and the growth of the indigenous business base are both key components of Invest NI's strategy. Foreign Direct Investment in technology businesses has brought significant economic benefit to Northern Ireland including job creation, new skills, increased innovation and productivity.

Our success in attracting Foreign Direct Investment has resulted in increased competition for qualified staff, which can be a challenge, particularly for smaller businesses. However, I firmly believe that the overall impact is positive, which will, in the long run, strengthen the indigenous technology business base.

Ms McCorley asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how Tourism Northern Ireland promotes Gaelic games to potential visitors.
(AQO 7544/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Tourism Northern Ireland delivers marketing activity promoting Northern Ireland as a tourism destination in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

Tourism Northern Ireland develops marketing initiatives with a range of sporting organisations including Ulster GAA and Ulster Rugby, targeting their respective fan bases.

Tourism Northern Ireland features event information, as supplied by event organisers and local authorities, on its consumer website www.discovernorthernireland.com and through its digital & social media channels.

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the importance of Northern Ireland having good connectivity to the City of London.
(AQO 7545/11-15)

Mrs Foster: It is essential that Northern Ireland has good air connectivity to London. Access to a network of global connections is currently provided via nine flights a day to Heathrow. Northern Ireland is also well served via frequent daily services to Gatwick, London City, Luton and Stansted.

Mr Milne asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on improvements to rural broadband in Mid Ulster.
(AQO 7546/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Building on previous interventions, my Department is currently implementing the Northern Ireland Broadband Improvement Project which seeks to provide wire line broadband services of at least 2 Megabits per second in areas that previously had no service and improve the availability of fixed line broadband services of 24 Megabits per second or higher in areas where choice is poor or broadband speeds are low. The project is progressing according to schedule and by 31 December 2014 almost seventeen thousand, five hundred premises across Northern Ireland had benefitted from the improvements being delivered including just over two thousand, five hundred in the Mid Ulster Constituency.

By project completion in December 2015, it is anticipated that improvements will have been delivered for at least forty five thousand premises across Northern Ireland.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline any recent discussions she has had with her Executive colleagues and the Irish Government on the economic benefits of an all-island tourism strategy.
(AQO 7547/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I have had no specific discussions about an all-island tourism strategy with Executive colleagues or the Irish Government.

Department of the Environment

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the savings to be made by his Department from the public sector voluntary exit scheme, over each of the four financial years commencing 2014/15.
(AQW 40738/11-15)

Mr Durkan (The Minister of the Environment): Under the final Budget for 2015-16, my Department's non ring-fenced Resource DEL budget was reduced by 10.7% to £104.2 million, the highest percentage reduction of all the Departments. Once account is taken of inescapable De-rating grant payments to councils, the reduction to my remaining Budget is almost 15%.

The cuts to my Budget will mean reducing or withdrawing funding from a wide range of external bodies while seeking to implement substantial reductions in staff numbers under the central Civil Service voluntary exit scheme.

My Department has highlighted a need to achieve approximately £15 million in savings by way of Civil Service Voluntary Exit Schemes. No savings are anticipated in the present financial year (2014/15). The level of savings that occur in 2015/16 and following years will depend on levels of uptake and management of the central Civil Service voluntary exit scheme.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the impact that the 56 per cent cut will have on his Department's delivery of strategic planning and policy, including to what extent this cut will be passed onto local councils.
(AQW 41101/11-15)

Mr Durkan: I am not immediately clear as to the basis of the 56 per cent reduction in funding referred to, while the headline reduction in the Department's final Budget was 10.7%, the underlying reduction is nearer to 15% once amount is taken of inescapable derating count payments to councils. The financial allocations for DOE contained in the Budget will have significant adverse implications for the services provided by my Department and for its staff, stakeholders and clients. This is one of the many reasons why I voted against the budget.

I am currently considering the impact that these significant cuts to my Department's budget will have on the level of funding available for all of my Department's functions, including strategic planning and policy. I now have very difficult decisions to make on all expenditure areas, including expenditure relating to the Department's delivery of strategic planning and policy in 2015/16.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment what percent of the cut to the planning budget will be passed on to local councils.
(AQW 41102/11-15)

Mr Durkan: My Department remains committed to ensuring that the transferred planning function is fit for purpose and adequately resourced to ensure the success of the planning process following reform. Consequently, my department has ring fenced all planning budgets associated with those functions transferring to councils and therefore planning budgets have been fully protected from recent budgetary cuts.

In addition, for the purpose of calculating the Transfer of Function Grant the department has taken a conservative view when estimating the value of planning receipts that the councils shall receive. The department has estimated planning income for

2015-16 to be in the region of £12.3m, however if the current growth in planning receipts continues, the income for 2015-16 could be closer to £13.6m. This could result in a windfall gain for rates payers as councils could potentially receive more in planning fees during 2015-16 than the department has estimated.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment when the Supplementary Planning Guidance in relation to Areas of Townscape Character referred to in the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan adoption statement at 11.1 will be published for consultation.
(AQW 41205/11-15)

Mr Durkan: My Department will not be publishing supplementary planning guidance for Areas of Townscape Character within the area covered by the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan.

To be effective supplementary planning guidance requires public consultation and I am content that the new planning authorities which come into being in April 2015 can take this matter forward in a manner and time suited to their needs.

The extensive preparatory work on the supplementary guidance will be available to the new authorities.

When the Belfast Metropolitan Area Pan was adopted in September 2014 the Department stated it would take forward the consultation process for Areas of Townscape Character guidance but this has not been possible. My Department has had to commit considerable resources to other aspects of the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan and insufficient time now remains to complete the Area of Townscape Character process prior to the transfer of planning functions in April 2015.

Mr Boylan asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the impact on category 2 and 3 farm businesses of planning insistence on a six year farming business, given that there is no scope within Planning Policy Statement 21.
(AQW 41287/11-15)

Mr Durkan: PPS21 policies CTY 10 'Dwellings on Farms' and CTY 12 'Agricultural and Forestry Development' share a requirement that any farm business has been established for at least 6 years.

The applicant will therefore be required to provide the farm's Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) business ID number along with other evidence to prove active farming over this period. This is a reasonable period to demonstrate an ongoing commitment to active farming on the part of the applicant.

The Department is aware that DARD issues different categories of business ID however PPS21 does not differentiate, for the purposes of planning policy, between these different categories.

Finally, as you will be aware planning policy and guidance cannot anticipate all possible scenarios. Therefore, notwithstanding the above requirement, and dependent upon the individual circumstances of a particular case, my Department may accept other suitable alternative evidence of active farming or a lesser period of establishment. In such cases my Department will always provide a robust justification for so doing.

Mr Boylan asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of whether there should be greater flexibility in determining what constitutes an active farm beyond entitlement to Single Farm Payments, such as the consideration of other information such as herd and flock numbers.
(AQW 41288/11-15)

Mr Durkan: There is no requirement in PPS 21 Policies CTY 10 or CTY 12 for an applicant to prove an entitlement to claim Single Farm Payment in order to demonstrate that a farm business is currently active. The Justification and Amplification to PPS 21 policy CTY10 'Dwellings on Farms' states that in order to demonstrate that a farm business is active an applicant 'will therefore be required to provide the farm's DARD business ID number, along with other evidence of active farming over the required period'.

Planning Appeals Commission decisions have confirmed that, while an applicant need not personally be involved in active farming, they should nevertheless provide the farm's DARD business ID in order to establish that the farm where the dwelling is proposed is both active and established.

As planning policy and guidance cannot anticipate all possible scenarios, my Department may accept other suitable alternative evidence of active farming, dependent upon the individual circumstances of a particular case. In such cases my Department will require a robust justification for so doing. However, the general position will be that applicants will be expected to provide the farm's agricultural business ID as evidence.

Mr Boylan asked the Minister of the Environment whether Planning Policy Statement 21 makes any formal distinction between farm business identification categorisations and debars categories 2 and 3 from consideration under Policy CTY 10.
(AQW 41289/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Justification and Amplification to PPS 21 policy CTY10 'Dwellings on Farms' states that in order to demonstrate that a farm business is active an applicant 'will therefore be required to provide the farm's Department of Agriculture and Rural Development business ID number, along with other evidence of active farming over the required period'.

The Department is aware that DARD issues different categories of business ID however PPS21 does not differentiate, for the purposes of planning policy, between these different categories.

Finally, as you will be aware planning policy and guidance cannot anticipate all possible scenarios. Therefore, notwithstanding the above requirement, and dependent upon the individual circumstances of a particular case, my Department may accept other suitable alternative evidence of active farming. In such cases my Department will always provide a robust justification for so doing.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the number of planning applications for single wind turbines and wind farms which are going directly to the Planning Appeals Commission without any determination and in the context of growing concerns relating to the current ETSU-R-97 guidelines.
(AQW 41325/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Article 32 of The Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1991 provides a statutory right of appeal for applicants against the refusal of a planning permission. Article 33 of The Order allows for an appeal in default of a planning decision by the Department. This applies as if permission had been refused by the Department. In both instances the Planning Appeals Commission (PAC) will deal with the application as if it had been made to them in the first instance.

The PAC operates under The Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1991. As such, in reaching a decision on a planning appeal, the PAC is required to take full account of all relevant planning matters. This will include the views of third parties both in objection and support. In relation to windfarms specifically this will include the provisions of relevant guidance documents, including the ETSU guidelines. ETSU remains a material consideration in the determination of single turbine and windfarm developments regardless of whether the decision is being taken by the Department or the PAC.

Ms Lo asked the Minister of the Environment what procedures are in place to ensure the allocation of positions of responsibility in a manner reflective of the compositions of the new councils.
(AQW 41501/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 (the 2014 Act) makes provision for the filling of positions of responsibility on a council to ensure that these positions are allocated across the political parties and independents represented on a council. Section 6 of the 2014 Act specifies the positions of responsibility on a council, and Schedule 1 to that Act specifies the procedures available to a council for filling those positions. These are the d'Hondt and Sainte-Laguë formula methods or the Single Transferable Vote method. The d'Hondt method is specified as the default method, unless a council decides by a qualified majority to use one of the alternative methods.

In addition to ensuring the sharing of positions of responsibility across the political parties and independents, Schedule 2 to the 2014 Act makes detailed provision in relation to the appointment of councillors to council committees to ensure that each committee, in so far as is practicable, reflects the levels of representation of the political parties and independents on the council.

Ms Lo asked the Minister of the Environment what procedures are in place to ensure the new councils are properly carrying out their responsibilities to improve good relations.
(AQW 41502/11-15)

Mr Durkan: All district councils, as public authorities, are subject to the duty specified in section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 in relation to promoting good relations. Each district council is responsible for ensuring that it complies with this statutory duty.

In addition to this duty, provision is made in the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 (the 2014 Act) that community planning for a local government district will include the identification of long-term objectives for improving the social well-being of the district. Section 66(3) of the 2014 Act provides that the reference to improving social well-being includes, amongst other matters, the desirability of improving good relations. The 2014 Act places a duty on a council and its community planning partners to review the community plan at least every four years and to monitor progress towards meeting the objectives in the current community plan. It also places a duty on a council and its community planning partners to seek the participation of, and view from, the community in relation to community planning and the community plan.

The combined effect of these statutory duties will commit district councils to carrying out their responsibilities in relation to good relations.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment (i) what guidelines are in place for the spraying of chemicals, including herbicides and pesticides, on (a) Areas of Special Scientific Interest (ASSIs) managed by his Department; (b) land owned or leased by his Department; and (ii) what chemicals have been sprayed on ASSIs managed by his Department in the last four years.
(AQW 41510/11-15)

Mr Durkan:

(i) There are no guidelines for the spraying of chemicals specific to:

(a) Areas of Special Scientific Interest (ASSIs) managed by my Department or

(b) land owned or leased by my Department.

My Department follows the guidelines set out in the document 'Pesticides – Code of Practice for using Plant Protection Products'. This is a DARD document to which the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) contributed.

In addition, the NIEA policy on the management of its country parks states:

The use of chemicals, particularly biocides, will be limited to situations where this represents the most sustainable means of achieving an essential objective, for example stump treatment with herbicide in the removal of invasive, non-native shrubs may be preferable to repeated coppicing.

A similar approach applies to NIEA-managed nature reserves.

Where it has been identified that there is a requirement to undertake spraying on Department lands which have been declared as an ASSI, each case is assessed on an individual basis.

(ii) Table 1 below provides details of those chemicals which have been sprayed in ASSIs managed by the Department of Environment during the last four years.

Table 1 – Chemicals sprayed within ASSIs managed by the DOE since 2011.

ASSI	Biocide product and active ingredient	Need
Roe Valley Country Park	Roundup Pro Biactive (Glyphosate)	Control of the invasive species Japanese knotweed (Fallopia japonica).
Peatlands Park	Roundup Pro Biactive (Glyphosate)	Control of the invasive species Rhododendron x super-ponticum.
Brackagh Moss Nature Reserve	Roundup Pro Biactive (Glyphosate)	Control of the invasive species Japanese knotweed (Fallopia japonica).
Dorn Nature Reserve (Strangford Lough).	Fusilade Max (Fluazifop P-butyl).	Control of the invasive hybrid species Common Cord Grass (Spartina anglica).
Roe Estuary Nature Reserve	Fusilade Max (Fluazifop P-butyl).	Control of the invasive hybrid species Common Cord Grass (Spartina anglica).

For clarification, ASSIs do not match the areas of Country Parks so there is some variation between this Answer and the Answer to AQW 41511/11-15.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment what chemicals have been used in (i) Crawfordsburn Country Park; (ii) Peatlands Park; and (iii) Roe Valley Country Park, by his Department, or by those leasing land from his Department, in the last four years.
(AQW 41511/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Details of chemicals that have been used in (i) Crawfordsburn Country Park; (ii) Peatlands Park; and (iii) Roe Valley Country Park by the Department of Environment, or by those leasing land from the Department in the last four years are provided in Table 1.

Table 1 – Chemicals used in Crawfordsburn Country Park, Peatlands Park and Roe Valley Country Park in the last four years.

Site	Chemical Product	Need
Roe Valley Country Park	Roundup Pro Biactive (Glyphosate)	Control of the invasive species Japanese knotweed (Fallopia japonica).
Roe Valley Country Park	Diclofenac	Pest control as part of Property Maintenance services.
Peatlands Park	Roundup Pro Biactive (Glyphosate)	Control of the invasive species Rhododendron x super-ponticum.
Peatlands Park	Scala	Treatment of apple orchard under lease (insecticide).
Peatlands Park	Dursban	Treatment of apple orchard under lease (fungicide).
Peatlands Park	Diclofenac	Pest control as part of Property Maintenance services.
Crawfordsburn Country Park (Glen).	Roundup Pro Biactive (Glyphosate)	Control of the invasive species Japanese knotweed (Fallopia japonica).
Crawfordsburn Country Park (Glen).	Roundup Pro Biactive (Glyphosate)	Control of Bohemian knotweed (Fallopia x bohemica).

Site	Chemical Product	Need
Crawfordsburn C P (Helen's Bay Car Park)	Roundup Pro Biactive (Glyphosate)	Control of Himalayan knotweed (Persicaria wallichii).
Crawfordsburn Country Park (Grey Point Fort)	Zeptreet 100	Control of moss and algae on ramp.
Crawfordsburn Country Park (visitor centre).	Diclofenac	Pest control as part of Property Maintenance services.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment whether a Habitat Regulations Assessment under article 6 of the Habitats Directive has been carried out for periwinkle harvesting on Strangford Lough.
(AQW 41512/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Habitats Directive requires that any plan or project likely to have a significant effect on a Natura 2000 site shall undergo an Appropriate Assessment (also known as a Habitats Regulation Assessment) to determine the implications for the site.

The term plan or project refers to a consent, authorisation, licence or permission, and the Competent Authority is the body with responsibility for determining that consent, authorisation, licence or permission.

The Department is not a Competent Authority, as defined in the Habitats Directive, for licensing the harvesting of periwinkles. Consequently, there is no obligation for it to undertake an Assessment under the Habitats Regulations.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment whether his Department has received reports of unlawful asbestos dumping on land managed by his Department within the last six years
(AQW 41513/11-15)

Mr Durkan: In March 2010, my Department received a report of the alleged illegal deposit of building waste, possibly including asbestos, at two sites in one of the Country Parks managed by NIEA.

A subsequent site investigation did not disclose any asbestos.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment, given that Northern Ireland is emerging from conflict, how he will ensure that the new planning functions bestowed on councils will examine the reality of contested spaces and support the development of safe, open and welcoming shared spaces which can be used by the whole community.
(AQW 41535/11-15)

Mr Durkan: I can advise the Member that I firmly believe the new two tier planning system will have a role to play in addressing issues arising from the conflict, particularly contested spaces. By returning planning powers to councils I consider them to be well placed, through the production of their Local Development Plans (LDPs), to contribute to strategies for dealing with legacies of the conflict such as contested spaces; as well as the creation of new and enhancing existing shared spaces in their own areas.

I have instructed my officials to reflect this approach in the draft Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS) which is currently being finalised and I intend to bring to the floor of the Assembly in the near future. A core planning principle of the SPPS is "Creating and Enhancing Shared Space", which emphasises this important role.

In addition, local councils will also have new powers of Community Planning which, together with their land-use planning powers, will help towards achieving the Government's wider objectives laid out in "Together: Building a United Communities" strategy of equality of opportunity, the desirability of good relations and reconciliation.

It is my belief that the planning system through local councils should seek to play its part in addressing all barriers that prevent or interfere with the creation and maintenance of shared space, and ensure that all individuals can live, learn, work and play wherever they choose.

My Department's commitment to ensure that planning is utilised to tackle a legacy of division is reiterated in the Department's "Living Places: Urban Stewardship and Design Guide", which acknowledges the problem before identifying that new and existing places should be accessible and inviting to all users.

Mr Ramsey asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the average cost to the public purse of a road fatality.
(AQW 41619/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The latest average cost figures, supplied by the Department for Transport in its 'Reported Road Casualties Great Britain: 2013 Annual Report', are provided below. We have traditionally read these cost estimates across to Northern Ireland as representing a reasonable proxy.

Casualty / Collision Type	Cost Per Casualty	Cost Per Collision
Fatal	£1,742,988	£1,953,783
Serious	£195,863	£223,870

Casualty / Collision Type	Cost Per Casualty	Cost Per Collision
Slight	£15,099	£23,544

These figures consider the cost to the economy rather than specifically the cost to the public purse, which are not figures that are currently produced or would be straightforward to produce.

The figures include:

- loss of output due to injury - this is calculated as the present value of the expected loss of earnings plus any non-wage payments paid by the employer;
- ambulance costs and the costs of hospital treatment; and
- the human costs of casualties. These are based on willingness to pay to avoid pain, grief and suffering to the casualty, relatives and friends, as well as intrinsic loss of enjoyment of life in the case of fatalities.

Police costs, administrative costs of insurance and costs of damage to vehicles and property and are not included in the average cost per casualty. These costs are deemed not to relate specifically to casualties and are instead included in the calculation of the average cost of a collision which is also provided in the table above.

Mr Ramsey asked the Minister of the Environment for a breakdown of road traffic accidents which resulted in the death of a pedestrian, broken down by (a) type of road, including the speed limit; and (b) whether the area was urban, rural or residential, in each of the last three years.
(AQW 41620/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The table below provides a breakdown of road traffic collisions where a pedestrian was killed by road type, speed limit and area.

Area (based on road speed)1	Road Type	Speed	2011	2012	2013	2014*
Urban	One way street	30	1	0	0	1
Urban	Single carriageway	30	5	6	5	4
Urban	Single carriageway	40	0	0	0	1
Rural	Single carriageway	50	0	0	0	1
Rural	Single carriageway	60	4	3	2	10
Motorway/Dual Carriageway	Dual carriageway	30	1	0	0	0
Motorway/Dual Carriageway	Dual carriageway	60	1	0	0	0
Motorway/Dual Carriageway	Dual carriageway	70	1	0	0	0
			13	**9**	**7**	**17**

Source: Police Service of Northern Ireland

1 This is based on speed limit of road where 40 miles per hour or less is urban and over 40 miles per hour is rural apart from where the carriageway type is a dual carriageway or motorway.

* Provisional data – estimates from January to November 2014

Over the last three complete calendar years (2011-13) there were 29 road traffic collisions which resulted in the death of a pedestrian. Provisional information for 2014 (January to November) is also provided. During the first eleven months of 2014 there were 17 road traffic collisions which resulted in the death of a pedestrian. Information is not available to indicate if the area in which each collision occurred was considered residential.

Mr Ramsey asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the latest statistics available on the number of road traffic accidents that resulted in death or serious injury.
(AQW 41629/11-15)

Mr Durkan: There were 68 fatal and 523 serious road traffic collisions recorded by the Police Service of Northern Ireland between January and November 2014. This resulted in 73 road deaths and 640 people being seriously injured. For the same time period in 2013 there were 51 fatal and 555 serious road traffic collisions resulting in 53 road deaths and 647 people seriously injured.

Mr Cree asked the Minister of the Environment whether he has agreed to support a register of Northern Ireland's remarkable trees; and if these trees will be protected as a crucial part of the environment.
(AQW 41653/11-15)

Mr Durkan: I am aware that the Woodland Trust is in the process of preparing a register of Northern Ireland's remarkable trees. The register will seek to identify, celebrate and protect our trees of special interest. I recognise that many of these trees will be of great age, have seen centuries come and go, are home to many species of wildlife and have cultural value. When I receive the register I will be happy to give it further consideration. This will include a consideration of how best to protect such trees.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment what road safety and advertising campaigns are planned for 2015/16, including the use of previously used material.
(AQW 41675/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Significant reductions have been made to my Department's budget allocation in the Executive's agreed budget for 2015-16. I am currently considering how to allocate my available budget to my Department's activities. I have yet to complete this exercise, so I cannot at this stage state with certainty what budget will be available to support road safety promotion activity next year.

When the budget allocation is finalised, my officials will undertake a critical review of the road safety problem profile and ensure resources are allocated in line with priorities. This will ensure resources are targeted where they will have the greatest impact on reducing the level of deaths and serious injuries on our roads.

Funds allocated to road safety would utilise my Department's current portfolio of actions which address many road safety problems. There are currently no plans to commission any new campaigns for 2015/16.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment what is the projected spend on road safety advertising and campaigns funded by his Department in 2015/16.
(AQW 41676/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Significant reductions have been made to my Department's budget allocation in the Executive's agreed budget for 2015-16. I am currently considering how to allocate my available budget to my Department's activities. I have yet to complete this exercise, so I cannot at this stage state with certainty what budget will be available to support road safety promotion activity next year.

When the budget allocation is finalised, my officials will undertake a critical review of the road safety problem profile and ensure resources are allocated in line with priorities. This will ensure resources are targeted where they will have the greatest impact on reducing the level of deaths and serious injuries on our roads.

Funds allocated to road safety would utilise my Department's current portfolio of actions which address many road safety problems. There are currently no plans to commission any new campaigns for 2015/16.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment what steps have been taken by his Department to protect spend on road safety campaigns and advertising.
(AQW 41679/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Significant reductions have been made to my Department's budget allocation in the Executive's agreed budget for 2015-16. I am currently considering how to allocate my available budget to my Department's activities. I have yet to complete this exercise, so I cannot at this stage state with certainty what budget will be available to support road safety promotion activity next year.

When the budget allocation is finalised, my officials will undertake a critical review of the road safety problem profile and ensure resources are allocated in line with priorities. This will ensure resources are targeted where they will have the greatest impact on reducing the level of deaths and serious injuries on our roads.

Funds allocated to road safety would utilise my Department's current portfolio of actions which address many road safety problems. There are currently no plans to commission any new campaigns for 2015/16.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of the Environment to list the historic monuments that are under the protection of the NIEA in the Fermanagh District Council area.
(AQW 41735/11-15)

Mr Durkan: For the purposes of this answer, NIEA has taken 'under the protection of NIEA' to refer to any "protected place" as defined by Article 29 of the Historic Monuments and Archaeological Objects (NI) Order 1995 (HMAOO 1995). That definition refers to any place which is the site of a scheduled monument or of any monument under the ownership or guardianship of the Department.

There are 12 sites in State Care in County Fermanagh and these are listed by townland in the attachments accompanying this response.

There are 299 Scheduled Historic Monuments in the Fermanagh District Council Area, and they are also listed in the attachments. These sites have statutory protection under Article 3 of the HMAOO 1995 and are comprised of a wide range of monument types from the prehistoric through to the more recent past. They are largely in private ownership and, through the provisions of the HMAOO 1995, NIEA regulate activities within their protected areas. NIEA also actively monitors their condition and advises on their upkeep through a cyclical inspection regime

NISMR Number	Townland	Site Type	Protection
FER 135:004	Montiaghroe	Stone Alignment	Scheduled
FER 135:007	Montiaghroe	Stone Alignment	Scheduled
FER 193:014	Brougher	Stone Alignment & Possible Megalithic Tomb	Scheduled
FER 212:010	Ratoran	Stone Alignment	Scheduled
FER 212:086	Cavancarragh	Three Stone Alignments	Scheduled
FER 153:019	Cruninish Island	Ring Barrow	Scheduled
FER 154:071	Kiltierney	Barrow	Scheduled
FER 154:072	Tullanaglug	Barrow	Scheduled
FER 154:073	Tullanaglug	Barrow	Scheduled
FER 173:045	Moynaghan South	Ring Barrow	Scheduled
FER 191:083	Inishmacsaint	Barrow: Moat Of Inis	Scheduled
FER 228:022	Gorteen	Barrow & Cist	Scheduled
FER 246:009	Sheebeg	Bowl Barrow?	Scheduled
FER 170:038	Farrancassidy	Possible Barrow	Scheduled
FER 212:146	Mullyknock Or Topped Mountain	Possible Barrow	Scheduled
FER 192:075	Coagh	Barrow Or Possibly Hengiform Enclosure	Scheduled
FER 230:096	Derryharney	Barrow Cemetery & Burnt Mounds (Fulachta Fiadh)	Scheduled
FER 261:081	Legmacaffry	Fundamental Bench Mark	Scheduled
FER 228:034	Templenaffrin	Bullaun: The Christening Stone	Scheduled
FER 154:120	Drumcurren	Burnt Mound / Fulacht Fiadh	Scheduled
FER 211:097	Kinarla	Burnt Mound / Fulacht Fiadh	Scheduled
FER 211:100	Cloghanagh	Burnt Mound / Fulacht Fiadh	Scheduled
FER 211:101	Faugher	Burnt Mound / Fulacht Fiadh	Scheduled
FER 211:104	Kinarla	Burnt Mound / Fulacht Fiadh	Scheduled
FER 212:103	Mountdrum	Burnt Mound - Fulacht Fiadh	Scheduled
FER 230:090	RING	Two Burnt Mounds/ Cooking Places (Fulachta Fiadh)	Scheduled
FER 171:016	Rossmore	Round Cairn: Black Fort	Scheduled
FER 212:028	Mullyknock Or Topped Mountain	Round Cairn With Burials	Scheduled
FER 212:049	Coolbuck	Cairn	Scheduled
FER 228:017	Moylehid	Ring Cairn	Scheduled
FER 228:036	Drumawillin	Round Cairn	Scheduled
FER 230:007	Cloghcor	Cairn Kerb: Cloghcor Stone Circle	Scheduled
FER 244:010	Beihy	Multiple Cist Cairn	Scheduled
FER 272:006	Annaghmore Glebe	Cairn Kerb: Druid's Temple	Scheduled
FER 210:038	Aghanaglack	Cashel	Scheduled
FER 227:001	Meenawargy; Mullan	Cashel & Mass Rock: Cashelbane	Scheduled
FER 227:010	Kilrooskagh	Cashel	Scheduled
FER 228:048	Cullentragh	Cashel	Scheduled

NISMR Number	Townland	Site Type	Protection
FER 243:004	Killykeeghan	Cashel	Scheduled
FER 243:006	Killykeeghan	Cashel	Scheduled
FER 243:016	Killykeeghan	Cashel	Scheduled
FER 244:021	Tonyvarnog	Cashel	Scheduled
FER 191:040	Knock More	Cave With Rock Scribings: Lettered Cave	Scheduled
FER 210:057	Aghanaglack	Cave Adapted For Use As Souterrain	Scheduled
FER 191:139	Monea	Cist Burial And Cremation Pit	Scheduled
FER 172:036	Lenaghan	Crannog	Scheduled
FER 172:037	Lenaghan	Crannog In Bunnahone Lough	Scheduled
FER 172:038	Lenaghan	Crannog In Bunnahone Lough	Scheduled
FER 191:003	Largalinny	Carrick Lough Crannog	Scheduled
FER 191:062	Drumcorban	Crannog: Maguire Crannog	Scheduled
FER 210:059	Ross	Crannog In Ross Lough	Scheduled
FER 211:053	Conerick	Crannog In Drumgay Lough: Cherry Or Bone Island	Scheduled
FER 211:054	Drumgay	Crannog In Drumgay Lough: Green Island	Scheduled
FER 211:057	Drumgay	Crannog In Drumgay Lough	Scheduled
FER 211:065	Gortaloughan	Crannog In Drumgay Lough	Scheduled
FER 212:066	Magonragh; Shanco	Crannog	Scheduled
FER 212:067	Shanco	Crannog	Scheduled
FER 212:068	Coolbuck	Crannog	Scheduled
FER 212:084	Derryhoney	Crannog	Scheduled
FER 212:099	Coolbuck	Crannog	Scheduled
FER 212:100	Derryhoney	Crannog	Scheduled
FER 228:042	Lough Macnean Lower	Crannog	Scheduled
FER 228:076	Belcoo East	Crannog	Scheduled
FER 228:081	Lough Macnean Lower	Crannog	Scheduled
FER 228:082	Lough Macnean Lower	Crannog	Scheduled
FER 245:030	Kinmore	Crannog In Lough Digh	Scheduled
FER 246:041	Dernaglug And Drumaa	Crannog In Mount Seborough Lough	Scheduled
FER 246:059	Rateen; Tattycam	Crannog In Tattycam Lough	Scheduled
FER 211:120	Drumclay; Knockalough	Crannog	Scheduled
FER 154:006	Ardvarny West	Stone Cross	Scheduled
FER 208:002	Frevagh	Monastic Site With Cross-Shaft & Base: Kilcoo	Scheduled
FER 210:037	Aghanaglack	Cross-Shaft & Base	Scheduled
FER 247:002	Drumbrughas	Cross	Scheduled
FER 243:028	Killykeeghan	Cup-&-Ring-Marked Stone	Scheduled
FER 228:089	Clyhannagh	Cup-Marked Stone	Scheduled
FER 210:013	Reyfad	Six Decorated Stones	Scheduled
FER 212:017	Doon	Two Stones With Cup Marks & Decoration: The Grey Stones	Scheduled

NISMR Number	Townland	Site Type	Protection
FER 173:001	White Island	Tree Ring	Scheduled
FER 154:003	Kiltierney; Tullanaglug	Linear Earthwork: The Friar's Walk	Scheduled
FER 154:070	Kiltierney	Earthwork	Scheduled
FER 211:036	Mullanacaw	Large Oval Earthwork Possibly Rath	Scheduled
FER 262:023	Lislea; Mullynavannoge	Linear Earthwork: The Black Pig's Dyke	Scheduled
FER 153:008	Dreenan	Stone Figures In Caldragh Graveyard: Boa Island	Scheduled
FER 153:022	Lusty More Island	Monastery (Site Of), Graveyard & Carved Stone Figure: Friar's Quay	Scheduled
FER 153:038	Crevinish	Church (Site Of) & Graveyard, At Crevinish Castle	Scheduled
FER 154:005	Kiltierney	Cistercian Abbey & Grange, Graveyard & Holy Well In Enclosure With Cross Slab, Cross & Cross-Carved Stone	Scheduled - Management Agreement in place with landowner
FER 171:002	Tievealough	Church (In Ruins), Graveyard & Stone Head: Abbey	Scheduled
FER 172:033	Tully	Monastery (Site Of): Abbey Point Or The Wee Ebby	Scheduled
FER 173:010	Inish More Or Davys Island	C12th Church And Enclosure: Abbey, Davy's Island	Scheduled
FER 191:027	Derrygonnelly	C17th Church	Scheduled
FER 191:069	Aghamore	Church & Graveyard: Carrick Or Aghamore Church	Scheduled
FER 192:001	Rockfield	Church & Graveyard With 4 Carved Stones: Killadeas, Yellow Church	Scheduled
FER 208:001	Slattinagh	Monastic Site With Cross-Slab: Kilcoo	Scheduled
FER 210:014	Toneel North	Multi-Period Church & Graveyard Cross-Shaft & Base: Boho Cross	Scheduled
FER 211:041	Rossorry	Church, Graveyard & Enclosure	Scheduled
FER 213:019	Ballyhill	Rath, Church (Site Of) & Graveyard	Scheduled
FER 229:007	Inishkeen	Multi-Period Church Site - Monastic Site, Medieval Church & Graveyard, Cross-Shaft & Base Etc.	Scheduled
FER 229:013	Cleenish	Early Christian Monastery, Medieval Church (Site Of) & Carved Stone In Graveyard: St. Sinells	Scheduled
FER 228:019	Rushin	Church, Graveyard, Penitential Stations & Bullaun: Templerushin, At Holywell	Scheduled
FER 228:030	Gortahurk West	Medieval Church & Graveyard: Templemoyle, Tampulmoyle	Scheduled
FER 228:033	Templenaffrin	Church, Graveyard & Enclosure: Tampulanaffrin	Scheduled
FER 228:058	Killesher	Early Christian Monastic Site, Medieval Church & Graveyard: Killesher Church	Scheduled
FER 230:001	Derryvullan	Multiperiod Church Site & Graveyard (E.Christian-Post Med.) With Cross-Carved Stone, Finial Stone & Bullaun: Tamlaght	Scheduled

NISMR Number	Townland	Site Type	Protection
FER 230:029	Fyagh	Medieval Church & Graveyard: Derrybrusk Church	Scheduled
FER 244:016	Teesnaghtan	Cross-Inscribed Standing Stone & Cairn	Scheduled
FER 244:017	Lismonaghan	Medieval Parish Church, Graveyard & Holy Well: Kinawley Church, Cell Naile & St. Naile's Well	Scheduled
FER 261:031	Galloon	C6th Monastery, Multiperiod Church Site , Graveyard, Two-Cross Shafts & Bases	Scheduled
FER 272:002	Kiltober	Mound, Possibly Church & Penal Site: Toberakill	Scheduled
FER 211:042	Rossorry	Rectangular Enclosure	Scheduled
FER 243:005	Killykeeghan	Sub-Rectangular Enclosure	Scheduled
FER 244:015	Teesnaghtan	Enclosure	Scheduled
FER 246:002	Cornashee	Henge?	Scheduled
FER 246:003	Cornashee	Circular Enclosure	Scheduled
TYR 056:014	Cabragh	Large Hilltop Enclosure: Cabragh Fort	Scheduled
FER 153:020	Crevinish	Castle: Crevinish Castle	Scheduled
FER 171:003	Rossbeg	Castle: Castle Caldwell	Scheduled
FER 191:066	Tullykelter	Fortified House: Tullykelter Castle	Scheduled
FER 191:103	Derrygonnelly	Two C17th Houses Within Bawn	Scheduled
FER 211:082	Castle Coole	Fortification(Site Of) & 18Th Century Formal Garden	Scheduled
FER 245:024	Corratrasna	Fortified Manor-House	Scheduled
FER 245:027	Trannish	Artillery Fort: Curraghgole Or Trannish Island	Scheduled
FER 261:020	Crom	Castle & Garden: Crom Old Castle	Scheduled
FER 261:021	Drumbrughas East	Castle	Scheduled
FER 271:002	Aghalane; Killycloghan	C17th Castle	Scheduled
FER 191:039	Knock Beg	Henge	Scheduled
FER 246:007	Sheebeg	Henge	Scheduled
FER 246:048	Lisnamallard	Henge: Lisnamallard	Scheduled
TYR 056:024	Drumsonnus	Henge: Drumsonnus	Scheduled
FER 154:009	Kiltierney	Holy Well: Tobernasool	Scheduled
FER 154:011	Kiltierney	Holy Well Within Ecclesiastical Enclosure Fer 154:005	Scheduled
FER 272:003	Kiltober	Holy Well: Toberakill	Scheduled
FER 244:028	Aghatirourke	Prehistoric Enclosure	Scheduled
FER 262:029	Lislea	Linear Earthwork: The Black Pig's Dyke	Scheduled
FER 135:001	Tawnydorragh	Court Tomb: Giant's Grave	Scheduled
FER 135:002	Dromore Big	Court Tomb: Giant's Grave	Scheduled
FER 154:002	Kiltierney	Passage Tomb Reused As Ring Barrow With Burial Mounds	Scheduled
FER 154:064	Keeran	Wedge Tomb: Giant's Grave	Scheduled
FER 155:001	Sheemuldoon	Wedge Tomb: Giant's Grave	Scheduled

NISMR Number	Townland	Site Type	Protection
FER 172:023	Tully	Court Tomb	Scheduled
FER 190:001	Killy Beg	Wedge Tomb: Giant's Grave	Scheduled
FER 190:003	Killy Beg	Wedge Tomb: Giant's Grave	Scheduled
FER 190:006	Killy Beg	Wedge Tomb: Giant's Grave	Scheduled
FER 190:009	Dog Little	Court Tomb: Skaglea Cairn	Scheduled
FER 190:015	Killy Beg	Megalithic Tomb	Scheduled
FER 190:017	Meenagleragh	Wedge Tomb?: Giant's Grave	Scheduled
FER 190:018	Rossinure Beg	Court Tomb: Giant's Grave	Scheduled
FER 191:038	Rossinure Beg	Court Tomb: Giant's Grave	Scheduled
FER 193:019	Ballyreagh	Dual Court Tomb: Giant's Graves	Scheduled
FER 193:024	Cavantillycormick	Dual Court Tomb: Giant's Grave	Scheduled
FER 194:010	Knockennis	Court Tomb: Giants' Graves	Scheduled
FER 194:012	Glengesh	Portal Tomb: Giant's Grave	Scheduled
FER 209:005	Cornacully	Court Tomb: Giant's Grave	Scheduled
FER 210:050	Moylehid	Passage Tomb: Giant's Grave Or Eagle's Knoll Cairn	Scheduled
FER 212:001	Lissan	Dual Court Tomb: Druids' Circle	Scheduled
FER 212:048	Coolbuck	Standing Stone, Possibly Megalithic Tomb	Scheduled
FER 212:051	Coolbuck	Wedge Tomb: The Druid's Altar & Giant's Grave	Scheduled
FER 212:054	Mountdrum	Wedge Tomb: Giant's Grave	Scheduled
FER 212:077	Cloghtogle	Wedge Tomb: The Druid's Altar & Giant's Grave	Scheduled
FER 212:089	Mountdrum	Megalithic Tomb	Scheduled
FER 212:115	Mountdrum	Wedge Tomb	Scheduled
FER 227:009	Kilrooskagh	Portal Tomb	Scheduled
FER 228:009	Carrickmacflaherty; Drumman	Court Tomb: Giant's Grave	Scheduled
FER 228:013	Carrickmacsparrow	Court Tomb: Giant's Grave	Scheduled
FER 228:072	Clyhannagh	Dual Court Tomb	Scheduled
FER 243:001	Kilnameel	Court Tomb: The Dumbies	Scheduled
FER 243:029	Beihy	Court Tomb	Scheduled
FER 244:011	Doohatty Glebe	Court Tomb: Giant's Grave Or The Star Cairn	Scheduled
FER 244:018	Greenan	Wedge Tomb: Giant's Grave	Scheduled
FER 245:023	Corratrasna	Court Tomb: Giant's Grave	Scheduled
FER 245:033	Aghakillymaud	Court Tomb	Scheduled
FER 245:037	Knockninny	Dual Court Tomb	Scheduled
FER 170:009	Keenaghan	Possible Megalithic Tomb: Graveyard	Scheduled
FER 172:028	Aghameelan	Two Standing Stones - Megalithic Tomb?	Scheduled
FER 190:019	Slisgarrow	Three Standing Stones, Possibly Megalithic Tomb	Scheduled
FER 193:021	Breagho	Six Standing Stones, Possibly Megalithic Tomb: Stone Circle	Scheduled

NISMR Number	Townland	Site Type	Protection
FER 212:060	Coolbuck	Cairn & Orthostat, Possibly Court Tomb	Scheduled
FER 212:087	Cavancarragh	Possible Megalithic Tomb	Scheduled
FER 154:013	Monavreece	Mound	Scheduled
FER 228:041	Inishee Island	Mound & Battle Site (1499): Inish Octa	Scheduled
FER 246:001	Cornashee	Cairn & Enclosures - Inauguration Site: Mote	Scheduled
FER 272:015	Derrykerrib	Mound	Scheduled
FER 272:004	Kiltober	Penitential Station Stones (Associated With Fer 0272:003, Holy Well)	Scheduled
FER 190:028	Doagh Glebe	Promontory Fort	Scheduled
FER 153:001	Bigwood	Bivallate Rath	Scheduled
FER 153:004	Brookhill; Bigwood	Counterscarp Rath	Scheduled
FER 153:007	Dreenan	Counterscarp Rath	Scheduled
FER 153:017	Ardshankill	Bivallate Rath	Scheduled
FER 154:012	Monavreece	Counterscarp Rath	Scheduled
FER 154:019	Diviny	Bivallate Rath	Scheduled
FER 154:020	Drumsawna More	Rath & Bullauns (2)	Scheduled
FER 154:029	Letterboy	Counterscarp Rath	Scheduled
FER 154:034	Aghaleague	Counterscarp Rath	Scheduled
FER 154:045	Ardvarny East	Counterscarp Rath	Scheduled
FER 154:051	Tullycallrick	Counterscarp Rath	Scheduled
FER 170:003	Corry	Bivallate Rath	Scheduled
FER 170:004	Moneendogue	Bivallate Rath	Scheduled
FER 172:001	Shean	Rath	Scheduled
FER 172:009	Carnirk	Rath & Possible House Platform	Scheduled
FER 172:010	Dresternan	Rath	Scheduled
FER 173:014	Coolisk	Rath	Scheduled
FER 173:025	Mullies	Counterscarp Rath	Scheduled
FER 173:026	Drumaran	Rath: Drumaran Fort	Scheduled
FER 173:035	Drumcrin	Rath	Scheduled
FER 173:039	Doonan	Counterscarp Rath	Scheduled
FER 173:040	Doonan	Counterscarp Rath	Scheduled
FER 189:002	Leglehid	Rath	Scheduled
FER 210:005	Crott	Rath	Scheduled
FER 210:010	Tullymargy	Rath - One Of Pair With Fer 210:011	Scheduled
FER 210:011	Tullymargy	Rath - One Of A Pair With Fer 210:010	Scheduled
FER 191:001	Inishmacsaint	Penannular Rath	Scheduled
FER 191:002	Drumary	Rath	Scheduled
FER 191:011	Rahalton	Rath	Scheduled
FER 191:012	Rahalton	Counterscarp Rath	Scheduled
FER 191:015	Cosbystown; Rahalton	Rath	Scheduled
FER 191:028	Drumadillar	Rath	Scheduled

NISMR Number	Townland	Site Type	Protection
FER 191:031	Roosky	Rath	Scheduled
FER 191:045	Scandally	Rath	Scheduled
FER 191:047	Scandally	Rath	Scheduled
FER 191:048	Magherahar	Bivallate Rath	Scheduled
FER 191:051	Derryvary Beg; Newtown	Rath With Annexe	Scheduled
FER 192:019	Ferney	Counterscarp Rath	Scheduled
FER 192:020	Enaghan	Rath	Scheduled
FER 192:021	Concaroe	Rath	Scheduled
FER 192:027	Ballygonnell; Rabron	Counterscarp Rath	Scheduled
FER 193:016	Cavantillycormick	Rath	Scheduled
FER 194:018	Mullaghsillogagh	Rath Reused As Tree Ring	Scheduled
FER 194:019	Mullaghsillogagh	Rath	Scheduled
FER 210:018	Aghahoorin	Bivallate Rath	Scheduled
FER 210:029	Aghaherrish	Counterscarp Rath	Scheduled
FER 210:039	Legnagay Beg	Rath	Scheduled
FER 210:040	Legnagay Beg	Rath	Scheduled
FER 210:044	Treel	Rath	Scheduled
FER 211:004	Donegall	Platform Rath	Scheduled
FER 211:009	Banagher	Rath	Scheduled
FER 211:010	Drumsillagh	Rath	Scheduled
FER 211:011	Magheradunbar	Burial Ground/ Enclosure	Scheduled
FER 211:012	Drumsillagh	Rath	Scheduled
FER 211:020	Devenish (Island)	Platform Rath	Scheduled
FER 211:032	Drummee	Rath	Scheduled
FER 212:031	Tiraltan	Rath	Scheduled
FER 212:062	Coolbuck	Rath	Scheduled
FER 212:071	Currin	Bivallate Rath	Scheduled
FER 212:078	Cloghtogle	Rath	Scheduled
FER 213:005	Rafintan	Counterscarp Rath	Scheduled
FER 229:001	Letterbreen	Platform Rath	Scheduled
FER 229:011	Clonbunniagh	Rath	Scheduled
FER 261:016	Corlatt	Counterscarp Rath	Scheduled
FER 228:031	Rahallan	Bivallate Rath: Rahallan	Scheduled
FER 228:040	Mullaghbane	Counterscarp Rath	Scheduled
FER 228:043	Mullaghbane	Rath	Scheduled
FER 228:064	Lisblake	Large Counterscarp Rath	Scheduled
FER 229:016	Carneyhill	Platform Rath	Scheduled
FER 229:017	Tonyloman	Rath	Scheduled
FER 229:023	Clontymullan	Rath	Scheduled
FER 230:002	Killyvannan	Platform Rath	Scheduled
FER 230:012	Beagho	Platform Rath	Scheduled

NISMR Number	Townland	Site Type	Protection
FER 230:014	Millwood	Platform Rath	Scheduled
FER 230:056	Derrycallaghan	Counterscarp Rath	Scheduled
FER 230:059	Drumcramph	Platform Rath	Scheduled
FER 230:071	Lisnagole	Platform Rath: Lisnagole	Scheduled
FER 231:007	Lismalore	Rath	Scheduled
FER 243:008	Gortmaconnell	Platform Rath	Scheduled
FER 243:012	Lanmore	Rath	Scheduled
FER 244:005	Aghatirourke	Platform Rath	Scheduled
FER 244:013	Laragh	Platform Rath	Scheduled
FER 246:008	Sheebeg	Rath	Scheduled
FER 246:049	Golan	Rath	Scheduled
FER 261:030	Kevenagh	Rath	Scheduled
FER 262:010	Lislea	Large Hilltop Enclosure	Scheduled
FER 271:001	Corry	Rath	Scheduled
FER 271:004	Glasmullagh	Rath	Scheduled
FER 228:061	Carrigan	Souterrain: St.Lasser's Cell	Scheduled
FER 154:025	Drumnarullagh	Standing Stone	Scheduled
FER 154:052	Clareview	Standing Stone	Scheduled
FER 154:054	Drumbarna	Standing Stone	Scheduled
FER 190:004	Killy Beg	Two Standing Stones: Fionn Maccool's Finger-Stone	Scheduled
FER 190:005	Killy Beg	Two Standing Stones	Scheduled
FER 192:015	Drumcullion	Standing Stone	Scheduled
FER 193:026	Ballyreagh	Three Standing Stones	Scheduled
FER 212:094	Lissan	Standing Stone	Scheduled
FER 228:023	Drumcoo	Standing Stone: Crom Cruaich	Scheduled
FER 244:006	Aghatirourke	Standing Stone	Scheduled
FER 246:047	Cloghagaddy	Standing Stone: Leagaun	Scheduled
FER 194:026	Letterbailey	Stone Circle: The Graves	Scheduled
FER 209:006	Corraderrybrock	Concentric Stone Circles	Scheduled
FER 212:112	Mountdrum	Stone Circle & Alignment	Scheduled
FER 212:147	Largy	Possible Stone Circle & Standing Stone	Scheduled
FER 134:007	Formil	Three Stone Circles & Alignments	Scheduled
FER 135:005	Montiaghroe	Stone Circle & Two Alignments	Scheduled
FER 193:013	Brougher	Two Stone Circles, Standing Stone & Alignment	Scheduled
FER 212:111	Mountdrum	Three Concentric Stone Circles & Alignment	Scheduled
FER 212:117	Mountdrum	Stone Circle & Two Alignments	Scheduled
FER 170:015	Lergan	Sweat House	Scheduled
FER 171:029	Braade	Sweat House	Scheduled
FER 190:022	Glennasheevar	Sweat House	Scheduled
FER 227:018	Mullan	Sweat House	Scheduled

NISMR Number	Townland	Site Type	Protection
FER 232:006	Corragunt	Sweat House	Scheduled
FER 232:007	Corraleek	Sweat House	Scheduled
FER 247:026	Corraghy	Sweat House	Scheduled

Department of Finance and Personnel

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to AQW 37850/11-15, of the £400m identified, what amount has been derived from dormant bank accounts within Northern Ireland.
(AQW 39683/11-15)

Mr Hamilton (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): Financial institutions participating in the dormant accounts scheme do not participate on a regional basis, instead they do so on an institutional basis. This unfortunately means that the amount of funding from Northern Ireland based dormant accounts is not available.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether he has met the Together: Building a United Community Strategy commitment to introduce an impact assessment that assesses the extent to which his departmental policies and interventions contribute to the objective of building a united, rather than divided, community.
(AQW 40223/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: Once the new Equality and Good Relations Commission is in place, and an impact assessment tool is developed to assess a policy's contribution to the delivery of good relations objectives, my Department will implement the new guidance in full.

In the meantime, we will continue to use the Equality Commission's current guidance to assess the impact of our policies.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how much funding his Department provided to Trade Unions in the last financial year.
(AQW 40298/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: In 2013-14 no funding was provided to Trade Union organisations by my Department. However, the Department paid £187k in salary costs in respect of Trade Union Representatives and their administrative support staff.

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number of tourists visiting Northern Ireland from (i) Great Britain; (ii) Republic of Ireland; and (iii) abroad, in each of year since 2007.
(AQW 40412/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The annual (2007-2013) number of overnight trips of visitors to Northern Ireland from (i) Great Britain; (ii) Republic of Ireland; and (iii) outside UK & Ireland is detailed in the table overleaf.

Table: Number of overnight trips (thousands) to Northern Ireland of visitors from (i) Great Britain, (ii) Republic of Ireland and (iii) outside UK & Ireland (2007-2013).

Overnight trips (thousands) to Northern Ireland of visitors from:	20071	2008	2009	20102	2011	2012	2013
Great Britain	1,285	1,202	1,017	972	1,052	1,034	1,165
Republic of Ireland	323	367	475	383	370	430	400
Outside UK & Ireland	500	507	426	454	509	520	528
All external-NI overnight trips	2,108	2,076	1,918	1,809	1,931	1,984	2,093

Notes:

1 Figures from 2007 to 2009 were collated by the Northern Ireland Tourist Board.

2 Figures from 2010 to 2013 were collated by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency.

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what is the estimated annual revenue generated by tourism since 2007.
(AQW 40413/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The annual expenditure (£million) on all overnight trips (NI residents and visitors) in Northern Ireland is detailed in the table below.

Table: Annual expenditure (£million) on overnight trips (NI residents and visitors) in Northern Ireland (2008-2013).

Year	20081	2009	20102	2011	2012	2013
Expenditure on overnight trips in Northern Ireland	£541m	£530m	£621m	£642m	£689m	£723m

1 Figures from 2008 to 2009 were collated by the Northern Ireland Tourist Board.

2 Figures from 2010 to 2013 were collated by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency.

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what percentage of overseas tourists to the island of Ireland in each year since 2007 have visited Northern Ireland.
(AQW 40415/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The annual number of overnight trips to Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland is detailed in the table overleaf.

The figures shown relate solely to visitors from outside Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

Table: The annual number of overnight trips (thousands) to Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland (2008-2013). The figures relate to visitors from outside Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

Overnight trips (thousands) of visitors from outside NI & RoI to:	20081	2009	20102	2011	2012	2013
Northern Ireland	1,709	1,443	1,426	1,561	1,554	1,693
Republic of Ireland	7,436	6,578	5,945	6,240	6,286	6,686
NI as percentage of NI plus RoI	19%	18%	19%	20%	20%	20%

Sources:

1 Northern Ireland Tourist Board, Central Statistics Office Ireland and Fáilte Ireland.

2 Northern Ireland Statistics & Research Agency, Central Statistics Office Ireland and Fáilte Ireland.

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether he plans to allow couples in civil partnerships to marry.
(AQW 40534/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: I have no plans to bring such legislation before the Assembly.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how much has been saved since Orange Halls were exempt from paying rates.
(AQW 40548/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: It is estimated that £5.7 million has been saved since April 2006 through Article 41A exemptions relating to Orange Halls.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to AQW 39009/11-15, to detail (i) when each subject premises was entered on the valuation list as liable for rates; and (ii) whether rates have been paid on each of the subject premises consistently since May 2011.
(AQW 40585/11-15)

Mr Hamilton:

(i) The premises were first entered in the Valuation List as follows:
- Unit 1 at 79 Quarry Road was separately valued from the main property on 24th September 2008;
- 26 Burn Road, Cookstown on 5th March 1998;
- 162 Tullaghans Road, Dunloy on 11th February 1992; and
- 12A Main Street, Dunloy, was separately valued from 12 Main Street, Dunloy on 31st December 2014.

(ii) Details relating to individual rate bills cannot be released under the Data Protection Act.

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number of people registered as unemployed in the Limavady Travel to Work Area, broken down by age.
(AQW 40595/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: There is no official Limavady Travel to Work Area (TTWA), Limavady District Council is included in the Derry TTWA.

The attached table shows the number of persons claiming unemployment related benefits at November 2014, broken down by age in the Derry TTWA.

Table: Number of persons claiming unemployment related benefits by age-group in Derry TTWA November 2014

Age Group	Number
16-24	1,650
25-34	1,820
35-44	1,255
45-54	1,255
55+	600
Total	**6,580**

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, following the recent report 'Equality Statistics for the Northern Ireland Civil Service', to detail the breakdown in the number of Protestants and Roman Catholics amongst those recruited to the general service grades in that year.
(AQW 40671/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: There were 366 Protestants and 354 Catholics recruited to the General Service grades during 2012. This is based on appointments to 18 competitions.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the proposed timetable for Corporation Tax to be devolved.
(AQW 40683/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The Corporation Tax (Northern Ireland) Bill was introduced in the House of Commons on 8 January 2015 and had its second reading on 27 January 2015. In line with the Stormont House Agreement, the passage of the Bill through UK Parliament is conditional on implementation of key measures to deliver sustainable finances for Northern Ireland. On this basis, it is anticipated that the Bill will receive Royal Assent before dissolution of Parliament on 30 March 2015. The legislation includes a commencement clause which will enable powers to transfer from April 2017 subject to the Northern Ireland Executive demonstrating its finances are on a sustainable footing for the long term.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail proposals which have been submitted, to benefit from unallocated Financial Transactions Capital funding, since the 2014 October Monitoring Round.
(AQW 40720/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: My Statement to the Assembly on the 2014-15 January Monitoring Round detailed allocations of ring-fenced Financial Transactions Capital totalling £40.6 million, including £38.5 million to support the University of Ulster Greater Belfast Development and £2.1 million for the Invest NI Growth Loan Fund. This ensured that all of the Financial Transactions Capital available to the Executive in this year is now allocated to departments.

No other bids were submitted for Financial Transactions Capital in the January Monitoring Round.

Details of allocations for 2015-16 are detailed in the Executive's Final Budget.

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for the percentage of his Department's overall Current Resource Expenditure allocated to staff wages in (i) 2013/14; and (ii) the 2014/15 draft budget.
(AQW 40736/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: Approximately 45% of my Department's 2013-14 current resource expenditure was allocated to staff wages.

The Department's 2014-15 January monitoring position also has approximately 45% of the current resource expenditure allocated to staff wages.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how his Department's definition of a rural areas differs from the definitions used by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Department of the Environment; and what consideration has been given to the merits of standardising the definition against flexibility in rural retail rates.
(AQW 40759/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: My Department's definition aligns with the recommendations of the Inter-Departmental Urban-Rural Definition Group.

You should note however that the Report recommended that definitions should not be used in a prescriptive way and that policy-makers need to consider the appropriateness of settlement and urban/rural classifications to individual policies. Accordingly I am not in a position to comment on the rationale used by DARD or DOE when defining rural areas for their own purposes as these may vary according to the reason for the definition.

In relation to your point on rural retail rates the location of a property is fully reflected in the rating valuation, because it represents an assessment of a property's rental value. This means that shops in less favourable trading locations are assessed at lower values.

One area where my Department defines rural is in the definition of Rural ATMs for rates exemption; that definition is premised upon settlement data from NISRA in order to designate what constitutes a rural ward.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to AQW 40195/11-15, to detail (i) the latest financial year for which his Department has an estimate of revenue raised from Corporation Tax in Northern Ireland; and (ii) how his Department conducted informed negotiations with HM Treasury over the transfer of Corporation Tax powers without up-to-date data.
(AQW 40828/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The most recently published Departmental estimate of Corporation Tax revenues for Northern Ireland was included in the Northern Ireland Net Fiscal Balance Report (NFBR) in March 2014. It relates to the 2011-12 financial year.

The comprehensive engagement between my Department and HM Treasury in relation to the transfer of Corporation Tax rate-setting powers has been informed by the latest available data from HMRC's administrative sources and associated projections.

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of the savings to be made by his Department from the public sector voluntary exit scheme, over each of the four financial years commencing 2014/15.
(AQW 40841/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: As the public sector voluntary exit scheme will only be effective from 2015-16, it will not deliver any savings in 2014-15.

It is anticipated that savings of around £2.5m will need to be made by my Department in 2015-16. Staff reductions will only start to generate a full year of savings from 2016-17 onwards, estimated at around £10m per annum in 2016-17 and 2017-18. Further reductions in staff costs are likely to be required in 2016-17 and 2017-18. However, until the Department's budget allocation for these years has been set, it is not possible to estimate what these may be.

This response is provided for the Department of Finance and Personnel only as the information for all departments is not held centrally. The Member should contact individual departments for their information.

Mr Ramsey asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on the PSNI equal pay claim.
(AQW 40861/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: It has been established that there are no valid equal pay claims for both PSNI and NIO staff upon which to base a settlement. The paper I circulated to Executive colleagues before last summer recognises the moral argument put forward, and I hope it will satisfactorily resolve the issue for this group of staff.

However, my recommendation and any associated expenditure require the approval of the Executive and I therefore await the agreement of Executive colleagues for the paper to be brought forward for discussion. While I appreciate the frustration of staff affected by this issue, the matter is now in the hands of the Executive.

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline all the business cases relating to the repayment of all Financial Transaction Capital projects identified in Northern Ireland.
(AQW 40907/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: It is the responsibility of individual departments to identify proposals for the utilisation of Financial Transactions Capital (FTC). These investment decisions must be underpinned by a proportionate business case developed by the relevant department. It is for the relevant department to release details of the business cases.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail all bids submitted by each Department for financial assistance provided under the Change Fund.
(AQW 40933/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: Over 120 bids were received from across the public sector, with the total amount requested equating to approximately five times the value of the fund. A list of all bids submitted by each department for financial assistance provided under the Change Fund is attached at Annex A.

A list of successful bids is published in the Northern Ireland Executive's Budget 2015-16.

Annex A

Department	Project Title
DEL	Essential Skills of Maths and English for 14-16 Year Olds
DEL	Condition Management Programme (CMP)

Department	Project Title
DEL	DEL – Further Education Colleges: Shared Services
DEL	Economic Inactivity Strategy
DEL	Local Employment Intermediary Service (LEMIS)
DEL	Collaboration and Innovation Fund Programme - the European Social Fund 2015-2018 - Priority 1 (Thematic Objective 8 Investment Priority (ii) of The European Social Fund (ESF) 2015-2018.
DEL	Community Family Support Fund
DEL	United Youth Programme Pilot Phase 2015-16
DEL	Apprenticeships and Youth Training
DOJ	Criminal Justice Partnership
DOJ	HR Shared Services - Future HR service delivery for DOJ agencies/ALBs – Scoping study
DOJ	Pilot: Specialist Domestic Violence Court
DOJ	Digital Working in the Justice System
DOJ	Changing Culture at Hydebank Wood Secure College
DOJ	Underachieving Boys: Supporting young offenders to change their lives through education
DOJ	Causeway IT Solution for the Receipt, Management and Processing of Non Molestation and Occupation Orders (NMOs)
DOJ	Risk Avoidance Danger Awareness Resource (RADAR)
DOJ	Small Business Research Initiative: Identifying Efficiency Savings through the Application of Analytics to Public Space Monitoring
DOJ	Sport Changes Life
DOJ	Programmes for Non Adjudicated Offenders of Sexual Abuse. ‘A Regional Family Risk Assessment and Intervention Model’
DOJ	Intensive Resettlement and Rehabilitation Project (IRRP)
DOJ	Digital Transformation of Legal Aid
OFMDFM	New Structures of Government
OFMDFM	Operational PFI Reviews
OFMDFM	Joint Executive Atlantic Philanthropies Programme
OFMDFM	Executive’s Childcare Strategy: School Age Childcare Grant Scheme
OFMDFM	Frederick J Douglas Centre
OFMDFM	Supporting Councils – World Health Organisation (WHO) Age Friendly Environments
OFMDFM	Match funding Atlantic Philanthropies to Support the Pensioners’ Parliament
DRD	E-car NI Phase 2 Commercialisation
DRD	NI Wide Implementation of Integrated Passenger Transport
DRD	Pilot Capital Project – 23,000 street lights
DRD	Renewable Energy
DRD	Mobile Sludge Dewatering Plant
DRD	Public-Private Partnership (PPP) Expert
DFP	Public Sector Innovation Lab
DFP	Collaborative Procurement
DFP	On-line Modernisation of Household and Business Surveys
DFP	Reform of Property Management - Space Rationalisation (Capital Expenditure) Capital Expenditure to facilitate Accommodation Lease Exits from non-DFP Properties Division Office Estate.
DFP	NI Courts Service On-boarding to IT Assist

Department	Project Title
DFP	Reform of Property Management (RPM) – resource bid for RPM salaries and costs
DFP	NICS Managed Print Service
DFP	Small Business Research Initiative: Identifying efficiency savings through application of analytics to Account NI
DFP	Management of Mobile Telephony across the NICS
DE	Centre for Curriculum Excellence
DE	Delivering Excellence for All
DE	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) Delivery
DE	Area Planning Acceleration Project
DE	Creation of a new Education Authority and Sectoral Body for Controlled Schools
DE	Nurture Units
DSD	NI Debt Recovery Service
DSD	Fraud NI
DSD	Want to Work or Why Work?
DSD	Health and Work Service
DSD	Credit Union Modernisation
DSD	Post Office Card Account (POca) Conversion Project
DSD	Cross Departmental Portrush Regeneration Programme to Maximise Economic Potential
DSD	Driving Collaboration in the Third Sector to Improve Sustainability, Develop Innovative Delivery Models and Deliver Improved Services
DSD	Preventing Housing Repossessions
DSD	Cross Departmental Housing Supply Unit
DSD	Innovative Pilot Project to Deliver Services to Older People in the Home Through Partnership Between the Public and Volunteer Sector
DSD	Leading to Improve
DSD	Modernisation Project for the Advice Sector to Transform Services to Citizens and Reduce Demand on Public Services
DARD	Integration of Control Information for EU Area-Based Schemes
DARD	Assisted Digital Support Programme for Farmers
DARD	New Operating Model for DARD
DETI	Focus on Food 2016 Initiative
DETI	Outsourcing of Insolvency Service Casework
DETI	Regulatory Reform: Implementation of recommendations in making life simpler: improving business regulation in NI
DETI	Health, Innovation and Life Sciences
DETI	Small Business Research Initiative Support Team
DETI	Agri-food Marketing Body
DETI	Farm Accident Prevention Plan
DETI	Jobs Fund SFA
DETI	Collaborative Skills
Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council	IT project

Department	Project Title
Antrim and Newtownabbey District Council	Triple Stack Waste Solution
Derry City and Strabane District Council	ICT Infrastructure Upgrade
Derry City and Strabane District Council	Improving Public Services – Geographic Information System (GIS)
Derry City and Strabane District Council	Building Control Records
Belfast City Council	Transferable Area Intervention Model to Support Local Community Planning
Mid Ulster District Council	Paperless Planning
North Down and Ards District Council	ICT Convergence
Fermanagh and Omagh District Council	Digitisation and Fermanagh and Omagh District Council
DCAL	DCAL Radical Change Working Group
DCAL	Creative Change and Delivery Programme
DCAL	Digital Modernisation of Permit/License and Management Information Systems in Inland Fisheries
DCAL	Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) Self-service Kiosks in 20 Locations
DCAL	Replacement Lighting to Various Public Libraries
DCAL	Boiler Replacement Programme
DCAL	Decade of Centenaries Digital Collaboration Project
DCAL	Parental Engagement at the Museums
DCAL	Online Safeguarding Training Resource
DCAL	Safeguarding Children in Sport – Cross platform IOS, Android and web app
DCAL	Equality Standard
DCAL	Sport Fund Bike Amnesty 2015-16
DCAL	Sport NI Active Awards for Sport
DCAL	Governance and Leadership Development
DCAL	Northern Ireland Museums Council (NIMC) co-location
DOE	Electronic Duty of Care (EDOC)+ - Single UK electronic waste data collection system.
DOE	Strategic Assessment of the Waste Sector in NI
DOE	All Island Unconventional Gas Exploration and Extraction (Fracking) Research Programme
DOE	Facilitating the Reporting of Environmental and Heritage Impacts Including Photos or Video by Phone App
DOE	All Ireland Environmental Transboundary Sensitivity Mapping Tool
DOE	Nature NI
DOE	Land and You Pilot
DOE	Marine Mapping Viewer for Northern Ireland & Single NI Government Licence for Marine Mapping
DOE	Carrickfergus Castle Presentation, Interpretation and Access
DOE	Grey Point Fort Presentation, Interpretation and Access

Department	Project Title
DOE	Historic Environment
DOE	New Ways of Working – A shared service model
DOE	Academic Attainment and Environmental Enhancement (AAEE)
DOE	Delivery of a Communication Plan to Support Delivery of Critical Waste Infrastructure
DHSSPS	Project Echo
DHSSPS	Acute Hospital Outpatients Modernisation
DHSSPS	Rapid Assessment Interface Discharge (RAID)
DHSSPS	Diabetes Navigation System for Patient Self-Management
DHSSPS	Liaison Psychiatry and Psychological Medicine Team (LPPMT)
DHSSPS	Supporting Medicines Optimisation
DHSSPS	Alcohol-Substance Misuse Liaison
DHSSPS	Communities Active Travel Programme
DHSSPS	Joint DHSSPS/DOJ Care Proceedings Pilot
DHSSPS	All Island Congenital Cardiac Service Model
DHSSPS	Delivery Improvement Hub
DHSSPS	My Mobile Health

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of the likely impact on the community background of the Civil Service of 20,000 redundancies.
(AQW 40958/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The Civil Service is not planning 20,000 redundancies.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, in reference to paragraph 3.61 of the Budget 2015/16, what is the comparison with Scotland in terms of the level of actual indebtedness, as opposed to the borrowing limit.
(AQW 40959/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The new borrowing powers available to the Scottish Government under the Scotland Act 2012 come into effect from 1 April 2015. It therefore follows that, at this point, Scotland does not currently have a level of indebtedness under these powers to compare to.

Ms Fearon asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail, for each of the last five years for which data is available, the (i) proportion; and (ii) value of food and drink sales exports (a) overseas; (b) to Britain; and (c) to the south of Ireland.
(AQW 40964/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: Exports data are available from the Regional Trade Statistics (RTS), which are produced by Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC). Table 1 attached shows the value and percentage of food and drink exports from Northern Ireland, to (a) overseas and (b) the Republic of Ireland (ROI) for the five year period 2009/10 – 2013/14.

As HMRC does not track trade between UK regions, the information requested on food and drink sales to Great Britain (GB) is sourced from the Department of Agriculture and Regional Development (DARD). Table 2 shows the data for the most recent five years available.

HMRC and DARD estimates are collected on a different basis and are not directly comparable.

Table 1: Value and proportion of Northern Ireland food and drink exports for selected destinations, 2009/10 -2013/14

	Overseas*		Republic of Ireland		Total Food & Drink exports £m
	value £m	% total	value £m	% total	
2013/14	330	25.8%	951	74.2%	1,281
2012/13	294	26.2%	827	73.8%	1,122
2011/12	315	27.0%	852	73.0%	1,166

	Overseas*		Republic of Ireland		Total Food & Drink exports £m
	value £m	% total	value £m	% total	
2010/11	276	26.7%	760	73.3%	1,036
2009/10	208	22.5%	718	77.5%	927

Source: Regional Trade Statistics, HMRC

*NI Sales outside the UK to the rest of the European Union (excluding ROI) and the Rest of the World

Table 2 Value of NI food and drinks processing sector sales to Great Britain

	Great Britain Food & Drink sales £m value £m
2012	1,711
2011	1,573
2010	1,530
2009	1,447
2008	1,324

Source: DARD

1 The figures in Table 2 exclude the sales of all food and drinks processing businesses with turnovers of less than £250,000.

2 A number of different definitions are available to describe what food and drinks processing encompasses. Table 2 relates to businesses that are involved in processing activities that change the nature of a raw material destined for human consumption. This differs from the standard industrial classification (SIC) definition, which is used to compile most Government's statistics on the manufacturing industry or its subsectors.

Mr Clarke asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on the progress of equal pay for (i) Northern Ireland Office staff; and (ii) PSNI civilian staff.
(AQW 40967/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: It has been established that there are no valid equal pay claims for both PSNI and NIO staff upon which to base a settlement. The paper I circulated to Executive colleagues before last summer recognises the moral argument put forward, and I hope it will satisfactorily resolve the issue for this group of staff.

However, my recommendation and any associated expenditure require the approval of the Executive and I therefore await the agreement of Executive colleagues for the paper to be brought forward for discussion. While I appreciate the frustration of staff affected by this issue, the matter is now in the hands of the Executive.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether the money received in the final Budget from the Change Fund by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and the Department for Employment and Learning for collaborative skills is being pooled between the Departments; and if not, to outline the reasons.
(AQW 41028/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The Collaborative Skills Change Fund allocation was distributed between the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and the Department for Employment and Learning and the details of the distribution can be found in the Annex of the 2015-16 Budget document.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (i) the locations on the Civil Service estate which have electric car charging points; (ii) the locations where he intends to install points over the next twelve months; and (iii) whether electric car charging points in the public sector estate are to be made available to all staff and visitors of those locations and be time limited.
(AQW 41031/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: Electric car charging points are currently installed at:-

a) Goodwood House, Belfast

b) Ballymena County Hall, Ballymena

c) Clarence Court, Belfast

Over the next 12 months it is intended to install electric car charging points at:-

a) Dundonald House, Stormont Estate, Belfast

b) Craigantlet Buildings, Stormont Estate, Belfast

c) Castle Buildings, Stormont Estate, Belfast

d) Stormont Cottages, Stormont Estate, Belfast

e) Clare House, Belfast

f) Clarence Court, Belfast

g) Rathgael House, Bangor

h) Marlborough House, Craigavon

i) Academy House, Ballymena

j) Inishkeen House, Enniskillen

k) Omagh County Hall, Omagh

l) Northland House, Belfast

Where electric car charge points are installed in the office estate, the current car park access arrangements will remain unchanged at each location. Management of charging spaces will be through local premises staff who currently have responsibility for management of each local car park. There are no plans to change current car park access arrangements.

Mr Clarke asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel (i) how much his Department pays annually for Trade Union officials; (ii) how many officials this payment covers; and (iii) what is the cost of administering Trade Union's dues.
(AQW 41061/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: In 2013-14 the Department paid £187k in salary costs in respect of Trade Union officials. The amount covers five Trade Union Representatives and administrative support of one staff member. It is not possible to provide the cost of administering Trade Union dues as it is not separately identifiable.

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the most recent rates arrears figures for the (i) Limavady; (ii) Ballymoney; (iii) Coleraine; and (iv) Moyle Borough Council areas.
(AQW 41120/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The amount of rate arrears at 31st March 2014 is provided in the table below.

District Council	Rate Arrears*
Limavady	£2,520,342
Ballymoney	£1,515,460
Coleraine	£4,240,862
Moyle	£973,372

*2013/14 figures subject to audit assurance.

Mrs Hale asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to AQW 36362/11-15, for an update on equal pay for PSNI and former Northern Ireland Office staff.
(AQW 41145/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: It has been established that there are no valid equal pay claims for both PSNI and NIO staff upon which to base a settlement. The paper I circulated to Executive colleagues before last summer recognises the moral argument put forward, and I hope it will satisfactorily resolve the issue for this group of staff.

However, my recommendation and any associated expenditure require the approval of the Executive and I therefore await the agreement of Executive colleagues for the paper to be brought forward for discussion. While I appreciate the frustration of staff affected by this issue, the matter is now in the hands of the Executive.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many responses were received to the public consultation on the draft 2015/16 Budget; and how these responses were considered in the short time period before his Department produced the Executive paper on the revised proposals.
(AQW 41165/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The overarching consultation on the 2015-16 Draft Budget received 19,050 responses. These responses were collated and analysed by DFP officials as they were received, with the first response received in early November 2014. A short summary of key consultation themes was provided to the Executive as part of their deliberations on the Final Budget.

In addition, individual departmental consultation received over 30,000 responses and these responses helped to form individual Minister's views on their departmental priorities.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what is the anticipated impact of the proposed exit scheme on natural wastage, at no added cost, over the next four years, given that those who might have retired in the normal process are now likely to wait for an exit package.
(AQW 41187/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: As there is no default retirement age in the NICS and the Voluntary Exit Scheme currently under development for the NICS is on a voluntary basis, it is not possible to predict any future likely impact on natural wastage, until applications are received and selected.

Mr Girvan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether the Department for Regional Development requested priority funding for the Ballyclare Relief Road in the last five years.
(AQW 41204/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The Department of Finance and Personnel has not received any priority funding requests from the Department for Regional Development in relation to the Ballyclare Relief Road in the last five years.

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to AQW 35745/11-15 and 39899/11-15, to detail (i) if the resolution of the long running issue in relation to equal pay for administration staff of the PSNI and others was discussed during recent budget negotiations; and (ii) when he expects this matter to be resolved.
(AQW 41302/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: It has been established that there are no valid equal pay claims for both PSNI and NIO staff upon which to base a settlement. The paper I circulated to Executive colleagues before last summer recognises the moral argument put forward, and I hope it will satisfactorily resolve the issue for this group of staff.

However, my recommendation and any associated expenditure require the approval of the Executive and I therefore await the agreement of Executive colleagues for the paper to be brought forward for discussion. While I appreciate the frustration of staff affected by this issue, the matter is now in the hands of the Executive.

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to AQW 35929/11-15, for an update on the progress of his Department's proposed settlement on equal pay for PSNI and Northern Ireland Office staff, following the circulation of the proposal to the Executive.
(AQW 41303/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: It has been established that there are no valid equal pay claims for both PSNI and NIO staff upon which to base a settlement. The paper I circulated to Executive colleagues before last summer recognises the moral argument put forward, and I hope it will satisfactorily resolve the issue for this group of staff.

However, my recommendation and any associated expenditure require the approval of the Executive and I therefore await the agreement of Executive colleagues for the paper to be brought forward for discussion. While I appreciate the frustration of staff affected by this issue, the matter is now in the hands of the Executive.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what progress is being made to address the equal pay issue of former Northern Ireland Office and PSNI staff within the Northern Ireland Civil Service.
(AQW 41356/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: It has been established that there are no valid equal pay claims for both PSNI and NIO staff upon which to base a settlement. The paper I circulated to Executive colleagues before last summer recognises the moral argument put forward, and I hope it will satisfactorily resolve the issue for this group of staff.

However, my recommendation and any associated expenditure require the approval of the Executive and I therefore await the agreement of Executive colleagues for the paper to be brought forward for discussion. While I appreciate the frustration of staff affected by this issue, the matter is now in the hands of the Executive.

Mr Irwin asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the non-departmental public bodies that have been required to pay (i) Corporation Tax; and (ii) penalties to HMRC in the last five years.
(AQW 41371/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: None of the Department of Finance & Personnel's non-departmental public bodies have paid corporation tax or penalties paid to HMRC in the last 5 years.

This response is provided for the Department of Finance and Personnel only as the information for all departments is not held centrally. The Member should contact individual departments for their information.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the current rates arrears in (i) North Down; and (ii) Ards Borough council areas; and the average arrears for Northern Ireland.
(AQW 41434/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The amount of rate arrears at 31st March 2014 is provided in the table below.

District Council	Rate Arrears*
North Down	£6,742,877
Ards	£4,906,662

*2013/14 figures subject to audit assurance.

Information is not available on the average arrears for Northern Ireland.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of the impact, particularly in the local construction industry, of the Onshore Employment Intermediaries: False Self-Employment legislation coming into effect.
(AQW 41524/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The legislation to reduce false self-employment was included in the UK 2014 Finance Act and came into effect on 6 April 2014.

While tax is a reserved matter, I appreciate that the legislation will have an impact on the local construction industry because of its reliance on subcontractor chains for the provision of labour.

Abuse of self-employment status damages local construction firms and construction workers. The legislation will benefit construction workers by ensuring that they receive the protection that employed status gives - protection such as holiday pay, sick pay, maternity pay and pensions. It also benefits our citizens, reducing the burden on them by ensuring that firms and individuals pay the tax they should.

However, I acknowledge that construction firms using self-employed workers may have increased reporting and tax withholding requirements. As with many tax requirements the penalties for non-compliance can be severe and, if incurred, could have a major impact on our smaller firms.

HM Revenue and Customs issued advice in 2011 on due diligence in the use of labour - only subcontractors. CPD brought this to the attention of the local construction industry through the Construction Industry Forum for Northern Ireland (CIFNI). CPD will highlight the current legislation to CIFNI at its next meeting on 2 April 2015.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether he has considered working with the Treasury to introduce National Savings and Investments pensioner bonds to Northern Ireland, as introduced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in 2014, and recently made available in Great Britain.
(AQW 41548/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The 65+ Guaranteed Growth Bonds (Pensioner Bonds) that were launched recently are already available to people living in Northern Ireland as long as they are aged 65+ and have a UK bank account.

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, in relation to the £70 million set aside to compensate for losses due to social welfare cuts, what Departments will face reductions as a result of this allocation.
(AQW 41567/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The Draft Budget 2015-16, published on 3 November 2014, provided for £70 million to be held centrally for a possible package of measures to mitigate the impact of welfare reform. This measure, as with all other non ring-fenced Resource DEL allocations made as part of the Draft Budget, was funded by the reductions that the Executive agreed should be applied to departments. These reductions form part of the overall departmental outcomes reflected in the Draft Budget 2015-16 document.

The Final Budget 2015-16, published on 19 January 2015, adjusted the amount held centrally for welfare reform mitigating measures to £26.9 million. This is based upon a revised estimate of cost and predicated on the implementation of welfare reform half way through the year. The funding released by this was then allocated to departments as part of the Final Budget process.

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what is the average salary in Northern Ireland.
(AQW 41617/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The median gross annual earnings for full-time employees at April 2014 was £24,020.

The median gross annual earnings for part-time employees at April 2014 was £8,624.

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the legislative process and timetable for devolving Corporation Tax to Northern Ireland; and whether the Northern Ireland Assembly will be required to pass legislation for this purpose.
(AQW 41632/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The Corporation Tax (Northern Ireland) Bill was introduced in the House of Commons on 8 January 2015. In line with the Stormont House Agreement, the passage of the Bill is conditional on implementation of key measures to deliver sustainable finances for Northern Ireland. On this basis, it is anticipated that the Bill will receive Royal Assent before dissolution of Parliament on 30 March 2015.

The legislation includes a commencement clause that will enable powers to transfer from April 2017 subject to the Northern Ireland Executive demonstrating its finances remain on a sustainable footing for the long term. Once the commencement clause has been exercised by the UK Government, the Northern Ireland Assembly will be enabled, by resolution, to set the Northern Ireland rate of Corporation Tax.

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the percentage of jobs that (i) are part time; and (ii) pay the minimum wage.
(AQW 41640/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The estimated percentage of employee jobs that are part time in Northern Ireland at September 2014 was 35.7%

The estimated percentage of adults (aged 21 or older) in part time jobs, which earned the minimum hourly rate of £6.31 at April 2014 was 10.4%.

Ms P Bradley asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on the equal pay settlement for civil servants who worked for the PSNI and the Northern Ireland Office.
(AQW 41645/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: It has been established that there are no valid equal pay claims for both PSNI and NIO staff upon which to base a settlement. The paper I circulated to Executive colleagues before last summer recognises the moral argument put forward, and I hope it will satisfactorily resolve the issue for this group of staff.

However, my recommendation and any associated expenditure require the approval of the Executive and I therefore await the agreement of Executive colleagues for the paper to be brought forward for discussion. While I appreciate the frustration of staff affected by this issue, the matter is now in the hands of the Executive.

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel when the Voluntary Exit Scheme will be initiated by the Executive.
(AQW 42005/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: Plans to develop a Voluntary Exit Scheme for the NICS are well advanced. The Executive agreed the preferred option at its meeting on 5 February and it is intended that the NICS Scheme will be launched on 2 March 2015.

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 40214/11-15, how the delays have impacted the Western Health Social Care Trust's budget.
(AQW 40977/11-15)

Mr Wells (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): I have been advised by the Western Health and Social Care Trust that cancellations do not impact significantly on the trust's overall financial position. Whilst cancellations typically occur within the context of service pressures in hospitals, patients who have had their treatment cancelled will be re-scheduled as per guidance contained within the Integrated Elective Access Protocol.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many Multiple Sclerosis patients are currently receiving Tysabri treatment in the (i) Belfast Health and Social Care Trust; and (ii) Western Health and Social Care Trust.
(AQW 41117/11-15)

Mr Wells: There are several different disease modifying drugs licensed for MS. Patients who meet the criteria are placed on a waiting list for NICE recommended disease modifying therapies rather than a specific product. Once the patient is ready to start treatment, they will be given information about the drugs available and discuss with their clinician which is the most appropriate for them.

At 31st December 2014, there were 29 people actively waiting for treatment for NICE recommended therapies for MS in Northern Ireland, all of whom were waiting less than 13 weeks. A breakdown of these by Trust of Residence is given below.

Trust of Residence	Number of Patients Waiting less than 13 weeks
Belfast Trust	6
Northern Trust	4
South Eastern Trust	6

Trust of Residence	Number of Patients Waiting less than 13 weeks
Southern Trust	5
Western Trust	8
Total	**29**

At 31st December 2014, there were 22 people receiving Tysabri treatment in the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust, and 20 people receiving Tysabri treatment in the Western Health and Social Care Trust.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether the Bangor Minor Injury Unit will remain open after April 2015.
(AQW 41137/11-15)

Mr Wells: The South Eastern Health and Social Trust has no plans to change the Bangor MIU service after April 2015. Any future proposed change to this service would be undertaken within my Department's policy guidance concerning changes to or withdrawal of services.

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of urology patients per consultant in each Health and Social Care Trust in each of the last five years.
(AQW 41157/11-15)

Mr Wells: The HSC Trusts have provided headcount and whole-time equivalent (WTE) numbers for Urology consultants in the last five years, shown in the tables below. Depending on Trust, either a number of consultant referrals or a combined figure of patients contributing to new/review outpatient attendances, inpatient admissions and day case activity have been used to approximate a patient count. Note that this means that some patients may be counted more than once in a given year. These factors, combined with the use in some Trusts of visiting and sessional consultants from other Trusts, means that a 'patients per consultant' comparison between Trusts cannot be inferred. Official Statistics on the hospital activity that patients generate can be found on the Department's website, by specialty, at: http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/statistics/hospital.htm

Belfast HSC Trust

Year	Headcount	WTE	Patients
2010	7	7.0	13,896
2011	7	7.0	13,791
2012	7	7.0	13,400
2013	8	8.0	14,599
2014	8	8.0	14,229

Belfast Trust's patient figures relate to the number of patients contributing to new/review outpatient attendances, inpatient admissions and day case activity. Belfast Trust consultants also provide services to Northern and South Eastern Trusts

Northern HSC Trust

Year	Headcount	WTE	Patients
2010	2 then 3 from November	2.00 then 3.00 from November	2,906
2011	3	3.00	3,236
2012	3 then 2 from October	3.00 then 2.00 from October	3,616
2013	2	2.00	4,316
2014	2	2.00	3,986

In the 2012 year, a consultant left the Trust in October 2012 and this post has been substantively vacant since that time. Consultant urology provision in the Northern Trust is also currently being managed through arrangements with Western and Belfast Trusts. The Northern Trust's patient figures are based on the number of referrals to consultants.

South Eastern HSC Trust

Year	Headcount	WTE	Patients
2010	4	3.5	5,424
2011	4	3.5	6,879

Year	Headcount	WTE	Patients
2012	4	3.5	6,772
2013	4	3.1	6,615
2014	5	3.6	6,035

The South Eastern Trust staffing figures for 2010-12 and 2014 include 0.5 WTE provided by a sessional visiting consultant from the Belfast Trust. Patient figures for South Eastern Trust are based on inpatient, day case and outpatient activity.

Southern HSC Trust

Year	Headcount	WTE	Patients
2010	3	3.0	6,731
2011	2 from Jan-Aug then 3	2.0 from Jan-Aug then 3.0	9,320
2012	4	4.0	10,090
2013	4	4.0	11,078
2014	5 until August 2014 then 6	5 until August 2014 then 6.0	12,653

Patient figures for the Southern Trust are based on inpatient deaths and discharges, day cases and outpatient activity.

Western HSC Trust

Year	Headcount	WTE	Patients
2010	2	2.0	2,496
2011	2	2.0	2,853
2012	2	2.0	3,603
2013	3	3.0	3,645
2014	3	3.0	4,184

The Western HSC Trust notes that its patient figures are based on the number of referrals to consultants. Western Trust consultants also provide services to Northern Trust.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 40033/11-15, whether his Department holds personal bank details of the scales of income and wealth of clients who contribute to their social care.
(AQW 41181/11-15)

Mr Wells: In line with the DHSSPS publication "Charging for Residential Accommodation Guide", Health and Social Care Trusts are required to carry out a financial assessment of clients' scale of income and wealth. In order to do so, evidence of clients' bank statements are required to validate the savings figure at the time of admission.

Actual bank account details are only held in each individual client file. These details are stored and accessed in accordance with the Trusts' data protection policy.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 40033/11-15, for a breakdown of the other income from non-patient services identified as contributions from external income.
(AQW 41183/11-15)

Mr Wells: The table below provides a breakdown of these income lines by HSC Trust for 2012/13:

	Other Income from non-patient services £m	Other Income £m
Belfast HSC Trust	38.5	7.8
Northern HSC Trust	14.2	-
Northern Ireland Ambulance Service	0.3	-
South Eastern HSC Trust	8.1	4.1
Southern HSC Trust	8.9	1.5
Western HSC Trust	10.2	-

	Other Income from non-patient services £m	Other Income £m
	80.3	13.5

The Trusts' Financial Returns do not require these categories of income to be broken down further by sub-heading. However, they typically include income for services that do not include episodes of patient care, examples of which include: pharmacy, laboratory and theatre services provided to other organisations; donations; government/lottery grants; R&D income; premises income eg rents received; food and catering income; car parking charges; and recouping the cost of staff seconded to other organisations.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 40033/11-15, for a breakdown of the other income identified as contributions from external income.
(AQW 41184/11-15)

Mr Wells: The table below provides a breakdown of these income lines by HSC Trust for 2012/13:

	Other Income from non-patient services £m	Other Income £m
Belfast HSC Trust	38.5	7.8
Northern HSC Trust	14.2	-
Northern Ireland Ambulance Service	0.3	-
South Eastern HSC Trust	8.1	4.1
Southern HSC Trust	8.9	1.5
Western HSC Trust	10.2	-
	80.3	13.5

The Trusts' Financial Returns do not require these categories of income to be broken down further by sub-heading. However, they typically include income for services that do not include episodes of patient care, examples of which include: pharmacy, laboratory and theatre services provided to other organisations; donations; government/lottery grants; R&D income; premises income eg rents received; food and catering income; car parking charges; and recouping the cost of staff seconded to other organisations.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the programme of training for Health Service staff on recognising the signs of human trafficking.
(AQW 41263/11-15)

Mr Wells: Substantial guidance has been developed to support staff working in Health and Social Care to recognise the signs of Human Trafficking. This includes: "Working arrangements for the welfare and safeguarding of child victims/suspected victims of human trafficking", published by DHSSPS and the Police Service of Northern Ireland in February 2011; "Working arrangements for the welfare and protection of adult victims of human trafficking", published by DHSSPS and the Department of Justice in October 2012; and "Pathway for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of separated children" launched by DHSSPS in November 2013.

Belfast, South Eastern and Southern Trusts have delivered training for staff on how to recognise the signs of human trafficking. This topic is also addressed in all training provided by HSC Trusts on Safeguarding Children and is to be incorporated into future training on Adult Safeguarding.

In addition, awareness training and/or specialist training is provided for social workers, as appropriate to their duties, and within the curriculum of the Degree in Social Work sponsored by the Department.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the current number of General Practice surgeries.
(AQW 41267/11-15)

Mr Wells: There are currently 350 general practices across Northern Ireland serving a population of £1.8m. While the number of GP Practices has decreased by 7 over the last five years this is primarily as a result of GP Practices merging together.

NI currently has the lowest average practice list size across the UK with 5,474 whilst Scotland is 5,566; Wales is 6,759; and England is 7,034.

I can confirm that any patient wishing to register with a general practice within Northern Ireland is able to do so.

The HSCB keeps the overall capacity of general practice under review and develops enhanced services, as necessary, to increase capacity in response to demand. During 2014/15 the HSCB has made available £800k of additional investment for a Northern Ireland Local Enhanced Service for Additional Surgeries. This service will run from 1st November 2014 to 31st March 2015 enabling GP Practices to provide additional surgeries, either in hours or in the evenings, or to put in place initiatives to manage acute demand and home visits for their patients.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of General Practice surgeries in each of the last five years; and how his Department is encouraging young doctors to enter the GP workforce.
(AQW 41268/11-15)

Mr Wells: The number of general practices by year is as follows;

Year	Number of practices
April 2014	350
April 2013	351
April 2012	353
April 2011	353
April 2010	357

Whilst the number of practices has reduced, this is primarily as a result of GP Practices merging together.

The number of applications for GP training places in NI regularly far exceeds the number of actual places. In the latest round of applications for courses there were 185 applications for a total of 65 training places which is comparable to the demand experienced for GP training in London.

Under the remit of the regional workforce planning group a medical workforce planning subgroup was established to develop a suite of medical workforce plans, including for GPs, for the five-year period 2013-14 to 2018-19. The GP medical workforce group included representatives of the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB), the Northern Ireland Medical and Dental Training Agency, the Northern Ireland General Practitioners Committee, the Royal College of GPs and my Department. In addition, the HSCB has undertaken further work specifically examining potential initiatives aimed at improving the recruitment and retention of trained GPs.

No final decisions will be taken until the Department has considered the findings of those reviews. Increasing the number of GP trainees would, of course, require increased funding, and any decisions would need to take account of the overall financial position of my Department.

Mr Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the support services, including overnight refuge provision, available to male victims of domestic violence in Foyle.
(AQW 41272/11-15)

Mr Wells: A range of support services are available regionally for male victims of domestic violence: the 24 Hour Domestic and Sexual Violence Helpline; Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences; Victim Support NI and the Men's Advisory Project which provides confidential counselling, information and referral services to men experiencing domestic abuse and relationship breakdown. In the Foyle area specifically, Men's Action Network supports male victims of domestic violence by offering advice, counselling and support.

The Department for Social Development has advised that there are currently no housing services specifically for male victims of domestic violence in the Foyle Area. However, the NI Housing Executive is currently in discussions with Foyle Women's Aid around the development of a number of new services in Londonderry and is exploring options around the introduction of accommodation based support services specifically for men.

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) how his Department is ensuring local audiology services are adequately resourced to meet the growing demand within communities; (ii) the current waiting times for audiology services; (iii) what consideration he has given to directing the Health and Social Care Board and Health and Social Care Trusts to publish waiting times for audiology services; and (iv) whether he will implement Quality Standards in Audiology as a matter of urgency, to help arrest the decline of audiology services and to support the thousands of local people with hearing loss.
(AQW 41295/11-15)

Mr Wells:

(i) Across Northern Ireland demand for audiology services exceeds the capacity that HSC Trusts have to deliver though 5 audiology posts. This is predominately in the Northern HSC Trust and the South Eastern HSC Trust. The Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) has plans in place with both Trusts that will address these gaps and this will ensure that the audiology service across Northern Ireland is fully resourced to meet the demand for services.

It should be noted however that currently there is a recruitment and retention difficulty with audiologists across Northern Ireland and as a result Trusts have a number of vacant posts, resulting in longer waiting times for patients.

(ii) Information on the number of patients waiting more than 9 weeks from referral to assessment at 31 December 2014 is detailed in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Patients Waiting from referral to Assessment at 31 December 2014

HSC Trust	Total waiters	Waiters > 9 weeks
Belfast	346	2
Northern	788	484
South Eastern	1,056	552
Southern	357	0
Western	783	473
Northern Ireland	3,330	1,511

Source: Health and Social Care (HSC) Board

Information on the number of patients waiting more than 13 weeks from assessment to fitting of a hearing aid at 31 December 2014 is detailed in Table 2 below:

Table 2: Patients Waiting from Assessment to Fitting of Hearing Aid at 31 December 2014

HSC Trust	Total waiters	Waiters > 13 weeks
Belfast	86	0
Northern	2,095	1,111
South Eastern	945	229
Southern	215	0
Western	203	20
Northern Ireland	3,544	1,360

Source: Health and Social Care (HSC) Board

My Department currently publishes information on patients waiting for an audiology (pure tone audiometry) diagnostic service by weeks waiting. This information is published quarterly by Hospital Information Branch (HIB) in the 'Northern Ireland Waiting Time Statistics:

(iii) Diagnostic Waiting Times' statistical bulletin and is available on the DHSSPS website at the following link: http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/statistics/hospital/waitingtimes/waitingtimes-diagnostic.htm

My Department is currently assessing newly developed information on waiting times for hearing aids and when considered as being of robust quality, it will be published as official statistics.

(iv) The HSCB and Health and Social Care Trusts (HSCTs) adopted the Adult Quality Standards for Audiology Services in 2013 to develop a process of measurable service improvement across Northern Ireland.

The implementation of the Adult Quality Standards by HSCTs was expected to take 3 years with improvements initially focussing on the quality of the patient experience; the development of improved pathways; and more efficient ways of delivering care. This has also included effective triage and a straight to diagnostic test to help deliver streamlined pathways. The pace of implementation has been slower than expected, due to a number of factors; most significantly recruitment and retention issues in respect of audiology staff. However, HSCTs remain fully committed to the implementation process.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment on the progress of the Autism Strategy.
(AQW 41314/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Autism Strategy is being progressed through the Autism Strategy Inter-departmental Senior Officials Group, which is chaired by the DHSSPS. An Action Plan is in place and implementation is being overseen by a Regional Multi-Agency Implementation Team. This team met initially in November 2014 and its focus has been on information sharing and establishing access to awareness training across all sectors. As carer/service-user and community/voluntary sector representation is key to progress, it is intended to hold an event in the coming weeks to advance this aspect.

The Autism Act (NI) 2011 states that the DHSSPS must prepare and lay a monitoring report on the implementation of the Strategy before the Assembly not more than three years after the publication of the Strategy and at least every three years thereafter. Based on these timescales an initial report will be made to the Assembly before 14 January 2017. However, it is intended that an annual update on overall progress of the Strategy, with cross-Departmental and inter-agency input, will be produced at the end of each financial year and I will ensure that this is shared with the Assembly.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for a breakdown of audiology service waiting times in relation to (i) the total number of patients; (ii) the number of patients waiting beyond the nine week referral for assessment; and (iii) the number of patients waiting beyond 13 weeks from assessment to treatment, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust, in the last three years.
(AQW 41316/11-15)

Mr Wells: Information on audiology service waiting times was requested from the Health and Social Care (HSC) Board. Information on the number of patients waiting more than nine weeks from referral to assessment is detailed in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Number of Patients Waiting from Referral to Assessment

	At 31 March 2012		At 31 March 2013		At 31 March 2014		At 31 December 2014	
HSC Trust	Total Waiting	Waiting > 9 weeks	Total Waiting	Waiting > 9 weeks	Total Waiting	Waiting > 9 weeks	Total Waiting	Waiting > 9 weeks
Belfast	197	0	385	0	498	0	346	2
Northern	165	0	227	0	307	0	788	484
South Eastern	76	20	329	12	708	193	1,056	552
Southern	453	0	526	0	481	0	357	0
Western	137	0	225	0	337	80	783	473

Source: Health and Social Care (HSC) Board

Information on the number of patients waiting more than thirteen weeks from assessment to fitting of a hearing aid is detailed in Table 2 below:

Table 2: Number of Patients Waiting from Assessment to Fitting of Hearing Aid

	At 30 April 2012		At 31 March 2013		At 31 March 2014		At 31 December 2014	
HSC Trust	Total Waiting	Waiting >13 weeks	Total Waiting	Waiting >13 weeks	Total Waiting	Waiting > 13 weeks	Total Waiting	Waiting > 13 weeks
Belfast	51	0	136	0	133	0	86	0
Northern	528	49	692	33	1,237	311	2,095	1,111
South Eastern	940	52	897	4	900	82	945	229
Southern	238	0	254	0	249	0	215	0
Western	176	0	162	0	262	60	203	20

Source: Health and Social Care (HSC) Board

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for a breakdown of current waiting times for all advance radiotherapy for cancer sufferers in Health and Social Care Trust, in each of the last twelve months.
(AQW 41318/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Belfast HSC Trust is the only Trust delivering advanced radiotherapy treatment (stereotactic ablative body radiotherapy, SABR) in Northern Ireland. This treatment is delivered in the Northern Ireland Cancer Centre for treatment of radical lung cancers, although the Northern Ireland Cancer Centre also refers patients with a range of brain conditions to England for stereotactic radiotherapy in England via the Extra Contractual Referral (ECR) process.

At the week beginning Monday 26th January 2015 there were fewer than five patients waiting to start SABR lung treatment, the majority of these were waiting longer than 31 days for treatment.

In each of the months for the period January 2014 to December 2014 there were between 0 and 6 patients waiting to receive SABR lung treatment. A number of these patients received treatment within 31 days however the majority waited for longer than 31 days. The Belfast HSC Trust has advised that patients attend for radiotherapy planning within 7 days of the decision to treat date. The waiting time to start of treatment reflects the complexity of the treatment; the time required to plan and quality check individual treatment plans.

Given the small numbers of patients receiving SABR lung treatment it has not been possible to provide a further breakdown of current waiting times, as this may compromise patient confidentiality.

Waiting times for patients referred to England for stereotactic radiotherapy via the Extra Contractual Referral (ECR) process are not recorded by the Belfast HSC Trust.

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the cost of prescribing a standard prescription of Aspirin, in each Health and Social Care Trust.
(AQW 41322/11-15)

Mr Wells: The cost of dispensing a standard prescription for Aspirin in primary care in Northern Ireland can be estimated using the Northern Ireland Drug Tariff cost for the item plus the dispensing fee paid to community pharmacy contractors. The actual cost of a prescription depends on the dosage, quantity and type of Aspirin prescribed. However, by way of example the cost of a prescription for 32 Aspirin 300mg Dispersible Tablets is £1.04 for the drug costs plus £0.98 dispensing fee paid to the community pharmacy contractor. There is an allowance of 4.43p per prescription for the work of coding prescriptions for the purposes of payment.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust authorised internal alterations to the new build at Bangor Hospital and taken delivery of '5 real leather sofas' and microwaves when Bangor Hospital GP Ward has just closed due to lack of funding.
(AQW 41338/11-15)

Mr Wells: Refurbishment and extension of the Bleakley Wing at Bangor Hospital was necessary in order to amalgamate Bleakley Wing staff teams with staff who were in rented accommodation at Balloo Industrial Estate. This action was taken as part of the South Eastern Trust's estates rationalisation and exit plan from leased property and as such, is a separate matter from the utilisation of GP beds in Bangor.

The accommodation in Bangor Hospital is designed to meet the DHSSPS's estates guidance note on new ways of working relating to open plan offices, meeting rooms, interview rooms, social spaces and tea points. Part of the furniture for the waiting areas and social spaces included soft sitting in the form of five plastic/leather lookalike sofas. Microwaves replaced cookers in the tea/staff room areas.

The SE Trust has informed me that this new working environment has been welcomed by staff, management and users.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the cost of the Sir Liam Donaldson report; and provide a breakdown of same.
(AQW 41360/11-15)

Mr Wells: The total cost, at this time, of the Donaldson report is £116,750, broken down as follows:

Professional fees(1)	£100,250
Travel, accommodation and other expenses	£16,500
Total	**£116,750**

Note (1) – Professor Sir Liam Donaldson, Dr Paul Rutter and Professor Michael Henderson

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 39586/11-15, to detail (i) why he has no plans to reduce the number of Health and Social Care Trusts currently in operation when, according to Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, the current population of Northern Ireland is 1.84m, whilst several single Health Trusts in England serve a larger population; (ii) his assessment of the potential financial and administrative savings which would result from consolidating the six existing Health and Social Care Trusts into one entity; and (iii) whether he will consider revising the terms of reference for the ongoing review of health spending to include an economic assessment of the optimum number of Health and Social Care Trusts for the population of Northern Ireland.
(AQW 41379/11-15)

Mr Wells: My Department has overseen two major structural changes to the Health and Social Care system within the last 8 years under the Review of Public Administration. In April 2007 the current model of 5 integrated HSC Trusts one NI Ambulance Trust was created. In April 2009 the Health and Social Care Board, Public Health Agency, Business Services Organisation and Patient and Client Council were established. In this context, I believe that the focus of the ongoing review should remain on how the structures work together, rather than a more fundamental review.

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the evaluation of the Individual Funding Request process, due to be completed at the end of 2014.
(AQW 41381/11-15)

Mr Wells: I plan to release the key findings of the evaluation of the IFR process shortly.

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he (i) intends to put in place plans for adequately resourced audiology services; (ii) will direct the Health and Social Care Board and Health and Social Care Trusts to publish waiting times for audiology services; and (iii) will implement Quality Standards in Audiology as a matter of urgency, to help arrest the decline of audiology services and to help the thousands of local people with hearing loss.
(AQW 41383/11-15)

Mr Wells:

(i) Across Northern Ireland demand for audiology services exceeds the capacity that HSC Trusts have to deliver by 5 audiology posts. This is predominately in the Northern HSC Trust and the South Eastern HSC Trust. The Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) has plans in place with both Trusts that will address these gaps and this will ensure that the audiology service across Northern Ireland is fully resourced to meet the demand for services.

It should be noted however that currently there is a recruitment and retention difficulty with audiologists across Northern Ireland and as a result Trusts have a number of vacant posts, resulting in longer waiting times for patients.

My Department currently publishes information on patients waiting for an audiology (pure tone audiometry) diagnostic service by weeks waiting. This information is published quarterly by Hospital Information Branch (HIB) in the 'Northern Ireland Waiting Time Statistics:

(ii) Diagnostic Waiting Times' statistical bulletin and is available on the DHSSPS website at the following link: http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/statistics/hospital/waitingtimes/waitingtimes-diagnostic.htm

My Department is currently assessing newly developed information on waiting times for hearing aids and when considered as being of robust quality, it will be published as official statistics.

(iii) The HSCB and Health and Social Care Trusts (HSCTs) adopted the Adult Quality Standards for Audiology Services in 2013 to develop a process of measurable service improvement across Northern Ireland.

The implementation of the Adult Quality Standards by HSCTs was expected to take 3 years with improvements initially focussing on the quality of the patient experience; the development of improved pathways; and more efficient ways of delivering care. This has also included effective triage and a straight to diagnostic test to help deliver streamlined pathways. The pace of implementation has been slower than expected, due to a number of factors; most significantly recruitment and retention issues in respect of audiology staff. However, HSCTs remain fully committed to the implementation process.

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many specialists, who work with adults with autism, can conduct assessments and issue appropriate diagnoses following referral, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust. **(AQW 41410/11-15)**

Mr Wells: The headcount and whole-time equivalent (WTE) numbers and roles of HSC Trust staff specialising in working with adult clients with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) are shown in the tables below. Where their time is split with other types of clients, the WTE shown is that which is dedicated to adults with ASD.

Belfast HSC Trust

Grade	Headcount	WTE
Consultant Clinical Psychologist	1	0.4
Clinical Psychologist	1	0.5
Occupational therapist	1	0.5
Psychiatrist	1	0.025

The Belfast Trust notes that their Adult Learning Disability team has a specialist clinical psychologist, a speech and language therapist and an occupational therapist who can complement the Adult ASD Team above for a small amount of time, depending on other pressures in their system. A second Consultant clinical psychologist working in Adult Mental Health Primary Care also has expertise and can provide some cover.

Northern HSC Trust

Grade	Headcount	WTE
Speech & Language Therapist (Learning Disability)	1	0.1
Clinical Psychologist (Learning Disability)	1	0.1
Principal Clinical Psychologist	1	0.6
Clinical Psychologist	1	0.1
Occupational Therapist	1	0.2
ASD Co-ordinator	1	0.1
Consultant Psychiatrist	1	0.025

The Northern Trust notes that the 0.025 WTE for the consultant psychiatrist equates to one session per month.

Southern HSC Trust

The Southern HSC Trust reports that it does not employ any specialists who work with adults who can undertake this role.

South Eastern HSC Trust

Grade	Headcount	WTE
Consultant Clinical Psychologist	1	0.2
Psychological Therapist	1	1.0
Specialist Occupational Therapist	1	0.7
Associate Psychologist	1	0.5

These figures relate to the South Eastern Trust's specialist Adult Autism Service which operates a multidisciplinary assessment process, conducts assessments and provides diagnosis based upon recommendations outlined in the RASDN Regional Guidelines. The Trust notes that it also provides a broad range of services through its Adults' Services, Primary Care and Older Peoples' Directorates. Staff in these services may also provide assessment and diagnosis for individuals who do not require referral to the specialist Autism Service.

Western HSC Trust

Grade	Headcount	WTE/Days Worked
Clinical Psychologist	1	1.0 WTE
Consultant Psychiatrist	1	1.0 WTE
Consultant Psychologist	1	1 day per month

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the role of (i) voluntary sector organisations; and (ii) Health and Social Care Trusts, in providing respite services to parents.
(AQW 41429/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Community/Voluntary sector (CVS) has a key role in supporting a wide range of individuals and their families. The HSC Board and Trusts commission a wide range of services from the CVS including those services related to short breaks/respite. The range of services available provides a more flexible response for families and is seen as going beyond the traditional model of residential respite.

Short Breaks has been subject to recent review undertaken by the RQIA and the HSC Board is currently taking forward a response to the recommendations contained within this review (http://www.rqia.org.uk/cms_resources/Respite_Rep_FINALREPORT_ISBN_.pdf). In addition, the NI Assembly Research and Information Service has completed a briefing paper in relation to Short Breaks for Families of Children with Disability (NIAR 825-13) which provides a comprehensive overview of practice in NI and across the rest of the UK.

With an ageing population, there is a need for the consideration of the needs of older parents caring for an adult with a disability. In such cases the individual needs of the carer and person cared for require to be assessed in terms of ensuring a person centred response. The HSC Board and Trusts are currently seeking to increase the number of carers' assessments offered and undertaken across all programmes of care. The HSC Board and Trusts have also developed a regional project to further develop initiatives such as Direct Payments, personalised budgets and enhancement of the Self Directed Support model which should offer broader choice and control for carers, including respite/short breaks.

This work, as noted in Transforming Your Care, is currently on-going and a Regional and Trust project structure has been developed. The aim of this work is to create a broader model of service provision and greater emphasis on choice for carers. Such a model is already well established in Great Britain.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how Health and Social Care Trusts maintain updated registers of children who have a disability.
(AQW 41430/11-15)

Mr Wells: Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts do not maintain registers of children who have a disability. However, they have a range of information systems which record children with a disability who are known to particular services. Their key information system is the Child Health Information System which has the capacity to record a number of relevant areas of information in respect of children with a disability.

In addition, the Children's Services Improvement Board (CSIB) has established a work stream to review the current information systems used within HSC Trusts with a view to ensuring regional consistency and the validation of information. CSIB membership includes all HSC Trusts, the Health and Social Care Board and DHSSPS.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he has accepted recommendation 1 in the Liam Donaldson report.
(AQW 41445/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Donaldson report recommendations' are far reaching in their implications and I want to take time to give full consideration to a number of them including recommendation 1. Given the significance of these recommendations I also want to ensure that stakeholders across Northern Ireland have the opportunity to give their views and participate in a debate about how we take forward health and care services in the future.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 39938/11-15, whether he can provide an assurance that any proposed cuts in services impacting 'frontline' care provision will be open to public consultation and equality screening.
(AQW 41447/11-15)

Mr Wells: In submitting their savings plans for 2015/16, Health and Social Care Trusts and the Health and Social Care Board have been asked to give consideration to whether any proposals they put forward may require public consultation, screening or impact assessments to be carried out in line with the requirements of their respective Personal and Public Involvement (PPI) Schemes.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 40484/11-15, why the information was not available in the format requested.
(AQW 41448/11-15)

Mr Wells: Information relating to domiciliary care clients, client visits and contact hours over the course of the year is not routinely collected and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Information on the number of clients receiving domiciliary care services and the number of domiciliary care contact hours in Northern Ireland during a survey week is published annually. For the purposes of this survey, the independent sector refers to all services provided by private and voluntary agencies under contract from Health and Social Care Trusts.

This and further information on domiciliary care is published in the 'Domiciliary Care Services for Adults in Northern Ireland' statistical bulletin and can be found on the DHSSPS website at the following link:

http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/statistics/socialcare/domiciliary-care.htm

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 40484/11-15, whether the independent sector category covers the private sector and the community and voluntary sector.
(AQW 41449/11-15)

Mr Wells: Information relating to domiciliary care clients, client visits and contact hours over the course of the year is not routinely collected and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Information on the number of clients receiving domiciliary care services and the number of domiciliary care contact hours in Northern Ireland during a survey week is published annually. For the purposes of this survey, the independent sector refers to all services provided by private and voluntary agencies under contract from Health and Social Care Trusts.

This and further information on domiciliary care is published in the 'Domiciliary Care Services for Adults in Northern Ireland' statistical bulletin and can be found on the DHSSPS website at the following link:

http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/statistics/socialcare/domiciliary-care.htm

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the specific actions his Department has taken to ensure families have adequate access to child-minding provision for children with autism.
(AQW 41450/11-15)

Mr Wells: A number of actions taken forward by my Department in recent years have supported improved access to childcare for children with a disability, including those with an autistic spectrum disorder.

Through Bright Start, my Department was able to secure £500k funding to support a range of initiatives to improve access to childcare for children with a disability. This included the provision of small grants and disability awareness training which allowed childcare providers, including childminders, to secure specialist equipment and training. There was a particularly high uptake from child care providers and childminders who were looking to support ASD children.

The Family Support NI website (www.familysupportni.gov.uk) was developed with funding from my Department's Families Matter Strategy, while information around Autism services on the site has been enhanced in line with the Autism Strategy.

An enhanced childcare search and App for all major smart phones and tablet devices have been developed using funding through Bright Start and my Department's Families Matter Strategy. This enables parents to search for registered and approved childcare across Northern Ireland, specifying a range of criteria which they require including a providers experience of supporting children with a disability.

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much has been spent on taxis by each of the Health and Social Care Trusts in the last five years.
(AQW 41453/11-15)

Mr Wells: Expenditure by HSC Trusts on taxis in each of the last five financial years is set out in the table below; this expenditure includes costs for private taxis and bus hire companies.

Taxis are used for a variety of reasons. Most of the expenditure is incurred on the transport of vulnerable patients and clients, particularly children in care and adults with a physical or learning disability.

The use of taxis by Health and Social Care Trusts is planned and monitored.

	2013/14 £	2012/13 £	2011/12 £	2010/11 £	2009/10 £
Belfast Health & Social Care Trust	778,000	802,000	798,000	646,000	856,000
Northern Health & Social Care Trust	885,842	908,348	775,595	859,540	989,296
South Eastern Health & Social Care Trust	1,007,027	934,412	1,014,604	879,178	912,674
Southern Health & Social Care Trust	890,484	999,544	901,737	994,793	1,180,437
Western Health & Social Care Trust	739,455	774,777	867,166	1,023,710	1,187,005
NI Ambulance Service HSCT	347,718	405,990	357,733	242,468	220,140
Total	**4,648,526**	**4,023,071**	**3,916,835**	**3,999,689**	**4,489,552**

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the current usage of spot purchased beds for intermediate care in each Health and Social Care Trust.
(AQW 41480/11-15)

Mr Wells: The information requested is not held centrally and was therefore requested from Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts. Their responses can be found below.

Belfast HSC Trust

The Trust do not spot purchase intermediate care beds.

Northern HSC Trust

The Trust was spot purchasing 35 beds at 30 January 2015.

South Eastern HSC Trust

The Trust was spot purchasing 39 beds at 2 February 2015.

Southern HSC Trust

In 2014/15, up until the end of December 2014, the Trust was spot purchasing an average of 23.3 nursing home beds and 8.8 residential beds on any given day.

Western HSC Trust

The Trust do not spot purchase intermediate care beds.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how Health and Social Care Trusts obtain spot purchased beds for intermediate care.
(AQW 41481/11-15)

Mr Wells: Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts are required to commission all care home placements in line with guidelines set out within Departmental Circular HSC ECCU 1/2010 Care Management, Provision of Services and Charging Guidance (http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/hsc-eccu-1-2010.pdf.). The terms and conditions of the services provided by care homes are contained in the Regional Residential and Nursing Home Specification and Contract between HSC Trust and care home providers.

Those Trusts that do spot purchase independent sector intermediate care beds, the Northern Trust, the Southern Trust and the South Eastern Trust, have confirmed that they strive to secure beds at the regional Independent Care Home Tariff Rate that is set by the HSC Board. The rates for the 2014/15 financial year are as follows: Residential Care Home - £461 per week, and Nursing Home - £581 per week.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is the average cost to Health and Social Care Trusts of a spot purchased bed for intermediate care.
(AQW 41482/11-15)

Mr Wells: Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts are required to commission all care home placements in line with guidelines set out within Departmental Circular HSC ECCU 1/2010 Care Management, Provision of Services and Charging Guidance (http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/hsc-eccu-1-2010.pdf.). The terms and conditions of the services provided by care homes are contained in the Regional Residential and Nursing Home Specification and Contract between HSC Trust and care home providers.

Those Trusts that do spot purchase independent sector intermediate care beds, the Northern Trust, the Southern Trust and the South Eastern Trust, have confirmed that they strive to secure beds at the regional Independent Care Home Tariff Rate that is set by the HSC Board. The rates for the 2014/15 financial year are as follows: Residential Care Home - £461 per week, and Nursing Home - £581 per week.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is the average cost of independent provider beds with GP medical support for intermediate care.
(AQW 41483/11-15)

Mr Wells: The medical care provided for an intermediate care bed is outside of the General Medical Services (GMS) contract. The medical management of patients in intermediate care beds remains with the HSC Trusts through employing or purchasing their own medical staff or sessions.

The Northern Trust, the Southern Trust and the South Eastern Trust have confirmed that they strive to secure independent provider beds at the regional Independent Care Home Tariff Rate that is set by the HSC Board. The rates for the 2014/15 financial year are as follows: Residential Care Home - £461 per week and Nursing Home - £581 per week. The Belfast Trust has advised that they commission independent provider interim beds to aid in timely discharge from hospital in the care planning process and rehabilitation beds which provide further specialised treatment to patients prior to return to home. These beds cost between £630 and £670.50 per bed per week.

The Western Trust does not commission independent provider beds for intermediate care.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the current usage in each Health and Social Care Trust of independent provider beds with GP medical support.
(AQW 41484/11-15)

Mr Wells: Clients requiring use of an independent provider bed are accommodated under the provision of the General Medical Services (GMS) contract by their own GP.

Information on the current number of independent provider beds in use is not available. However, information on the number of residential and nursing home care packages in effect in the independent sector is available and can be found in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Number of residential and nursing home care packages in effect in the independent sector at quarter ending 31 December 2014*.

HSC Trust	Quarter ending 31-Dec-14
Belfast	2,487
Northern	2,769
South Eastern	2,206
Southern	2,185
Western	1,773
Northern Ireland	11,420

Source: CC7 Community Information Return

*The independent sector is composed of both private and voluntary care providers.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to what extent do each of the Health and Social Care Trusts comply with the RM1599 Procurement Framework during the tendering process in relation to MFDs and Printing services.
(AQW 41516/11-15)

Mr Wells: Multi-functional devices (MFDs) are in common use throughout Health & Social Care organisations. In some cases they are procured on a stand-alone basis and in others, they are procured as part of a wider managed service, which includes all costs associated with their operation.

RM1599 is a framework let by Crown Commercial Services (CCS) for, inter alia, MFDs. As RM1599 is a framework and not a contract, there is no obligation for a particular public body to use it. Trusts are therefore free to put local arrangements in place.

The only Trust to have currently put a contract in place by way of RM1599, is the South Eastern Health & Social Care Trust.

Belfast HSC Trust currently procures its MFD needs through the Technology Partner Agreement – this is a framework for ICT goods and services in place between HSC and Hewlett Packard. However, the Trust is currently developing a business case with a view to moving to a MFD managed service contract. This contract is likely to be procured under framework RM1599 and will be subject to the terms of that framework.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the tenders accepted by the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust regarding MFDs and printing supplies; and whether these tenders have adhered to the RM1599 procurement framework.
(AQW 41517/11-15)

Mr Wells: Multi-functional devices (MFDs) are in common use throughout Health & Social Care organisations. In some cases they are procured on a stand-alone basis and in others, they are procured as part of a wider managed service, which includes all costs associated with their operation.

RM1599 is a framework let by Crown Commercial Services (CCS) for, inter alia, MFDs. As RM1599 is a framework and not a contract, there is no obligation for a particular public body to use it. Trusts are therefore free to put local arrangements in place.

The only Trust to have currently put a contract in place by way of RM1599, is the South Eastern Health & Social Care Trust.

Belfast HSC Trust currently procures its MFD needs through the Technology Partner Agreement – this is a framework for ICT goods and services in place between HSC and Hewlett Packard. However, the Trust is currently developing a business case with a view to moving to a MFD managed service contract. This contract is likely to be procured under framework RM1599 and will be subject to the terms of that framework.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the total expenditure on MFDs and print related services by each Health and Social Care Trust over the last three years.
(AQW 41518/11-15)

Mr Wells: Expenditure by HSC Trusts on MFDs and printed related services can only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what steps his Department is taking to implement National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence guidance CG32 regarding Nutritional Support for Adults.
(AQW 41519/11-15)

Mr Wells: The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) Clinical Guideline 32 (CG32) regarding Nutritional Support for Adults was published in February 2006.

This predates the Department's formal links with NICE and therefore CG32 has not been endorsed by the Department.

My Department launched 'Promoting Good Nutrition: A Strategy for Good Nutritional Care for Adults in all Care Settings in N. Ireland' in 2011.

The vision of this strategy is to improve the quality of nutritional care of adults in Northern Ireland in health and social care, whether delivered or commissioned, through the prevention, identification and management of malnutrition in all health and social care settings, and has been extensively rolled out in all HSC Trusts in both acute and community settings.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether Bangor Hospital GP Ward will reopen in 2015/16.
(AQW 41534/11-15)

Mr Wells: The future provision of intermediate care in North Down and Ards, including the GP Ward at Bangor Community Hospital, is currently being consulted on by the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust. In its consultation document the Trust has stated that the temporary closure of 20 GP beds in Bangor Community Hospital will remain in place until the public consultation and associated decision making processes are concluded.

The temporary closure remains the subject of an ongoing Judicial Review. A substantive hearing is expected to commence on 20 February. It would be therefore be inappropriate for me to comment further on this matter in the meantime.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the resources supplied for audiology services; and what plans he has to increase provision.
(AQW 41542/11-15)

Mr Wells: Audiology Services in Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts provide a full range of diagnostic tests for hearing impairments and a comprehensive hearing aid provision service.

Across Northern Ireland demand for audiology services exceeds the capacity that HSC Trusts have to deliver through 5 audiology posts. This capacity issue is predominately in the Northern HSC Trust and the South Eastern HSC Trust. The Health and Social Care Board has plans in place with both Trusts that will address these gaps and this will ensure that the audiology service across Northern Ireland is fully resourced to meet the demand for services.

It should be noted however that currently there is a recruitment and retention difficulty with audiologists across Northern Ireland and as a result HSC Trusts have a number of vacant posts, resulting in longer waiting times for patients.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when will he introduce Quality Standards for audiology.
(AQW 41543/11-15)

Mr Wells: I refer the member to my answer to AQW 41317.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the Public Health Agency's 10,000 Voices Project; and whether it will be continued in 2015/16.
(AQW 41547/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Regional Outcomes Report of the 10,000 Voices project, published by the Public Health Agency in October 2014 clearly highlights that it provides a valuable forum for service users to inform us of how we are delivering and how we should deliver health and social care services.

Information from patient's stories has already been used to inform a range of local and regional service improvements. By using this information to shape how we deliver services we can be assured that improvements will be based on information which really matters to people.

The Public Health Agency have advised that the 10,000 Voices project will be continued in 2015/16 subject to funding. The work plan for 2015/16 is currently being negotiated and will be available at the end of March 2015.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the process of the collection of data in Health and Social Care Trust areas of addiction issues relating to people under eighteen.
(AQW 41552/11-15)

Mr Wells: Data relating to addiction issues of people of all ages are collected from Addiction Treatment Service providers centrally within the Department through the annual Drugs Misuse Database (DMD) and the biennial Census of Drug and Alcohol Misuse.

The latest publications are available at:

- http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/dmd-2013-14.pdf
- http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/drug-alcohol-census-2014.pdf

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 40033/11-15, with regard to income generated from client contributions to social care, for a breakdown of the number of clients in each Health and Social Care Trust.
(AQW 41554/11-15)

Mr Wells: Information on the number of clients contributing to social care income is not available and could only be provided at a disproportionate cost.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the implementation of the recommendations in the Dementia Strategy; and whether adequate action is being taken to achieve meaningful outcomes for patients.
(AQW 41555/11-15)

Mr Wells: Implementation of the recommendations in the Dementia Strategy is being taken forward by the regional Dementia Strategy Implementation Group, which is co-chaired by the Health and Social Care Board and the Public Health Agency.

The latest report from the Group indicates that significant progress has been made on a range of recommendations in the Dementia Strategy, in particular developing and enhancing memory services across the five HSC Trusts, providing timely diagnosis for people with dementia and information and support to inform decisions about future care and treatment, and reviewing hospital bed provision for dementia assessment with the aim of developing assessment services in the community.

The Atlantic Philanthropies/ Delivering Social Change Dementia Signature initiative, launched in September 2014, will also support implementation of recommendations in the Dementia Strategy. The initiative will focus on three key strands: awareness raising, information and support; training; and short breaks, respite and support to carers. These themes have been selected as they are likely to have the greatest impact on improving the quality of life, care and treatment for people living with dementia. As part of this project, an Outcomes Based Accountability Model to evaluate this work is being developed.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many hours of counselling support is provided to patients resident in Tyrone and Fermanagh Hospital on a weekly basis.
(AQW 41578/11-15)

Mr Wells: Inpatients at the Tyrone and Fermanagh Hospital receive care and treatment based on individual assessed needs, delivered by teams of multidisciplinary professionals.

A range of evidence-based psychological/psychotherapeutic treatments is provided in the context of individual care and support plans, based on individual assessed needs.

Talking therapies vary in type and intensity. The total number of hours provided each week is therefore variable and it is not possible to quantify provision in this way.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many individuals have been referred for Robotic Assisted Radical Prostatectomies in each of the last four years, including (i) where they were referred; and (iii) the total annual cost of referrals.
(AQW 41579/11-15)

Mr Wells: Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts currently refer men who need radical prostatectomies to a Great Britain centre that has the facility to undertake robot assisted surgery. Information on the number of referrals for Robotic Assisted Radical Prostatectomies is collected by the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB), as the commissioner of such services.

Information on HSCB approved referrals is available from 1st April 2013 to date. There have been 24 patients referred for Robotic Assisted Radical Prostatectomies since 1st April 2013. Due to the small numbers, it has not been possible to provide a breakdown for individual years as this may compromise patient confidentiality.

The hospitals to which the HSCB have referred patients to for Robotic Assisted Radical Prostatectomies are:

(i) Addenbrookes Hospital, Cambridge Hospital, Christie Foundation Trust, Guys Hospital and University College Hospital, London.

(ii) The estimated total cost of these treatments (using the NHS draft tariff for 2015/16 of £5070) as advised by the HSC Board, is set out in the table below:

	£
Total Estimated Treatment cost range	121,000-126,000
Total Estimated Travel costs (estimated- £1k per referral)	24,000

Source: Health and Social Care Board

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many patients spent one night or more in the recovery ward of Craigavon Area Hospital in the last three months.
(AQW 41580/11-15)

Mr Wells: Information on the number of post - operative patients who spent one night or more in the recovery ward of Craigavon Area Hospital, in each of the last three months, is shown in the table below.

Month	Number of patients who spent one night or more in recovery ward*	Average Number of Nights Spent in Recovery Ward
November 2014	56	1.0
December 2014	30	1.5
January 2015	137	1.0
Total	**223**	

Source: Southern Trust

* All post-operative patients.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many domiciliary care packages are in place in the Southern Health and Social Care Trust; and of these, how many are direct payment.
(AQW 41584/11-15)

Mr Wells: The number of domiciliary care packages currently in place is not available. However, information on the number of clients receiving a domiciliary care package during a survey week in 2013 is available.

During a survey week in 2013 there were 4,461 clients receiving a domiciliary care package in the Southern Health and Social Care (HSC) Trust. This does not include services provided to clients by direct payment.

Information on domiciliary care is published annually by my Department in 'Domiciliary Care Services for Adults in Northern Ireland' and can be found online at the following web address:

http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/statistics/socialcare/domiciliary-care.htm

Domiciliary Care Services for Adults in Northern Ireland (2014) will be published on 12 February 2015.

The number of direct payments currently in place is not available. However, during the quarter ending 31 December 2014 there were 705 direct payments, including one-off and payments which ceased, paid in the Southern HSC Trust.

Information on direct payments is published quarterly by my Department and can be found online at the following web address: http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/statistics/socialcare/direct-payments.htm

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why residents are prohibited from making any contribution for more expensive nursing or residential home provision and are restricted to third party contributions.
(AQW 41599/11-15)

Mr Wells: Departmental guidance (Circular HSC (ECCU) 1/2010 – Care Management, Provision of Services and charging guidance) clearly states that the HSC has a duty to procure quality services in response to assessed need at a price that represents good value for money. When arranging a place in a residential or nursing home, Trusts are required to contract at whichever rate is necessary to secure appropriate accommodation.

Some service users, however, will wish to go to alternative accommodation which may be more expensive than that which a Trust can arrange. In these circumstances, the additional cost must be met by a third party such as a family member or friend. Residents are not permitted to meet the extra cost themselves as they will already have been financially assessed to determine the maximum amount of money they can contribute to the cost of their care. Paying their own top-up would deplete their assets at a quicker rate meaning they would reach the point of requiring financial support from the HSC more quickly. Private funders who make their own arrangements and fund their care privately are free to purchase care at any price they can afford.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the average number of respite or intermediate care patients at Northfield House, Donaghadee, in each of the last five years.
(AQW 41601/11-15)

Mr Wells: Information on the average number of respite or intermediate care patients at Northfield House is not held centrally and was therefore requested from the South Eastern Health and Social Care (HSC) Trust. The Trust provided information on the total number of respite and intermediate care admissions to Northfield House and their response can be found in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Number of respite and intermediate care admissions to Northfield House by financial year.

Year	Respite	Intermediate Care
2013/14	4	116
2012/13	4	107
2011/12	4	95
2010/11	4	105
2009/10	28	168

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many patients were not in the appropriate ward in Craigavon Area Hospital over the last three months.
(AQW 41602/11-15)

Mr Wells: The average number of patients outlied into other specialities per day in Craigavon Area Hospital, over the last three months, is shown in the table below:

Month	Average number of patients outlied into other specialities per day
November 2014	11
December 2014	11
January 2015	28

Source: Southern Trust

The Southern Trust would also like to highlight that despite the pressures they have been experiencing, at all times they have maintained the same gender bays, have had no corridor beds and at this time have maintained their elective service.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the impact that the Mental Capacity Bill may have on the provision of Power of Attorney in Northern Ireland.
(AQW 41627/11-15)

Mr Wells: The draft Mental Capacity Bill, which is being taken forward jointly by my Department and the Department of Justice, provides for a new system of Lasting Powers of Attorney (LPA) to replace the existing Enduring Powers of Attorney (EPA) system. This was a key recommendation of the Bamford Review and follows similar reforms in England and Wales.

The new scheme will provide stronger protections for people who want to plan ahead for a time when they may lose their mental capacity. Importantly, it will allow a person to give someone else the authority to make decisions on his/her behalf not just in

relation to financial matters, but also health and welfare matters. Any EPA put in place prior to the Bill coming into operation will, however, be respected. Further work on the implementation of the new system will be undertaken in consultation with key stakeholders to help ensure that the transition to the LPA scheme here goes as smoothly as possible.

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of hours that senior management have been on evening duty in the last six months; and of these shifts, to detail (i) the purpose; (ii) the cost; (iii) whether any senior staff performed portering duties.
(AQW 41641/11-15)

Mr Wells: For the purposes of this question 'senior management' has been interpreted as staff at director level and above (including Chief Executives).

Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts have advised that:

(i) senior management frequently work in excess to their specified contractual hours to support frontline staff during periods of increased activity and demand including after normal working hours and at weekends. Information on the additional hours worked is not routinely collected. Senior management do not work shifts;

(ii) there is no cost associated with these additional hours;

(iii) portering duties have not been performed by senior management, however, within the Belfast HSC Trust there are a number of senior managers who are qualified as clinical staff by professional background and on a very small number of occasions may have accompanied patients from one part of the hospital system to another. This would be deemed to be within the scope of the professional practice of good support to staff but most critically of benefit to patients.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when he decided to progress plans to implement plain packaging for tobacco products.
(AQW 41646/11-15)

Mr Wells: On 21 January the UK Government announced its decision to lay UK-wide regulations on standardised packaging within the current Parliament, subject to agreement from the Devolved Administrations.

I sought Executive support and I announced on 2 February that the proposed regulations will apply to Northern Ireland. This decision was made on the basis of the consultation responses to the draft standardised packaging regulations which the Department of Health shared with my Department on 22 January 2015 as well as the findings of the Chantler Review and other relevant information

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why waiting times for audiology services are currently not published; and whether he will take steps to ensure they are published.
(AQW 41669/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Department currently publish information on patients waiting for an audiology (pure tone audiometry) diagnostic service by weeks waiting. This information is published quarterly by Hospital Information Branch (HIB) in the 'Northern Ireland Waiting Time Statistics: Diagnostic Waiting Times' statistical bulletin and is available on the DHSSPS website at the following link:

http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/statistics/hospital/waitingtimes/waitingtimes-diagnostic.htm

The Department is currently assessing newly developed information on waiting times for hearing aids and when considered as being of robust quality it will be published as official statistics.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of waiting times for first appointments and reassessments for audiology services in each Health and Social Care Trust.
(AQW 41670/11-15)

Mr Wells: Across Northern Ireland demand for audiology services exceeds the capacity that Trusts have to deliver through 5 audiology posts. This is predominately in the Northern HSC Trust and the South Eastern HSC Trust. The Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) has plans in place with both Trusts that will address these gaps and this will ensure that the audiology service across Northern Ireland is fully resourced to meet the demand for services.

It should be noted however that there is a recruitment and retention difficulty with audiologists across Northern Ireland and as a result HSC Trusts have a number of vacant posts, resulting in longer waiting times for patients.

My Department does not hold information on reassessments however it is currently assessing newly developed information on waiting times for hearing aids and when considered as being of robust quality, it will be published as official statistics.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what consideration is being given to capping care home fees, in light of the decision to cap fees in England from April 2016.
(AQW 41678/11-15)

Mr Wells: I recognise the need to ensure both that our care and support system remains sustainable into the future and also that the balance of responsibility between government and individuals is fair. My Department is therefore progressing the Reform of Adult Care and Support project which will give consideration to a broad range of potential reforms, this will include exploring the introduction of a cap on care home fees.

It is intended that proposals for change will be finalised next year with public consultation to follow.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of whether Northern Ireland could benefit from a Better Care Fund as currently present in England.
(AQW 41702/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Better Care Fund was established in England to fund integration of local health and social care services, particularly for older people. As Northern Ireland already has an integrated health and social care system a Better Care Fund would provide no additional benefit.

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the sickness and absenteeism trend in Craigavon Area Hospital amongst nursing staff in the last six months.
(AQW 41729/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Southern HSC Trust has provided sickness absence rates for the most recent available six months for Nursing & Midwifery staff in the main building of Craigavon Area Hospital. These are shown in the table below. Figures for December 2014 are not yet available; the table refers to the period of June to November 2014.

Month	Sickness Absence %
June 2014	6.69%
July 2014	6.55%
August 2014	5.92%
September 2014	5.65%
October 2014	6.85%
November 2014	6.68%

Notes:

1 The Southern Trust notes that sickness absence reporting is currently being refined as the new Human Resources, Payroll, Travel and Subsistence (HRPTS) system is rolled out. Sickness absence percentages reported above are therefore marginally inflated until refinement of the reporting functionality is complete.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 38568/11-15, for an update on the procurement process.
(AQW 41745/11-15)

Mr Wells: Under the cross-departmental strategy to prevent and address the harm related to substance misuse, known as the New Strategic Direction for Alcohol and Drugs Phase 2, the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) and the Public Health Agency (PHA) were tasked with developing a Regional Commissioning Framework for Alcohol and Drug Services in Northern Ireland.

The HSCB and PHA subsequently produced a draft Framework document for public consultation, along with a corresponding procurement plan to tender for a range of services to address the key priorities outlined in the Framework. It had originally been envisaged that these services would be in place from April 2015. However, the procurement process for such a wide range of services is complex, therefore the process has been extended and the PHA anticipates the new contracts will commence in July 2015. The existing services will remain in operation until the new services are in place.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how extra contractual referrals are administered for young people at risk of substance misuse.
(AQW 41749/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) operates a process which allows local Trusts, in exceptional circumstances, to refer patients outside NI by means of an Extra Contractual Referral (ECR). ECRs must be based on clinical recommendations for specific treatment needs that cannot be met in NI. Such a referral must outline all of the resources that have been considered locally, and why these are felt to be inappropriate.

ECRs normally arise, and are eligible for approval, in the following circumstances:

- the patient's clinical condition requires specialised care that could only be sustained for a large catchment population and cannot be provided for a small geographic area such as Northern Ireland;

- the patient's clinician wishes to seek a second opinion from a provider outside Northern Ireland because of complexities of the patient's condition or circumstances;
- the treatment is available locally but the patient has an exceptional reason which renders their case different from the vast majority of other patients with the same condition which therefore justifies a referral outside Northern Ireland;
- the service being requested is not reflected in commissioning arrangements such as a Service Level Agreement with a provider outside Northern Ireland; or
- the service being requested is not commissioned for the population of Northern Ireland, but the patient's clinical circumstances are such that exceptionality can be demonstrated and a case justified for an ECR to access care from a provider outside Northern Ireland.

All applications are first cleared within the given Trust, and are then sent to the ECR Panel in the HSCB. The ECR Panel meets on a weekly basis to consider all ECRs received within the preceding 7 days. Decisions are made and communicated to the Trust within one week of the panel meeting.

Mr Clarke asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 40970/11-15, given that the competition had concluded, will he answer parts (i), (ii) and (iii) of the question.
(AQW 41810/11-15)

Mr Wells: Pursuant to my response to AQW 40970/11-15, the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust has advised that:

(i) there were 70 applicants;

(ii) two applicants have been given conditional offers;

(iii) no final offers or appointments have been made as yet due to financial constraints. It is the intention to progress to final offer stage in the new financial year.

I can confirm that:

(i) the business case was made on 17 April 2014;

(ii) the original offers of employment will proceed when approval is received via the Trust's scrutiny arrangements; and

(iii) the position will be filled when this approval is received.

Mr Brady asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is the annual cost of the Cancer Drug Fund.
(AQW 41832/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Cancer Drugs Fund is administered by NHS England and applies only to England; details of the operation and finances of the Fund may be found at this link:

http://www.england.nhs.uk/ourwork/pe/cdf/

Mr Brady asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether any drugs provided through the Cancer Drug Fund are life saving.
(AQW 41856/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Cancer Drugs Fund (CDF) is administered by NHS England and applies only to England. The assessment of the clinical performance of the drugs made available via the CDF is a matter for NHS England.

Details of the operation of the Fund may be found at this link: http://www.england.nhs.uk/ourwork/pe/cdf/

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the expected income bracket for paying prescription charges.
(AQW 41857/11-15)

Mr Wells: I have previously stated publicly that it is not unreasonable for patients to make a contribution towards the costs of their prescriptions, particularly given the challenges of funding high cost specialist medicines. Any proposal to reintroduce prescription charges would be subject to public consultation. That consultation will include how a charge could be applied and potential patient exemptions.

Mr Brady asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the annual cost of administrating the system for prescription charges.
(AQW 41944/11-15)

Mr Wells: There are currently no charges for prescriptions and no associated administration costs. Any proposal to reintroduce prescription charges would be subject to a full public consultation. That consultation would include consideration of how a charge should be applied and also any associated administration costs.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether cancer drugs have to be paid for; and if so, to detail the income bracket.
(AQW 41945/11-15)

Mr Wells: Health service treatment is free at the point of delivery of care. No patient receiving approved health service treatment in any specialty, including cancer, should be asked to pay.

The Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) has responsibility for commissioning cancer drugs in Northern Ireland. Every patient in Northern Ireland has the same access to approved cancer drugs as any other patient in the UK. All NICE approved cancer drugs are either recurrently funded or available via a cost per case mechanism in Northern Ireland.

Ms McGahan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update for the business case submitted by the Southern Health and Social Care Trust in relation to the development of a centre for adults with complex learning disabilities at Oakridge, Dungannon.
(AQW 41994/11-15)

Mr Wells: In September 2014, the Southern Health and Social Care Trust submitted an updated Outline Business Case for the development of the centre at Oakridge, taking into account feedback from my Department's review of the previous version. Whilst improvement has been made, there is some further work required to make the Business Case sufficiently robust to obtain approval.

Once the necessary business case approval has been obtained, the progress of any development will then still be subject to the budget process for 2015/16 onwards and its relative priority against all other Trust and regional capital proposals. In that context I would highlight that the current financial position for my Department is challenging and that the majority of capital funding will be allocated to contractually committed schemes.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 40378/11-15, to detail the number of applications (i) still in process; and (ii) that have been rejected, including the reasons for rejection.
(AQW 42028/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Health and Social Care Trusts have advised that, of the 10 applications for adoption received from same sex couples, 9 are still being processed. 1 application has not proceeded on medical grounds.

Department of Justice

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Justice how many times HMP Maghaberry has been locked down because of staff shortages in each of the past twelve months.
(AQW 41221/11-15)

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): While there has not been a full lockdown of Maghaberry Prison, individual residential areas have been locked on occasions. There are 51 residential landings, with the number of partial lockdowns as follows:

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
104	134	73	85	20	13	3	16	0	28	50	151

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to provide, or place in the Assembly library, the risk assessment document used in deciding whether a convicted murderer is suitable for temporary leave from custody; and (i) when this criteria were drawn up and put into practice; and (ii) how many changes have been implemented since its introduction.
(AQW 41232/11-15)

Mr Ford: The exact date the criteria were drawn up is not known but it has been in use since at least 2008. The criteria have been changed once since 2008.

Copies of the risk assessment documents have been placed in the Assembly Library.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Justice whether he will review how ex parte High Court applications are processed.
(AQW 41281/11-15)

Mr Ford: Table 1 below outlines the numbers of ex-parte High Court applications dealt with on a Friday in 2014. It is not possible to determine how many were heard on a Friday afternoon. Data for 2015 are not yet available.

Table 1 Ex-parte High Court applications dealt with on a Friday

Number of ex-parte High Court applications Dealt With in 2014 [1]	1049
Number of ex-parte High Court applications Dealt With in 2014 on a Friday [1]	168

1 Ex-parte applications based on initiating document entered on Integrated Courts Operation System (ICOS). Data for 2014 is provisional.

Table 2 below outlines the numbers of ex-parte High Court applications received and dealt with in each Division of the High Court in the last 3 years. It is not possible to determine how many have been granted, heard and or refused without a manual review trawl of all final orders. This could not be completed without incurring a disproportionate cost.

Table 2 Ex-parte receipts and disposals in the High Court by division 2012 - 20141

	Business Area	Received	Dealt with by High Court Judge	Dealt with by Master	Office disposal	Total dealt with
2012	Chancery	511	9	413	3	425
	Bankruptcy	0	0	0	0	0
	Companies	18	0	18	0	18
	Queen's Bench	448	38	366	1	405
	Judicial Reviews	279	220	0	0	220
	Adoption	0	0	0	0	0
	Family Homes & Domestic Violence	28	0	27	0	27
	Divorce	43	16	19	0	35
	Total	**1,327**	**283**	**843**	**4**	**1,130**
2013	Chancery	430	10	432	1	443
	Bankruptcy	0	0	0	0	0
	Companies	21	3	14	0	17
	Queen's Bench	447	33	367	1	401
	Judicial Reviews	305	317	0	0	317
	Adoption	0	0	0	0	0
	Family Homes & Domestic Violence	28	0	21	0	21
	Divorce	30	9	14	0	23
	Total	**1,261**	**372**	**848**	**2**	**1,222**
2014	Chancery	335	15	310	0	325
	Bankruptcy	0	0	0	0	0
	Companies	6	0	3	0	3
	Queen's Bench	411	17	357	0	374
	Judicial Reviews	336	288	0	0	288
	Adoption	0	0	0	0	0
	Family Homes & Domestic Violence	32	1	25	0	26
	Divorce	43	18	15	0	33
	Total	**1,163**	**339**	**710**	**0**	**1,049**

1 Ex-parte applications based on initiating document entered on Integrated Courts Operation System (ICOS). Data for 2014 is provisional.

To determine how many ex-parte High Court applications have been granted and resulted in costs and damages being ordered for the respondent would require a manual review of all final orders and would incur a disproportionate cost.

I currently have no plans to review how ex-parte High Court applications are processed.

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister of Justice how many prison officers have been injured while on duty at HMP Maghaberry as a result of attacks from inmates, in each of the last five years.
(AQW 41350/11-15)

Mr Ford: The information requested is not recorded in a format that is easily retrievable therefore this answer could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister of Justice how many prison officers have been on (i) short term; and (ii) long term sick leave as a result of injuries received on duty at HMP Maghaberry, in each of the last five years.
(AQW 41351/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Northern Ireland Prison Service updates and records the reason for sickness absence as provided by the member of staff or their General Practitioner. The reason provided is normally the medical condition that is preventing the individual from attending work. There is not necessarily any indication that the absence is due to an injury received on duty.

Therefore the information requested cannot be provided without disproportionate costs being incurred as an examination of each individual case would be required.

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister of Justice how many prison officers in HMP Maghaberry have had a (i) verbal warning; (ii) written warning; and (iii) final written warning as a result of being off on sick leave due to work related injuries or stress, in each of the last five years.
(AQW 41352/11-15)

Mr Ford:

(i) The Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) does not issue verbal warnings as such warnings are not provided for in the policy contained in the Northern Ireland Civil Service HR Handbook, specifically the section dealing with inefficiency sickness absence policy and procedures.

(ii) (iii) This information cannot be provided without disproportionate costs being incurred as an examination of each individual case would be required.

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister of Justice how many prison officers in HMP Maghaberry have (i) lost their job; or (ii) left the service following a final written warning, in each of the last five years.
(AQW 41353/11-15)

Mr Ford: During the last five years 12 Prison Officers in Maghaberry, who were issued with a final written warning on the grounds of inefficiency, have lost their jobs or left the service. A number of these left on a voluntary basis. Those that did not left on grounds of ill health, inefficiency or misconduct. I am unable to provide details of this information for each year, or provide additional details, as to do so would breach the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998 as it may lead to the identification of an individual.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether legal aid is available for people, who have been convicted of offences and imprisoned in a country outside Northern Ireland and who wish to be repatriated to serve their sentence in a Northern Ireland prison, to pay for legal costs and representations; and in how many instances has this been (i) sought; and (ii) granted, in each of the last five years.
(AQW 41354/11-15)

Mr Ford: Each application for legal aid is considered on its own merits. The Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission does not hold details of the name(s) of the people who have been convicted of offences and imprisoned in a country outside Northern Ireland and who wish to be repatriated to serve their sentence in Northern Ireland and cannot, therefore, comment on in how many instances has this been (i) sought; and (ii) granted, in each of the last five years.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to list the schools visited by the Prison Service in the last twelve months to promote careers in the service.
(AQW 41355/11-15)

Mr Ford: In the last 12 months the Northern Ireland Prison Service has not visited schools for the purpose of promoting careers in the service. NIPS has not conducted a recruitment campaign during this period.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, in relation to persons remanded in custody after an alleged offence but then transferred to an outside facility due to mental health issues, (i) whether this counts as time spent on remand if convicted; and (ii) whether a person would remain classed as a prisoner or be deemed a patient after transfer.
(AQW 41357/11-15)

Mr Ford: Persons remanded in custody but then transferred to an outside facility by means of a transfer direction under Article 54 of the Mental Health (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 have the time they spend at such facilities counted as remand time, given that they are still being detained under the direction of the court. Persons so transferred are referred to as detainees under Article 57(1) of the Order.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, in light of the three recent cases of convicted murders absconding whilst on temporary leave from custodial sentences, whether a review is to be conducted into the criteria of granting temporary leave to convicted murderers, with particular attention paid to those who have committed this offence on previous releases.
(AQW 41366/11-15)

Mr Ford: No review of the criteria of granting temporary leave to convicted murderers is planned. Particular attention is already given to those who have committed this offence on previous releases.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 40747/11-15, whether it is possible to examine CCTV to ascertain this information.
(AQW 41406/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service has reviewed the Closed Circuit Television footage from Dungannon Courthouse on 12 January 2015 up to 10.30am. All 96 marked car parking spaces were full. In addition, the recorded CCTV footage shows that approximately 12 vehicles were double parked on pavements, at kerbs and outside parking bays in the lower public car park. There were no vehicles parked outside marked parking bays in the secure upper car park.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 40522/11-15, how many (i) law firms; (ii) junior counsel and (iii) senior counsel acted throughout the various trials, including the aborted trial and appeal; and whether any of the instructed counsel acted throughout all or more than one trial.
(AQW 41407/11-15)

Mr Ford: The same firm of solicitors, junior and senior counsel acted throughout all proceedings.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many prisoners have been repatriated from Northern Ireland prison facilities in each of the last five calendar years, stating the convictions for which each prisoner was jailed.
(AQW 41409/11-15)

Mr Ford: Four prisoners have been repatriated from Northern Ireland since 2010. In 2012 two prisoners were repatriated to the Netherlands both having been convicted of importing controlled drugs. In 2013 one prisoner was repatriated to the Republic of Ireland having been convicted of murder. In 2014 one prisoner was repatriated to Lithuania having been convicted of rape, assault occasioning actual bodily harm and false imprisonment.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to explain the difference between a charge sheet and a Public Prosecution Service summons appearance in court; and whether, particularly in indictable allegations, (i) the nature of the charges is any less significant; and (ii) upon conviction, the sentencing outcome is different.
(AQW 41411/11-15)

Mr Ford: Summonses and charge sheets are two different mechanisms to get cases before the magistrates' courts. A charge sheet will be used where the person has been arrested and charged with an offence and they will appear before the court the next day (if in custody) or within 28 days if released on police bail. Where a person is not charged, they may be reported to PPS for prosecution and PPS may initiate proceedings by way of summons.

Decisions as to the method, timing and approach by which a criminal offence or charge is brought to the court are operational matters for the police and the Public Prosecution Service. The decision to charge or submit a file to the Public Prosecution Service is, for example, a matter for police.

Sentencing powers in relation to indictable offences are typically more substantial than those dealt with by way of summary proceedings.

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Justice to detail the timescale for publication of locally agreed phased plans to remove all interface barriers; and what work has been completed to meet the timescale.
(AQW 41419/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Department of Justice is engaged with voluntary/community sector groups and other statutory agencies in exploring the opportunities for reducing and eventually removing interface structures. Engagement has been initiated on close to 40 of the Department's remaining 52 structures.

My officials work closely with community groups, both directly and through the International Fund for Ireland Peace Walls Programme, to develop site specific plans to deal with individual structures. The progress made in developing these plans will depend on many factors, with community safety and regeneration at the heart of the process. It is simply not possible to set timescales for the development or publication of such plans. They will develop at their own pace, with community support remaining a key element.

The Department continues to work with all stakeholders, including the International Fund for Ireland, to develop and improve the programme for looking at alternatives to interface barriers.

The University of Ulster and Department of Justice commenced a 12 month knowledge exchange partnership in August to support and develop policy and practice enabling the removal of peace walls. The University team will act as a 'critical friend',

as formative evaluators of the current policy implementation process, and as a provider of evidence-based research to my Department. Part of this work will see a rerun of the "Attitudes to Peace Walls" survey of June 2012, including, for the first time, Portadown and Lurgan.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether he will authorise an investigation into how Vidmantas Jokubauskis was permitted to reside close to homes of victims whilst awaiting sentencing at Dungannon Magistrates Court and in spite of specified bail terms.
(AQW 41455/11-15)

Mr Ford: The setting of court bail terms is entirely a matter for the judge hearing the bail application. These may include conditions specifying a bail address, placing restrictions on residing at a particular address or requiring that a place of residence is approved by police. No specific conditions regarding his address were imposed by the court during the period in question. Bail conditions regarding residency were imposed subsequently by the judge when granting bail pending appeal.

A referral into the public protection arrangements, where there has been no previous relevant conviction, is triggered when a convicted offender is sentenced by the court.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 40522/11-15, whether the costs of the aborted trial have been finalised; and for a breakdown of these costs.
(AQW 41456/11-15)

Mr Ford: The fees in respect of the aborted trial and the second re- trial have not yet been paid and therefore the costs are not finalised.

It is not possible to provide a breakdown of the costs of the aborted retrial separately as, in accordance with paragraph 23(2) of Schedule 1 to the Legal Aid for Crown Court Proceedings (Costs) Rules (Northern Ireland) 2005, the determination of costs for both the aborted retrial and the second retrial are considered as having comprised one trial.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 40605/11-15, how many law firms do these figures equate to in each year.
(AQW 41457/11-15)

Mr Ford: The number of law firms and counsel paid by the Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission (the Commission) for legal aid for representation in legacy cases under the Statutory Exceptional Grant Power Scheme per year was:

Year	Number of Firms	Number of Counsel
2011/12	Nil	Nil
2012/13	1	2
2013/14	1	2

The number of law firms and counsel paid by the Commission under the Statutory Exceptional Grant Power Scheme in respect of the plaintiffs' costs in the Omagh civil action per year was:

Year	Number of Firms	Number of Counsel
2011/12	1	Nil
2012/13	2	3
2013/14	1	3

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice to detail the refurbishment and upkeep expenditure over the last ten years on each of the eight court houses proposed for closure.
(AQW 41477/11-15)

Mr Ford: The expenditure included in the response dates from the devolution of Justice to the Northern Ireland Assembly on the 12 April 2010. The total expenditure for the eight courthouses proposed for closure from this date to December 2014 is £4.5 million. This figure, which includes refurbishment, maintenance and security costs, is broken down as follows:

Total Expenditure (£) per Court Office from 1 April 2010 to 31 December 2014

Armagh Court Office	508,535.66
Ballymena Court Office	1,675,078.26
Enniskillen Court Office	307,240.22
Limavady Court Office	163,110.67

Lisburn Court Office	567,793.03
Magherafelt Court Office	198,399.93
Newtownards Court Office	906,488.81
Strabane Court Office	247,308.38
Grand Total	**4,573,954.96**

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Justice what is the annual cost of keeping a person in prison; and for a breakdown of this cost.
(AQW 41507/11-15)

Mr Ford: The annual cost of keeping a person in prison in Northern Ireland is known as the Cost per Prisoner Place (CPPP). It is the full operating expenditure of the Prison Service divided by the average number of staffed prisoner places. The Northern Ireland Prison Service CPPP for 2013/14 was £62,898. There is no further breakdown of this cost.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice (i) whether a PSNI Chief Constable has had the authority to direct how (a) public funds supplied by the Department of Justice; and (b) private funds, are used within or by the Police Federation of Northern Ireland; (ii) whether a policy exists on this issue; if so (iii) to place a copy in the Assembly Library; and (iv) what accountability or scrutiny in applied in these instances.
(AQW 41536/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Police Association for Northern Ireland Regulations 1991 (a copy of which was placed in the Assembly Library in November 2014) provides the authority for the Police Federation to raise funds for defraying expenses incurred by the Federation through the collection of voluntary subscriptions from its members, and by other means including borrowing money, accepting donations, and the sale of publications or other articles.

The Police Federation is also required to keep accounts of funding and expenditure and to have such accounts audited annually by independent auditors.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, in relation to people convicted of sex offences against children or persons remanded on suspicion of child sex offences, and in line with child protection and safeguarding policies and given that no bail conditions can be imposed on prisoners, (i) what procedures are in place to prevent contact with children during prison visits; (ii) how visits in these circumstances can be accommodated; (iii) whether these visits are barred from occurring when children are present to visit other prisoners; and (iv) whether visits in these circumstances are routinely supervised by Social Services personnel, as per in the community.
(AQW 41537/11-15)

Mr Ford: Managing visits to, and communication with, those prisoners who present a risk to children is done in accordance with NIPS' Child Protection Policy and Procedures contained in Safeguarding Children Framework and Guidance, which is available on the NIPS website.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many forfeiture orders have been made for vehicles following criminal convictions in each of the last three calendar years, broken down by court division.
(AQW 41538/11-15)

Mr Ford: Forfeiture orders made in court relate to the forfeiture of property. To identify the number of orders relating specifically to the forfeiture of vehicles would require a manual trawl of court records and would incur a disproportionate cost.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many sex offenders being managed in the community have been moved from placements or residences following concerns raised by the public, in each of the last two calender years.
(AQW 41539/11-15)

Mr Ford: On 31 March 2013 there were 1,375 sex offenders being managed under the public protection arrangements and on 31 March 2014 the statistics stood at 1,251 offenders. The information requested is not recorded separately and could only be ascertained by a manual search of files by all relevant agencies which would incur a disproportionate cost.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice what are the job consequences of the proposal to close eight courthouses.
(AQW 41540/11-15)

Mr Ford: As a result of the Executive's Public Sector Voluntary Exit Scheme, it is anticipated that staff numbers within the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service (NICTS) will reduce significantly. The rationalisation proposals would allow NICTS to manage some of the consequent pressures through a reduction in the number of locations at which it operates and the implementation of more streamlined management structures.

The rationalisation would also reduce the level of contracted services currently provided although the impact on jobs is a matter for those contractors.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice what consultation was carried out with the judiciary and other relevant stakeholders before announcing the proposal to close eight courthouses; and what were the responses.
(AQW 41541/11-15)

Mr Ford: In developing the rationalisation proposals, the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service worked closely with the judicial representatives on the NICTS Agency Board. NICTS officials also briefed the Lord Chief Justice during the process, before formally consulting him in relation to the draft consultation document. I also discussed the matter with him on a number of occasions prior to the launch of the consultation.

The judicial representatives assisted in developing proposals which would accommodate the court business within a reduced court estate. However they expressed concerns about the impact of the proposed closures on court users.

NICTS officials also met with key partners as the consultation proposals were developed. They included PSNI, Public Prosecution Service, Probation Board, Youth Justice Agency, Prisoner Escort and Court Custody Service, and Northern Ireland Guardian Ad Litem Agency. The views provided recognised the necessity of reducing the court estate and were broadly supportive of the proposals. Partners welcomed the opportunity to be engaged during the full consultation to identify opportunities for business improvement.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, in respect of vehicles which have been ordered forfeit by courts following criminal convictions, how are these vehicles disposed of; and who has responsibility for their disposal.
(AQW 41603/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) may apply to the court for the forfeiture of a vehicle. Once a court order is made, the seizure becomes a matter for PSNI. The Department of Justice does not hold any information in relation to seized vehicles.

I am committed to respecting the operational independence of the Chief Constable and the role of the Policing Board. You may wish to direct your question to the PSNI.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to outline the changes in staffing structures and procedures within the Northern Ireland Legal Aid Agency that differentiates its role from that of the Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission, as its predecessor; and to whom is the agency responsible.
(AQW 41605/11-15)

Mr Ford: The creation of the Legal Services Agency Northern Ireland (LSANI) on 1 April 2015 will result in a number of changes that will deliver efficiency savings and improve governance and accountability.

The Chief Executive will report directly to me, with meetings held annually (or more frequently as required) to discuss the Agency's aims, objectives, performance and financial management. This closer relationship will strengthen accountability. A new appeals process will be put in place, which will streamline operations and reduce costs. NICS conditions of service and accountancy standards will apply to the Agency resulting in more efficient and effective working practices. There will also be benefits from the Agency joining the NICS network of shared services and its digitisation programme.

While the Agency will be subject to my overall direction, it will retain independence in relation to decisions in individual cases, and therefore at the core of the new arrangements is the creation of a new Statutory Office Holder, the Director of Legal Aid Casework.

Agency status will also provide greater flexibility in managing staff resources, by providing access to a wider skills base in the NICS. In this context it will facilitate implementation of the outcome of the Staff Review, which is in the process of being concluded, by allowing any changes in staffing to be managed within the NICS.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice of the recently published figure of 1878 reports of domestic abuse within the period of 16 December 2014 and 5 January 2015, how many have resulted in cases now within the court system, broken down by court division.
(AQW 41606/11-15)

Mr Ford: The figures quoted relate to the number of domestic incidents reported to the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

The Department of Justice does not hold any information in relation to these incidents. It is, therefore, not known how many of these incidents have resulted in a case before the court or how many persons may be subsequently reported for prosecution by way of a summons.

I am committed to respecting the operational independence of the Chief Constable and the role of the Policing Board. You may wish to direct your question to the PSNI.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice (i) for a breakdown of the current operating costs of the eight courthouses proposed for closure; (ii) to detail the estimated annual maintenance and other costs associated with the upkeep of the courthouses if they are not used until they are disposed of; (iii) when and how it is anticipated that the courthouses will be disposed of; and (iv) the anticipated level of receipt from any sales.
(AQW 41610/11-15)

Mr Ford: The current operating costs for the eight courthouses, based on audited figures for the financial year 2013/14, are set out in Table 1 below. These costs include utility charges, premises related costs, service charges and general administration costs excluding salaries:

Table 1 – Annual Operating Costs

Courthouse	2013/2014 Annual Operating Costs
Armagh	£429,445
Ballymena	£473,555
Enniskillen	£238,771
Limavady	£63,846
Lisburn	£302,835
Magherafelt	£89,747
Newtownards	£469,446
Strabane	£174,443
Total	**£2,242,087**

Following any decision to close a courthouse a reduced planned maintenance programme will be established. Each building will be surveyed prior to closure to agree the necessary maintenance works and the associated cost. Aside from these planned maintenance works, any budget allocation will also include on-going premises costs such as rates charges (if applicable), utilities and minor reactive maintenance works. Table 2 sets out these estimated premises costs for each courthouse.

Table 2 – Estimated Annual Premises Costs Following Closure

Courthouse	Estimated Annual Premises Costs
Armagh	£21,068
Ballymena	£14,834
Enniskillen	£11,079
Limavady	£10,284
Lisburn	£23,951
Magherafelt	£9,416
Newtownards	£39,793
Strabane	£18,059
Total	**£148,484**

The Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service will work closely with Land and Property Services to ensure courthouse are disposed of in accordance with the Department of Finance and Personnel guidelines on the Disposal of Surplus Public Sector Property in Northern Ireland. It is not possible at this stage to estimate the receipt from any sale of the courthouses.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice what impact assessment on the capacity of surviving courts has been carried out in respect of the proposal to close eight courthouses.
(AQW 41611/11-15)

Mr Ford: The capacity of receiving venues to deal with the business transferring from any closing courthouse was considered fully as part of the development of the proposals. Business levels, court sitting times, court utilisation rates and facilities were examined for all court venues.

The receiving venues are the larger or more modern venues with more courtrooms able to deal with the range of court business. The illustrative calendars underpinning the proposals demonstrate that it is possible to accommodate the transfer of the current scheduled business to the receiving venues.

I believe the proposals will also provide the opportunity to discuss with the judiciary the listing and scheduling of business to make better use of scheduled sitting days and where appropriate merge smaller less busy sittings.

It is accepted that for some court users the closures will result in additional travel to attend court. Even though a very small number of court users attend court by using public transport, there were tolerance levels set for journey times between venues. The parameters set where that journey times by public transport between venues should not exceed 60 minutes, and that they should enable users to arrive at the start of the court sitting and return home within a reasonable time each day.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice what impact assessment on the inconvenience imposed on users has been carried out in respect of the proposal to close eight courthouses.
(AQW 41612/11-15)

Mr Ford: The capacity of receiving venues to deal with the business transferring from any closing courthouse was considered fully as part of the development of the proposals. Business levels, court sitting times, court utilisation rates and facilities were examined for all court venues.

The receiving venues are the larger or more modern venues with more courtrooms able to deal with the range of court business. The illustrative calendars underpinning the proposals demonstrate that it is possible to accommodate the transfer of the current scheduled business to the receiving venues.

I believe the proposals will also provide the opportunity to discuss with the judiciary the listing and scheduling of business to make better use of scheduled sitting days and where appropriate merge smaller less busy sittings.

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Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister of Justice to make public immediately a timeline and timeframe for the publication of the responses to the NI Law Commission's Consultation Paper Defamation Law in Northern Ireland.
(AQW 41618/11-15)

Mr Ford: The NI Law Commission consultation on Defamation Law in Northern Ireland ends on 20 February 2015. At that point the Law Commission will consider the timeline for the remainder of the project taking into account factors such as resources available and the number and complexity of the responses received.

Mr Ramsey asked the Minister of Justice for a break down of prison sentences for convictions for causing death by (i) dangerous; (ii) inconsiderate; and (iii) dangerous and careless driving.
(AQW 41621/11-15)

Mr Ford: Offences where a death was caused by dangerous, inconsiderate or careless driving may be prosecuted under the Road Traffic (Northern Ireland) Order 1995. However, some offences under this Order do not differentiate between death and grievous bodily injury in the offence title. Databases held by the Department do not contain detail on the circumstances of an offence. It is not therefore always possible to say for a conviction for such offences whether death, or grievous bodily injury, resulted.

The most recent convictions data available relate to 2013. In that year there were 55 convictions for offences causing death or grievous bodily injury by careless, inconsiderate or dangerous driving. Of these, 8 resulted in a custodial penalty. Details of the sentences imposed are listed in the following table.

Custodial terms imposed for convictions for causing death by dangerous or careless driving, 2013

	Custodial sentence period		
Offence	**< 1 year**	**1 year - < 3 years**	**3 years & over**
Causing death by dangerous driving	1	1	2
Causing death by driving carelessly with excess alcohol	-	1	-
Causing death or grievous bodily injury by careless driving (without due care and attention)	3	-	-

Note:

1 Data are collated on the principal offence rule; only the most serious offence for which an offender is convicted is included.

2 The figures provided relate to convictions for all classifications of the offence specified.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Justice when Lasting Power of Attorney will be introduced in Northern Ireland.
(AQW 41622/11-15)

Mr Ford: My Department does not have substantive policy responsibility for Lasting Powers of Attorney.

However, I can confirm that the draft Mental Capacity Bill contains provisions to introduce Lasting Powers of Attorney in Northern Ireland. The Bill is being prepared jointly by my Department and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety. It is currently intended to submit a Bill to the Executive for approval in March 2015, to enable introduction to and passage through the Assembly by March 2016.

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister of Justice (i) how many Enhanced Disclosure checks are currently being processed by Access NI; (ii) what is the current average waiting time for an Enhanced Disclosure Certificated to be issued; and (iii) what action is being taken to address any delays.
(AQW 41633/11-15)

Mr Ford:

(i) AccessNI processed 127,758 enhanced disclosure checks in 2014. It receives on average 2,450 applications per week.

(ii) AccessNI is currently processing enhanced applications within 5 days of receipt. Approximately 72% of the checks can then be issued. The other 28% are sent to PSNI (or other police services as appropriate). Currently, a further 24% of all enhanced checks, are issued within five weeks of receipt once returned by police forces. The remaining small percentage of checks fall into a category of cases which cannot be issued until PSNI advise AccessNI if they have any information to be disclosed. The average waiting time for an enhanced check between 1 January and 31 December 2014 was 17.5 days.

(iii) There is regular contact between AccessNI and PSNI staff to review progress and backlogs. The PSNI have a backlog of the more complex cases requiring greater scrutiny. The Christmas holiday period has also impacted on their turnaround of the more straightforward cases. PSNI have a recovery plan in place, with steps being taken to reduce the number of outstanding cases over the next few months. AccessNI will continue to work with PSNI and to monitor the situation.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Justice how his Department intends to engage with the local community over his proposal to close Enniskillen courthouse.
(AQW 41651/11-15)

Mr Ford: My officials will hold a public meeting to engage with the local community. This will be in Enniskillen courthouse and the date and time of the meeting will be made known shortly.

Local residents may also respond formally to the public consultation and I would encourage them to do so.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Justice how his Department and its agencies have helped in the efforts to find Kieran McAree in Enniskillen.
(AQW 41652/11-15)

Mr Ford: While responsibility for search and rescue policy rests with the Department of Justice, the operational response and deployment of search and rescue assets remain with the relevant statutory tasking authority.

I visited the search area in January and met some of the teams, both statutory and voluntary, involved in this sustained operation. The dedication and professionalism of all those who have taken part in the search is remarkable.

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Justice to outline the rationale behind the decision to close Newtownards Courthouse.
(AQW 41660/11-15)

Mr Ford: The main drivers for the rationalisation of the court estate, including the proposal to close Newtownards, are set out in the consultation document.

My Department, like others, is required to make savings to operate within a challenging budget allocation. This means that continuing to operate the current 20 courthouses is no longer sustainable.

The Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service has strategically reviewed the current court estate to identify venues which could be closed and business transferred to an alternative court venue with minimal impact and ensuring continuing efficient and effective service delivery.

Each court venue was evaluated against the same criteria to identify potential closures e.g. caseload, physical condition of buildings, number of courtrooms, ability to deal with a range of business types, and distance and public transport availability to alternative venue etc. On this basis Newtownards was one of the courthouses identified for potential closure.

Bangor previously operated as a Hearing Centre for a number of years, opening only on court days. A public consultation exercise was carried out in 2012 and based on the efficiency savings to be made, the comparatively poorer facilities and accessibility issues I decided to close Bangor in April 2013 and transfer business to Newtownards.

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Justice what is his justification for closing both Bangor and Newtownards courthouses within the last three years.
(AQW 41661/11-15)

Mr Ford: The main drivers for the rationalisation of the court estate, including the proposal to close Newtownards, are set out in the consultation document.

My Department, like others, is required to make savings to operate within a challenging budget allocation. This means that continuing to operate the current 20 courthouses is no longer sustainable.

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Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 40889/11-15, whether some ground could be opened to accommodate overspill, reduce carpark congestion and obstructive on-street parking at Killyman Road.
(AQW 41663/11-15)

Mr Ford: Given the layout of the Dungannon Courthouse site and the current financial climate, the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service has no plans to extend car parking facilities.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice (i) which agencies are involved in placing a sex offender in the community post custodial sentence; (ii) what procedures are applied; and (iii) do these procedures differ in relation to the category of sex offender.
(AQW 41664/11-15)

Mr Ford: Sex offenders are released from prison when they have served the custodial element of their sentence or on a date determined by the Parole Commissioners for Northern Ireland.

The agencies involved in their assessment and risk management under the Public Protection Arrangements for Northern Ireland (PPANI) are PSNI, the Probation Board, the Prison Service, the Health and Social Care Trusts and the Housing Executive. This involves assessing the risk presented by individual sex offenders and developing a risk management plan tailored to their circumstances and the particular risks they present. One agency is then identified as the individual's designated risk manager.

The relevant procedures applying to this process are detailed in the PPANI Manual of Practice which is available on the PPANI website www.publicprotectionni.com. The procedures are applied to all eligible offenders as defined in the Manual of Practice.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice (i) how much has been recouped in outstanding unpaid fines through Fine Default Reviews or other mechanisms, in each court division to date; (ii) to provide a progress report on this matter; and (iii) whether any further measures to secure longstanding overdue fines are being considered.
(AQW 41665/11-15)

Mr Ford: At the end of December 2014, 14,938 default hearing notices in respect 20,442 outstanding Magistrates' Court imposed fines had been issued.

The table below details the value of outstanding fines that have been cleared through Fine Default Hearings by cash payment or by way of 'notional payment' i.e. remitted by judicial authority or by serving a default prison period up to 5 February 2015.

County Court Division	Cash Receipt	Notional payment	Total
Antrim	43,413.45	65,288.57	108,702.02
Ards	32,242.08	130,928.83	163,170.91
Armagh And South Down	32,753.36	24,934.26	57,687.62
Belfast	225,856.39	119,363.12	345,219.51
Craigavon	15,827.71	52,207.34	68,035.05
Fermanagh And Tyrone	59,347.48	254,261.67	313,609.15
Londonderry	30,768.72	8,270.41	39,039.13
Total	**440,209.19**	**655,254.20**	**1,095,463.39**

The table does not include a further £997,000 in fine payments recovered by staff through the fine collection scheme: a centralised service which targets defaulters as they approach their fine payment due date.

Legislation to reform the arrangements for the collection and enforcement of fines is currently being drafted. It will introduce a range of new powers, under the authority of the court, including the ability to agree instalment orders, extend time to pay and arrange for deductions from earnings and benefits.

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Justice for an estimate of the annual value of assets gained through crime that the PSNI has been unable to seize but which would have been seized if the National Crime Agency (NCA) had been allowed to operate in Northern Ireland, given that the PSNI does not have the legal authority to the same extent as the NCA to seize assets gained through criminality.
(AQW 41671/11-15)

Mr Ford: There was a significant step forward in securing a full role for the National Crime Agency here on 3 February when the Assembly gave consent to Westminster introducing the necessary legislation. After an impasse since 7 October 2013 we should shortly be able to see a full operational NCA here supporting our law enforcement effort.

The inability to bring civil recovery cases in the devolved sphere has been costly. Since June 2013 there has been a 58% decrease in the number of Northern Ireland investigations (19 to 8). Obviously there have been no new devolved cases since October 2013. The value of the cases involved has dropped by approximately £4m net which gives an indication of the loss to the public purse. There has also been a 71% decrease in the number of property freezing orders in Northern Ireland cases.

There is no precise figure on the resource cost to the PSNI to accommodate work which should have been handled by NCA. They have, however, on occasion had to withdraw officers from other work. Difficult decisions regarding prioritisation have had to be made.

A 2014 report by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child expressed their strong concern that, in the absence of National Crime Agency operation in the devolved sphere in Northern Ireland, the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP), which is integrated into the NCA, is not fully operational here. It suggested that this was an example of devolution leading to discrimination in the enjoyment of rights by children. The PSNI are able to access information and advice from CEOP. What has been missing, however, is access to operational support and an input into NCA planning strategically and operationally.

I hope that shortly the hiatus will be resolved and the people of Northern Ireland can then benefit from the expertise and resources of the National Crime Agency.

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Justice for an estimate of the additional resource cost to the PSNI incurred through the National Crime Agency not being allowed to operate in Northern Ireland, with specific reference to serious and organised crime, child protection and human trafficking.
(AQW 41672/11-15)

Mr Ford: There was a significant step forward in securing a full role for the National Crime Agency here on 3 February when the Assembly gave consent to Westminster introducing the necessary legislation. After an impasse since 7 October 2013 we should shortly be able to see a full operational NCA here supporting our law enforcement effort.

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I hope that shortly the hiatus will be resolved and the people of Northern Ireland can then benefit from the expertise and resources of the National Crime Agency.

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of the number of vulnerable children who are put at risk of sexual exploitation and trafficking through the inability of the National Crime Agency (NCA) to operate in Northern Ireland.
(AQW 41673/11-15)

Mr Ford: There was a significant step forward in securing a full role for the National Crime Agency here on 3 February when the Assembly gave consent to Westminster introducing the necessary legislation. After an impasse since 7 October 2013 we should shortly be able to see a full operational NCA here supporting our law enforcement effort.

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I hope that shortly the hiatus will be resolved and the people of Northern Ireland can then benefit from the expertise and resources of the National Crime Agency.

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Justice for an estimate of the annual value of criminal assets lost to the public purse through the inability of the National Crime Agency to operate in Northern Ireland; and what additional pressure does this put on the PSNI budget.
(AQW 41674/11-15)

Mr Ford: There was a significant step forward in securing a full role for the National Crime Agency here on 3 February when the Assembly gave consent to Westminster introducing the necessary legislation. After an impasse since 7 October 2013 we should shortly be able to see a full operational NCA here supporting our law enforcement effort.

The inability to bring civil recovery cases in the devolved sphere has been costly. Since June 2013 there has been a 58% decrease in the number of Northern Ireland investigations (19 to 8). Obviously there have been no new devolved cases since October 2013. The value of the cases involved has dropped by approximately £4m net which gives an indication of the loss to the public purse. There has also been a 71% decrease in the number of property freezing orders in Northern Ireland cases.

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I hope that shortly the hiatus will be resolved and the people of Northern Ireland can then benefit from the expertise and resources of the National Crime Agency.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice whether he will initiate an investigation into the handling of applications by firearms dealer Person A by Firearms Branch and his Department.
(AQW 41688/11-15)

Mr Ford: It is not within my remit to initiate an investigation into the handling of applications by PSNI Firearms Branch. In the absence of any specified concern I do not see the need to examine the handling of the appeals by my officials.

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Justice why, in cases where a criminal conviction for sexual abuse has arisen, members living in the same household as the perpetrator can not avail of criminal injuries compensation if their case pre-dates 1988.
(AQW 41689/11-15)

Mr Ford: Article 3(2) (b) of the Criminal Injuries (Compensation) (Northern Ireland) Order 1977 states that no compensation shall be paid if the victim was, at the time when the criminal injury was sustained, living with the offender as his wife or her husband or as a member of the same household as the offender. The position was changed by the Criminal Injuries Order 1988, but the principle is that legislation is not retrospective so the change does not apply to cases before the commencement of the Order.

Those who suffered sexual abuse in such circumstances would indeed be classed as victims. They would not, however, be eligible for compensation due to the legislative provisions which prevailed pre-1988.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 40886/11-15, how many prisoner officers were medically retired in each year of the Voluntary Exit Scheme.
(AQW 41709/11-15)

Mr Ford: The first tranche of prison officers left under the Voluntary Exit Scheme on 31 March 2012 with the last tranche leaving on 31 May 2014. The number of Prison Officers medically retired during the calendar years from 1 January 2012 to 31 December 2014 is set out in the table below:

Year	Number of Prison Staff Medically Retired
2,2012	17
2013	23
2014	20

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether the role of the Reducing Reoffending Team extends to monitoring youths or minors remanded on bail for serious offences, which are within the court system, particularly in respect of instances in which further offences are committed whilst on bail for separate matters and further bail is granted; and if not, whether he will give consideration to such an initiative.
(AQW 41711/11-15)

Mr Ford: The granting of bail and any conditions set, including any police monitoring role, is a matter for the judiciary in conjunction with the PSNI.

The Youth Justice Agency does assist in the supervision, surveillance and support of young people subject to bail in specific cases where the court has requested it. This service is provided by a dedicated Bail Support and Supervision Team who oversee bespoke packages of intervention to young people. These programmes are delivered in partnership with the PSNI Reducing Offending Unit teams.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice in how many court cases in 2014 have cash sureties been seized in whole or part after a breach, broken down by court division.
(AQW 41713/11-15)

Mr Ford: Three court cases had cash sureties seized in whole or part after a breach during 2014. Two cases were within the Division of Armagh and South Down and one was in the High Court.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice whether the Peruvian authorities have contacted his Department regarding the potential repatriation of Michaela McCollum.
(AQW 41715/11-15)

Mr Ford: I am able to confirm that the Peruvian authorities have been in contact with the Northern Ireland Prison Service regarding the repatriation of Michaella McCollum. This contact was made via the British Embassy in Lima, Peru and the National Offender Management Service in London.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice whether he can refuse the repatriation of Michaela McCollum.
(AQW 41716/11-15)

Mr Ford: There is no obligation on those countries, of which the United Kingdom is one, which have entered into bilateral prisoner transfer agreements or are signatories of the European Convention on the Transfer of Sentenced Persons, to accept every application for repatriation. However, the ethos behind the reciprocal arrangements that are in place is to encourage and promote rehabilitation and resettlement by allowing persons convicted of offences overseas to return to their home jurisdiction so that they can serve their sentences much closer to their families and avail of the support they can offer through regular visits and other forms of familial contact. It would be wrong, after entering into such reciprocal arrangements and having facilitated the repatriation of others in the past in very similar circumstances, to refuse an application when tried and tested grounds for such a repatriation have been proven to exist. While data protection restrictions prevent me from commenting on the detail of this particular case it is already a matter of public record that I have accepted Michaella McCollum's application for repatriation to this jurisdiction.

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Justice why people living with a convicted perpetrator of sexual abuse, during the period when the abuse occurred, are not classed as victims, given that their emotional and psychological well being is likely to have been harmed.
(AQW 41725/11-15)

Mr Ford: Article 3(2) (b) of the Criminal Injuries (Compensation) (Northern Ireland) Order 1977 states that no compensation shall be paid if the victim was, at the time when the criminal injury was sustained, living with the offender as his wife or her husband or as a member of the same household as the offender. The position was changed by the Criminal Injuries Order 1988,

but the principle is that legislation is not retrospective so the change does not apply to cases before the commencement of the Order.

Those who suffered sexual abuse in such circumstances would indeed be classed as victims. They would not, however, be eligible for compensation due to the legislative provisions which prevailed pre-1988.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Justice what role the National Crime Agency will have in tackling the sale and smuggling of illegal tobacco products.
(AQW 41728/11-15)

Mr Ford: Excise evasion on tobacco products is a reserved matter and therefore is within the remit of the National Crime Agency, although without local accountability at present. The lead agency for evasion of duty is HM Revenue and Customs (and Border Force in relation to smuggling). They may call on the National Crime Agency for support and additional expertise where they feel it is necessary.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice whether former employees of the Historical Enquiries Team are subject to the constraints of the Official Secrets Act.
(AQW 41738/11-15)

Mr Ford: The management of the Historical Enquiries Team was an operational matter for the Chief Constable, for which he is accountable to the Policing Board.

You may, therefore, wish to refer your query to the Chief Constable.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many convicted sexual offenders are being managed in a community setting in each court division; and whether the relevant monitoring agencies are giving due consideration to the potential for clustering in some areas.
(AQW 41789/11-15)

Mr Ford: Data in relation to management of offenders under the public protection arrangements (PPANI) is not recorded by court division but can be provided by police district. Data is generally only recorded by court division where the Northern Ireland Courts & Tribunals Service is responsible for its collation.

The number of convicted sex offenders being managed within the community is subject to change on a daily basis. The data provided in the table below relates to the number of sex offenders being risk managed under the public protection arrangements within each police district on 10 February 2015.

Police District	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Number	119	277	144	144	167	113	150	118

The location of convicted sex offenders is always considered as part of the PPANI multi-agency risk assessment and risk management process.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 40980/11-15, whether he will review this answer given that the arraignment was held, pleas entered and sentencing passed on 12 January 2015 at Dungannon Crown Court, over a week before the question was submitted.
(AQW 41792/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission has not yet received any claims for payment in relation to the proceedings in Dungannon Crown Court, as detailed in ICOS reference number 14/109656. The following is an estimate of the costs payable broken down by type of legal representative:

Solicitor	£287,515.92
Junior Counsel	£127,107.60
Senior Counsel	£250,320.00

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice what action is being taken to reduce the cost of holding a person in prison.
(AQW 41799/11-15)

Mr Ford: Northern Ireland Prison Service is taking all actions possible to minimise the cost of holding a person in prison. The Cost per Prisoner Place (CPPP) has fallen from £81,340 in 2008-09 to £62,898 in 2013-14, with a target CPPP of £60,800 for the current financial year 2014-15

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice what criteria were used to select the courthouses proposed for closure and those to remain open; and why the eight proposed for closure were selected.
(AQW 41800/11-15)

Mr Ford: As detailed within the consultation paper on proposals for rationalisation of the court estate, every courthouse was assessed against the following criteria:

- Caseload at each court venue;
- The physical condition of the buildings;
- The numbers of courtrooms available at each building and their capability to accommodate a range of court business;
- Existing technology available at venues;
- Availability of facilities for victims and witnesses, such as separate waiting areas, space for voluntary sector partners and remote link rooms for video evidence;
- Accessibility of facilities for victims, witnesses and vulnerable users;
- Travel time and public transport links to an alternative venue;
- The cell capacity and access to courtrooms for prisoners; and
- Potential for public sector re-use, disposal or re-sale.

Each criterion was rated by importance, and all courthouses assessed against these criteria. The potential savings to be made by closing those with the lowest ratings was also considered together with the ability to establish a workable administrative court structure which would align with the new local government districts.

As a result of this exercise, the eight selected courthouses were identified for closure.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice to detail the projected savings from the proposed closure of (i) Ards Courthouse; and (ii) the other courthouses listed for closure.
(AQW 41803/11-15)

Mr Ford: As detailed within the consultation paper the projected financial savings from the closure of the courthouses are as set out in the table below.

Courthouse	**Annual recurrent savings**
Lisburn	£143,865
Newtownards	£191,818
Ballymena	£223,351
Limavady	£33,866
Armagh	£217,406
Magherafelt	£50,971
Strabane	£101,012
Enniskillen	£92,439
Total	**£1,054,728**

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 40366/11-15, and in respect of the Fermanagh and Tyrone court division, what assurances he can give that there are adequate measures in place to protect the public and prevent clustering.
(AQW 41877/11-15)

Mr Ford: Individuals who are subject to the notification requirements of Part 2 of the Sexual Offences Act 2003 are relevant sexual offenders for the purposes of risk assessment and risk management under the public protection arrangements. They will have a risk management plan which is tailored to the circumstances of the individual offender and the risk they present to the public. Their location is carefully considered as part of the risk management process.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 41459/11-15, (i) why this situation was allowed to occur; (ii) who is responsible; and (iii) what action will he take, particularly in respect of the failure to refer in line with provision of Regulation 18 (1).
(AQW 41946/11-15)

Mr Ford: The individuals to which the Questions refer are serving police officers and are paid by the Chief Constable as police officers.

The 'situation' covered by Regulation 18(1) allows the Police Federation to make a contribution in respect of the pay, pensions or allowances paid to individual office holders as agreed between the central committee of the Police Federation for Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Policing Board. Only in default of any such agreement would the Department be asked to make a determination in the matter.

I have not been made aware by the Policing Board or the Federation's central committee that any agreement reached between the parties is in default.

As stated in the answers I gave to AQW/38708/11-15 and AQW/41459/11-15,

I can reaffirm that this matter has not been referred to the Department for such a determination.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, following the recent incidents at HMP Maghaberry that jeopardised the safety of staff, whether he will order a full inquiry into why the Prison Service failed to implement the correct procedures in these circumstances.
(AQW 41950/11-15)

Mr Ford: As is normal practice, following any serious incident in a prison, the Northern Ireland Prison Service will conduct a review to establish the exact facts surrounding the incident and what lessons might be learnt.

That enquiry will determine whether any further action is required.

If there are specific procedural concerns that the Member thinks should be addressed I can refer those to the Prison Service for consideration.

Department for Regional Development

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the roads adopted in the Strangford constituency since January 2011; and the length of time bonds were in place until they were released.
(AQW 41106/11-15)

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): Details of the roads adopted within the Strangford Constituency since 1 April 2011, along with the length of time the respective bonds were in place, are as follows:

Development	Date Adopted	Time Bond Held (Years)
Whitecherry Lane, Killinchy	11/04/2011	12
Katie Janes Garden, Killinchy	03/05/2011	12
The Cornmill, Donaghadee	09/05/2011	4
Manse Close, Carrowdore	10/08/2011	6
Westlands, Portavogie	21/09/2011	6
Belfast Road, Comber	01/11/2011	6
31-39 Main Street, Carrowdore	18/11/2011	6
Rockhill, Donaghadee	08/12/2011	6
Rockhill, Donaghadee	08/12/2011	6
Ashgrove/Kilmia Ave., Newtownards	08/12/2011	7
Shore Road, Ballyhalbert	12/12/2011	7
Mark St/Thomas St, Newtownards	04/01/2012	5
Mount Pleasant, Newtownards	04/04/2012	3
39/40 Bristol Park, Newtownards	20/04/2012	1
1-6 Upper Crescent, Comber	28/05/2012	2
The Gables, Portaferry	18/07/2012	8
The Gables, Portaferry	18/07/2012	8
The Gables, Portaferry	18/07/2012	8
Millisle Road, Donaghadee	18/07/2012	6
Millisle Road, Donaghadee	18/07/2012	6
Helensview Park, Newtownards	22/08/2012	6
Turnstone, Newtownards	03/09/2012	15
Cuan View, Lisbane	27/09/2012	10
Albion Court, Comber	03/10/2012	10

Development	Date Adopted	Time Bond Held (Years)
Seaview Court, Portavogie	01/02/2013	6
Lansdowne Road, Newtownards	22/02/2013	12
Briarwood Park, Ballywalter	28/02/2013	17
The Forge, Ballygowan	22/04/2013	3
Whitechurch Meadows, Ballywalter	16/05/2013	9
Pineridge, Donaghadee	06/06/2013	12
Banff Brackenridge Donaghadee	06/06/2013	12
Hawthornridge, Donaghadee	06/06/2013	12
Brackenridge, Donaghadee	6/06/2013	12
The Meadows, Donaghadee	06/06/2013	12
The Meadows, Donaghadee	06/06/2013	12
The Meadows, Donaghadee	06/06/2013	12
Ballyrolly Cottages, Millisle	08/08/2013	13
Ballyrolly Cottages, Millisle	08 /08/2013	13
Castle Meadows, Cloughey	21 /08/2013	6
Bartleys Wood, Ballywalter	23/08/2013	6
The Tides, Portavogie	29/08/2013	12
The Tides, Portavogie	29/08/2013	12
Seahill, Donaghadee	18/09/2013	12
Seahill, Donaghadee	18/ 09/2013	12
Seahill, Donaghadee	18/ 09/2013	12
Seahill, Donaghadee	18/ 09/2013	12
Castle Cottages, Carrowdore	10/10/2013	3
Tullynargardy Road, Newtownards	04/11/2013	1
Tullynargardy Road, Newtownards	04/11/2013	1
Stump Road, Ballywalter	07/01/2014	17
Stanfield Court, Newtownards	15/01/2014	15
The Brambles/Stump Rd, Ballywalter	06/02/2014	10
The Brambles/Stump Rd, Ballywalter	06/02/2014	10
The Moatlands ,Victoria Rd, B'halbert	19/02/2014	12
The Moatlands, Victoria Rd, B'halbert	19/02/2014	12
The Moatlands, Victoria Rd, B'halbert	19/02/2014	12
The Moatlands, Victoria Rd, B'halbert	19/02/2014	12
The Moatlands ,Victoria Rd, B'halbert	19/02/2014	12
The Moatlands, Victoria Rd, B'halbert	19/02/2014	12
The Moatlands, Victoria Rd, B'halbert	19/02/2004	12
The Moatlands, Victoria Rd, B'halbert	19/02/2014	12
Spinners Court ,Comber	12/03/2014	12
New Court, Portavogie	07/04/2014	13
New Court, Portavogie	07/04/2014	13
New Court, Portavogie	07/04/2014	13

Development	Date Adopted	Time Bond Held (Years)
The Cornmill, Millisle	07/04/2014	7
The Cornmill, Millisle	07/04/2014	7
Carnmoon Millisle Rd, Donaghadee	07/04/2014	9
Exchange Mews, Donaghadee	21/05/2014	9
Aldergrange, Newtownards	11/06/2014	9
The Willows Stanvilla Rd, Newtownards	7/07/2014	18
Abbot Drive, Newtownards (Partial Adoption)	27/08/2014	13
Judes Crescent, Newtownards	04/09/2014	13
The Cornmill, Millisle	09/06/2014	7
Ashbourne Pk , Donaghadee Rd, Newtownards	18 09/2014	7
Ashbourne Pk, Donaghadee Rd, Newtownards	18/09/2014	3
North Road, Newtownards	03/10/2014	3
Fox Holow, Ballygowan	21/10/2014	5
Cranfield Grange, Newtownards	21/10/2014	7
Cranfield Grange, Newtownards	21/10/2014	8
The Meadows, Donaghadee	21/10/2014	13
Millbank Crescent, Abbey Road, Millisle	03/12/2014	13
Millbank Crescent, Abbey Road, Millisle	03/12/2014	13
New Road, Portavogie	15/12/2014	13
New Road, Portavogie	15/12/2014	13
New Road, Portavogie	15/12/2014	13
New Road, Portavogie	15/12/2014	13
Mount Royal, Millisle Road, Donaghadee	20/01/2015	14
The Old Mill, Killyleagh	29/09/2011	9
The Old Mill, Killyleagh	29/09/2011	9
The Old Mill, Killyleagh	29/09/2011	9
The Old Mill, Killyleagh	29/09/2011	9
Strawberry Fields, Strangford	11/10/2011	14
Lord Moira Park, Ballynahinch	10/11/2011	14
Lord Moira Park, Ballynahinch	10/11/2011	14
Lord Moira Park, Ballynahinch	10/11/2011	14
Lord Moira Park, Ballynahinch	10/11/2011	14
The Moorings, Killyleagh	12/03/2012	5
Riverside Rd, Ballynahinch	13/03/2012	5
Crossgar Road, Ballnahinch	04/12/2012	6
Drummond Brae, Ballynahinch	20/02/2013	11
Riverside Road, Ballynahinch	12/12/2013	12
Aldergrange, Darragh Cross	2/10/2014	5

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he has considered the use of LED lighting as a cost saving measure.
(AQW 41215/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department has considered the use of LED street lighting and already installed many hundreds of new LED street light fittings.

LEDs have developed rapidly over recent years and their efficiency and reliability has improved greatly, while costs have been falling steeply. My Department has worked with the Strategic Investment Board to examine a number of technical and operational options for street lighting and LEDs featured prominently in that work.

Going forward, my Department plans to make extensive use of LED street lighting.

Ms McCorley asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the integrated ticketing system and concessionary fares for Belfast Rapid Transit vehicles and the West Belfast Taxi Association.
(AQW 41230/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink is currently finalising an economic appraisal to examine the costs and benefits of various replacement options for a new ticketing system. My Department will require that any new ticketing system is compatible with the Belfast Rapid Transit project and offers the best possible value for money for passengers and the Department. The new system will be designed so that it can also be used by other public transport operators. When the economic appraisal is finalised, it will need approval from my Department and the Department of Finance and Personnel.

In relation to the Concessionary Fares Scheme, this will apply to Belfast Rapid Transit as it does to other public transport services in Northern Ireland.

The West Belfast Taxi Association (WBTA) has not applied to join the Northern Ireland Concessionary Fares Scheme.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 40135/11-15 and his reference to an hourly service, why no bus departs Enniskillen serving commuters travelling to Belfast between 6:05am and 7:30am.
(AQW 41236/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The key determinant of current levels of frequency on the 261 route between Enniskillen and Belfast to serve commuters is Translink's ability to operate efficiently and the requirement to allocate resources in a sustainable manner.

Current patronage levels would not support the resource required to provide a direct bus service from Enniskillen to Belfast. However Translink continues to review its services and how best to improve and attract new customers. Services at 06:05 and 07:30 from Enniskillen which operate via Dungannon and Park and Ride sites are currently being reviewed as part of an overall Bus Business Plan.

Ms McCorley asked the Minister for Regional Development whether West Belfast Taxi Association vehicles will be permitted to use the bus lanes on the Belfast Rapid Transit scheme.
(AQW 41239/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: It is currently proposed that the bus lanes on which Belfast Rapid Transit will operate will be available for use by buses, bicycles, motorcycles and permitted taxis, in the same way as other bus lanes in the city currently operate. As such the West Belfast Taxi Association vehicles will be permitted to use them.

Mr McMullan asked the Minister for Regional Development what assurances he can give that the Winter Service Route Optimization programme will be rural proofed; and that the gritting schedule will not be reduced in terms of personnel or machinery as a result of the programme.
(AQW 41255/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Route Optimisation project will not involve a change to our current Winter Service policy.

The purpose of the project is to deliver savings in the cost of delivering the winter gritting service by minimising the total number of salting routes and overall mileage covered to service the whole treatment network. It will not reduce the length of the current salted network but will identify the most cost effective way of providing this service. This is likely to result in a reduction in the level of personnel and machinery required to carry out this activity.

My Department's current Winter Service policy has been established in accordance with Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the measures under consideration to allay traffic and road safety issues around the Gransha Road roundabout, Bangor.
(AQW 41259/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: It is recognised that Gransha Road roundabout would benefit from enhanced pedestrian measures and my officials are currently investigating the best option to facilitate both pedestrian and traffic movements at this busy interchange. Various options are being considered, including a fully signalised roundabout providing controlled pedestrian facilities on each approach.

I have asked Mr Simon Richardson, TransportNI's Divisional Manager for the area, to apprise you of the outcome, upon completion of this work.

Mr Ramsey asked the Minister for Regional Development when the recently commenced street light maintenance work will be completed; and what steps he is taking to ensure that the lighting system is not allowed to deteriorate to such an extent in the future.
(AQW 41274/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Following the Executive's decision to meet my Department's bid for additional funding in the January monitoring round, I immediately reinstated the use of external contractors to repair defective street lights. Contractors are back on the ground, in addition to my Department's own street lighting staff, working through the backlog of street lighting repairs that has accumulated since last August. I have instructed that all available resources are to be used to expedite the work. My aim is to have the backlog cleared as quickly as possible within the remainder of this financial year.

However, the funding provided in January monitoring is for this financial year only. In order to avoid a similar situation occurring next financial year, I have alerted Executive colleagues to the need for an adequate road maintenance budget, which includes for street lighting repairs. I will continue to bid for adequate resources to keep street lighting operating, but ultimately my Department will not be able to spend money it does not have.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Regional Development, in view of the indication that Irish Rail is considering a rail spur to directly connect rail passengers from Belfast to Dublin Airport, whether he will review and act on the need for a direct rail link to Belfast International Airport.
(AQW 41276/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I fully recognise the strategic importance of our airports and remain committed to exploring opportunities to enhance our road and rail connections where appropriate and where funding can be secured.

In publishing my Railway Investment Prioritisation Strategy last year, I set out my priorities for investment in our rail network over the next 20 years. At that time I highlighted my commitment to explore the potential for establishing a rail link to Belfast International Airport. However, as the Strategy noted, annual passenger numbers through Belfast International Airport would need to rise to around 10 million, to make a rail link economically viable and to enable provision of a regular and frequent service. While passenger throughput in 2013 was just over 4 million, this is expected to grow towards 10 million by 2030, well within the lifetime of my Strategy.

I note that Dublin Airport currently handles over 21 million passengers per annum. I am aware that the Irish Government has consulted recently on six transport options for North Dublin, which would provide services to Dublin Airport. Three of the options do not involve a heavy rail link and I note the Irish Government has not yet selected its preferred option.

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on progress on the flood alleviation project in Mourneview, Newcastle Co Down.
(AQW 41293/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by NI Water that the development of the detailed design of a project to reduce the risk of flooding in the Mourneview area of Newcastle is progressing well. NI Water and its design consultant, McAdam Design, have completed extensive topographical surveys in the area and have appointed an independent Hydraulic Modelling Consultancy to validate design options, with CCTV internal pipe inspections and ground investigation work commencing in the near future. NI Water will also be seeking lands agreements and undertaking consultations with Transport NI and DARD Rivers Agency.

Subject to available funding and statutory approvals, it is envisaged this project will be tendered with a target construction start date of October 2015. This date has been selected in order to avoid construction work clashing with the peak holiday season.

The current estimated value of the project is approximately £0.5 million, which will be jointly funded by NI Water and TransportNI.

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister for Regional Development what progress his Department has made in addressing the traffic congestion in Downpatrick town centre.
(AQW 41294/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: A full review of all recent traffic studies for Downpatrick town centre is currently being carried out to help identify the best option for traffic progression through the town. This includes a review of the Council's Town Centre Masterplan and a number of other studies carried out over the years.

A full consultation process will be undertaken with all interested parties upon completion of the overall review, which is scheduled for spring 2015.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans his Department has in place to provide additional, regular public transport to the new Local Enhanced Hospital in Omagh.
(AQW 41310/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: It was identified that the current level of service was insufficient to serve the proposed new Local Enhanced Hospital in Omagh. As such, Translink has been involved in on-going discussions with the Trust in relation to the provision of public transport to the new hospital site.

Translink recommended that a shuttle bus service should operate, throughout the day, between the Hospital and Omagh Town Centre/Bus Centre for the benefit of staff, patients and visitors. This service would penetrate the site and be provided subject to a period of financial support from the Trust.

A meeting to discuss the detail of frequency of service and hours of operation was scheduled for week commencing 19 January 2015 but has been rescheduled to mid-February.

Translink is represented on the Western Health & Social Care Trust Travel Plan Steering Group which is tasked with achieving the sustainable travel targets detailed in its travel plans

Mr McElduff asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline his Department's plans to invest in the water infrastructure in West Tyrone to ensure no recurrence of the problems experienced during January 2015.
(AQW 41311/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by NI Water that the water treatment works and associated distribution systems across Northern Ireland ordinarily provide a continuous service and are normally robust. The primary reason for the interruptions to supply during December 2014 and January 2015 was the industrial action taken by NI Water's staff including those with the skills and knowledge required to maintain the service.

NI Water is progressing a review of the issues highlighted during this period with the intention of identifying and analysing the problems encountered and if necessary developing a programme of work to address the issues. Internal and external reviews have just commenced and it would be premature to indicate the extent of the reviews and the time frame for completion.

A number of major capital projects relevant to the West Tyrone area have been identified in the PC15 capital programme covering the period April 2015 to March 2021. Details of the works identified are listed below. They do however remain subject to the availability of funding.

- A major trunk main from Carland to Cookstown;
- Upgrade of Filters and Chemical Dosing at the Derg Water Treatment Works;
- Provision of additional treated water storage at Lough Fea Water Treatment Works; and
- A Northern Ireland wide study to develop new Water Resource and Supply Resilience Guidance quantifying capital expenditure for the post 2021 funding period.

The total cost of the work identified above is £11.5 million.

NI Water also intends to spend £46 million, during this programme period, on Base Maintenance work at water treatment works and water pumping stations across Northern Ireland which will be delivered on a prioritised basis. This will include maintenance and investment to improve the resilience of water treatment works where necessary.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister for Regional Development whether his Department will introduce traffic calming measures in the Coolnagard area of Omagh.
(AQW 41312/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department has undertaken an assessment of the need to provide traffic calming measures in the Coolnagard area of Omagh. During the assessment it was noted that this development has been designed and constructed with traffic calming in mind, in that the road alignment within the housing areas encourages vehicles to travel at appropriate speeds. This important factor contributed to the outcome of the assessment, which indicated the Coolnagard development is not ranked as highly as other sites currently within the 2015-2017 Traffic Calming programme for Omagh District Council area. Therefore, based on current funding allocations, traffic calming measures are not being proposed for this development.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the one way driving proposal by residents for Shore Road, Millisle,
(AQW 41327/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My officials have been considering your request for a one-way system in Shore Road, Millisle. As I stated in my letter to you of 23 December 2014, one-way systems can create specific problems such as increased vehicle speeds due to the absence of opposing traffic, additional journey lengths and times, inconvenience to locals and displacement of traffic to other previously quiet streets.

I understand there is one isolated area on Shore Road where parked cars on both sides of the carriageway restrict the road to one lane. This is a common occurrence in many areas across many areas in Northern Ireland and traffic must "give and take" to progress through these sections.

As this general area has a good safety record, there may be other options that could be considered, rather than the requested one-way system, such as the introduction of localised waiting restrictions, which would improve traffic progression in the specific area of concern.

These options need time to be considered and require discussion with the Police Service of Northern Ireland, which will enforce such measures. I have asked my officials to apprise you of the outcome when they complete their deliberations.

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the circumstances in which a half hour rail service could be established between Coleraine and Derry.
(AQW 41343/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Establishment of a 30-minute frequency train service in both directions on a single track between Coleraine and Londonderry would require the creation of passing loops at 15-minute travel time intervals. Hence, in addition to the planned passing loop at Bellarena, this would require an additional loop at Eglinton. This is not part of the current Phase 2 signalling and relay project currently being procured.

Half-hourly frequency between Coleraine and Londonderry will be most effective when half-hourly frequency extends southwards from Coleraine to Belfast, i.e. a half-hour through service between Belfast and Londonderry. To achieve this would require the creation of a series of loops (at 15 minutes travel time intervals). This would best be achieved by extending the Ballymoney loop, i.e. dualling in a southerly direction a new loop between Killagan and Ballymena (possible at Glarryford) with dualling of track from Ballymena to Bleach Green.

The precise detail for extent of dualling, location of loops etc. can only be established after detailed modelling/simulation.

Such an upgrade would require significant capital funding to allow the substantial signalling renewals that would be required as well as the works to construct the passing loops. In addition, more trains would have to be purchased to provide the additional services and those services would require additional funding under the Rail Public Service Obligation to operate.

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Regional Development what progress has been made to agree the future of the old Waterside Railway station as a focal point of new passenger facilities in Derry.
(AQW 41344/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I announced in March 2014 plans for an integrated transport hub in Londonderry, subject to securing the necessary funding. Since then, my Department has engaged extensively with the Special European Programmes Body and officials in Scotland and the Republic of Ireland to secure the inclusion of a Sustainable Transport thematic objective in the INTERREG VA Programme. The programme is currently going through the final stages of the European Commission approval process.

I expect the first call for INTERREG VA projects to open later this year and my Department intends to present an application for funding at this, or a subsequent, call.

I am particularly keen that the community benefits arising from any such project are optimised and reflect local and regional demand. To this end, if and when funding is confirmed, I expect my Department's engagement meetings with stakeholders to further inform the detailed design of the project.

Mr McCallister asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the proposals outlined by Irish Rail that mean a commuter may be able to get on a train in Northern Ireland and arrive at Dublin Airport, but not be able to get on a train in Northern Ireland and arrive at an airport in Northern Ireland.
(AQW 41346/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I am aware that the Irish Government has consulted recently on six public transport options for the North Dublin area, which also would serve Dublin Airport. Three of these options do not include a heavy rail solution. Two of the options would involve an extension of DART services from the line north of Dublin to the airport. Other options involve light rail or bus based rapid transit. The Irish Government has yet to commit to a preferred option.

Within my recently published Railway Investment Prioritisation Strategy, establishing a rail link to Belfast International Airport is one of the options to be considered to enhance the Northern Ireland network, if significantly greater amounts of railways capital grant can be found from the Executive's budget over the next 20 years.

The Strategy noted that annual passenger numbers through Belfast International Airport would need to rise to around 10 million, to make a rail link economically viable. As passenger throughput in 2013 was just over 4 million, a detailed feasibility study would be expected as passenger numbers grow towards 10 million by 2030, as is predicted by the airport operator. By comparison, air passenger throughput in Dublin Airport in 2014 was 21.7 million.

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development how many grit boxes were provided in North Down in each of the last five years.
(AQW 41348/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Details of the number of salt bins provided, in each of the last five years, are provided in the table below:

Year	Salt bins provided in North Down (no.)
2010/11	172
2011/12	184
2012/13	188

Year	Salt bins provided in North Down (no.)
2013/14	185
2014/15	184

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development what is the target time for the repair of a broken street light; and what percentage of repairs meet this target.
(AQW 41349/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: In normal circumstances, the majority of street lighting repairs are carried out within five working days of the fault being reported. However, due to budgetary constraints I had to suspend the use of external contractors, who had been carrying out the majority of the repairs and supplementing our internal resources and consequently it has been taking longer to complete the necessary repairs.

Following the Executive's decision to meet my bid for additional funding in the January Monitoring round, I immediately reinstated the use of external contractors to repair faulty street lights. Contractors, in addition to my Department's own street lighting staff, are working through the large backlog of street lighting repairs that has accumulated since last August and it is estimated that 15% of the backlog has already been cleared.

My Department aims to have the backlog of faulty street lights cleared as quickly as possible within the remainder of this financial year.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline the reasons for the withdrawal of the Notice of Intention to make a Vesting Order for certain lands at numbers 3, 5 and 7 Temple Road, Strathfoyle, Derry; and what are the implications of this withdrawal for the proposed A6 Londonderry to Dungiven dualling.
(AQW 41369/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: When the Notice of Intention to Make a Vesting Order was published in December 2011, unresolved environmental issues influenced the area of land required at Temple Road. Having resolved these issues, my officials were content that the area of land under threat of vesting could be reduced without compromising construction of the new road.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Regional Development whether any lands have been vested by his Department to facilitate the proposed A6 Londonderry to Dungiven dualling; and if so, to detail the costs involved.
(AQW 41370/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: No land has been vested for the construction of the A6 Londonderry to Dungiven dualling scheme.

Mr Newton asked the Minister for Regional Development how many street lights are currently non-operational in East Belfast; and when these street lights will be fully functional.
(AQW 41392/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department does not hold data relating to street lighting outages by individual electoral area.

However I am pleased to be able to confirm that following the Executive's decision to meet my Department's bid for additional funding in the January monitoring round, I immediately reinstated the use of external contractors to repair defective street lights. Contractors are back on the ground, in addition to my Department's own street lighting staff, working through the backlog of street lighting repairs that has accumulated since last August. I expect all repairs to be completed by mid-March 2015.

Mr Newton asked the Minister for Regional Development what actions his Department will take to liaise with businesses and residents on the route of the rapid transit system along the Upper Newtownards Road.
(AQW 41393/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department has already carried out considerable public consultation in relation to the Belfast Rapid Transit (BRT) project. In 2009/10 the Department carried out a full public consultation on the policy proposals for BRT. In 2011/12, a further public consultation on the route options for BRT and the Equality Impact Assessment of the proposals was carried out. The latter consultation included public exhibitions of the proposals. In East Belfast, the proposals were exhibited in Ballyhackamore Library and Connswater Shopping Centre. In addition, the proposals were exhibited in the Offices of the East Belfast Partnership Board for the duration of the consultation period.

As the designs for individual sections of the BRT routes are completed, my Department is undertaking local Public Information Events. These events provide an opportunity for local elected representatives, residents and businesses to view the proposals and speak to members of the BRT project team. Invitations to these events are issued to all residents and businesses which front the section of the route; the elected representatives (Councillors, Shadow Councillors, MLAs and MPs) for the area; and members of the Assembly's Committee for Regional Development and Belfast City Council's Development Committee. The events are also advertised in the local daily newspapers. To date the following events have been held in East Belfast:

- Dundonald Park & Ride – in Dundonald Library on 27 April 2013 and 1 May 2013.

- BRT route on the Upper Newtownards Road between Sandown Road and Knock Road – in Ballyhackamore Library on 28 & 29 November 2013.
- BRT route on the Upper Newtownards Road between Albertbridge Road and Sandown Road – in Holywood Arches Library on 25 & 26 September 2014.

These Events have been well attended and the views expressed by attendees have been generally supportive of the project. Further Public Information Events will be arranged as the detailed designs for each section of the route are finalised.

Officials from my Department are also happy to provide briefings on the BRT project to local groups on request. They have recently provided briefings to the Ballyhackamore Business Association and the Newtownards Road & Inner East Traders Association.

When works are being undertaken on a particular section of the route, the appointed contractor letter drops all residents and businesses on the section prior to the commencement of the works and again in relation to any specific works which will affect particular properties. This correspondence also provides local site contact details should anyone have queries or issues regarding the works. Site supervisors are on site during working hours to deal with day-to-day issues as they arise.

As work on each section of the BRT route is completed, there will be further public consultation in relation to the introduction of the bus lanes. Initially these bus lanes will operate during peak hours, typically 7:30-9:30 and 15:30-18:30. When BRT becomes operational in 2017, it is the intention to change the operative hours of the bus lanes to 12 hours (7am-7pm). This change to the bus lane operating hours will be the subject of further public consultation. This consultation will seek to identify and address local issues in relation to servicing, deliveries, etc.

This high level of local engagement has been ongoing and will continue throughout the BRT project. My Department's BRT project team would be happy to meet with you to discuss the project if you would find that helpful.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the NI Water staff pensions dispute.
(AQW 41404/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NI Water) that an initial agreement on potential settlement terms has been agreed with the Water Group of Trade Unions (WGTU) on a without prejudice basis. This has allowed WGTU to agree to a suspension of the current industrial action. NI Water is now in the process of completing Business Cases and Pay Remit documentation for submission to DRD and DFP for review and approval.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development in light of the additional money awarded in the Budget 2015-16, whether his Department is now in a position to repair all malfunctioning street lights.
(AQW 41405/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Following the Executive's decision to meet my Department's bid for additional funding in the January monitoring round, I immediately reinstated the use of external contractors to repair defective street lights. Contractors are back on the ground, in addition to my Department's own street lighting staff, working through the backlog of street lighting repairs that has accumulated since last August. I have instructed that all available resources are to be used to expedite the work. My aim is to have the backlog cleared as quickly as possible within the remainder of this financial year.

However, the funding provided for street lighting repairs in January monitoring is for this financial year only and there has been no additional money awarded in the 2015/16 budget to maintain this level of service. In order to avoid a similar situation occurring next financial year, I have alerted Executive colleagues to the need for an adequate road maintenance budget, including for street lighting repairs.

I will continue to bid for adequate resources to keep street lighting operating, but ultimately my Department will not be able to spend money it does not have.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Regional Development who funded the building and installation of the private hire taxi-rank at Central Station, Belfast; and who approved the funding.
(AQW 41408/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Economic Appraisal, which was submitted in 2002/03, catered for a wider traffic management system at Central Station which included the car park, the bus-way and a taxi rank.

The project was submitted to Translink's Executive Committee for approval, then to the NITHC Board. Once approved at both forums, the project was submitted to and subsequently approved by my Department, who provided approval for capital funding in September 2003.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 40719/11-15, to detail additional eligibility criteria, for properties which were built before 2000 who wish to install mains water, so they can benefit from the supplemented allowance of £12,000.
(AQW 41427/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The supplementary allowance of £12,000 per property is available to all properties constructed before 1 January 2000 which have not previously been served by a public mains water supply. Properties classed as 'not served' do not have

a water main in the nearest public road as opposed to properties that are not connected to a nearby water main by a private supply pipe. Householders are responsible for installing and paying for the private supply pipe from the boundary of their property to the point of supply.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Regional Development whether it is still his Department's intention to vest the lands at Mobuoy Road; and if so, what are the costs involved from (i) vesting; (ii) additional environmental assessment processes; and (iii) remediation of contaminated land.
(AQW 41439/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have not yet confirmed any of the Statutory Orders for the Londonderry to Dungiven dual carriageway. If in due course I confirm the Direction Order to complete planning for the scheme, the Vesting Order will continue to remain in draft until funding has been confirmed.

This draft Vesting Order, as presented at the Public Inquiry into the scheme, has not been amended at Mobuoy. The costs associated with the acquisition of these lands will not be known until the vesting process is completed at some stage in the future. At that stage, the Department will be guided by DFP's Lands and Property Services on land valuation.

It has not been necessary for my Department to undertake any additional assessment work at Mobuoy as the environmental considerations into the chosen road alignment took existing conditions, known at the time, into account. The land being vested at this location which forms part of the illegal land fill site is required for flood compensation measures. Additional environmental assessments have been undertaken by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency and this information has been used to inform potential solutions to the contamination, which may be required should remediation still be necessary.

In responding to your previous questions on this issue, I noted that, should the contamination issue remain unresolved when the road is being built, I am content that cost effective measures can be deployed to remedy the undesirable effects of the buried waste.

Having examined the extant record of extensive intrusive investigation of the contaminated lands, consultants experienced in the remediation of contaminated land have advised that the contaminated material can be left in situ provided:

1 a watertight cut-off trench is installed alongside the River Faughan to prevent contaminated groundwater migrating into the river;

2 filter drains are installed within the contaminated material to direct contaminated groundwater to a sump where it can be removed and dealt with offsite;

3 an impermeable membrane is installed over the contaminated area to prevent ingress of rainwater into the contaminated area; and

4 the contaminated area is capped with surplus excavated material arising from the road construction.

The last item is an integral part of the earthworks strategy for the scheme and is already allowed for in the scheme estimate. The remaining costs would be assimilated quite easily into allowances already included in the scheme estimate to defray the cost of unforeseen events.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Regional Development whether Translink has a contract with any private hire taxi company or preferred operator; and if so (i) with which company; (ii) when the contract was tendered and awarded; and (iii) whether Translink promotes said taxi company on its vehicles or premises.
(AQW 41458/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The contract for Central Station generates revenue for Translink in exchange for Value Cabs being the on-site provider of taxi services. This contract commenced in 2009 and is due to expire in October 2015.

Translink is currently collaborating with the Central Procurement Directorate (CPD) of DFP for the provision of taxi services, including the use of taxis for operational requirements within Translink.

This contract is due to be awarded in 2015.

There are stands/signage directing passengers emerging from trains to access the taxi services. There is no other advertising in the form of posters, etc. on premises, or on buses.

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Regional Development when work on the next phase of the Coleraine to Londonderry rail line will begin.
(AQW 41462/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Invitations to tender for the signalling works contract of the Coleraine-Londonderry Renewals Project (Phase 2) have been issued.

At this point Translink hopes to appoint a signalling contractor by around the end of May 2015.

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Regional Development what is the expected timeline to completion of the A26 dualling from Glarryford.
(AQW 41463/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The contract commenced on 19 January 2015 and is expected to be completed in the summer of 2017.

Mr Anderson asked the Minister for Regional Development how many street lights are currently non-operational in (i) Portadown; (ii) Lurgan; and (iii) Banbridge; and when these street lights will be fully functional.
(AQW 41498/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: As of Monday 2 February 2015, the numbers of non-operational street lights in each of the towns listed were as follows:

Town	Non-operational street lights (No.)
Portadown	132
Lurgan	100
Banbridge	94

The backlog of defective street lights in each council area is being addressed on a route-by-route basis to maximise the repair rate and minimise non-productive travelling time. It is not possible to predict when all the defective lights will be repaired at particular locations within a local authority area, but it is estimated that it will take a minimum of six weeks to clear the backlog in the Craigavon Borough and Banbridge District Council areas.

Mr Anderson asked the Minister for Regional Development how many staff are deployed by his Department to fill grit boxes in Upper Bann.
(AQW 41499/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Upper Bann constituency is serviced by TransportNI's Carn and Corbet depots, which cover the Craigavon and Banbridge areas, respectively.

Salt boxes and piles are placed at strategic locations in compliance with established Departmental criteria commencing from October and maintained until the end of the winter season in April. The frequency of replenishment of salt/grit at these locations is dependent upon weather conditions and usage. The number of operatives utilised on replenishment will therefore vary on a day-to-day basis depending on weather conditions and other work priorities.

Throughout the recent cold period since early January 2015 there have been, on average, 12 operatives engaged on this activity each day.

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development how many (i) domestic; and (ii) non-domestic water meters were installed in North Down in each year since 2007.
(AQW 41564/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Northern Ireland Water holds water meter installation information according to the nature of the installation, the number of meters, and the type of property (domestic or non-domestic) it serves. It is not operationally practical for the company to hold the information according to geographical area or constituency boundary and it is therefore not in a position to provide the requested information.

There are approximately 113,000 water meters in Northern Ireland, of which some 32,000 have been installed at domestic properties. The table below shows the number of meter installations in Northern Ireland from 2007 – 2014.

Year	Number of meters installed at domestic properties	Number of meters installed at non-domestic properties	Total Number of meters installed
2007 / 08	3,220	2,154	5374
2008 / 09	11,460	4,886	16346
2009 / 10	3,945	933	4878
2010 / 2011	4,427	1,115	5542
2011 / 2012	3,458	814	4272
2012 / 2013	3,078	737	3815
2013 / 2014	3,031	481	3512

Mr McElduff asked the Minister for Regional Development whether his Department will investigate the need for traffic calming measures on the Circular Road, Killyclogher, particularly in the area of Castleview and Mullaghmore.
(AQW 41571/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have asked my officials to undertake an assessment for a traffic calming scheme at Circular Road, Killyclogher. This assessment should be completed within the next 10 to 12 weeks and my officials will write to you to apprise you of the outcome.

Mr Irwin asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the discovery of fuel in the Transport NI Armagh depot which contained potentially trace amounts of fuel unsuitable for road use.
(AQW 41650/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Fuel is supplied to TransportNI through a UK-wide government contract. Armagh depot received a delivery of fuel recently which, following testing, was found to have potentially trace amounts of fuel unsuitable for road use. TransportNI promptly reported the incident to HMRC and an investigation is underway.

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Regional Development whether there have been any recent changes in, or alterations to, contracts regarding the A26 dualling scheme which could affect the cost or timing of the project.
(AQW 41657/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The contract for the A26 Dualling scheme was awarded to the consortium BAM/McCann on 21 October 2014. Following contract award, a dispute arose between the contractor and the Department. Despite this, BAM/McCann remained the most economically advantageous tenderer.

The dispute has had no impact on timing of the project as it has always been anticipated that design/site mobilisation works would be carried out in late 2014/early 2015, with the main construction works commencing in March/April 2015. The estimated overall cost of the project remains in the region of £55million.

Mr Dunne asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the new sewage pump improvement scheme in Millisle.
(AQW 41666/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The ownership of the site required for the new wastewater pumping station in Millisle is presently split between Ards Borough Council and the Crown Estate. Before NI Water can acquire the entire site, Ards Borough Council must first acquire a strip of land from the Crown Estate. Matters in relation to this initial acquisition are still ongoing and are outside of NI Water's direct control. NI Water's legal department have sought regular updates from the external parties and I understand that the legal processes are still progressing. The contract to construct the new pumping station is presently out to tender and the project will be brought to construction as soon as possible, following completion of the necessary land acquisitions.

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the cost of (i) new; and (ii) replacement road markings in each region, in each of the last five years.
(AQW 41696/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department does not monitor the cost of new and replacement road markings separately, however, the table below provides details of the total expenditure by each of Transport NI's Divisions, for each of the last five years, for the renewal of road markings and reflective road studs (cat's eyes):

Financial Year	Northern Division (£)	Southern Division (£)	Eastern Division (£)	Western Division (£)	Total (£)
2009/10	566,000	592,000	485,000	459,000	2,102,000
2010/11	482,000	506,000	537,000	422,000	1,947,000
2011/12	638,000	595,000	704,000	369,000	2,306,000
2012/13	549,000	556,000	744,000	467,000	2,316,000
2013/14	553,000	662,000	836,000	385,000	2,436,000

Department for Social Development

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development whether the individual has ever declared any interest while being involved in the approval process for assistance to GAA clubs under the Neighbourhood Renewal Programme.
(AQW 40859/11-15)

Mr Storey (The Minister for Social Development): The Officer is not a member of any GAA club, which has received assistance from my Department therefore the officer has not had to declare any interest.

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Social Development whether Employment Support Allowance applicants are permitted to cancel an appointment more than once on the grounds of poor weather not permitting them to attend.
(AQW 41151/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Service provider seeks to arrange a mutually agreeable appointment for Employment and Support Allowance claimants who have been asked to attend a face to face assessment. Claimants will be automatically offered one further appointment when they have notified that they are unable to attend due to poor weather. Where a subsequent appointment is cancelled due to poor weather a form is dispatched to the claimant asking for the reasons. This is then considered by a decision maker and a further appointment will be set where the decision maker determines it is appropriate.

Mr Clarke asked the Minister for Social Development (i) how much his Department pays annually for Trade Union officials; (ii) how many officials this payment covers; and (iii) what is the cost of administering Trade Union's dues.
(AQW 41176/11-15)

Mr Storey: In the 2013/14 financial year, my Department paid staff costs of £184,116 in respect of 5.8 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff seconded to NIPSA.

HRConnect, as the payroll provider for the NICS, provides the facility to deduct trade union subscriptions from staff salaries. There is no charge levied for this service.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 40536/11-15, to list by constituency the number of households in receipt of benefits in excess of £26,000 per annum.
(AQW 41192/11-15)

Mr Storey: At June/July 2014, it was identified that there were 6,600 households receiving benefits (Social Security Agency benefits[1], Housing Benefit, Child Benefit and Tax Credits) in excess of £26,000 per annum in Northern Ireland.

By constituency these are:

Constituency	Number of Households
Belfast East	240
Belfast North	570
Belfast South	250
Belfast West	850
East Antrim	210
East Londonderry	290
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	300
Foyle	550
Lagan Valley	220
Mid Ulster	370
Newry And Armagh	460
North Antrim	290
North Down	150
South Antrim	250
South Down	420
Strangford	250
Upper Bann	420
West Tyrone	510

1 The following benefits are not included in this calculation as data is either not held by the Department or is not in a format that can be linked to overall household benefit income: Child Disability Living Allowance, Guardian's Allowance, Widow's Pension, War Widow's or War Widower's Pension, Armed Forces Compensation Scheme, Armed Forces Independence Payment and War Pensions.

Figures have been rounded to the nearest 10 households

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Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 40536/11-15, to detail the total annual benefits being paid to the 6,600 families in receipt of benefits in excess of £26,000 per annum.
(AQW 41264/11-15)

Mr Storey: At June/July 2014, it was identified that there were 6,600 households receiving benefits (Social Security Agency benefits[1], Housing Benefit, Child Benefit and Tax Credits) in excess of £26,000 per annum in Northern Ireland.

The total annual benefits being paid to the 6,600 households is estimated to be £203,500,000 (rounded to the nearest £100,000).

The average annual benefit received by these households is estimated to be £30,700 (rounded to the nearest £100).

The following benefits are not included in this calculation as data is either not held by the Department or is not in a format that can be linked to overall household benefit income: Child Disability Living Allowance, Guardian's Allowance, Widow's Pension, War Widow's or War Widower's Pension, Armed Forces Compensation Scheme, Armed Forces Independence Payment and War Pensions.

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Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development what is the anticipated cost to the Northern Ireland budget over the coming years of sustaining benefits above the cap being applied elsewhere in the United Kingdom.
(AQW 41265/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Benefit Cap will be considered during the passage of the Welfare Reform Bill through the Assembly. Proposals within the Bill mirror the approach taken elsewhere in the United Kingdom with a cap of £26,000 for a family or lone parent and £18,200 for a single person with no children. The same exclusions will apply to the Benefit Cap as are in place in Great Britain.

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister for Social Development how the Warm Home Scheme was evaluated for (i) value for money; and (ii) reducing fuel poverty.
(AQW 41320/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Warm Homes Scheme has been my Department's main tool in contributing to tackle fuel poverty since 2001. It has assisted over 125,000 households and has invested over £150 million in energy efficiency improvements.

The Warm Homes Scheme relies on households self referring to the scheme and those householders must be in receipt of certain social security benefits in order to qualify. Evaluation of the Warm Homes Scheme was carried out in 2014 and highlighted:-

- 61 per cent of claimants as being either very satisfied or satisfied with the cost of running their heating system following intervention through Scheme assistance; and
- That 89% of claimants were overall either satisfied or very satisfied with the Warm Homes Scheme.

This is a positive claimant satisfaction achievement.

Following installation of Warm Homes Scheme measures, households achieved an average SAP improvement of 15%.

The evaluation of the Warm Homes Scheme also found that fuel poverty may benefit from a move away from self-referral applications to a targeted approach based on identifying households in greatest need.

The evaluation concluded that the Warm Homes Scheme successfully met its objectives.

However in spite of the investment in domestic energy efficiency the rate of fuel poverty in Northern Ireland continued to rise, with a significant number of people living in extreme or severe fuel poverty, who were not self referring into the Warm Homes Scheme.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development whether the mooted merger of Oaklee, Trinity and Ulidia Housing Associations will be subject to any tenant ballot; and if not, why this is not the case given its monopolistic and competition implications.
(AQW 41358/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Department requires that appropriate public consultation be carried out in the eventuality of a merger and extensive guidance is available on the forms that this may take. This can be found at:

http://www.dsdni.gov.uk/index/hsdiv-housing/ha_guide/hag-index/hagsa-scheme-approval-contents/hagsa-background-consultation.htm

The Government Code of Practice on Consultation can be assessed at:
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/100807/file47158.pdf

In Northern Ireland the Board of an association is elected by its shareholders and provided there is no change to the regulatory framework covering the tenancies there is no requirement for a tenant ballot. This is the situation which applies to the Oaklee Trinity and Ulidia merger.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the staffing implications of the merger of Trinity and Oaklee Housing Associations; and what measures were taken to ensure parity in relation to salary and pension rights.
(AQW 41359/11-15)

Mr Storey: All housing associations are bound by existing government legislation in relation to equality, recruitment and employment protection. It is not the Department's role to determine the salary or pension contributions of any individual working for a housing association. However, as the regulatory body, part of the role of the Department's inspection team is to ensure that human resource policies are clear, complete, appropriate and fit for purpose.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of houses that have benefited from the Affordable Warmth Scheme to date.
(AQW 41373/11-15)

Mr Storey: My Department has been piloting the Affordable Warmth Scheme since 2012. Since then, 1,279 homes have benefited from the provision of energy efficiency measures.

The Information provided in this response is governed by the Principles and Protocols of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. This is enforced by UK Statistics Authority

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of (i) Employment and Support Allowance; and (ii) Disability Living Allowance appeals that have been upheld in each of the last four financial years, based on additional medical evidence supplied by the applicant or obtained by the Social Security Agency subsequent to their original decision.
(AQW 41421/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Chairman of the Appeal Tribunal only records whether the decision made on appeal was either more or less advantageous than a previous decision. The specific information used by the Tribunal in reaching its decision is not recorded. A more advantageous decision may increase the allowance or direct that a new award be made.

The table below details the number of Employment and Support Allowance and Disability Living Allowance appeals in each of the last four financial years that have received final determination/outcome and of those how many were successful.

Year	Benefit type	Final Outcome	More Advantageous Decision	Benefit Type	Final Outcome	More Advantageous Decision
2010/11	ESA	5035	1461	DLA	4607	1651
2011/12	ESA	6318	2193	DLA	3826	1511
2012/13	ESA	8559	2855	DLA	3819	1395
2013/14	ESA	12193	3778	DLA	3799	1318

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the rate that benefit appeal tribunal panel members are paid; and the basis on which the payment is calculated.
(AQW 41431/11-15)

Mr Storey: In relation to benefit appeal tribunals, panel members are paid per half day session, between either 9.30 to 13.00 or 13.30 to 17.00. Each session includes multiple hearings. Members may be asked to prepare multiple cases for each session and to sit for two sessions in one day.

The Department for Social Development is responsible for determining and paying the remuneration and allowances of panel members. The fee payable is included in members' terms and conditions.

The current rate payable to each category of panel member is detailed in the table below.

Panel Member Category	Rate per session
Legally Qualified Member	£226.50
Medically Qualified Member (up to 40 sessions)	£156.50
Medically Qualified Member (over 40 sessions and Consultants IRO certain appeal type)	£187.50

Panel Member Category	Rate per session
Financially Qualified Member	£152.50
Disability Qualified Member	£97.00

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Social Development why (i) the Affordable Warmth Scheme was not openly procured to ensure best value; and (ii) the skills of the Warm Homes Scheme staff were not transferred through The Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006 to ensure a smooth transition to Affordable Warmth.
(AQW 41436/11-15)

Mr Storey: Delivery of measures under the Warm Homes Scheme is restricted to the two Scheme Managers contracted to deliver that scheme.

The new Affordable Warmth Scheme is similar to the Boiler Replacement Scheme which was introduced in September 2012 and is open to all boiler installers to fit replacement boilers. To date some 2,000 local installers have gained work through the Boiler Replacement Scheme. This model is successful in providing much needed employment in local areas.

The Affordable Warmth Scheme was designed to allow independent installers to carry out the energy efficiency improvements.

In addition, my Department, local councils and the Housing Executive are working in partnership to effectively target vulnerable households most at risk of fuel poverty. This partnership is effective in referring vulnerable households to other services such as the councils Home Safety Officer, Environmental Health, Social Security Agency and Disabled Facilities Grants.

There was therefore no requirement to seek tenders to deliver the Scheme.

As there will be a fragmentation of how works are carried out, under the Affordable Warmth Scheme, moving from the responsibility of the two scheme managers to individual contractors chosen by the householder, the Housing Executive does not believe that any Service Change Provision arises within the meaning of the Service Provision Change (Protection of Employment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006. The Housing Executive is therefore satisfied that Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) (TUPE) does not apply in the particular circumstances of this case.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 33523/11-15, since a policy was in place, how many times the Social Security Agency provided information in an accessible format to people with visual impairment.
(AQW 41437/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Social Security Agency can provide general information in relation to benefits in Braille, large print or audio cassette format. Many benefit leaflets include a standard signposting clause advising customers of this facility and to contact their benefit paying branch if they require further help. Notifications issued to customers relating to their benefit entitlement can also be provided in these formats on request.

The Social Security Agency does not collate information requests in terms of the actual number of times it has provided this information in an accessible format to people with a visual impairment; however this information is widely available.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Social Development whether his Department has an equality policy in relation to people with a visual impairment; and if so, whether it is monitored for compliance by the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland.
(AQW 41438/11-15)

Mr Storey: Contained within the Department for Social Development's Equality Scheme is the commitment to ensure that information and services are fully accessible to everyone in the community. This would include people with a visual impairment.

To ensure equality of opportunity in accessing information, the Department provides information in alternative formats on request, where reasonably practicable. Alternative formats may include audio, Braille or large print.

The Department reports to the Equality Commission annually on the implementation of its Equality Scheme, including progress on delivery of actions identified to promote equality of opportunity and good relations.

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister for Social Development how many Housing Executive properties are vacant in the Coleraine Borough Council.
(AQW 41452/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised that at 31 December 2014 there were 24 properties vacant in the Coleraine Borough Council area, 20 of which are awaiting imminent relet.

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Social Development what benefit was derived as a result of the monies allocated under the Get Britain Building project in 2013.
(AQW 41464/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Department is currently in the process of progressing a number of initiatives under the Get Britain Building funding.

The first of these initiatives, under the banner of the Affordable Home Loans Fund (AHLF), involves working in partnership with three Housing Associations (Oakley, Clanmil and Apex) to deliver 600 affordable homes by 2020. Unfortunately, efforts to move ahead with the pilot have been hampered by the reluctance of lending institutions to partner the Housing Associations in the delivery of a new shared equity product, a core element of the ALHF.

The Department has worked closely with the 3 Housing Associations, the Federation of Housing Associations and the Council for Mortgage Lenders to resolve this issue. Good progress has been made and indications are that the new shared equity product should be available early in the new financial year. Furthermore, it is positive to note that the Housing Associations involved in this initiative have a number of homes ready to sell, including the 20 Mountview homes in Lisburn where the Fund was launched, and have reported a high degree of interest from potential purchasers.

In addition, under Great Britain Building Phase 2, the Department has allocated a £5m to date in Financial Transactions Capital (FTC) funding to a Rent to Purchase scheme (being delivered by Co-Ownership) and £9.2m in FTC funding to an Empty Homes scheme (being delivered by Clanmil Housing Association). These pilots are an earlier stage than the ALHF but the Department is working closely with both partner organisations to ensure appropriate progress is made against targets.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on his Department's Empty Homes Strategy in East Londonderry.
(AQW 41485/11-15)

Mr Storey: Within the constituency of East Londonderry, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive's Empty Homes Unit has had 38 empty properties reported to it from April 2014 to January 2015. 25 of these are located in the Coleraine council area and 13 in the wider Limavady council area. 19 of the reported properties are in areas where there is no housing need.

The Department will continue to work with the Housing Executive across a number of initiatives to assist in bringing empty homes back into use.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the current level of unoccupied social housing in East Londonderry.
(AQW 41489/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised that at 31 December 2014 they had 30 vacant properties in the East Londonderry Parliamentary constituency, which includes properties awaiting imminent relet, difficult to let or undergoing major repairs etc. Housing Associations advise they currently have 37 vacant properties in the East Londonderry Parliamentary constituency, which includes properties awaiting imminent relet, undergoing major repairs or pending appraisal/ consideration of disposal or redevelopment.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 39719/11-15, whether any conditions are attached to the various funding of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender groups which prohibits the use of the public funds provided in political campaigning, such as the current campaign by the Rainbow Project against equality legislation providing for a conscience clause; and if so, how this is monitored.
(AQW 41527/11-15)

Mr Storey: Funding approved by my Department to any organisation can only be used for the purpose of furthering the aims and objectives of the project as defined in the organisation's application form and in the agreed Contract for Funding. Organisations must inform the Department of any circumstances which may affect the project, including change of use or any potential misuse of funds. Delivery of projects is monitored through quarterly reports in line with procedural guidance.

In regard to funding to the Rainbow Project, the Housing Executive has advised that the funding provided to this organisation is specifically for an advocacy worker to support victims of hate crime and help sustain their tenancies. It is not for any wider work they may be involved in as an organisation.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on when the double glazing windows will be installed to the flats at Ballyferris, Kilcooley Estate, Bangor.
(AQW 41528/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised that the replacement of windows at Ballyferris Walk flats, Kilcooley is part of a double glazing scheme which started on site on 13 October 2014.

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 40865/11-15, whether (i) the interim manager appointed by the Charity Commission to the DPOANI has power or authority to share personal information held by the Disabled Police Officers Association (DPOANI) with the Charity Commission in the absence of a valid Order made by the Commission under section 23 of the Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008; (ii) the Charity Commission has lawful authority to share personal information with third parties other than public bodies; (iii) he will place in the Assembly Library a copy of any Order made by the Charity Commission under section 23 of the Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008 in relation to mobile phones owned by DPOANI, and a copy of any other Orders made by the Charity Commission in respect of such telephones.
(AQW 41570/11-15)

Mr Storey:

(i) The Charity Commission is the independent regulator of charities in Northern Ireland and sections 33 and 35 of the Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008 deal with the functions to be discharged by the interim manager appointed by the Commission.

(ii) Part 5 of the Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008 deals with the information powers of the Charity Commission; in particular, section 24 allows the Charity Commission to disclose information to any public body or office-holder. Section 10(1) of the Act provides, generally, that the Commission has power to do anything which is calculated to facilitate, or is conducive or incidental to, the performance of any of its functions or general duties.

(iii) My Department does not hold such documents.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the procurement thresholds for (i) his Department; and (ii) his Department's arm's-length bodies.
(AQW 41582/11-15)

Mr Storey: Procurement Guidance Note 04/12, endorsed by the Procurement Board sets out the Procurement Control Limit's (PCL's) and the basis of contract award for application in all procurements. These Procurement Control Limits apply across the Department including the Social Security Agency, Northern Ireland Housing Executive and the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland. The relevant Procurement Control Limits are detailed at Annex 1.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development when the Housing Executive plans to complete double glazing works in Willowbrook, Bangor.
(AQW 41594/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised that all double glazing in Willowbrook estate has already been completed.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development whether the Housing Executive plans to replace front doors in Willowbrook, Bangor.
(AQW 41596/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised that their properties in Willowbrook estate in Bangor are due to have External Cyclical Maintenance works carried out in a scheme which is currently programmed to start in the last quarter of 2015/16. Any repairs or replacement of external doors deemed necessary will be included in the scheme. In the meantime any defects reported will continue to be addressed through response maintenance.

Mr Newton asked the Minister for Social Development how many households in East Belfast applied for the Boiler Replacement Scheme; and to detail how many were approved in each of the last thee years.
(AQW 41616/11-15)

Mr Storey: Since September 2012 there have been 1,592 Boiler Replacement Scheme applications received where the applicant has supplied all the necessary information for the Housing Executive to process and 1,356 applications have been approved.

The information which is provided in the tables below is based on the best interpretation of the postcodes in the East Belfast parliamentary constituency.

Applications Boiler Replacement Scheme in East Belfast by year

Year 1	September 2012 to March 2013	246
Year 2	April 2013 to March 2014	613
Year 3	April 2014 to January 2015	733
Total		**1,592**

Approvals Boiler Replacement Scheme in East Belfast by year

Year 1	September 2012 to March 2013	216
Year 2	April 2013 to March 2014	522
Year 3	April 2014 to January 15	618
Total		**1,356**

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Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development whether the Housing Executive plans to replace kitchens in Willowbrook, Bangor.
(AQW 41635/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised that properties in Willowbrook Dale were not built until 1997 and there is a kitchen scheme scheduled there for 2017, which is line with the NIHE policy on kitchen replacement of 20 years.

They further advise that all kitchens in Willowbrook Drive, Gardens, Green, Grove, Park, Place and Rise were replaced in 2006 and are not due another replacement until 2026.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development whether the Housing Executive plans to replace double glazing in Barnagh Park, Donaghadee.
(AQW 41636/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised that all dwellings in Barnagh Park estate already have double glazing and they have no plans to replace it.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development whether the Housing Executive plans to replace wooden eves in Barnagh Park, Donaghadee.
(AQW 41637/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised that an External Cyclical Maintenance scheme, which includes all NIHE properties in Barnagh Park, Donaghadee, is currently programmed to start in 2016/17. Any repairs or replacement of eaves deemed necessary will be included in the scheme. In the meantime any defects reported will continue to be addressed through response maintenance.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development whether the Housing Executive plans to replace kitchens in Barnagh Park, Donaghadee.
(AQW 41638/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised that there is a scheme currently on site since December 2014 for 86 dwellings in Ballywalter, Donaghadee and Millisle. The contract will last for 14 weeks and the kitchens in Barnagh Park will be replaced by April 2015 at the latest.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the implementation of the Enniskillen Town Masterplan.
(AQW 41642/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Enniskillen Masterplan was launched in November 2012 setting out 24 separate regeneration actions, their priority, timeframes and the potential delivery partners for each action. Improvements to the town centre public realm were identified as a key regeneration activity for delivery in the 1 – 3 year time frame. My officials continue to work with Council to finalise the business case that Council commissioned for this major programme of public realm improvements in the town centre.

The Enniskillen Castle Basin (Riverside Walk) Public Realm scheme was also identified as a priority in the masterplan. Work on this scheme is progressing well and it is due to complete in June 2015.

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the Affordable Warmth Scheme.
(AQO 7557/11-15)

Mr Storey: My Department has been working closely with both the NI Housing Executive and local councils to develop the new Affordable Warmth Scheme. The Affordable Warmth Scheme was launched in September 2014, following two successful pilots which were conducted over a 2 year period. In some of the targeted pilot areas fuel poverty prevalence was over 80% and many of these households had not applied to the Warm Homes Scheme. These are the households that the Affordable Warmth Scheme will identify, approach, and persuade to take up the offer of the help available.

The Affordable Warmth Scheme is at an early stage but it is already being effectively delivered across all councils areas. Whilst local councils are going through a period of significant restructure, officials have been working with council staff for over 2 years to pilot and develop the scheme. Each of the 11 lead councils has signed a Service Level Agreement with the Department demonstrating their commitment to delivering the new scheme. All councils have appointed a Co-ordinator as well as support staff for the scheme.

The current Warm Homes Scheme contract has been extended to 31st March 2015 to allow for the Affordable Warmth Scheme to become established and embedded in the new structures.

Mr Dunne asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the Public Realm Scheme in Donaghadee.
(AQW 41722/11-15)

Mr Storey: On-site construction works on the £2.4 million public realm scheme commenced in early September 2014. The scheme is progressing as planned and is on schedule to complete in July 2015. These works will address all aspects of street design including new paving, kerbstones, street furniture, lighting and planting.

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the households that receive the highest proportion of welfare benefits, broken down by postcode.
(AQW 41733/11-15)

Mr Storey: Pursuant to AQW 41192/11-15, in June/July 2014 there were 6,600 households receiving benefits (Social Security Agency benefits[2], Housing Benefit, Child Benefit and Tax Credits) in excess of £26,000 per annum in Northern Ireland.

By postcode these are:

Postcode	No. of Households	Postcode	No. of Households
BT48	397	BT43	59
BT17	299	BT44	55
BT12	294	BT63	55
BT14	268	BT8	52
BT35	240	BT94	52
BT47	210	BT51	51
BT34	200	BT33	48
BT13	189	BT81	47
BT11	187	BT92	47
BT79	184	BT24	44
BT30	166	BT52	44
BT71	150	BT27	41
BT82	145	BT31	41
BT28	137	BT39	35
BT36	137	BT20	34
BT78	131	BT16	33
BT23	125	BT46	31
BT62	122	BT61	30
BT41	121	BT93	30
BT15	118	BT29	26
BT45	117	BT54	23
BT5	112	BT9	23
BT49	109	BT25	21
BT60	109	BT56	19
BT22	100	BT55	18
BT38	94	BT10	13
BT66	91	BT18	12
BT53	85	BT21	*
BT42	82	BT1	*
BT7	81	BT64	*

2 The following benefits are not included in this calculation as data is either not held by the Department or is not in a format that can be linked to overall household benefit income: Child Disability Living Allowance, Guardian's Allowance, Widow's Pension, War Widow's or War Widower's Pension, Armed Forces Compensation Scheme, Armed Forces Independence Payment and War Pensions.

Postcode	No. of Households	Postcode	No. of Households
BT80	81	BT69	*
BT40	75	BT75	*
BT70	74	BT57	*
BT74	73	BT2	*
BT19	71	BT26	*
BT32	69	BT68	*
BT37	68	BT76	*
BT4	67		
BT67	66		
BT6	64		
BT65	62		

* indicates a figure under 10 which has been suppressed to avoid disclosure

26 households contained missing postcode information on the data so could not be identified

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Mr Ramsey asked the Minister for Social Development whether his Department plans to centralise in excess of 100 jobs, specifically those dealing with housing benefit claims, to Lisburn.
(AQW 41766/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised that as part of its response to budget reductions, it is reviewing all the services it provides including the Housing Benefit service.

The Housing Executive has further advised that in relation to Housing Benefit, there has been preliminary exploration of an option to reconfigure part of the Housing Executive's Housing Benefit Service Centres to deliver a more efficient and effective use of its resources. However, these considerations are at an early stage and there are no plans for changes of the scale suggested. The proposed reconfiguration of workload does not involve the redeployment of staff.

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Social Development what agencies or bodies he has engaged with regarding the development of the masterplan for the St Patrick's site in Ballymena.
(AQW 41779/11-15)

Mr Storey: I have met with the Chief Executives of Northern Regional College, North Eastern Education and Library Board and Mid and East Antrim Council to discuss potential development opportunities for public sector use for the St Patrick's Barracks site

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister for Social Development (i) whether all of the contractors have been paid, or money reimbursed to the Housing Executive, in accordance with the agreement made in March 2014, for response maintenance work; (ii) whether any disputed amounts have been settled within the 21 day target; and if not (iii) how many are outstanding in Upper Bann.
(AQW 41821/11-15)

Mr Storey: I assume the Member's question relates to the planned maintenance settlement agreement. The Housing Executive has advised as follows: -

(i) The Housing Executive and its four Contractors are working through the Settlement Terms where assessments are being made against financial reconciliations submitted. This involves 191 schemes across the five area contracts and progress has been achieved allowing payments to be made to each of the Contractors. This process is ongoing. Some 51 schemes have yet to be presented to the Housing Executive for assessment. All monies identified in the Settlement have been reimbursed to the Housing Executive.

(ii) Disputed amounts are being considered in accordance with the terms and due to several factors there has been a slippage of the time periods. To date the parties have not involved the need of the Adjudication process to resolve disputes but rather sought a decision from the Housing Executive in the first instance and / or the two experts who provided assistance as part of the agreed settlement.

(iii) There are 37 schemes involved in the South Area, which covers Upper Bann, to be finalised of which eight schemes have still to be presented for consideration. Difficulties have arisen in establishing the entitlements of some elements of claim, although to date some £169k has been processed in favour of Bann Ltd since the 5 August 2014. It is believed that at least six schemes are well advanced and close to agreement with only a small number of elements to be verified.

Meetings have been convened with the parties and their Solicitors and experts to advance the resolution of issues identified by each side. Agreement has been reached as to a way forward on one scheme where the findings of a joint inspection can be adopted for other unresolved schemes and therefore expedite the payment process. This is being monitored on a regular basis.

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Social Development how many people are entitled to £26,000 or more in benefits.
(AQW 41822/11-15)

Mr Storey: Pursuant to AQW 40536/11-15, at June/July 2014 it was identified that there were 6,600 working-age households receiving benefits (Social Security Agency benefits[3], Housing Benefit, Child Benefit and Tax Credits) in excess of £26,000 per annum in Northern Ireland.

A household may include a single adult, or a married or cohabiting couple plus any of their dependent children.

The following benefits are not included in this calculation as data is either not held by the Department or is not in a format that can be linked to overall household benefit income: Child Disability Living Allowance, Guardian's Allowance, Widow's Pension, War Widow's or War Widower's Pension, Armed Forces Compensation Scheme, Armed Forces Independence Payment and War Pensions.

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Mr Frew asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the financial support available for low income households to heat their homes.
(AQW 41893/11-15)

Mr Storey: My Department offers a range of financial support to assist low income households to heat their homes.

Warm Homes Scheme

The Warm Homes Scheme offers a range of energy efficiency improvement measures to households in receipt of qualifying benefits. The Warm Homes Scheme has been the Department's main fuel poverty scheme since 2001 and is due to end on 31 March 2015.

Affordable Warmth Scheme

The new Affordable Warmth Scheme was launched in September 2014 following two successful pilots conducted over a 2 year period and will replace the Warm Homes Scheme from 1 April 2015. The new Affordable Warmth Scheme will find and assist households with an income of less than £20,000 per year and will improve the energy efficiency of their homes with a range of insulation and heating measures.

Boiler Replacement Scheme

The Boiler Replacement Scheme provides a grant of up to £1,000 to assist householders who earn less than £40,000 per year to replace old inefficient boilers. Since it was launched in 2012 the scheme has funded the installation of over 18,000 new energy efficient boilers.

Cold Weather Payments

Cold Weather Payments will be paid to eligible claimants during periods of exceptionally cold weather in the area where they live. Payments will be made when the average temperature is, or is forecast to be, zero degrees centigrade or below over 7 consecutive days from November to March. This information is supplied to the Social Security Agency by the Met Office based on information from weather stations located across the province. Payments are at the rate of £25 for each 7 day cold weather period and are issued automatically. To qualify for a Cold Weather Payment a person must be receiving:

- State Pension Credit or income-related Employment and Support Allowance that includes a work related activity or support component (main phase) for at least one day in a period of cold weather; or
- Income Support, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance or income-related Employment and Support Allowance (in the assessment phase) for at least one day in a period of cold weather and
- have a dependent child aged under five; or
- have a relevant pensioner or disability premium; or
- Child Tax Credit for a child or qualifying young person who is disabled or severely disabled.

3 The following benefits are not included in this calculation as data is either not held by the Department or is not in a format that can be linked to overall household benefit income: Child Disability Living Allowance, Guardian's Allowance, Widow's Pension, War Widow's or War Widower's Pension, Armed Forces Compensation Scheme, Armed Forces Independence Payment and War Pensions.

Winter Fuel Payment

In addition, the Social Security Agency in line with previous years is operating a Winter Fuel Payment scheme for winter 2014/15. A Winter Fuel Payment is a lump sum payment to provide support for older people to be able to meet the costs of their heating bills. Winter Fuel Payments are paid to all eligible people born on or before 5 July 1952 and you do not need to be claiming benefits to qualify for this extra money.

Winter Fuel Payments are £200 for those households with someone over women's state pension age but under age 80, and £300 for those households with someone aged 80 or over. If there is more than one eligible claimant in the household the payment is split between them.

Benefit Uptake Programme

As part of its 2014/15 Benefit Uptake Programme, the Social Security Agency is writing directly to 25,000 existing customers who may have additional benefit entitlement to offer them a full and confidential assessment. This assessment, provided by the Independent Advice Sector partner, Advice NI, will explore potential entitlement to all social security benefits. It will also provide advice about Housing Benefit, Rates Relief and the Warm Homes Scheme.

Make the Call Campaign

The Department for Social Development's 'Make the Call' campaign, which aims to ensure people are getting all the money they are entitled to, encourages people to call the Benefits Advice Line where experienced advisors assess their entitlement to benefits, services and other government supports. The advisor can also provide help and assistance with making a claim and a visit from a Community Outreach Officer can be arranged if required. The Benefits Advice Line can be reached on 0800 232 1271. A province-wide advertising campaign using television, press and outdoor locations, has been running during the 2014/15 Benefit Uptake programme. The aim of the campaign is to encourage people across Northern Ireland to check if there is additional benefit to which they may be entitled.

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Social Development how many people receive more than £26,000 in benefits; and to detail the total sums involved.
(AQW 41898/11-15)

Mr Storey: At June/July 2014, it was identified that there were 6,600 working-age households receiving benefits (Social Security Agency benefits[4], Housing Benefit, Child Benefit and Tax Credits) in excess of £26,000 per annum in Northern Ireland.

A household may include a single adult, or a married or cohabiting couple plus any of their dependent children.

The total annual benefits being paid to these 6,600 households is estimated to be £203,500,000 (rounded to the nearest £100,000). The average annual benefit received by these households is estimated to be £30,700 (rounded to the nearest £100).

The information provided is an Official Statistic. The Production and dissemination of all such Statistics is governed by the Principles and Protocols of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. This is enforced by the UK Statistics Authority.

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Social Development when the criteria for the new proposed Hardship Top up Fund will be published.
(AQW 41942/11-15)

Mr Storey: My Department is continuing to develop proposals for providing additional financial support to claimants that will be adversely impacted by the Welfare Reforms. I am determined to ensure the best possible outcome for all affected claimants and this is a necessarily complex process.

While considerable progress has been made to date it is not yet possible to confirm when the eligibility criteria will be available for publication. However, I can provide an assurance that, following agreement with Executive colleagues, the criteria will be issued for public consultation.

Mr Ross asked the Minister for Social Development how many households receive more than (i) £24,000; and (ii) £25,000 in benefits per annum.
(AQW 41981/11-15)

Mr Storey: At June/July 2014 it was identified that there were:

(i) 9,900 working-age households receiving benefits (Social Security Agency benefits[4], Housing Benefit, Child Benefit and Tax Credits) in excess of £24,000 per annum in Northern Ireland and;

(ii) 8,100 working-age households receiving benefits (Social Security Agency benefits[4], Housing Benefit, Child Benefit and Tax Credits) in excess of £25,000 per annum in Northern Ireland.

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4 The following benefits are not included in this calculation as data is either not held by the Department or is not in a format that can be linked to overall household benefit income: Child Disability Living Allowance, Guardian's Allowance, Widow's Pension, War Widow's or War Widower's Pension, Armed Forces Compensation Scheme, Armed Forces Independence Payment and War Pensions.

A household may include a single adult, or a married or cohabiting couple plus any of their dependent children.

The following benefits are not included in this calculation as data is either not held by the Department or is not in a format that can be linked to overall household benefit income: Child Disability Living Allowance, Guardian's Allowance, Widow's Pension, War Widow's or War Widower's Pension, Armed Forces Compensation Scheme, Armed Forces Independence Payment and War Pensions.

The information provided is an Official Statistic. The Production and dissemination of all such Statistics is governed by the Principles and Protocols of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. This is enforced by the UK Statistics Authority.

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Social Development who will administer the Top up Fund.
(AQW 42091/11-15)

Mr Storey: The administrative arrangements that will be necessary for the effective delivery of the additional financial support are currently being developed. However, the current assumption is that the Department for Social Development will have responsibility for this scheme.

Friday 20 February 2015

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Mr Givan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for their assessment of the Equality Commission's legal action against Ashers Bakery.
(AQO 7109/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness (The First Minister and deputy First Minister): The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland is an executive non departmental public body sponsored by the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister and, as such, is independent from Government and Ministers in respect of its operation.

Mr Lyttle asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister when an enhanced good relations section of the Equality Impact Assessment for all government policy was introduced as per the Together: Building a United Community commitment set out in May 2013.
(AQW 39990/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Together: Building a United Community (T:BUC) strategy includes a commitment to establish an Equality and Good Relations Commission that will act as an independent, statutorily-based organisation to provide policy advice and a challenge to Government. One of the stated objectives of the proposed Equality and Good Relations Commission is the development of an augmented impact assessment that will assess the extent to which public authorities contribute to the delivery of the strategy's overarching good relations objectives.

It is envisaged that the commission will be underpinned by primary legislation. The draft legislation is currently under active consideration in the Department.

Concurrently, departmental officials intend to work with both the Equality Commission and the Community Relations Council to consider the extent to which the aims and objectives of the T:BUC strategy can be delivered by these respective organisations within their existing vires.

Officials are also working with other departments and key stakeholders, including District Councils to ensure that the strategy's aims and objectives are embedded in policy delivery.

Mr Agnew asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what steps they are taking to remove Article 71 of the Fair Employment and Treatment (Northern Ireland) Order 1998.
(AQW 40555/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Department of Education has policy responsibility for this issue and, therefore, proposals to amend or repeal the exception to the Fair Employment and Treatment Order 1978 should be initiated by the Department of Education.

As our Department has legislative responsibility for the Fair Employment and Treatment Order, if a change to the current policy position were agreed by the Executive, following proposals from the Department of Education, OFMDFM would bring forward the proposed changes to the legislation.

Ms Boyle asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what funding streams are available within their Department for sports groups to apply for in 2015.
(AQW 40648/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Department provides support through a range of funding programmes. Sports groups may apply to these where their applications meet the specific criteria for the schemes.

For 2014/15, sports groups whose applications meet the criteria, may apply for small grants of up to £500 through the Central Good Relations Fund.

All other sports related funding streams for 2014/15 are now fully committed.

Now that the 2015/16 budget has been agreed by the Executive, the Department will be able to finalise funding allocations for the new financial year and will make further announcements on funding opportunities in due course.

Mr Rogers asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail any meetings they attended at which the Narrow Water Bridge project was discussed in 2014; and to detail the positive decisions made on the subject during these discussions.
(AQW 40751/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We attended meetings of the North South Ministerial Council in Institutional format on 10 January 2014 and Plenary format on 5 December 2014 where the Narrow Water Bridge project was discussed.

At those meetings both jurisdictions indicated that they remain supportive of the concept of a bridge at Narrow Water subject to the availability of funding for the project.

Ms Sugden asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQW 38521/11-15, to detail the outcome of meetings with the local community association in Ballykelly.
(AQW 40853/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Meetings between officials and the local community association in Ballykelly have been positive, and discussions have taken place regarding the community benefits which could be derived from the future development of the Shackleton site.

Any plans for the future development of the site will be expected to demonstrate how community needs have been identified and will be met.

Ms Lo asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQO 7333/11-15, on what basis they are seeking to widen the pool of candidates when two candidates were deemed suitable for appointment in October 2014 following a rigorous recruitment process.
(AQW 40975/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We have not indicated how many candidates were deemed suitable but as the First Minister said in response to a question during Question Time on Monday 19 January, the previous competition to appoint a new Commissioner for Victims and Survivors produced a disappointingly small pool of appointable candidates. It is on this basis that we are seeking to widen the pool through a new competition.

However, the candidates from the previous competition will remain on the deemed appointable list.

We would once again assure you that we remain committed to ensuring all victims and survivors have an appropriate representative voice through their Commissioner and, as such wish to ensure that we have the right person for the job.

Mr McMullan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister who can apply for funding from the Play and Leisure Programme; and to detail the criteria that must be met.
(AQW 41158/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Play and Leisure Signature Programme is the seventh Delivering Social Change signature programme and is expected to support new play and leisure opportunities for children and young people. It is proposed that the signature programme will support new sustainable opportunities for play; raise awareness of the importance of play and ensure play is considered in the provision of local services.

The programme is not open to applications for funding. Details of the scheme will be outlined in due course.

Mr Lunn asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the cross-community sports programme of Together: Building a United Community; and to detail their Department's definition of "significant".
(AQW 41417/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The purpose of the cross-community sports programme is to use sport in a central role to break down divisions in society and deliver a detailed good relations programme through the medium of sport with the emphasis on tackling sectarianism, racism and improving good relations.

The Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure launched a pilot project on 5 January 2015 which will run to 31 March 2015. This pilot will involve young people engaging in a range of sporting and creative activities with a strong good relations focus. The areas of Lower Falls and the Greater Village have been identified as the two Action Zones for the pilot project.

The cross community youth sports programme is designed to build the capacity in these communities to ensure community led, community owned projects.

The programme will seek to promote employability prospects, health messages and core values to young people. Young Leaders from the programme will be drawn from the various communities to participate in the delivery of the programme and build community cohesion and long term sustainability in the community, local sports clubs and governing bodies.

As it rolls out, this will be a significant programme in engaging young people in terms of its reach geographically and in terms of inclusion and access, in particular to young women, young people with disabilities and those from a minority ethnic background.

Mr Spratt asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how the Urban Village project will be facilitated in Sandy Row.
(AQW 41514/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Junior Ministers announced on 21 January 2015 that the areas of the Markets/ Donegall Pass/Sandy Row in South Belfast and Bogside/Fountain in Derry/Londonderry have been identified as the next locations to benefit from the Urban Villages Programme, as committed to within Together: Building a United Community.

The next step in the process will be to establish a project team for each of the new Urban Village areas to engage and work with the community in these areas to determine the boundaries of the urban villages, assess what is needed and develop priorities for each of the areas.

Ms Sugden asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to provide further details on the North West Executive sub-group; and to define the geographical remit of the North West.
(AQW 41549/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Executive Sub-Group is on Regional Opportunities not just the North West. It will consider the economic needs of regions and the potential for further investment to overcome obstacles to growth and prosperity. We will be co-chairs of the sub-group which will also include the Minister for Employment and Learning, the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, the Minister of the Environment, and the Minister for Regional Development. While focusing initially on the North West, it will in due course examine other regions with identified economic needs.

Mr McGimpsey asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister if they have had any recent discussions with the Northern Ireland Office about the proposals to reduce the number of MLAs.
(AQO 7450/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The first quarterly review meeting of the Stormont House Agreement took place on Friday 30 January 2015. We discussed progress on all aspects of the Agreement with the Secretary of State, including the provision that the number of Assembly members should be reduced in time for the 2021 election.

The meeting noted that Executive Party Leaders have established a sub-group to consider this, and a number of the other institutional issues contained in the Agreement.

Mr Wilson asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what departmental arrangements are in place to monitor the implementation of the Stormont House Agreement.
(AQO 7453/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: A commitment to effective implementation and to active review and monitoring is an intrinsic part of the Stormont House Agreement.

An Implementation Plan has been drawn up by the Head of the Civil Service and agreed by the Executive Party Leaders Group. This allocates responsibility to the relevant department for each of the commitments in the Agreement and sets out a projected timeline for their implementation. The Plan will be updated regularly and progress will be reviewed at the weekly meetings of the Party Leaders. The Agreement also provides for quarterly review meetings between the Party Leaders and the UK and Irish Governments. The first meeting took place on Friday, 30 January.

A number of these commitments falls specifically to our department, particularly in relation to the establishment of a Commission on Flags, Identity, Culture and Tradition; support for victims; institutional reform; and civic engagement. Our officials are already working on all of these issues in accordance with the work plans and timescales set out in the agreed Implementation Plan.

Mr Dickson asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the implementation of those aspects of the Stormont House Agreement that are within their remit.
(AQO 7454/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: A commitment to effective implementation and to active review and monitoring is an intrinsic part of the Stormont House Agreement.

An Implementation Plan has been drawn up by the Head of the Civil Service and agreed by the Executive Party Leaders Group. This allocates responsibility to the relevant department for each of the commitments in the Agreement and sets out a projected timeline for their implementation. The Plan will be updated regularly and progress will be reviewed at the weekly meetings of the Party Leaders. The Agreement also provides for quarterly review meetings between the Party Leaders and the UK and Irish Governments. The first meeting took place last Friday, 30 January.

A number of these commitments falls specifically to our department, particularly in relation to the establishment of a Commission on Flags, Identity, Culture and Tradition; support for victims; institutional reform; and civic engagement. Our officials are already working on all of these issues in accordance with the work plans and timescales set out in the agreed Implementation Plan.

Mr Kinahan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what steps are being taken to promote racial equality.
(AQO 7459/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Racial equality remains a key goal for the Executive.

Central to this are the Racial Equality Strategy and the Minority Ethnic Development Fund.

We recently completed a public consultation exercise to ensure our revised Racial Equality Strategy is relevant to current need and reflective of the aspirations of our minority ethnic population. Officials are currently analysing the responses to the consultation and these will inform the new Strategy.

We are pleased to confirm that, despite the financial pressures that currently exist, the Minority Ethnic Development Fund remains at £1.1m for the 2015/16 financial year. We shall be making a public announcement inviting applications soon.

We also remain committed to the elimination of all hate crime and continue to support the work of Unite Against Hate.

We are supporting a range of actions to counter the attitudes that give rise to racism and race hate attacks. Unite Against Hate has been taking forward valuable work to highlight that this is a welcoming place and to challenge the myths that circulate.

Mrs Cochrane asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what consideration they are giving to the allocation of Junior Ministerial posts as part of the review and reduction of Executive Departments.
(AQO 7460/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The number and functions of Junior Ministers will be kept under review in light of the future reduction in the number of Departments and our ongoing assessment of changing needs and priorities.

Ms Sugden asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister when the Ageing Strategy is expected to be published.
(AQW 41764/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Active Ageing Strategy is currently being finalised and, subject to Committee consideration and Executive approval, will be published in due course.

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020.
(AQW 41624/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): The draft Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 was formally submitted to the European Commission on 14th October 2014. We are currently waiting for the Commission's response on the content of the draft Programme.

Because of a backlog in approving Programmes across Europe, the European Commission have advised that the earliest possible date for approval of our Programme is likely to be June 2015 and not April as originally planned.

While any delay in the approval process of the RDP is disappointing, it will not affect the continuing work by my officials in obtaining the necessary business case approvals and in developing the schemes for opening. We will continue to work to open the schemes as early as possible once all the necessary approvals are in place.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how her Department and its agencies have helped in the efforts to find Kieran McAree in Enniskillen.
(AQW 41654/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Rivers Agency has co-operated with and provided assistance to the PSNI in the search for Kieran McAree by operating the Lock Gates at Portora and controlling water levels in Lough Erne.

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what was done with the timber which was felled following the clearance of large sections of trees in a number of forests in the Craigantlet Hills, Holywood over the last number of months.
(AQW 41667/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Forest Service has contract supply arrangements in place with licensed timber processors to allow for the removal and industrial processing of timber arising from areas which have been felled to control the spread of tree disease at Ballysallagh forest in the Craigantlet Hills.

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the councils that have banned circuses that use wild animals from using council property.
(AQW 41753/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Each Council is autonomous and adopts its own policy on any issue, including banning circuses that use wild animals from Council property.

My Department does not collate or retain information relating to Councils' operational policies for circuses.

I would suggest that this information is sought directly from Councils.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to AQW 39235/11-15, when the scoping study will be completed and progressed.
(AQW 41814/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The scoping study has been commissioned by Fermanagh District Council. As such, timescales and proposals associated with the study are a matter for the council. My officials in Forest Service have provided information and access to Lough Navar forest to facilitate this exercise and will continue to liaise closely with the council on any proposals they develop resulting from the scoping study.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of organic farming in Northern Ireland; and what support is available from her Department.
(AQW 41830/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: There is currently around 9,000ha of land within the north that is certified organic. This represents approximately 0.9% of the total area of agricultural land.

Higher commodity prices in recent years have resulted in limited premiums at the farm gate for organic produce. This has led to a reduction in the number of organic producers from 224 in 2006 to currently some 150.

Overall, because of the weak market, there has been limited opportunity to expand the sector. Therefore, any further development is likely to be into supplying niche markets. My Department will continue to work with the sector, listen to market signals, and help the sector develop in areas where there are opportunities.

Under the Rural Development Programme 2007-2013 my Department provided financial support to 39 farmers through the Organic Farming Scheme for conversion to organic production. It also provided an organic maintenance payment to 10 farmers through the Organic Management Option within the NI Countryside Management Scheme.

Furthermore, ongoing technical advice and training courses on growing organic produce are available through CAFRE's Development Advisers and Technologists. There is a fully operational organic farm at Greenmount College, which farmers can visit to learn more about best practice in organic production methods. DARD Supply Chain Advisers can also provide supply chain and marketing advice.

My Department also offers a wide range of support through various other schemes, which are open to all farmers, including organic farmers.

My officials are currently reviewing what support for the maintenance of organic production may be possible under the new Rural Development Programme 2014-2020.

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the departmental and arm's-length body buildings that are equipped with defibrillators; and how many staff in each of these buildings are trained in (i) the use of defibrillators; and (ii) C.P.R.
(AQW 41844/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: A total of 5 buildings are equipped with defibrillators. The table below outlines those buildings and the number of DARD staff trained in the use of (i) defibrillators and (ii) CPR.

	Number of Staff Trained	
Building	**Defibrillators**	**CPR**
Castleton House, Mallusk	1 (private sector owned)	2
Dundonald House, Stormont	1 (DOJ owned)	15
Enniskillen Campus, Enniskillen	18	21
Loughs Agency (Prehen, Derry & Carlingford)	6	31
Greenmount Campus, Antrim	29	63
Loughry Campus, Cookstown	19	21

In addition there are a further 9 staff trained in the use of a defibrillator (in buildings not equipped with a defibrillator) and 296 staff trained in CPR across the rest of the Department and Arms Length bodies.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she will extend the legislation to ban hunting of wild animals with dogs to Northern Ireland.
(AQW 42207/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department has no powers to regulate, or ban, hunting or coursing with dogs. Hunting is not regarded as an agricultural activity. It is not exclusively carried out on agricultural land and the fox is not regarded as an agricultural animal. DARD has responsibility for the Welfare of Animals Act 2011 (the 2011 Act), but its responsibilities towards animals in the wild are very limited and do not include any controls over the hunting, or taking, of wild animals and birds, or powers of entry for their protection.

Section 53 of the 2011 Act specifically exempts from its provisions the coursing or hunting of any animal, other than a protected animal, except under certain circumstances such as the animal being released in an injured state or into a confined space from which it has no reasonable chance of escape.

As the hunting issue cuts across the responsibilities of two or more Ministers any introduction of legislation to ban hunting with dogs is a matter for the Executive.

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how her Department will help secure the future of POBAL.
(AQW 40255/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): The review of core funding recommended new service delivery arrangements to support 6 lead organisations delivering specified services on an all island basis to meet the needs of the language.

Following an open competitive selection process Conradh na Gaeilge was appointed as the lead organisation for language awareness raising; language protection and representation. The new arrangements took effect from 20th July 2014.

Foras na Gaeilge engaged a Change Management Consultant to work with those organisations whose funding would cease. The role of the Change Management Consultant was to assist the organisations in identifying and exploring other funding options or to develop an exit strategy. POBAL did engage, albeit to a limited extent, with the Change Management Consultant.

I would encourage Pobal to discuss with Foras na Gaeilge and also with Conradh na Gaeilge, the Lead Organisation for Awareness Raising, Language Protection and Representation, opportunities for collaboration and funding.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (i) whether any NI Screen funding, or any other departmental or arm's-length body funding, has been allocated towards projects to mark the anniversary of the Somme; if so, (ii) how much has been awarded; and (iii) to which organisations.
(AQW 41440/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Funding has been provided for the following projects relevant to this period:

NI Screen: Irish Language Broadcasting Fund

Funding	Project Title	Company	Broadcaster	Summary of Project
£65,000 Year: 2013	Gaeilgeoirí an Chogaidh Mhóir	Big Mountain Productions	BBC	Focus on Irish speakers in WW1, tied in with anniversary of the Battle of the Somme

Other NI Screen support

Funding	Project Title	Company	Broadcaster	Summary of Project
£100,000	37 Days	Hardy Pictures Ltd	A factual drama serial revealing the complex story of the outbreak of the First World War. This 3 part series was broadcast on BBC Two in March 2014.	
£230,000	Wiper Times	Trademark Productions Ltd	This BAFTA nominated drama was based on the true story of a soldier who discovered a printing press in the ruins of Ypres in 1916 and decided to publish a satirical magazine called The Wipers Times. The drama was broadcast on BBC Two in September 2014.	
£55,000	The Man Who Shot the Great War	Doubleband Films	This is a landmark documentary for BBC NI which uses the previously unseen photographs and diaries of a First World War soldier from Belfast to explore his experiences at the frontline. The drama was broadcast on BBC One in November 2014	

Other

Funding	Organisation/project	Summary of Project
£127,000	National Museums NI	A new Modern History Gallery which addresses the 'Decade of Centenaries' and includes a significantly expanded section - Home Rule to Partition - which deals with the period 1912-22. The gallery was developed with funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund (£454,800) and DCAL (£127,000).
£50,000	National Museums NI	Support from DCAL for NMNI to develop digital resources exploring the Decade of Centenaries

Other

Funding	Organisation/project	Summary of Project
£870	North Down Borough Council	DCAL provides funding to local councils to facilitate 50% match funding and allow decision making on the funding of festivals to be made at a local level. North Down Borough Council awarded funding to North Down & Ards U3A to hold a commemoration event to mark the centenary of the war in the Somme Centre in October 2014.
£15,000	Derry City Council	The Royal British Legion Waterside Branch received £15,000 from Derry City Council in 2014/15 towards their Festival of Remembrance and First World War Commemorations. 50% of this was therefore DCAL funding.
£30,000 (2014-15)	Somme Heritage Centre	To support work aligned to its Decade of Centenaries programme.
£7,000	The Last Post	A First World War centenary project bringing diverse communities together to play the Last Post on a variety of different instruments from different traditions at commemorative musical events.
£75,000	The Nerve Centre	Creative Centenaries initiative bringing together information and digital resources about the Decade of Centenaries and the work of the creative sector in commemorating these events. The initiative is endorsed by the Community Relations Council and the Heritage Lottery Fund.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (i) whether any NI Screen funding, or any other departmental or arm's-length body funding, has been allocated towards projects to mark the anniversary of the 1916 Uprising; if so, (ii) how much has been awarded; and (iii) to which organisations.
(AQW 41441/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Funding has been provided for the following projects relevant to this period:

NI Screen: Irish Language Broadcasting Fund

Funding	Project Title	Company	Broadcaster	Summary of Project
£52,771 Year: 2014	Bás Síochánaí	Dearcán Media	TG4	Biography of pacifist/socialist Frank Sheehy Skeffington who was killed in the run up to the Easter Rising.

NI Screen: Irish Language Broadcasting Fund

Funding	Project Title	Company	Broadcaster	Summary of Project
£56,250 Year: 2014	Saol Eoin Mhic Néill	Doubleband Films	BBC & TG4	Biography of Eoin Mac Néill who was involved with those behind the 1916 Rising but advised against the Rising.
£60,000 Year: 2014	Faoi Gheall ag Éireann	Imagine Media	BBC	Biography on Alice Milligan and Nell & Elizabeth Corr and their impact on cultural and political life around 1916 – 1920's

NI Screen: Lottery Fund

Funding	Project Title	Company	Broadcaster	Summary of Project
£3,000 Year: 2013/14	The Rising Mastermind	Maccana Teoranta	N/A	1st stage development funding to develop a first draft script for their feature film/historic biopic The Rising Mastermind. This charts the story of Sean MacDiarmada through the proclamation of Irish Independence; the Easter Rising up to his execution.
£5,000 Year: 2014/15	The Rising Mastermind	Maccana Teoranta	N/A	2nd stage development funding to develop a second draft script for The Rising Mastermind.

Other

Funding	Organisation/project	Summary of Project
£127,000	National Museums NI	A new Modern History Gallery which addresses the 'Decade of Centenaries' and includes a significantly expanded section - Home Rule to Partition - which deals with the period 1912-22. The gallery was developed with funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund (£454,800) and DCAL (£127,000).
£50,000	National Museums NI	Support from DCAL for NMNI to develop digital resources exploring the Decade of Centenaries
£1,438	Newry & Mourne Council	DCAL provides funding to local councils to facilitate 50% match funding and allow decision making on the funding of festivals to be made at a local level. Newry and Mourne Council made an award of £1,438 to the Newry 1916 Commemoration Association to mark the anniversary of 1916 Uprising. 50% of this amount (i.e. £719) was DCAL funding.
£75,000	The Nerve Centre	Creative Centenaries initiative bringing together information and digital resources about the Decade of Centenaries and the work of the creative sector in commemorating these events. The initiative is endorsed by the Community Relations Council and the Heritage Lottery Fund.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure when, how and to whom in the Ministerial Advisory Group on the Ulster-Scots Academy (MAGUS) she conveyed her request for MAGUS to bring forward a proposal for an Ulster-Scots initiative of similar value to the Irish language initiative Liofa as stated in the Assembly on 2 February 2015.
(AQW 41777/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I conveyed my request in person on 25th March 2014 to the Chair and Secretary of the MAG Ulster-Scots Academy.

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the departmental and arm's-length body buildings that are equipped with defibrillators; and how many staff in each of these buildings are trained in (i) the use of defibrillators; and (ii) C.P.R.
(AQW 41845/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: There are no defibrillators in my Department's buildings.

The following arm's length body (ALB) buildings are equipped with defibrillators:- Sports Institute NI (SINI); Armagh Observatory; and Waterways Ireland HQ.

Sport NI, Foras na Gaeilge and Libraries NI are undergoing a procurement exercise for the supply of defibrillators for the House of Sport, Tollymore National Outdoor Centre, Foras' HQ in Belfast and a number of libraries. It is planned that 40 defibrillators will be placed in the busiest libraries across the north.

Details of the staff in DCAL and ALB buildings trained in the use of defibrillators and CPR is provided in the table below:

Building	Defibrillator Training	CPR Training
DCAL Buildings	2	25
House of Sport	0	9

Building	Defibrillator Training	CPR Training
TNOC	11	23
SINI	16	16
Libraries NI	0	16
NMNI (all sites)	0	74
Armagh Observatory	1	4
Armagh Planetarium	0	4
Arts Council NI	0	4
NI Screen	0	1
Waterways Ireland	13	9
Ulster-Scots Agency	1	3

Mr Humphrey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much funding has been given to Cricket Ireland and spent in Northern Ireland, through the Northern Cricket Union and North West Cricket Union, over the last five years.
(AQW 41881/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: In the last five years up to March 2014, Sport NI, an arms length body of my Department, has allocated a total of £1,249,589 in funding to Cricket Ireland to develop the sport of cricket solely in the north of Ireland.

This funding includes £30,000 awarded in 2010, from Sport NI's Sports Matters Capital and Equipment Programme to Cricket Ireland, towards the development of a two lane outdoor net facility and purchasing of performance analysis equipment. This was for the development of a Centre of Excellence in the North West Cricket Union area.

In addition, a further £30,000 was awarded in 2010, to the Instonians Sports Club for the development of a 2 lane outdoor net facility and purchasing of performance analysis equipment, for the development of a Centre of Excellence in the Northern Cricket Union area.

The remaining funding has been provided to Cricket Ireland to develop performance within the sport, including the Northern Cricket Union and North West Cricket Union areas. Examples include the provision of £582,237 through its Investing in Performance Sport Programme between 2009 and 2013; £150,000 through its Athlete Investment Programme from 2013 – 2015; and £373,352 through its PerformanceFocus Programme from 2013 – 2015.

In February 2015, Sport NI advised Cricket Ireland that it intends to provide a total of £366,524 over 4 years through the Active Clubs programme to recruit two Active Club Coordinators who will be based in the Northern Cricket Union and North West Cricket Union respectively.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the planned funding allocations by her Department for stadia redevelopment; and for an update on the expenditure to date.
(AQW 41943/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: DCAL was allocated £110 million by the Executive to deliver the stadia projects. In terms of executive funding: £31m has been made available to the IFA for the redevelopment of Windsor Park; £62.5 million has been made available to the Ulster Council of the GAA to build a new stadium at Casement Park; and £16.5 million has been made available to the Ulster Branch of the IRFU to redevelop the Kingspan Stadium.

As of 31st March 2014 total spend across the programme was circa £20.4 million. In terms of spend to 31st March 2014: £1.9 million has been spent on the Windsor Park project; £5.1 million has been spent on the Casement Park project; and £13.4 million has been spent on the Kingspan Stadium project.

The current spend forecast for 2014/15 is circa £21.9 million. In terms of 2014/15 spend forecast: £17.2 million spend is forecast for Windsor Park; £1.6 million spend is forecast for Casement Park; and £3.0 million spend is forecast for the Kingspan Stadium.

With regards to the 2015/16 spend, circa £11.8 million is anticipated to bring the Windsor Park project to completion. The Kingspan Stadium project will be completed in 2014/15 therefore no spend is forecast in 2015/16. Anticipated spend on the Casement Park project during 2015/16 and beyond is currently under review and will be linked to the new project schedule which is currently being developed.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for her assessment of the level of funding that has been provided by SportNI to angling in recent years.
(AQW 42008/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Good progress continues to be made by Sport NI in respect of the support it is providing to angling overall.

In addition to the financial investment provided, Sport NI is working closely with the Ulster Angling Federation (UAF), the representative body for game angling clubs in the North, to develop the sport on a practical level including the current work to appoint an angling development officer. The detail of this support is outlined below.

In the last five years up to March 2014, Sport NI provided a total of £78,749 grant funding to angling groups as follows:

Year	Organisation	Project Summary	Amount
2011/12	Ulster Angling Federation Ltd	Governance Improvement Programme	£3,750
2013/14	Ulster Coarse Fishing Federation	Coaching development	£1,700
2014/15	Ulster Angling Federation Ltd	Coaching development	£5,200
2014/16	Ulster Angling Federation Ltd	Active clubs co-ordinator post	£54,699
2014/15	Ulster Coarse Fishing Federation	Coaching development	£3,400
2014/15	Loughmacrory and Murrins District Angling Association	Active Awards for Sport small grants	£10,000
		Total	**£78,749**

Sport NI also undertook a Strategic Review of Angling and invested £14,000 towards the total cost of £228,325. As part of the recommendations identified in this Strategy, the UAF received funding of £4,900 towards angling training. Sport NI also provides practical advice and financial support to the UAF on a range of angling related development programmes.

Furthermore, Sport NI has invested £6,565 in the first angling conference in the north of Ireland in June 2014 with over 70 delegates attending. This conference was a direct result of the recommendations from the Review.

Sport NI has approved the investment of up to £190,000 in the UAF through its 'Active Clubs' programme. Included in this amount is funding for the provision of an angling development officer to work on behalf of the UAF, the Ulster Coarse Fishing Federation and other angling representative bodies to develop the sport. The recruitment process for this post is currently underway.

In addition, in the 2013/14 financial year, Sport NI provided funding of £27,000 to Families at the Waterworks Fishing Club for the provision of an additional boat and engine for the use of their members with disabilities and for the supply of a new engine for their existing boat.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how her Department intends to develop the angling sector in Co. Fermanagh.
(AQW 42009/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My Department has been consulting recently with stakeholders in Co. Fermanagh and beyond regarding the development of a Fisheries Management Plan for the Lough Erne catchment.

The Plan will consider a range of issues including the status and interrelationships of fish stocks in the Lough and the how all sectors of angling may be sustained and developed for the social and economic benefit of the region.

The Plan will be a vital factor in informing my Department's future policies and priorities on the Lough Erne fisheries

Officials have also been liaising with Fermanagh District Council, which, in conjunction with Omagh District Council, is developing an angling strategy for the new council area. This will have a focus on the development of the angling product in the region through improved facilities, targeted promotion and strong stakeholder partnerships to increase participation in the sport from the range of local interests and tourist anglers.

My Department is also working with closely with Fermanagh District Council and other partners to organise, promote and deliver a number of high profile angling competitions, including the 2015 Classic Fishing Festival. These play an important role in promoting Fermanagh as a world class angling venue and provide a welcome boost to the local economy.

My Inland Fisheries staff in the South West operational area continue to deliver infrastructure improvements, including access paths, fishing stands and facilities for disabled anglers, at Public Angling Estate Waters across Fermanagh. They have also been involved in the delivery of a number of angling taster events for young people, women and those with disabilities.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much annual funding her Department provides to Belfast Zoo.
(AQW 42062/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My Department does not provide annual funding to the Belfast Zoo.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what was the operating cost of the Ministerial car in each of the last three financial years.
(AQW 42139/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The operating cost of the Ministerial car (including maintenance costs and fuel costs) in each of the last three financial years is as follows-

Year	Car operating costs
2011-2012	£2,629.10
2012-2013	£2,166.40
2013-2014	£2,775.25

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether her Department has any plans to implement further accessibility for wheelchair and motorised wheelchair access in the development of Windsor Park.
(AQW 42191/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Regional Stadium Programme will integrate an exemplar standard for inclusive design on all new-build elements of the 3 projects at Ravenhill Park, Windsor Park and Casement Park based on all current statutory requirements and legislation.

We have also worked closely and incorporated recent draft guidance developed by Disability Sport NI (DSNI) in conjunction with DCAL and the new Inclusive Stadia Advisory Group which includes representatives of all NI key disability agencies (ISAG also includes DCAL).

The guidance incorporates and in some cases exceeds current best practice and is an important element within the programme.

Windsor Park includes existing facilities which will be refurbished and DCAL will make best endeavours to raise the standard of access to services in these areas within the constraints of the programme.

Based on the proposed new 18,000 capacity stadium, current guidance provides 140 wheelchair viewing spaces are required at the redeveloped Windsor Park.

I understand at present 159 wheelchair viewing spaces are proposed within the current design. This exceeds the capacity requirement.

To summarise there will be significant provision in relation to accessibility and comfort for spectators of all abilities within the completed Windsor Park, these will include (but are not limited to):

- Provision of 159 wheelchair spaces dispersed throughout the venue in order to provide a range of viewing options;
- Installation of accessible lifts to provide access to wheelchair viewing spaces on the upper floors in the stands;

Further general accessibility factors such as Induction Loops and Guide Dog spending areas have also been incorporated.

Department of Education

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education how he will ensure the Committee for Education are given sufficient opportunity to properly scrutinise his draft budget for 2015/16.
(AQW 39214/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): Since the publication of the Draft Budget 2015-16 by the Finance Minister on 3 November 2014, I worked with my officials to establish the full extent of the Department's inescapable pressures and identify potential areas for reductions.

You will be aware that the Department of Education's 2015-16 Draft Budget was published on 26 November 2014. This document set out my draft budget allocation and reduction proposals and was open for public consultation until 29 December 2014.

My officials met with the Education Committee on 3 December 2014 to provide the opportunity to discuss these draft proposals and to highlight the key issues and challenges that these proposals present for Education.

Following Executive agreement of the Final Budget 2015-16 I am currently finalising my spending plans for next year and hope to announce these in the near future. In recognition of the important and integral role that the Education Committee can play in shaping the education budget I, and my officials, are happy to address any questions the Committee may have in regard to the 2015-16 Budget process at the upcoming briefing on 4 March 2015.

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education how many teachers are currently involved in collective agreements and have yet to find suitable new teaching positions, broken down by Education and Library Board.
(AQW 41720/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The number of teachers currently involved in collective agreements[5] and yet to find suitable new teaching positions is detailed in the table below. Please note that the figures for CCMS have been broken down by Education and Library Board area and incorporated into the overall figures.

The symbol # indicates that due to the small numbers involved suppression would be required to prevent the identification of an individual.

This guidance is in accordance with the confidentiality principle of the Statistics Authority's Code of Practice on Official Statistics.

Board Area	Numbers
BELB	#
NEELB	#
SEELB	Nil
SELB	Nil
WELB	Nil

Please note also that these figures do not include Voluntary Grammar Schools (VGS) or Grant Maintained Integrated (GMI) Schools.

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) how many appeals have been launched against each Education and Library Boards at Special Educational Needs and Disability Tribunals; and (ii) how many children have been assessed as having Special Educational Needs in each Education and Library Board in the last five years.
(AQW 41748/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department of Justice has advised that the number of appeals received by the Special Educational Needs and Disability Tribunal in the last five financial years is as follows:

	2010/11	2011/12	2012/03	2013/14	2014/15
BELB	*	*	5	6	13
NEELB	22	29	33	54	31
SEELB	24	20	30	33	30
SELB	7	10	16	15	11
WELB	10	19	18	13	13
Total	**66**	**81**	**102**	**121**	**98**

The information in respect of the current financial year covers the period 1 April 2014 to 31 January 2015.

*denotes fewer than five pupils suppressed due to potential identification of individual pupils.

The number of children who have been assessed as having special educational needs (SEN) in each Education and Library Board in the last five years is as follows:

	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
BELB	14841	15144	15146	15874	16044
NEELB	11741	12304	13291	13696	14066
SEELB	12391	12883	13170	13888	14489
SELB	11956	12150	12419	12656	13075
WELB	12178	12450	13318	13489	13908
Total	**63107**	**64931**	**67344**	**69603**	**71582**

Source: NI school census - data collected in October each year.

While the 2014/15 school census took place on the 10th October 2014, finalised figures for SEN will not be available until late February 2015.

The above figures include all children, in all school settings, at all stages of the Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs.

5 The School Reorganisation Agreement (TNC 2013/2) sets out the arrangements for the transfer of teaching staff following any reorganisation of school provision in an area and was drawn up by Employing Authorities and recognised teachers' unions on 6 June 2013. This circular supersedes TNC Circular 2007/3 (Collective Agreement).

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education what arrangements exist for insuring teachers who qualify to teach in Great Britain, but wish to work in Northern Ireland.
(AQW 41752/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: You have clarified that this question relates to the indemnification of student teachers enrolled on teacher education courses in institutions outside this jurisdiction, who wish to carry out the school placement element of their course locally.

Ensuring adequate insurance cover for students on teacher education courses is the responsibility of the providing institution and is not a matter in which the Department can intervene.

The Department is aware that some universities in Britain are prepared to provide an indemnity agreement for local placements, which places a certain transfer of risk/insurance cover to the university should the student-teacher cause injury to persons or damage to property; however other providers do not offer such an arrangement.

I am sure you will appreciate that it is not possible for schools here to facilitate placements in the absence of adequate insurance cover.

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the number of teachers currently suspended in each Education and Library Board; (ii) the length of the suspensions; and (iii) all costs relating to salaries and employer's contributions to pensions and National Insurance Contributions.
(AQW 41754/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Details of (i) the number of teachers currently suspended in each Education and Library Board (ELB); (ii) the length of the suspensions and; (iii) all costs relation to salaries and employer's contributions to pension and National Insurance contributions are shown in the table below.

Across the ELBs	Period of Suspension	Cost including employers contributions to pensions & National Insurance
11*	Varies according to the individual**	£943,648.74

* This is the total figure for the ELBs as due to the small numbers involved in each ELB a high level of suppression would be required to prevent the identification of an individual.

** The length of suspension for each individual has not been given, as to do so may assist identifying them. This is in accordance with the confidentiality principle of the Statistics Authority's Code of Practice on Official Statistics.

Please note these figures only include the controlled schools within the respective ELBs. They do not include schools under the remit of the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools, Voluntary Grammar Schools, Grant Maintained Integrated Schools and other Maintained Schools.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of professional development opportunities currently available for youth work staff.
(AQW 41765/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The professional development of youth work staff is an operational matter for the Education and Library Boards and the Youth Council. All of the Boards and the Youth Council have an ongoing commitment to support the professional development of staff.

Mr Newton asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to question AQW 40995/11-15, to detail the planned investment in outdoor play areas in schools for pupils with special needs within the Belfast area over the next three years.
(AQW 41831/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Belfast Education and Library Board (BELB) and the South Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB), who have responsibility for Special Schools in the Belfast area, have advised that the process of setting a programme for capital minor works, which would include outdoor play areas, over the next three years has not yet concluded. Decisions will be dependent on the extent of the allocated budget over this period which has still to be determined.

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Education to detail the departmental and arm's-length body buildings that are equipped with defibrillators; and how many staff in each of these buildings are trained in (i) the use of defibrillators; and (ii) C.P.R.
(AQW 41848/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department and Arm's-Length Body buildings that are equipped with defibrillators are as follows:

Buildings equipped with defibrillators	No. of staff trained in use of defibrillators	No. of staff trained in CPR
DE - Rathgael House	10	26

Buildings equipped with defibrillators	No. of staff trained in use of defibrillators	No. of staff trained in CPR
DE - Waterside House	6	6
CCEA – Clarendon	11	11
CCEA – William Ritchie	7	7
CCEA - Mallusk	3	3
GTCNI	2	2
BELB – Academy Street	8 to be trained wc: 2.3.15	8
BELB-Exchange Street	2 to be trained wc: 2.3.15	2
BELB-Fortwilliam	5 to be trained wc: 2.3.15	1
BELB- Lancaster Street	2 + 2 additional to be trained wc:2.3.15	1
SEELB-HQ Dundonald	8 to be trained wc: 2.3.15	5
NEELB - Ballymena	0 - training pending as defibrillator just received	21
SELB - HQ	8	8
SELB - AMMA	4	4
SELB – Armagh Teacher Centre	5	5
SELB – Newry Teacher Centre	3	3
SELB – Clounagh Centre	5	5
SELB - Silverwood	4	4

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of the Aiming High Programme in England; and whether he would consider a similar programme in order to transform services for children with a disability in Northern Ireland.
(AQW 41880/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Aiming High for Disabled Children: Better Support for Families Report, published in 2007, tries to address the needs of disabled children and their families specifically within the English system. The report spans the responsibilities of a number of government departments and local government bodies.

In relation to my responsibilities for supporting the education of pupils with a disability here, I am content that an inclusive environment is promoted in all school settings to ensure that all pupils are valued. The learning needs of a pupil with special educational needs and a disability are addressed through the special educational needs framework and discrimination against pupils on the grounds of disability is prohibited within the Special Educational Needs and Disability (NI) Order 2005 (SENDO). School buildings are also required to be disability compliant as part of SENDO.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Education how many staff are employed in the Irish Medium section of the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment.
(AQW 41883/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I am advised by CCEA that the number of staff employed in its Irish Medium section at 9 February 2015 is 16.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Education to outline the role of the Irish Medium section of the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment in relation to non-Irish Medium schools.
(AQW 41884/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I am advised by CCEA that the Irish Medium team sits within CCEA's Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting (CAR) Unit. Its main remit, as defined within CCEA's costed work programme, is to address elements of the Review of Irish-Medium Education Report (2009).

The Irish Medium team also contributes to the broad remit of the CAR Unit to provide guidance, support, resources and training for teachers in the north of Ireland in relation to the implementation of the Curriculum and its Assessment and Reporting arrangements.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the number of primary schools that were sent a letter dated 28 January 2015 from the Irish Medium Programme Manager of the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment

seeking expressions of interest in the development of the teaching of the Irish language; (ii) how many of these were controlled schools; and (iii) how many of the controlled schools were integrated schools.
(AQW 41887/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Letters were sent to 837 primary schools. Of these, 387 were controlled schools and of these, 19 were controlled integrated schools.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Education whether he (i) carried out an Equality Impact Assessment on his proposal to support the teaching of the Irish language in non-Irish Medium Schools; and (ii) considered the human rights implications of this project, particularly in regard to the right of non-assimilation.
(AQW 41888/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department did not screen this proposal in terms of equality or human rights legislation and does not consider that this proposal would adversely impact upon anyone either from a Section 75 or Human Rights perspective.

The letter which issued was intended to be as inclusive as possible and hence was issued to all primary schools. It sought responses from schools expressing an interest; a nil response was not required. Participation in any programme arising from the initial consultation will remain purely voluntary for schools i.e. at all stages the choice to participate remains with schools.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the training provided to teachers and classroom assistants to deal with homophobic bulling in schools; and (ii) what steps he has taken to improve the current training provision.
(AQW 41891/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Bullying, for whatever reason and in whatever form, is unacceptable. Tackling bullying is a complex challenge, in which the training of teachers is just one of many necessary responses.

All initial teacher training programmes delivered locally will include training on bullying and many specifically draw on homophobic bullying as a learning example or case study.

In-service teacher training is provided by the Education and Library Boards and focuses on the needs of all children and young people, and is supplemented with school-based advice, on-going telephone guidance, support in relation to specific anti-bullying issues and advice on the content of a school's anti-bullying policy. Priority issues for general in-service training are set annually by the Boards drawing on needs identified by their schools.

My Department funds and is a member of the local Anti Bullying Forum. The Forum promotes an anti-bullying culture in schools and offers training and advice to schools on current best-practice in this area. It also provides awareness raising activities for pupils, highlighting the different forms bullying can take and pointing them towards sources of help and support if they are experiencing bullying. The Forum has produced a resource pack called "Effective Responses to Bullying Behaviour" and this has been distributed to every school in the North.

Whilst much of the training provided to teachers and classroom assistants is generic, if a school needs support with specific types of bullying, such as homophobic bullying, both the Education and Library Boards and the Anti-Bullying Forum can signpost them to resources or agencies with specific expertise in that area.

At my request, in late 2013, the Anti-Bullying Forum undertook a review of current anti-bullying provision and practices in our schools. One of the recommendations of that review was that we needed to strengthen our current legislation; and that is one of the drivers behind my Department's current public consultation on new Anti-Bullying legislation and my commitment to legislate for this during the current Assembly mandate.

Mr Humphrey asked the Minister of Education why Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment gave school principals a few days to respond to the letters dated 28 January 2015 with the result that they could not consult with Boards of Governors before responding.
(AQW 41900/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: It is routine practice within CCEA's Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Team to give similar periods of notice for initial responses in terms of expressions of interest. The deadline was given as 6 February 2015 to ensure that schools which had expressed an initial interest in talking to CCEA, could be given as much notice as possible to arrange dates for appointments or cluster meetings to discuss their views prior to any proposal being made to the Department by the end of March 2015.

It is reasonable that any school introducing a voluntary programme should consult as required with their Board of Governors and parents prior to its implementation. However, as outlined in the letter, schools were not asked to express an interest in participating in a programme, but to express an interest in participating in initial consultation discussions which could help inform and shape such a programme.

Mr Humphrey asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) when; and (ii) how the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment was first asked to explore and develop an initiative to teach the Irish language in non-Irish Medium primary schools.
(AQW 41902/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: In February 2012, my Department asked the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA), to consider this proposal and to determine how best to proceed. After a further meeting in March 2012, the Department commissioned CCEA in September 2012, to undertake a feasibility study into the scale of need. This work was carried out by CCEA's Research and Statistics Team in November / December 2012 and the report submitted to the Department in early 2013.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 40342/11-15, what are the significant changes since 2007; and whether he plans to commission any new research.
(AQW 41915/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Significant changes to educational structures and policies since the publication of the Deloitte 'Cost of the Divide' report include the implementation of a new Curriculum (from 2007) that includes key elements of mutual understanding, cultural understanding and citizenship; replacement of the Community Relations funding schemes by the Community Relations, Equality and Diversity in Education policy (March 2011) and subsequent reduction in earmarked funding to £1.1m per annum up to March 2015; the introduction of the Entitlement Framework (Sept 2013) and Shared Education (2014) leading to increased collaboration between schools; introduction of a Sustainable Schools policy (January 2009) and implementation of Area Planning (from 2012) both of which are aimed at reducing the schools estate; the introduction of legislation to establish the new Education Authority from April 2015; and a more collaboration approach in relation to teacher education, for example the CREDIT programme which was a collaboration between St Mary's and Stranmillis University Colleges.

The 'Cost of the Divide' research was commissioned by OFMdFM. I have no plans to commission new research in relation to education.

Mr Humphrey asked the Minister of Education to detail all support provided by his Department and its arm's-length bodies to Fóram na nÓg.
(AQW 41962/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Since 2009, the Youth Council for (YCNI) has awarded circa £20k to Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta (CnaG) per annum to contribute towards the implementation of Recommendation 18 of the Review of Irish Medium Education. Following a regional assessment of need of Irish medium for 2014-15, the YCNI allocated £40k to CnaG.

To date, CnaG have used this funding to support the development of a regional voluntary platform, Fóram na nÓg, to help coordinate the development of local groups delivering youth work through the medium of Irish.

CnaG also provides some administrative assistance to support the youth development officer in Fóram na nóg in terms of office space; telephone, payroll and supervision of employee.

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the cost of producing the recent education works advertisements; (ii) the cost of producing an Irish language version; (iii) whether he intends to produce a further advertisement in minority languages; and (iv) what research was undertaken to ascertain the number of people who would not understand an English language version only.
(AQW 41966/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The 'Education Works' campaign aims to raise the value we, as a society, place on education.

This is a multi-media campaign comprising television, radio, outdoor posters, local press and various online sites. It is being taken forward in English and in Irish in keeping with the Department of Education's statutory duty to encourage and facilitate Irish-medium education.

Whilst production costs are commercially sensitive, the overall cost of the advertising campaign in its entirety is £139,520. The total campaign media spend for the Irish language element of the Education Works campaign was £6,784.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Education how often Special Education Needs inspections are carried out in mainstream post-primary schools in the Southern Education and Library Board.
(AQW 41968/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Education and Training Inspectorate inspect special education needs as part of all mainstream post-primary inspections in the Southern Education and Library Board. By the end of the current academic year almost all post-primary schools in the SELB (94%) will have been inspected within seven years of their last inspection (or follow-up inspection).

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Education what actions his Department has taken in recent years to (i) identify; and (ii) tackle educational inequalities.
(AQW 41969/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department's evidence, based on a census of all schools/pupils , confirms that social deprivation, as measured by Free School Meals, is strongly correlated with and reflective of educational disadvantage and lower educational attainment. This is very much in line with international evidence which also reports the strong correlation between pupils' socio-economic background and their outcomes in education.

The evidence shows that pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds have greater obstacles to overcome. Their schools need additional resources to help them do this.

That is why I have redistributed school funding to target schools with high numbers of pupils from socially disadvantaged backgrounds and have continued to implement policies and provide funding for a range of additional interventions, with a focus on improving standards and tackling educational underachievement. However, there are two other key issues.

Firstly, a socially balanced education system enables all pupils to perform better. While some schools persist in the use of academic selection, we will be unable to eradicate this social division.

Secondly, inequality in outcomes is a societal issue and one that education authorities and schools cannot tackle on their own. The challenge of tackling inequalities, be they educational, health or economic, is one that we all face and success will depend on all stakeholders working together in order to achieve greater equity in our society.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 40818/11-15, to detail the location of all withdrawn crossing patrols.
(AQW 41971/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Education and Library Boards have provided the following information which shows the location of school crossing patrols that have been withdrawn during the period 2012 to 2014 (inclusive):

Education and Library Board	Location of withdrawn school crossing patrol
Belfast Education and Library Board	Carr's Glen Primary School, Belfast
North Eastern Education and Library Board	Glengormley Intergated Primary School (2 patrols withdrawn) Groggan Primary School, Randalstown Victoria Primary School, Carrickfergus
South Eastern Education and Library Board	Academy Primary School, Saintfield Alexander Dickson Primary School, Ballygowan Ballymacash Primary School, Lisburn Braniel Primary School, Belfast Brooklands Primary School, Dundonald (2 patrols withdrawn) Dundonald Primary School, Belfast Londonderry Primary School, Newtownards Old Warren Primary School, Lisburn Spa Primary School, Ballynahinch
Southern Education and Library Board	Holy Trinity Cookstown Iveagh Primary School, Rathfriland Maheralin Primary School Newmills Primary School, Dungannon (2 patrols withdrawn) Newtownhamilton Primary School Royal School Dungannon St Malachy's Primary School, Newry St Patrick's Primary School, Hilltown
Western Education and Library Board	Ebrington Primary School, Derry St Canices Primary School, Derry St Eugenes Primary School, Strabane St Joseph's College, Enniskillen

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Education for an update on plans for a new build for Drumlins Integrated Primary School, Ballynahinch.
(AQW 41973/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I was pleased to announce Drumlins Integrated Primary School as part of the major capital announcement in June 2014. The business case for this project has been approved and it is anticipated that a professional team to take forward this

project will be appointed mid-March 2015. The new school will be built on site of the old Library Board Headquarters and Health Centre off Windmill Lane, Ballynahinch and work is ongoing to clear this site. It is currently estimated that the school will be completed May/June 2017.

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Education whether his Department offers any scholarships for young people advancing to tertiary education.
(AQW 41974/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department does not offer any direct scholarships for young people advancing to tertiary education.

However my Department promotes and facilitates the All Ireland Scholarship Scheme which is funded by JP McManus and administered by the Department for Employment and Learning. The scheme provides financial support of £5,500 per annum to 25 high achieving students from challenging economic backgrounds for the duration of their undergraduate degree courses. Applicants to the scheme must be in receipt of the Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA).

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education how many teachers are unemployed and on the Northern Ireland Substitute Teacher Register.
(AQW 42029/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: While there are some 9100+ teachers registered on the Substitute Teacher Register (NISTR), the number who can be regarded as actively available for work in schools varies from day-to-day, depending on an individual teacher's availability, their personal preferences and on the number of substitute teachers employed by schools each day. The number of teachers registered as actively available for work on any given day cannot be taken as an indication of the number of unemployed teachers, as some individuals may be engaged in other types of work.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education how many school patrol crossing guards are currently employed in North Down; and to detail how this compares with 2005.
(AQW 42069/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I am advised by the South-Eastern Education and Library Board that the number of school crossing patrol guards that are currently employed in North Down is 15, and in 2005 the number employed was 23.

The reduction of 8 School Crossing Patrol's between 2005 and 2015 can be attributed to: 3 posts discontinued in post primary schools (the Board does not provide School Crossing Patrols in post-primary locations); 2 posts discontinued following 2 school closures; 1 post discontinued as road traffic lights were installed at the crossing location; and, 2 posts discontinued following ill-health retirement of post-holders and locations not meeting criteria for provision.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of the 'World Around Us' component of the Key Stage 2 curriculum, including its effectiveness in specifically encouraging students to pursue science subjects.
(AQW 42081/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department asked the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) to conduct a review of the implementation of the 'World Around Us' Area of Learning in 2013/14. The purpose of this review was to find out how primary schools are implementing and developing this Area of Learning. ETI's report found that most of the science and technology lessons observed by inspectors (86%) were evaluated as good or better. Over half of the lessons were evaluated as very good or outstanding. The report makes a number of recommendations and I have asked my officials to consider how these can be taken forward.

Additionally, the Department has a number of STEM intervention programmes and initiatives to complement the curriculum and together, I believe these are having a positive impact in terms of pupils pursuing science subjects. There has been an upward trend in the number of A-level STEM examination entries since 2007/08 rising from 38.2% to 41.2% in 2012/13.

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Education to list the consultancy firms that provided financial services to his Department in each of the last five years; and the amount paid to each firm for these services.
(AQW 42094/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: A list of firms engaged by my Department for the provision of financial services, and classified as external consultancy assignments in accordance with guidelines set out by the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP), is set out below. The tables detail spend incurred on external consultancy in respect of financial services in the last five years. Such firms may also be engaged for other external consultancy projects which are not related to financial services or they may also be engaged on other areas of work, which are not classified as external consultancy in line with DFP guidance. Spend in relation to such activities is not readily available and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

2009-2010

Name of consultant / firm	£
-	NIL

2010-2011

Name of consultant / firm	£
-	NIL

2011-2012

Name of consultant / firm	£
-	NIL

2012-2013

Name of consultant / firm	£
KPMG	947
Robert Salisbury, Eemer Eivers, Evan Bates	136,200
Total	**137,147**

2013-2014

Name of consultant / firm	£
PWC	1,750
Deloitte	29,950
PWC	59,880
Total	**91,580**

Mr Moutray asked the Minister of Education for an update on the current status of the Portadown YMCA Building Project.
(AQW 42097/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: An Economic Appraisal is in the process of being completed by Department of Education in conjunction with the Portadown YMCA regarding the proposed project.

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education what progress has been made in ending the requirement for candidates to have Certificates of Religious Education in maintained primary schools appointments.
(AQW 42100/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department does not employ teachers.

The requirement to hold the Certificate in Religious Education is a policy decision of some employers, namely the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) and some Grant Maintained Integrated Primary Schools.

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education what steps are being taken to repeal the exception for teachers in the Fair Employment and Treatment (Northern Ireland) Order 1998.
(AQW 42102/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Fair Employment and Treatment (NI) Order 1998 is the responsibility of OFMdFM.

The removal of the exception under Article 71 of the FETO is a matter for OFMdFM to take forward and should be subject to a full public consultation.

Mr Ramsey asked the Minister of Education to outline the number of Special Educational Needs classrooms assistants employed by each Education and Library Board, in each of the last five years.
(AQW 42121/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The number (headcount) of Special Educational Needs classrooms assistants employed by each Education and Library Board, in each of the last five years, is as follows:

	At 31/8/10	At 31/8/11	At 31/8/12	At 31/8/13	At 31/8/14
BELB	1125	1200	1295	1404	1565
WELB	1364	1365	1313	1368	1446
NEELB	1021	1046	1096	1141	1270
SEELB	1148	1266	1279	1429	1630
SELB	1157	1139	1187	1200	1282

The figures shown above include all Special Needs and Additional Special Needs classroom assistants.

Mr Clarke asked the Minister of Education for an update on the status of Parkhall College; and; whether it has received full integrated status.
(AQW 42125/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Development Proposal (DP) for the acquisition of controlled integrated status for Parkhall College was approved by the Minister on 15 May 2009. From the date specified in the DP (1 September 2009), Parkhall became a Controlled Integrated school, as provided for in legislation.

This position was outlined to the NEELB by the Department on 19 December 2013 in order to address any confusion that there may have been on the status of the school.

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister of Education what steps he has taken to remove the requirement for a Certificate in Religious Education which is a barrier to teachers within the controlled sector getting employment within the maintained sector.
(AQW 42135/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department does not employ teachers. The requirement to hold the Certificate in Religious Education is a policy decision of some employers, namely the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) and certain Grant Maintained Integrated Primary Schools. A teacher of any religious background, or none, can hold the Certificate in Religious Education. The policy and criteria for selection and recruitment of teachers is a matter for the relevant employers.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education what was the operating cost of the Ministerial car in each of the last three financial years.
(AQW 42136/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The operating costs of the Ministerial car in each of the last three financial years are as follows:

Financial year	Operating costs
2011/2012	£41,591
2012/2013	£38,944
2013/2014	£40,123
1/04/14 to 31/01/15	£33,341

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Education how many pupils in the mainstream Southern Education and Library Board division are within each of the five Special Educational Needs stages; and of these, how many have a classroom assistant, shown per stage.
(AQW 42159/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The number of pupils in mainstream schools in the Southern Education and Library Board area at each stage of the Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs and the number of those who had access to classroom assistance specified in their statement of special educational needs, as at 11 October 2013, is as follows:

	Number of Pupils	Number with a Classroom Assistant
Stage 1	2,190	0
Stage 2	4,704	0
Stage 3	2,182	0
Stage 4	195	0
Stage 5	2,960	1989
Total	**12,231**	**1989**

Sources: NI school census 2013/14 and Southern Education and Library Board.

While the 2014/15 school census took place on the 10th October 2014, finalised figures for SEN will not be available until late February 2015.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Education for an update on the adoption of a Unique Learner Number as part of the development of a system to track student progress, particularly those at risk of not being in education, employment or training.
(AQW 42204/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department is working on the introduction of a Unique Learner Number (ULN) for all learners in the north of Ireland at Year 11 and above. In taking forward this work, the Department established a pilot exercise involving up to 25 post-primary schools during 2013/14. This pilot was subsequently extended to 2014/15 to allow for IT developments and to optimise participation from schools.

Progress to date has been positive and the outcomes of the pilot are being evaluated to help inform decisions on the full roll out of the ULN across all schools here.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Education what is the required number of Special Education Needs inspections at mainstream post-primary schools during each school year.
(AQW 42236/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Education and Training Inspectorate inspect special educational needs as part of all mainstream post-primary inspections. The number of post-primary inspections undertaken each year is linked to the business planning cycle in that particular year. For example: by the end of the current academic year 28 post-primary schools should have been inspected; in 2013-14, 29 were inspected; and in 2012-13, 28 were inspected.

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of primary school headteachers, broken down by gender.
(AQW 42315/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The number of primary school principals broken down by gender is published annually as part of the Teacher Workforce Statistical Bulletin and the most recent bulletin, published June 2014, is available at the below link. The information requested is contained within Table 7.

http://www.deni.gov.uk/workforce_stats_press_release_for_web_revised.pdf

Department for Employment and Learning

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how much funding his Department has awarded the GAA over the last three financial years.
(AQW 41174/11-15)

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): The Department for Employment and Learning has not awarded direct funding to the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA). However, through two employment programmes, GAA organisations did receive payments as employers participating in the relevant programmes. To date, in the 2014-15 financial year, £3,603 has been paid, and £250 in 2013-14, to GAA organisations participating in the Youth Employment Scheme. GAA organisations were also paid £5,700 in the 2013-14 financial year and £460 in 2012-13 for employment subsidies in relation to participants on the Steps to Work Programme.

Mr Clarke asked the Minister for Employment and Learning (i) how much his Department pays annually for Trade Union officials; (ii) how many officials this payment covers; and (iii) what is the cost of administering Trade Union's dues.
(AQW 41197/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Department funds civil servants on secondment to the Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance (NIPSA) to carry out full-time trade union duties. In the financial year 2013/14, the total cost of funding the civil servants on secondment to NIPSA was £92,867.24.

This payment covers the number of officials below:

2013/14	**Number of Trade Union Officials**
April 2013 – February 2014 (inclusive)	2
March 2014	3

There is no charge throughout the Northern Ireland Civil Service for the cost of administering Trade Unions' dues.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many students, in 2013/14, in the (i) Northern; and (ii) North West Regional Colleges enrolled in courses which support the hospitality and tourism sectors.
(AQW 41200/11-15)

Dr Farry: The most recent figures available, for the 2013/14 academic year, show that (i) 985 individuals enrolled in 'Hospitality and Catering' or 'Travel and Tourism' at Northern Regional College and (ii) 1,001 individuals enrolled in 'Hospitality and Catering' or 'Travel and Tourism' at North West Regional College.

The figures are correct as at 17th October 2014 using the subject sector area Hospitality & Catering and Travel and Tourism for both colleges.

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many applications for funding from the European Social Fund were received from North Down.
(AQW 41565/11-15)

Dr Farry: A total of 135 applications were submitted to the European Social Fund by the closing date of 9 January 2015 although it should now be noted that one of the applications was a duplicate, making the final number of applications received as 134. There were no applications received from organisations registered in North Down.

You may wish to note that a number of applications submitted across each strand of the new ESF Programme would, if successful, be delivered across Northern Ireland and therefore should cover North Down.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, pursuant to AQW 41202/11-15, to detail the support, other than financial provision, which is available.
(AQW 41693/11-15)

Dr Farry: All of the further and higher education institutions in Northern Ireland offer a wide range of support services to all students, some of whom will have caring responsibilities.

Further Education colleges provide a wide range of non-financial support for students with caring responsibilities in relation to entering, sustaining and achieving in FE. Student support teams within FE colleges provide pastoral care to all students and work closely with those students who have declared themselves as being carers to ensure they are not disadvantaged. Such support can include individually tailored timetables to facilitate carer duties; the use of technology to support students to access course information remotely and to complete assignments online; and time off at short or without any notice for medical/hospital appointments.

Northern Ireland's higher education providers also provide a range of support services to both full-time and part-time students. The nature of the support will vary according to the needs of the individual student but can include the support of a tutor / mentor and flexibility with course delivery and assessment, including extensions if necessary, for coursework submissions. In addition, it is a basic function of student support services that staff are alert to the needs of students, including carers, and that they are sign-posted appropriately so that help and advice can be accessed in a timely manner.

Access to Success, my Department's regional strategy for widening participation in higher education, has identified adult learners as a group which faces barriers to their participation in higher education. In some cases this will include adult learners who find it difficult to engage in education because of caring responsibilities. Access to Success aims to give groups such as adult learners the encouragement and support they need to achieve the necessary qualifications to apply to, and to benefit from, the higher education that is right for them, irrespective of their personal or social background.

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what support could be available to JTI Ballymena workers from the Northern Ireland Redundancy Service.
(AQW 41699/11-15)

Dr Farry: It is deeply regrettable that Japan Tobacco International (JTI) will close its production facility at Gallaher's, Lisnafillan, with the loss of 877 jobs.

Support will be available to JTI employees through the Redundancy Advice Service co-ordinated by my officials in the Employment Service. They will work in partnership with the Social Security Agency, Further Education Colleges, Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs, (HMRC), and other agencies. Advice on alternative job opportunities, mentoring, access to training courses, entrepreneurship, education opportunities and careers advice, as well as a range of other issues such as benefits and taxation will be provided to JTI Gallaher employees. This service is always delivered free of charge to any company and employees facing closure or redundancy.

In addition and in order to ensure there is on-going support for JTI and its employees, my officials in Ballymena Jobs and Benefits Office have already identified a dedicated team to provide advice and guidance should any of the employees facing redundancy require immediate assistance. Specifically this includes guidance on our initiatives and programmes, local provision, help with jobsearch, job clubs, writing CVs, job application forms, preparing for interviews, careers guidance and assistance with travel costs for interviews.

My officials are attending meetings with JTI Gallahers, Ballymena Borough Council and Invest Northern Ireland over the next few weeks. Over the coming months, my Department will work closely with all those involved to manage the closure process and ensure that the best advice, help and support are offered to all those affected employees at the appropriate time

Finally, please rest assured that my Department will do everything that it can to assist the employees of JTI Gallaher's back into employment where appropriate. I thank you for your interest and support on this matter

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning (i) for an update on the work of the Cross Border Project Team; (ii) the dates on which the group have met; and (iii) the progress made to date.
(AQW 41812/11-15)

Dr Farry:

(i) The Cross Border project team was established as part of the implementation plan for Graduating to Success. The key objectives of the team are to:

- ensure that by the end of 2013, the higher education institutions (HEIs) will have identified opportunities for north-south co-operation in teaching and learning;
- assist in ensuring that by the end of 2020, the HEIs will have met established targets on increased cross-border student mobility; and
- support the Department in the implementation of the relevant recommendations (1, 4, 6 and 9) in the the Irish Business and Employers' Confederation - Confederation of British Industry (IBEC-CBI) Report "A Study of Obstacles to Cross-Border Undergraduate Education".

(ii) The project team has met on four occasions: 21 June 2013; 2 October 2013; 24 January 2014; and 15 May 2014.

(iii) The project team has made the following progress:

The Higher Education Institutions in Northern Ireland have provided assurance to the project team that they are continuing to identify opportunities for collaboration.

The project team has considered the relevant recommendations (1, 4, 6 and 9) of the IBEC-CBI report on undergraduate mobility and progress has been made in the following areas:

- In relation to improving information (recommendation 1), careers teachers and my Department's careers advisers have received additional training on the higher education opportunities available in the Republic of Ireland and on the Central Applications Office processes. Extensive information, to support our local students in their higher education decisions and also to act as a gateway for other students, including from the Republic of Ireland, who may be interested in studying in Northern Ireland, is now available through the NIDirect portal;
- The recommendation in relation to student funding (recommendation 4) has been achieved as Northern Ireland students studying in the South now have access to funding support;
- In relation to A Level and Leaving Certificate grades (recommendation 6), the project group has received updates from the Department of Education that discussions between CCEA and Irish Universities Association are still ongoing. However the group has noted the progress made by individual institutions e.g. Trinity College Dublin and Dublin City University; and
- In relation to the impact of future demographics on cross border student flows (recommendation 9), my officials have been working with officials in the Department for Education and Skills to research and analyse the current position in order to inform future policy development. A joint report is being finalised and will form the basis for the next project team meeting.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the support available for partners of the Steps 2 Success and Steps to Work Programmes to enable them to offer employment to people who complete a placement.
(AQW 41826/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Steps 2 Success programme is designed to assist unemployed participants find and sustain work. Each of the three Lead Contractors that deliver the programme has designed a wide range of provision to help participants find work. The Contractors have all worked with their supply chain partners to put in place the same service to that available from the Lead Contractor. The service delivered to all participants must at least meet standards set by the Department in a Service Guarantee. All delivery organisations will agree a Progression to Employment Plan that will outline the activities that each will complete to address the participant's assessed barriers to employment. The Progression to Employment Plan will be updated regularly to take account of the participant's improvement in job readiness. The Lead Contractors and partners will also work with a wide range of employers to identify jobs and match participants to these. All activities undertaken by participants are based on helping the participant finding their job goal.

In delivering the service there are a range of supports offered by each of the Lead Contractors to their supply chain partners, these include: dedicated supply chain management team; staff training; computer hardware and dedicated software package; performance management regime including assisting with underperformance; provision of detailed and timely Management Information; clearly defined performance targets; compliance and audit support; quality management regime; and Human Resources support.

Those participants who complete their attachment period on Steps 2 Success without having found employment are referred back to an Employment Service Adviser. They will build on the improvement in employability that have occurred during their Steps 2 Success attachment.

The Steps to Work Programme was closed to new entrants in May 2014.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the number of participants on the Steps 2 Success and Steps Work Programmes who have been offered employment by their work placement, following its completion.
(AQW 41827/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Steps 2 Success programme is designed to assist unemployed participants find and sustain work. Each of the three Lead Contractors that deliver the programme has designed a wide range of provision to help participants find work. The Contractors have all worked with their supply chain partners to put in place the same service to that available from the Lead Contractor. The service delivered to all participants must at least meet standards set by the Department in a Service Guarantee. All delivery organisations will agree a Progression to Employment Plan that will outline the activities that each will complete to address the participant's assessed barriers to employment. The Progression to Employment Plan will be updated regularly to take account of the participant's improvement in job readiness. The Lead Contractors and partners will also work with a wide range of employers to identify jobs and match participants to these. All activities undertaken by participants are based on helping the participant finding their job goal.

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Those participants who complete their attachment period on Steps 2 Success without having found employment are referred back to an Employment Service Adviser. They will build on the improvement in employability that have occurred during their Steps 2 Success attachment.

The Steps to Work Programme was closed to new entrants in May 2014.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many groups representing people with a disability applied for the European Social Fund in (i) Northern Ireland; and (ii) East Londonderry.
(AQW 41828/11-15)

Dr Farry: A total of 33 applications were submitted from groups representing people with a disability to the European Social Fund by the closing date of 9 January 2015. One of the above applications came from an organisation in the East Londonderry constituency.

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what consultation a university or college must undertake with his Department prior to discontinuing a course.
(AQW 41874/11-15)

Dr Farry: While the Department sets the strategic direction for the higher and further education sectors, each university and college is responsible for its own course provision and curriculum change. In these circumstances the Department does not approve individual university or college courses nor require a university or college to consult when it proposes to discontinue a course.

Before making decisions regarding course provision the universities take a number of factors into account including my Department's priorities, the needs of the economy and student demand. Reviewing course provision is part of the normal annual cycle and is good business practice.

My Department sets high level Public Service Agreement targets in respect of the FE curriculum to be delivered by the FE sector, and agrees broad targets with individual colleges through the annual college development planning process.

Colleges offer a wide range of economically focused provision, tailored to meet local needs. Decisions on whether specific courses run are driven by the level of demand locally and it is the responsibility of individual colleges to meet the needs of learners and employers in their areas in a cost effective way that ensures best use of public money.

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what steps his Department is taking to encourage joint working between the two universities in order to rationalise higher education provision, in view of the cuts to the departmental budget.
(AQW 41907/11-15)

Dr Farry:

(i) While the Department sets the strategic direction for the higher education sector, each University is responsible for its own course provision and curriculum. My Department has therefore not entered into discussion with the two universities in relation to joint working and rationalisation of higher education provision.

(ii) The two Vice-Chancellors and members of the respective Senior Management Teams meet on a regular basis to review issues relating to Higher Education. This includes discussion on opportunities for cooperation and partnership across a broad range of issues relating to education, research, knowledge transfer and societal impact.

(iii) As no rationalisation plans have been developed it is not possible to comment on the implications of such plans.

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on any discussions that have taken place between Queen's University, Belfast and the Ulster University on co-operating to rationalise their educational provision, including the outcome of these talks for course provision across the higher education sector.
(AQW 41908/11-15)

Dr Farry:

(i) While the Department sets the strategic direction for the higher education sector, each University is responsible for its own course provision and curriculum. My Department has therefore not entered into discussion with the two universities in relation to joint working and rationalisation of higher education provision.

(ii) The two Vice-Chancellors and members of the respective Senior Management Teams meet on a regular basis to review issues relating to Higher Education. This includes discussion on opportunities for cooperation and partnership across a broad range of issues relating to education, research, knowledge transfer and societal impact.

(iii) As no rationalisation plans have been developed it is not possible to comment on the implications of such plans.

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what would be the implications for staff numbers and job losses arising from any rationalization plans agreed between the two universities.
(AQW 41909/11-15)

Dr Farry:

(i) While the Department sets the strategic direction for the higher education sector, each University is responsible for its own course provision and curriculum. My Department has therefore not entered into discussion with the two universities in relation to joint working and rationalisation of higher education provision.

(ii) The two Vice-Chancellors and members of the respective Senior Management Teams meet on a regular basis to review issues relating to Higher Education. This includes discussion on opportunities for cooperation and partnership across a broad range of issues relating to education, research, knowledge transfer and societal impact.

(iii) As no rationalisation plans have been developed it is not possible to comment on the implications of such plans.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the number of (i) teacher training places at (a) Stranmillis; (b) St Mary's; (c) Ulster University; (d) Queens's University; (e) Open University; and (ii) teachers needed in Northern Ireland.
(AQW 41911/11-15)

Dr Farry:

(i) The number of teachers being trained at the Higher Education Institutions as of 1 December 2014 is as follows:

a St Mary's University College, 579;

b Stranmillis University College, 569;

c Queen's University Belfast, 136;

d Ulster University, 117; and

e The Open University, 27.

(ii) My Department does not determine the number of teachers to be trained. That responsibility falls to the Minister of Education.

My Department's responsibility for teacher training relates to resourcing the Initial Teacher Education providers.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether he intends to bid for funding for the expansion of Ulster University at Magee in the next Comprehensive Spending Review.
(AQW 41952/11-15)

Dr Farry: You will know that a business case for the expansion of the Magee campus was submitted to my Department in December. The business case is currently being scrutinised to ensure that it meets the requirements of the Northern Ireland Guide to Expenditure Appraisal and Evaluation. If it does and we also obtain approval from the Department of Finance and Personnel, I would intend to submit a bid in the next Comprehensive Spending Review to secure funding for the expansion on a sustainable basis.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether the reduction of courses available for study at Ulster University provides space for a veterinary school at Coleraine.
(AQW 41980/11-15)

Dr Farry: My understanding is that space was never an issue with regards to the proposal to establish a veterinary school at Ulster University's Coleraine campus. The University is preparing a business case to support the establishment of the veterinary school but a complete full draft of the business case has never been submitted to my Department. The key issues are establishing that there is a need for a veterinary school in Northern Ireland and securing the funding for it.

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail his Department's (i) understanding; and (ii) definition of Management Accounts.
(AQW 42038/11-15)

Dr Farry: This Department's understanding and definition of Management Accounts is that they comprise internal financial and non-financial data, regularly produced by an organisation in order to provide information to management to inform decision making, budget management, planning, control, performance measurement and continuous improvement. They are often used by the Department for monitoring purposes, and for assessing financial capability and stability when awarding contracts.

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline any discussions she has had with (i) the operators, or owners, of St Angelo Airport, Enniskillen; or (ii) commercial airlines, about the possibility of commercial airlines using the facility.
(AQW 41575/11-15)

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): I have not had any discussions regarding the potential for new routes from St Angelo Airport.

I would be happy to consider any proposals for the introduction of new routes from the airport with business or inbound tourism potential. However, it would be important that any new services were profitable and sustainable for both airport and airline.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what benefits the opening of St Angelo Airport in Enniskillen would bring to the local economy.
(AQW 41576/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The introduction of air routes from St Angelo Airport would provide direct access for visitors to the extensive tourist offering available in Fermanagh. In particular, potential visitor segments might include those interested in activity tourism such as golfing and fishing. However, it would be important that any new services were profitable and sustainable for both airport and airline.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 34114/11-15 and AQW 33390/11-15, whether her department has completed reviewing the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development Regional Development Working Paper 2013/20 'The Case of Ireland – Northern Ireland – Regions and Innovation: Collaborating Across Borders'; and what action she intends to take as a result of the report.
(AQW 41607/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department has considered the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development Regional Development Working Paper 2013/20 'The Case of Ireland – Northern Ireland – Regions and Innovation: Collaborating Across Borders'.

The recommendations in this report have been reviewed and are being taken forward by InterTradeIreland, a North South body established to foster and support cross border collaboration on innovation, trade and business development activities.

My Department, in conjunction with the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation in the Republic of Ireland will seek to ensure that InterTradeIreland takes account of the findings and recommendations in the Report in its work going forward.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many visits by potential foreign direct investors took place in (i) Moyle; (ii) Ballymoney; (iii) Ballymena; (iv) Carrickfergus; and (v) Larne, in each of the last five years.
(AQW 41609/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The number of visits by potential foreign direct investors that took place in (i) Moyle; (ii) Ballymoney; (iii) Ballymena; (iv) Carrickfergus; and (v) Larne, in each of the last five years was as follows:

- 2009-10 – Larne (2)
- 2010-11 – Ballymena (1), Larne (3), Moyle (1)
- 2012-13 – Ballymena (4), Carrickfergus (5), Larne (5)
- 2013-14 – Ballymoney (1), Larne (3)

Foreign investors choose to visit Northern Ireland on the basis of our talented and loyal workforce, advanced telecoms infrastructure, high skilled business clusters, a pro-business environment, competitive operating costs and proximity to major markets.

Once Invest NI has secured agreement to visit Northern Ireland the company then decides what areas it wishes to visit based on its requirements. Requirements will vary depending on the nature of the project, but a company will typically look at existing investors in the same business sector (Invest NI's key target sectors being ICT, business and professional services, financial services and renewables); universities and colleges that offer courses relating to that sector; and suitable, available property.

Areas in which these desired features do not exist, or are not clearly presented, are unlikely to attract the attention of potential investors to visit or locate in the area. In addition, potential investors are often drawn to population centres that they consider will provide the appropriate number of suitably skilled potential employees. Therefore a clear understanding and evidence of skill demographics for any region would greatly assist a potential investor in considering a particular area.

Ultimately the investor will make the decision as to where they visit and locate based on their specific business needs and having considered the options available to them.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on the European Regional Development Fund Operational Programme.
(AQW 41623/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department has considered the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development Regional Development Working Paper 2013/20 'The Case of Ireland – Northern Ireland – Regions and Innovation: Collaborating Across Borders'.

The recommendations in this report have been reviewed and are being taken forward by InterTradeIreland, a North South body established to foster and support cross border collaboration on innovation, trade and business development activities.

My Department, in conjunction with the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation in the Republic of Ireland will seek to ensure that InterTradeIreland takes account of the findings and recommendations in the Report in its work going forward.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what pressures her Department can put on energy providers to reduce customers' bills in light of the reduction in oil prices.
(AQW 41714/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department has no formal role in this matter and I have no power to compel energy suppliers to reduce prices. However, my Department participates in the latter stages of electricity and gas tariff review meetings between the Utility Regulator and regulated suppliers.

On 12 February, the Regulator and Power NI announced a reduction of 9.2% in the company's domestic and small business customer electricity tariff. This will take effect from 1 April 2015. This is a 2-year tariff, but it will be kept under close review by the Regulator. Budget Energy, one of the non-regulated electricity suppliers, has also announced a reduction of 5% in its domestic tariff to take effect from 10 March 2015.

Separately, the Regulator has been progressing a review of regulated gas tariffs in respect of Airtricity Gas Supply (for the Greater Belfast area) and firmus energy (for the Ten Towns area). It is also expected that these reviews will conclude soon to allow any changes to gas bills to take effect from 1 April.

Oil prices have no direct or significant influence over generation prices in the Single Electricity Market – gas prices are the main driver and they have fallen less sharply than those for oil. Wholesale costs also account for only part of a customer's bill and movements in other charges impact on the final tariff position. Of course, the benefits of lower oil prices are already feeding through in lower heating bills and costs of transport.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment which postcodes in North Down will benefit from the Broadband Improvement Project.
(AQW 41732/11-15)

Mrs Foster: A number of postcode areas in the North Down constituency have already benefited from the increases in broadband availability provided through the roll-out of the Northern Ireland Broadband Improvement Project.

Further details regarding improvements already made, or planned in postcode districts, can be found using the on-line postcode checker provided at: http://www.online.detini.gov.uk/Broadband/Start.aspx

Work is continuing in the area and is due to be completed by 31 March 2015.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail (i) the number of; and (ii) the amount granted to businesses in (a) North Down; and (ii) Northern Ireland from the Northern Ireland Small Business Loan Fund since its inception.
(AQW 41750/11-15)

Mrs Foster: During the period from the launch of the Northern Ireland Small Business Loan Fund in February 2013 until the date of the most recently publicly released figures (30th September 2014):

(i) two business in North Down have availed of the fund, securing funding amounting to £30,000; and

(ii) 100 businesses across Northern Ireland have availed of the fund. The total value of these loans is £2,146,809.

Mr Byrne asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline the areas in West Tyrone that do not have adequate and reliable broadband coverage.
(AQW 41771/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I would refer the member to the NI Direct website (http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/broadband-improvement-project) where details of the postcode areas to be addressed by the current Northern Ireland Broadband Improvement Project (NIBIP) can be found. This project aims to improve the broadband connectivity for more than 45,000 premises by the end of 2015.

In addition, my Department has consulted on the proposed intervention area for the Superfast Roll-out Programme Phase 2 (SRP2) project which seeks to further increase the coverage of superfast broadband services across Northern Ireland by 2017. The consultation document, which can be found on the DETI website (http://www.detini.gov.uk/index/what-we-do/deti-telecoms-index/consultations_from_2014/superfast_rollout_programme_phase_2.htm), contains a list of postcodes where it is considered additional public intervention may be required when the NIBIP is complete.

Mr Byrne asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline the areas in Fermanagh and South Tyrone that do not have adequate and reliable broadband coverage.
(AQW 41772/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I would refer the member to the NI Direct website (http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/broadband-improvement-project) where details of the postcode areas to be addressed by the current Northern Ireland Broadband Improvement Project (NIBIP) can be found. This project aims to improve the broadband connectivity for more than 45,000 premises by the end of 2015.

In addition, my Department has consulted on the proposed intervention area for the Superfast Roll-out Programme Phase 2 (SRP2) project which seeks to further increase the coverage of superfast broadband services across Northern Ireland by 2017. The consultation document, which can be found on the DETI website (http://www.detini.gov.uk/index/what-we-do/deti-telecoms-index/consultations_from_2014/superfast_rollout_programme_phase_2.htm), contains a list of postcodes where it is considered additional public intervention may be required when the NIBIP is complete.

Mr Byrne asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what monies have been allocated to IT and telecom companies over the last five years to increase broadband services across rural black spots.
(AQW 41773/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Over the last five years £40.207 million has been allocated to Telecoms companies to increase the availability of broadband services across Northern Ireland including rural areas.

The allocation can be broken down as follows:

Project	**Allocation**
Northern Ireland Broadband Fund	£ 1.107 million
Next Generation Broadband	£19.800 million
Northern Ireland Broadband Improvement Project	£19.300 million
Total	**£40.207 Million**

Mr Byrne asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what proposals her Department has to meet the current needs of many rural businesses that require a reliable and adequate broadband service.
(AQW 41774/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department is currently implementing the £23.68million Northern Ireland Broadband Improvement Project. This project is being delivered in eight phases with an overall completion date of 31 December 2015. The project is progressing according to schedule and by 31 December 2014 just under 17,500 premises across Northern Ireland, both business and residential, had benefited from the improvements being delivered, including many in rural areas.

By project completion it is anticipated that improvements will have been delivered for at least 45,000 premises across Northern Ireland resulting in the provision of basic fixed-line broadband services of at least 2 Megabits per second in areas that previously had no service and improvements in the availability of superfast fixed-line broadband services (24 Megabits per second or higher) in areas where choice is poor or broadband speeds are low.

In addition my Department is currently progressing a further project (Superfast Rollout Programme phase 2) which is aimed at extending the reach of Superfast Broadband services across Northern Ireland by 2017. The proposed intervention area includes postcodes in rural areas.

A response to an Invitation to Tender has been received and is currently under consideration. The final intervention area is dependent on this evaluation. Assuming that the bid is acceptable, it is anticipated that contract award will be made towards the

beginning of March 2015 with implementation commencing immediately thereafter. Further information on the project, including details of the proposed intervention area, can be found at on the Department's website at www.detini.gov.uk/index/what-we-do/deti-telecoms-index/telecoms-srp.htm

Mr Byrne asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment when 100 per cent broadband coverage will be achieved.
(AQW 41775/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Broadband in Northern Ireland is available to 100% of premises and is delivered through various technologies, including fixed line, fixed wireless, satellite and mobile broadband.

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the departmental and arm's-length body buildings that are equipped with defibrillators; and how many staff in each of these buildings are trained in (i) the use of defibrillators; and (ii) C.P.R.
(AQW 41847/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The information requested is set out below.

DETI Buildings equipped with defibrillators: None

(i) Staff trained in use of defibrillator: None

(ii) Staff trained in C.P.R.

DETI HQ, Netherleigh, Belfast – 8 staff (First Aid at Work)
Consumer Affairs, Newtownbreda - 4 staff (First Aid at Work)
Fermanagh House, Belfast - 2 staff (First Aid at Work)
Colby House, Belfast - 1 staff (First Aid at Work)

HSENI Buildings equipped with defibrillators:
HSENI HQ, Ladas Drive, Belfast
HSENI (Omagh), Lancer Building

(i) Staff trained in use of defibrillator:

HSENI HQ - 22 staff
HSENI (Omagh) - 4 staff

(ii) Staff trained in C.P.R.

HSENI HQ - 47 staff (10 - First Aid at Work; 37 - Emergency First Aid at Work)
HSENI (Omagh) - 6 staff (2 - First Aid at Work; 4 - Emergency First Aid at Work)
HSENI (Longbridge House) - 14 staff (3 - First Aid at Work; 11 - Emergency First Aid at Work)

Consumer Council Buildings equipped with defibrillators: None

Staff trained in use of defibrillator:

(i) None

(ii) Staff trained in C.P.R.

Elizabeth House, Belfast - 2 staff (First Aid at Work)

Invest NI Buildings equipped with defibrillators: INI HQ, Bedford St. Belfast

(i) Staff trained in use of defibrillator:

INI HQ - 15 staff

(ii) Staff trained in C.P.R.

INI Craigavon - 1 staff (First Aid at Work)
INI Newry - 1 staff (First Aid at Work)
INI Ballymena - 1 staff (First Aid at Work)
INI Omagh - 1 staff (First Aid at Work)
INI London - 1 staff (First Aid at Work)

Tourism Northern Ireland Buildings equipped with defibrillators: None

(i) Staff trained in use of defibrillator: None

(ii) Staff trained in C.P.R.

Tourism NI HQ, Belfast – 6 Staff (First Aid at Work)

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment which areas of East Londonderry do not have adequate and reliable mobile phone coverage; and what measures her Department is taking to address this issue.
(AQW 41872/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department does not gather information on mobile coverage. Such data is collected by the telecommunications regulator, Ofcom and is published on an annual basis in its Infrastructure Reports. The latest report, published in December 2014, can be found at http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/binaries/research/infrastructure/2014/infrastructure-14.pdf. In addition, an interactive map, which allows users to assess the coverage and performance of the infrastructure in their area, can be found at http://infrastructure.ofcom.org.uk.

The telecommunications market is fully privatised and independently regulated, with investment decisions taken on the basis of commercial return. In recent years the Mobile Network Operators (MNOs) have been investing significantly to improve their 2G and 3G networks and Northern Ireland has seen some marked improvements, particularly with regard to 3G coverage, which is now on a par with the rest of the UK at 99% from at least one operator.

To address areas where the market is not currently investing, the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) is currently implementing the Mobile Infrastructure project which is focused on 2G technology. However, it is understood that operators will future proof the infrastructure being deployed, in order to further support 3G, 4G and beyond, where possible. Northern Ireland is in line for around 70 nominal, new mast sites under this project.

In addition, in December 2014, the UK Government announced that it had struck a deal with the MNOs which will see the mobile industry investing £5 billion in UK infrastructure and increasing coverage by 2017.

My Department maintains a watching brief on these initiatives and will assess the need for further Government intervention once they are complete.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment which areas of East Londonderry do not have adequate and reliable broadband coverage; and what measures her Department is taking to address this issue.
(AQW 41873/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I would refer the member to the NI Direct website (http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/broadband-improvement-project) where details of the postcode areas to be addressed by the current Northern Ireland Broadband Improvement Project (NIBIP) can be found. This project aims to improve the broadband connectivity for more than 45,000 premises by the end of 2015.

In addition, my Department has consulted on the proposed intervention area for the Superfast Roll-out Programme Phase 2 (SRP2) project, which seeks to further increase the coverage of superfast broadband services across Northern Ireland by 2017. An Invitation to Tender was issued on 12 November, with a closing date for bids of 26 January 2015. A bid was received and is under consideration. If this bid is acceptable, it is anticipated that contract award will take place in early March 2015.

The consultation document, which can be found on the DETI website (http://www.detini.gov.uk/index/what-we-do/deti-telecoms-index/consultations_from_2014/superfast_rollout_programme_phase_2.htm), contains a list of postcodes where it is considered additional public intervention may be required when the NIBIP is complete.

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what actions have been taken to encourage local energy providers to reduce their pricing to local consumers and businesses.
(AQW 41914/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department has no formal role in this matter and I have no power to compel energy suppliers to reduce prices. However, my Department participates in the latter stages of electricity and gas tariff review meetings between the Utility Regulator and regulated suppliers.

On 12 February, the Regulator and Power NI announced a reduction of 9.2% in the company's domestic and small business customer electricity tariff. This will take effect from 1 April 2015. This is a 2-year tariff, but it will be kept under close review by the Regulator. Budget Energy, one of the non-regulated electricity suppliers has also announced a reduction of 5% in its domestic tariff to take effect from 10 March 2015.

Separately, the Regulator has been progressing a review of regulated gas tariffs in respect of Airtricity Gas Supply (for the Greater Belfast area) and firmus energy (for the Ten Towns area). It is also expected that these reviews will conclude soon to allow any changes to gas bills to take effect from 1 April.

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what contact her Department has had with NIE concerning the lack of capacity at substations for new renewable energy developments in the Ballycastle area.
(AQW 41951/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department is in regular contact with NIE on substation capacity across Northern Ireland, including Ballycastle. I would encourage any proposals for new development to take into account information on NIE's website showing the availability of connection.

Mr McAleer asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail any proposals her Department has to address areas of poor broadband coverage in the Sperrins region.
(AQW 42001/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department is currently implementing the Northern Ireland Broadband Improvement Project (NIBIP). It is anticipated that by project completion in December 2015, improvements will have been delivered for at least 45,000 premises across many areas of Northern Ireland, including the Sperrins region, resulting in the provision of basic wire-line broadband services of at least 2 Megabits per second in areas that previously had no service and improvements in the availability of superfast fixed-line broadband services (24 Megabits per second or higher) in areas where choice is poor or broadband speeds are low.

Information on the areas where work has completed to date and the timeline for roll-out over the remainder of the project can be found on the NI Direct website at http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/broadband-improvement-project).

In addition, the Department is progressing the Superfast Roll-out Programme Phase 2 (SRP2) project, which seeks to further increase the coverage of superfast broadband services across Northern Ireland by 2017. A tender bid has been received and is under consideration. If this bid is acceptable, it is anticipated that contract award will take place in early March 2015. The proposed intervention area, which includes postcodes in the Sperrins Region, can be found on the DETI website at http://www.detini.gov.uk/index/what-we-do/deti-telecoms-index/telecoms-srp.htm

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on high speed broad band roll out in East Belfast.
(AQW 42122/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department is currently implementing the Northern Ireland Broadband Improvement Project (NIBIP). The project is progressing according to schedule and by 31 December 2014 just over 17,500 premises across Northern Ireland had benefited from the improvements being delivered including a number in the East Belfast constituency. Information on the areas where work has completed to date and the timeline for roll-out over the remainder of the project can be found on the NI Direct website at http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/broadband-improvement-project)

By project completion in December 2015, it is anticipated that improvements will have been delivered for at least 45,000 premises across Northern Ireland resulting in the provision of basic wire-line broadband services of at least 2 Megabits per second in areas that previously had no service and improvements in the availability of superfast fixed-line broadband services (24 Megabits per second or higher) in areas where choice is poor or broadband speeds are low.

In addition, the Department is progressing the Superfast Roll-out Programme Phase 2 (SRP2) project, which seeks to further increase the coverage of superfast broadband services across Northern Ireland by 2017. A tender bid has been received and is under consideration. If this bid is acceptable, it is anticipated that contract award will take place in early March 2015. The proposed intervention area, which includes postcodes in the East Belfast Constituency, can be found on the DETI website at http://www.detini.gov.uk/index/what-we-do/deti-telecoms-index/telecoms-srp.htm

Mr Dickson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what efforts are being made to ensure that reductions in the wholesale price of natural gas are being passed on to domestic customers.
(AQW 42303/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Utility Regulator is currently engaged in a review of regulated gas tariffs in respect of Airtricity Gas Supply (for the Greater Belfast area) and firmus energy (for the Ten Towns area). It is expected that these reviews will conclude soon to allow any changes to gas bills to take effect from 1 April 2015.

Department of the Environment

Mr Swann asked the Minister of the Environment how many complaints have been received, in each year since 2012, by Planning Service in relation to their failure to provide necessary neighbourhood notification to residents in respect of planning applications; and how many of these complaints were later referred to the Northern Ireland Ombudsman.
(AQW 41546/11-15)

Mr Durkan (The Minister of the Environment): Table 1 below outlines the number of complaints received by the Department in relation to neighbour notification, in each year since 2012;

Table 1 Complaints received in relation to neighbour notification

2012	2013	2014
5	9	4

Table 2 details the number of cases investigated by the Ombudsman in relation to neighbour notification, in each year since 2012;

Table 2 Ombudsman Cases in relation to neighbour notification

2012	2013	2014
0	2	4

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of the Environment whether he intends to amend The Planning (General Development) Order (Northern Ireland) 1993 to bring it into line with similar legislation in England which does not allow permitted development rights through The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995 if 'it consists of the drilling of boreholes for petroleum exploration' or Scotland, which through the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (Scotland) Order 1992 has stated that the 'the provisions permitting minerals development...exclude exploration for oil and gas'. **(AQW 41588/11-15)**

Mr Durkan: In Northern Ireland, there are certain permitted development rights under Part 16 of Schedule 1 to the Planning (General Development) Order (NI) 1993 for Mineral Exploration where planning permission is not required, which includes exploration for oil and gas. They allow certain specified development on land in any period not exceeding four months consisting of drilling boreholes, carrying out seismic surveys or making other excavations. Any operation within an area of special scientific interest or site of archaeological interest is specifically excluded from these permitted development rights.

Importantly, there are also a number of limitations and conditions associated with this temporary permitted development right. These restrictions include a requirement for pre-commencement notification to the Department of the Environment giving details of the location, target mineral, details of plant and operations and anticipated timescale. A developer, should they wish to invoke these permitted development rights, must notify the Department accordingly in order that a decision can be taken on whether or not the permitted development right should be removed and the proposal made subject to the full planning application process.

In addition, where development is identified in either of the Schedules to the Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 and Environmental Impact Assessment is applicable based on the details of the proposed development, permitted development rights do not apply (Article 3(8) of the Planning (General Development) Order (NI) 1993 refers).

In the interests of clarity, it is important to note that the temporary permitted development rights for minerals exploration do not allow the commercial extraction of minerals, including petroleum. Such activity will be subject to the full planning application process as well as relevant Environmental Impact Assessment, licensing and environmental permitting arrangements.

There are no plans at present to amend the existing legislation in Northern Ireland in relation to permitted development rights for Mineral Exploration under Part 16 of Schedule 1 to the Planning (General Development) Order (NI) 1993. The Department takes the view that the permitted development right as currently drafted strikes an appropriate balance between permitting the carrying out of legitimate exploratory activity and at the same time protecting amenity interests and the environment.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the total spent by his Department on road safety campaigns and advertising in each of the last five years, including the percentage of his Department's budget this spend represented. **(AQW 41677/11-15)**

Mr Durkan: The total spent by the Department on road safety campaigns and advertising in each of the last five years, including the percentage of the Department's budget, is as follows;

Year	Spend on Road Safety Campaigns & Advertising £	% Net RDEL Budget
2009/10	1,476,587	0.97%
2010/11	1,703,256	1.17%
2011/12	2,504,043	1.94%
2012/13	2,513,472	1.90%
2013/14	2,528,361	1.93%

Ms Lo asked the Minister of the Environment, in the context of the 2013 High Court ruling in the case of Champion v North Norfolk District Council, whether the imposition of planning conditions to monitor environmental effects on water quality in relation to the Gortin gold mine planning approval K/2013/0072/F, and of the recovery of protected habitat (peat bog) following the removal of development approved under application K/2014/0387/F, is compatible with; (i) the negative Environmental Impact Assessment determinations reached by his Department on each of these cases; and (ii) legislation. **(AQW 41705/11-15)**

Mr Durkan: I am satisfied that these applications have gone through proper process and that the planning approvals are lawful.

For information, the High Court decision you refer to has been overturned at appeal and is now before the Supreme Court for adjudication.

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of the Environment for a breakdown of (i) the (a) actual; and (b) estimated cost of Local Government Administration from 2009 to April 2015, broken down by year; and (ii) the estimated cost for 2015/16.
(AQW 41726/11-15)

Mr Durkan: My Department only holds information on the overall gross expenditure incurred by councils each year and this information cannot be broken down to show the actual cost of local government administration in each year. Therefore I have provided the gross expenditure incurred by councils. The actual gross expenditure incurred by councils between 2008/09 to 2013/14 is contained in the certified accounts of councils and is summarised in Annex A.

The estimated gross expenditure for 2014/15 is taken from the General Estimates Forms submitted by councils to my Department after the rates for 2014/15 were struck, and is also summarised in Annex A.

Estimated gross expenditure for the 11 councils in 2015/16 will not be available until after the 2015/16 rates are struck.

Annex A
Council Gross Expenditure

Year	Gross Expenditure
2008/09	£696,344,246
2009/10	£690,582,241
2010/11	£694,546,833
2011/12	£707,809,299
2012/13	£732,192,192
2013/14	£773,988,049
2014/15	£741,847,718*
2015/16	Not Available

* estimated figure taken from General Estimate of Rates forms submitted by councils in February 2014.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (i) the number of raths in each council area; and (ii) the number that are protected by the NIEA.
(AQW 41734/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Some 2,814 sites are identified as raths in the Northern Ireland Monuments and Buildings Record (MBR). I have provided an overview map of these in Appendix 1 and the actual numbers as they relate to each council area (pre and post RPA) in Appendix 2. I will also place copies of these in the Assembly library.

There are 524 raths in Northern Ireland which are protected by scheduling under the Historic Monuments and Archaeological Objects (NI) Order 1995; the majority of these are on private land. Fifteen raths are protected by being in State Care: Appendix 2 details the location of these protected sites with regard to council areas. In addition, all other recorded raths are protected by both planning and agricultural policies.

You should also note that the MBR contains details of 3,474 sites that have a potential to be raths but which survive now only as below ground remains. As there are no visible above ground remains to examine, only archaeological excavation could ascertain the definitive nature of these 3,474 sites. I trust that this information and the accompanying appendices have answered your query.

Appendix 2
Location of Raths pre-RPA LGD:

	Scheduled	State Care	State Care & Scheduled	Other	Total
Antrim	30	1	0	205	236
Ards	11	0	0	45	56
Armagh	36	0	0	158	194
Ballymena	19	0	0	46	65
Ballymoney	16	0	0	26	42

	Scheduled	State Care	State Care & Scheduled	Other	Total
Banbridge	34	0	2	182	218
Belfast	4	1	0	11	16
Carrickfergus	2	0	0	10	12
Castlereagh	7	0	0	10	17
Coleraine	17	0	1	61	79
Cookstown	16	0	1	91	108
Craigavon	4	0	1	43	48
Derry	7	0	0	10	17
Down	35	0	1	107	143
Dungannon	23	0	2	133	158
Fermanagh	88	0	0	531	619
Larne	5	0	0	33	38
Limavady	15	0	1	26	42
Lisburn	36	2	1	138	177
Magherafelt	18	1	0	61	80
Moyle	2	0	0	11	13
Newry & Mourne	39	0	0	138	177
Newtownabbey	11	0	0	22	33
North Down	0	0	0	13	13
Omagh	25	0	0	100	125
Strabane	14	0	0	74	88
Totals	**514**	**5**	**10**	**2285**	**2814**

Location of Raths post-RPA LGD:

	Scheduled	State Care	State Care & Scheduled	Other	Total
Antrim & Newtownabbey	41	1	0	227	269
Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon	68	0	3	369	440
Belfast	5	1	0	12	18
Causeway Coast & Glens	50	0	2	124	176
Derry & Strabane	21	0	0	84	105
Fermanagh & Omagh	113	0	0	631	744
Lisburn & Castlereagh	42	2	1	147	192
Mid & East Antrim	26	0	0	89	115
Mid Ulster	57	1	3	285	346
Newry, Mourne & Down	80	0	1	259	340
North Down & Ards	11	0	0	58	69
Totals	**514**	**5**	**10**	**2285**	**2814**

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the areas where new development is not permitted due to capacity issues relating to sewage disposal.
(AQW 41757/11-15)

Mr Durkan: DOE Planning works closely with Northern Ireland Water and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency to ensure that capacity issues relating to sewage disposal are fully considered in the determination of planning applications. Where capacity issues are identified as part of consultations my Department is able to consider a range of solutions including issuing approvals with negative conditions and provision of temporary sewage arrangements until the wastewater treatment works are upgraded. My Department is not aware of any areas where new development is not permitted due to sewage capacity issues. Each planning application must be considered on its own merits taking account of all material planning considerations including sewage infrastructure.

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister of the Environment whether his Department has been liaising with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport in relation to the Listed Places of Worship Repair Fund announced in the Chancellor's Autumn Statement, 3rd December 2014; and how many applications have been received from Northern Ireland.
(AQW 41809/11-15)

Mr Durkan: In November 2014, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport notified this Department of the potential of the Listed Places of Worship: Roof Repair Fund and offered the opportunity to comment on the draft application pack, which my officials duly did. This fund is a government sponsored grant scheme administered by the National Heritage Memorial Fund. It is not linked to the Heritage Lottery Fund.

In December 2014, I wrote to Ed Vaizey, Minister of State for Culture and the Digital Economy, welcoming this new, one-off £15m grant scheme and advised that 'My department has been proactively raising the profile of this scheme, and it has been drawn to the attention of the relevant church 'umbrella groups'.' This has included a press release on the scheme, and officials providing advice to some church groups for their applications, including the provision of 'letters of support'.

I understand 1,900 applications were received from across the UK. I am not aware how many applications were submitted from Northern Ireland. The National Heritage Memorial Fund is now processing the applications and beginning the assessment process. The Fund closed on 30 January 2015, and it is anticipated that a final decision on the successful applicants should be announced by the end of March 2015.

In relation to other sources of funding, I would draw attention to the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme which continues to make grants towards the VAT incurred in making repairs and carrying out alterations to listed buildings mainly used for worship.

I would also direct congregations to the 'Funds for Historic Buildings Website' a comprehensive on-line directory of funding sources for historic buildings, including places of worship. This service, administered by the Architectural Heritage Fund, is partially funded by this Department.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of the Environment how many applications for the discharge of raw sewage were made in the Fermanagh District Council area in each of the last five years.
(AQW 41811/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Discharges from sewage collection systems are consented under the Water (Northern Ireland) Order 1999. Most collection systems are combined systems in that they deal with rainwater run-off as well as domestic and industrial wastewater. Discharges from combined systems consist of:

- Combined Sewer Overflows (CSOs) cause intermittent discharges from sewers which carry both foul sewage and rainfall run-off water. CSOs discharge dilute raw sewage during heavy rainfall; and
- Emergency Overflows (EOs) from sewage pumping stations may discharge raw sewage under emergency conditions.

Northern Ireland Water is consented for 19 CSOs, 28EOs and 31 pumping stations which consist of both CSOs and EOs. Of these only five EO were consented in the last five years.

Eight private developers have been consented for pumping stations with EOs in the last five years.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 40667/11-15, to address the second part of that question and advise where in planning application K/2013/0072/F are the details approving the importation and infilling of 8,000 tonnes of aggregates adjacent to the Owenkillew Special Area of Conservation.
(AQW 41840/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The aggregates were brought on to this site to facilitate the hard surface layout of the development as approved under application ref: K/2013/0072/F for the extension to existing underground exploration tunnel; including temporary buildings, vehicle parking, waste rock storage area, water treatment system and passing bays. The approved site layout extends to approximately 51 hectares.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 40714/11-15, and given the precautionary requirements of Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive, (i) to detail documentary evidence which confirms that his officials took into account the effects of the importation of materials on the Owenkillew Special Area of Conservation prior to the granting of permission; (ii)

whether the detailed plans with final topographical levels referred to were recieved prior to the granting of planning permission; and (iii) whether these details were available to consultees and the public to comment on and inspect prior to the granting of planning permission.
(AQW 41842/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Habitat Regulations Assessment and EIA determination undertaken by the Department assessed the potential impacts of site preparation and construction phase operations. The need for the importation of material for the construction of the site compound is described in the Project Description document and information supplied by the applicant.

The impact of reduced water quality and potential effects on the Owenkillew Special Area of Conservation caused by site preparation works and construction phase were also assessed. This is referred to in the EIA determination, case officer report and Habitats Regulations Assessment report relating to the project. These documents are available to view online on the Department's Planning Portal.

In addition, a discharge consent at the site from NIEA requires that discharge from the site is below the limits specified in the consent. Adherence to the consent will prevent any impact from the works on the water quality of the Owenkillew SAC/ASSI.

Detailed plans with final topographical levels for the compound area were received following the grant of planning permission to aid the Department's enforcement investigation.

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the departmental and arm's-length body buildings that are equipped with defibrillators; and how many staff in each of these buildings are trained in (i) the use of defibrillators; and (ii) C.P.R.
(AQW 41858/11-15)

Mr Durkan: My Department does not have any directly managed departmental buildings or arms length body buildings equipped with defibrillators. There are some DOE staff located in one building (Goodwood House), managed by another department, which does have defibrillators. There are qualified first aiders located in all buildings housing DOE staff and they are trained to administer cardiopulmonary resuscitation in an emergency.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 40626/11-15, to detail (i) the organisations that have submitted an application from the Fermanagh District Council area; (ii) the value of each of application; and (iii) the applications that were successful and amounts awarded.
(AQW 41889/11-15)

Mr Durkan: ENTRUST, as the regulatory body for the Landfill Communities Fund, enrols those organisations wishing to receive funding through the scheme, and the environmental bodies will report to ENTRUST the contributions they have received from landfill operators. Details of the amounts paid out to environmental bodies by Fermanagh District Council since the fund was established are contained in the attached table.

However, ENTRUST does not hold information on any unsuccessful or partially successful applications. That information would need to be sought directly from Fermanagh District Council.

Amounts Awarded to Environmental Bodies by Fermanagh District Council 1996/97 – 2013/14

EB name	Date contribution declared	Date contribution received	Amount declared as received
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	30/09/2014	30/09/2014	£18,365.00
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	30/06/2014	30/06/2014	£18,345.00
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	31/03/2014	31/03/2014	£22,977.00
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	31/12/2013	31/12/2013	£21,240.00
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	30/09/2013	30/09/2013	£23,320.00
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	30/06/2013	30/06/2013	£21,650.00
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	31/03/2013	31/03/2013	£17,170.00
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	31/12/2012	31/12/2012	£15,610.00
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	30/09/2012	30/09/2012	£18,100.00
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	30/06/2012	30/06/2012	£17,390.00
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	31/03/2012	31/03/2012	£19,148.00
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	31/12/2011	31/12/2011	£17,090.00
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	30/09/2011	30/09/2011	£18,997.78
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	11/06/2011	11/06/2011	£19,127.00

EB name	Date contribution declared	Date contribution received	Amount declared as received
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	31/03/2011	31/03/2011	£18,720.00
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	31/12/2010	31/12/2010	£17,500.00
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	30/09/2010	30/09/2010	£20,090.00
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	30/06/2010	30/06/2010	£20,630.00
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	31/03/2010	31/03/2010	£17,760.00
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	31/12/2009	31/12/2009	£18,720.00
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	30/09/2009	30/09/2009	£19,840.00
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	30/06/2009	30/06/2009	£20,346.67
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	31/03/2009	31/03/2009	£16,378.00
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	31/12/2008	31/12/2008	£17,120.00
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	30/09/2008	30/09/2008	£17,228.00
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	30/06/2008	30/06/2008	£17,177.00
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	31/03/2008	31/03/2008	£15,139.96
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	31/12/2007	31/12/2007	£14,619.21
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	30/09/2007	30/09/2007	£16,346.47
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	30/06/2007	30/06/2007	£15,566.50
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	31/03/2007	31/03/2007	£13,430.00
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	31/12/2006	31/12/2006	£12,590.00
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	30/09/2006	30/09/2006	£13,330.00
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	30/06/2006	30/06/2006	£13,390.00
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	31/03/2006	31/03/2006	£11,660.00
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	31/12/2005	31/12/2005	£10,975.56
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	30/09/2005	30/09/2005	£11,995.00
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	30/06/2005	30/06/2005	£12,000.00
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	30/03/2005	30/03/2005	£5,612.26
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	30/09/2004	30/09/2004	£38,000.00
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	30/09/2003	30/09/2003	£20,000.00
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	31/03/2003	31/03/2003	£52,000.00
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	30/09/2002	30/09/2002	£107,000.00
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	01/09/2001	01/09/2001	£98,000.00
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	01/09/2000	10/01/2000	£84,000.00
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	01/09/1999	02/11/1998	£69,000.00
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	01/09/1998	23/10/1997	£55,000.00
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	01/09/1997	01/09/1997	£55,555.55
Total			**£1,235,249.96**

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment, given the length of time taken to deal with enforcement cases, for his assessment of whether the requirement of Regulation 26 of the Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012, to screen unauthorised developments for Environment Impact Assessment only at the time when formal enforcement action is deemed appropriate, for his assessment of whether his Department transposed the Environmental Impact Assessment Directive, which requires the effects of a project to be considered at the earliest possible stage of the decision making process.
(AQW 41913/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Department has made the Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 which amend and consolidate the Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1999. These Regulations transpose the codified EIA Directive (Directive 2011/92/EU) into the planning process in Northern Ireland. The Department is satisfied that it has fully transposed the directive into Northern Ireland law which has passed the scrutiny of the European Commission to whom the regulations were submitted.

The alleged length of time taken to get to enforcement is not a legislative error as implied and the actions undertaken by the department are both appropriate and legally compliant with the EIA directive.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of the Environment whether the proposed mini fall off test in the shale reservoir included in planning application E/2013/0093/F under licence PL3/10 issued to Rathlin Energy Ltd, will provide information about the character of the shales that would be relevant to an assessment of their unconventional resource potential.
(AQW 42022/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Ballinlea No. 2 well is planned to test whether the oil found in a sandstone unit in the 2008 Ballinlea No. 1 well is an indication that there is a significant oil / gas accumulation nearby (at a geologically structurally higher level).

The proposed mini fall off test will take place in the Carboniferous shale which lies beneath the target sandstone layer. The fall off test measures how the pressure in a low permeability rock unit 'falls off' with time. It gives an estimate of the permeability in low pressure formations and is not a hydraulic fracturing process.

Currently, there is relatively little known about the deep geology of the Rathlin sedimentary basin and the distribution of Carboniferous shales is poorly understood, let alone their viability as an economic target for gas.

The exploration operations proposed by Rathlin will examine the Carboniferous shale, because these would be the source rocks for any oil discovered in the overlying sandstones and it is important for the company to understand their physical and chemical properties including their potential to have generated oil and gas in the geological past. No testing for shale gas will be carried out and the results of the mini fall off test will provide information about the shale properties but not constitute an assessment of the shale's unconventional resource potential.

I can assure you that application E/2013/0093/F constitutes a conventional borehole and is not for the unconventional exploration of hydrocarbons and neither does it propose to use any unconventional testing techniques. The primary objective of the proposed Ballinlea No. 2 well is to test the Carboniferous conventional sandstone reservoir sequence at the new well location.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of the Environment what reassurance he can provide that planning application E/2013/0093/F will not involve or permit fracking.
(AQW 42033/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Planning application E/2013/0093/F seeks permission for an exploratory borehole for hydrocarbon exploration. The application does not propose high volume unconventional hydraulic fracturing, however at the extended testing phase, should the operator have difficulty obtaining the natural flow of the gas/oil, a conventional hydraulic stimulation fracture may need to be conducted.

A conventional hydraulic stimulated fracture is different from the unconventional hydraulic fracturing currently being debated in the media. It is common practice in the industry and was not controversial prior to the debate around unconventional horizontal fracking.

A shale gas fracking operation is multiple fracking zones over a significant length through a horizontal section in the shale requiring a significant amount of equipment, water and high pressure.

The conventional hydraulic stimulation would only be carried out if the oil or gas production rate was poor during previous flow tests or if the acid stimulation (acid wash) to clean up the perforations in the casing are not successful.

The volumes of fluid to be used (115 cu m) may be compared to those specified by the European Commission in their definition of High Volume Hydraulic Fracturing (1000 cu metres per stage or 10,000 cu. m. per well) to which the recent recommendation paper on the 'Exploration and production of hydrocarbons (such as shale gas) using high volume hydraulic fracturing in the EU' (Jan 2014) applies.

I can therefore assure you that application E/2013/0093/F constitutes a conventional borehole and is not for the unconventional exploration of hydrocarbons and neither does it propose to use any unconventional testing techniques.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of the Environment to outline how he will mitigate the impact of the Budget 2015/16 on environmental Non-Government Organisations.
(AQO 7554/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Under the final Budget for 2015-16, my Department's non ring-fenced Resource DEL budget was reduced by 10.7% to £104.2 million, the highest percentage reduction of all the Departments.

My Department is actively assessing which discretionary functions will be affected. It is expected that a wide range of grant and other support programmes that are aimed at supporting key environmental programmes will be affected.

I will be trying to support the many Non Government Organisations in whatever practical way possible including the use of receipts from the 2015/16 Carrier Bag Levy.

In making my final budget decisions I will of course take into consideration the concerns and issues raised during the consultation process.

Ms McCorley asked the Minister of the Environment to outline the extent of co-operation between his Department and the Road Safety Authority in agreeing road safety policy.
(AQO 7555/11-15)

Mr Durkan: There is a great deal of co-operation between my Department and the Road Safety Authority (RSA) on road safety matters. We also have strong working arrangements with the Department for Transport, Tourism and Sport (DTTAS).

My officials and I liaise regularly with our counterparts in Ireland to share experience and exchange information including, over recent times, on the development of our respective road safety strategies. Our strategies are complementary, with many of the same issues to be addressed, and both focus on the principal causes of road traffic casualties such as speeding, drink-driving, carelessness and failure to wear seat belts. The RSA is a member of my Road Safety Forum and regularly attends and contributes to Forum meetings.

Structured arrangements at official level have been established to progress mutual projects, support activities in one jurisdiction which impact on the other, and generally to ensure positive road safety benefits on both sides of the border. DOE, RSA and DTTAS officials engage regularly between more formal meetings, the most recent of which was on 16 December 2014 when a range of road safety and vehicle regulation issues of mutual interest were explored. These included Graduated Fixed Penalty and Deposit Schemes; graduated driver licensing; fitness to drive; definitions of serious injuries; and interventions around driving at work.

We will continue to share information on initiatives and measures and on the technical, logistical and public information aspects of implementing such measures. We will also consider further activities that would afford the possibility of raising the profile of the strong collaboration on road safety activities, including in enforcement operations and promotional campaigns. The next formal meeting with RSA and DTTAS officials is scheduled take place in May 2015 but a wide range of contact will take place between now and then.

I am keen to see links continue and strengthen. It makes sense to work together to the benefit of everyone on the island. We all aspire to ever increased levels of road safety, and learning from each other is an important element of delivering this.

Mr Rogers asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the development of Dundrum Castle.
(AQO 7556/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Further to my announcement, in December 2013, of significant Capital investment in Heritage-Led Development, my officials have progressed works to develop enhanced visitor facilities at Dundrum Castle. Part of this was the completion of an objective Feasibility Study to ensure we get the best location and form for a new visitor facility, based on present and anticipated needs at Dundrum Castle.

The Feasibility Study was completed in September 2014, and identified particular issues around vehicular and pedestrian access to Dundrum Castle, issues that are key to the site.

I am advised by officials that work continues with key stakeholders, including landowners and other statutory bodies, to resolve these issues, and to move forward with delivery of the enhanced visitor facilities.

Works underway to date include trial excavations to ensure that the new facility will not destroy important archaeological remains at the site, geotechnical studies to assess the ground conditions for development, vegetation management to enhance public views to and from the castle, and trial lighting to illuminate the upstanding remains.

As the project develops I will ensure that you are kept updated. Dundrum Castle is a jewel in terms of the heritage offering of South Down, which is why I have prioritised it for new facilities, making a real contribution to our tourism economy in this and the wider region.

Mr Ó Muilleoir asked the Minister of the Environment whether he will reconsider the decision not to allow planning permission to convert the Scottish Mutual building in Belfast into a boutique hotel.
(AQO 7558/11-15)

Mr Durkan: In 2013/14 my Department processed a planning application for the conversion of the Scottish Mutual Building to Boutique Hotel along with an associated listed Building Consent for various internal alterations and external repairs. NIEA Conservation Architects provided particularly helpful advice on the Listed Building aspects of these proposals.

My Department granted Planning Permission and Listed Building Consent on 28 February 2014.

At that time I acknowledged the importance of this prominent listed building in Donegall Square and within the Linen Conservation Area. The proposals for the sympathetic conversion of this beautiful building secure the future sustainable use of such an important landmark building and will add to the vitality of Belfast City Centre.

In line with my vision for a fast, fair and fit for purpose planning system this large scale investment proposal was processed and approved within 6 months in line with the Programme for Government commitment.

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the proposed development of Killeavy Castle.
(AQO 7559/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The planning application for the proposed development of Killeavy Castle will be presented to the Planning Development Committee of the Newry & Mourne District Council on 5 February 2015 as an approval.

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of the Environment to outline the material cost difference identified by the DVLA for printing Northern Ireland driving licences with or without the Union Flag.
(AQO 7560/11-15)

Mr Durkan: As I stated during the Assembly debate on this subject on 27 January 2015, I do not believe there to be a material cost difference between printing Northern Ireland driving licences with or without the Union flag. Rather it is the provision of an opt in/opt out option and the overall costs associated with the system and other changes required to offer this individual choice which led DVLA officials to advise DOE officials in 2012 that such costs would be prohibitive.

The Department for Transport itself concluded that the costs associated with an opt in/ opt out option were prohibitive and have confirmed, as I have previously noted, that all GB driving licences will be printed with the EU and Union flag.

I understand that DVLA has recently estimated the cost associated with individual choice, had it been offered to Great Britain driving licence holders, to be in the region of £14-19 million.

As I stated in my answer to AQW 40588/11-15, DVLA has confirmed that the cost of printing NI driving licences will not be impacted by the decision to change the design of the GB driving licence.

Mr Milne asked the Minister of the Environment to outline his Department's response to the wind turbine collapse near Fintona, County Tyrone, in particular the implications for set-back distances in planning policy.
(AQO 7561/11-15)

Mr Durkan: I would, firstly, like to convey my concern at this unprecedented event, however, I am very pleased to hear that no harm occurred to any member of the public. Indeed, it is reassuring to learn that no member of the public has ever been injured by a wind turbine operating in the UK or Ireland and I am assured by the renewable energy industry that this event was an extremely rare occurrence. The trade bodies that the Northern Ireland Renewable Energy Group (NIRIG) represents are committed to taking practical steps to improve safety standards and to ensure that lessons learned are shared as widely as possible among member companies so that standards are continually improved.

I am aware that investigations into the incident are currently being carried out by the Health and Safety Executive as well as by the manufacturer of the wind turbine. I look forward to the findings from these investigations which I intend to fully consider in terms of any implications that they may have on my Department's planning policy for Renewable Energy.

The planning system in Northern Ireland exists to regulate the development and use of land in the public interest. It is important to distinguish those matters which planning can influence from those which are outside its control. The central concerns of the planning system are to determine what kind of development is appropriate, how much is desirable, where it should best be located and what it looks like. In carrying out its statutory duty as the Planning Authority, my Department determines planning applications for Renewable Energy developments on a case by case basis, against planning policy such as that contained within Planning Policy Statement 18: Renewable Energy (PPS 18), its supplementary Best Practice Guidance as well as all other material considerations.

Planning policy indicates that the separation distance which will generally apply in relation to potential impacts on public safety, human health and residential amenity for wind farm development is 10 times rotor diameter to occupied property, with a minimum distance not less than 500m.

The details of each application including the site characteristics, locality and height of turbines will differ and therefore each application is determined on its own merits and separation distances may differ in each case.

Although my Department does not have any responsibility for the physical construction, mechanical integrity or the maintenance of wind turbines, I am committed to working with Executive colleagues as well as the Renewable Energy Industry on any findings that may arise from the ongoing investigations into this incident at Screggagh wind farm.

Department of Finance and Personnel

Mr Cree asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether there is a disease prevelant which attacks the yew trees at the front of Parliament Buildings; and if so, why his Department replaces the trees rather than trying to eradicate the disease.
(AQW 39614/11-15)

Mr Hamilton (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): Tests undertaken of the yew trees and soil in front of Parliament Buildings revealed that no disease is present. The loss of some of the yew trees is related to the nature of the site and the exposure of the trees to the elements.

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how much revenue was raised through stamp duty in each of the last five financial years.
(AQW 41759/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The latest HM Revenue & Customs estimates of the stamp duty raised in Northern Ireland in each of the five years to 2013-14 are detailed in the table below.

	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14
N. Ireland	£40m	£40m	£30m	£33m	£37m

Source: "Disaggregation of HMRC Tax Receipts between England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland", HMRC, October 2014

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what was the outcome of his Department's review of the accreditation process for Centres of Procurement Expertise.
(AQW 41796/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: My Department, through the Central Procurement Directorate (CPD), carried out a review of the Centre of Procurement Expertise (CoPE) accreditation process resulting in agreement by the Procurement Board of a new model in November 2011. The CoPEs were subsequently assessed against the model between September and December 2013, with the results considered by the Procurement Board in June 2014.

The assessment process tested CoPEs against the Model's eight key criteria, to ensure that processes, procedures and controls were operating efficiently and were compliant with Northern Ireland Procurement Policy.

The criteria are as follows:

- a unique portfolio in the roads, transport, water, housing, education or health sectors;
- a clearly defined organisational structure, setting out the roles and responsibilities of Head of CoPE and Head of Procurement;
- delivery of the Procurement Board's Strategic Plan, including best value for money;
- compliance with Northern Ireland Procurement Policy and best practice;
- adequate resourcing of qualified procurement/construction professionals;
- robust data capture and management information systems to enable the implementation of policy and best practice;
- sufficient controls in place within the CoPE to manage risk; and
- effective engagement with the relevant supply base.

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the departmental and arm's-length body buildings that are equipped with defibrillators; and how many staff in each of these buildings are trained in (i) the use of defibrillators; and (ii) C.P.R.
(AQW 41846/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The information requested is provided in the table below.

Building	Staff trained in use of defibrillators	Staff trained in C.P.R
Clare House	10	6
Craigantlet Buildings	10	9
Goodwood House	12	12
Lincoln Buildings	13	13
Waterside House	0	2
M-TEK II Armagh	2	2

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number of staff employed by the Special EU Programmes Body, broken down by religion.
(AQW 41906/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The community composition of the SEUPB staff in the Belfast and Omagh offices is outlined in the table below.

	Number of staff
Protestant	20
Roman Catholic	32
Other	3
Total	**55**

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number of people who have enquired about a reassessment of a non-domestic rate bill since the Schedule of Draft Rateable Values was revealed in November 2014.
(AQW 41957/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: Since the release of the schedule of draft rateable values on the 13th November 2014 there has been a total of 895 enquiries.

597 of these have been general enquiries and 298 have been enquiries relating to the assessment of the property.

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether he will publish the strategy which links the Executive's Voluntary Exit Scheme to wider public sector reforms in Northern Ireland.
(AQW 42004/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The Stormont House Agreement and Budget 2015-16 set the strategic direction for a significant period of restructuring and reform across the public sector. On 22 January, the NI Executive agreed a suite of measures to help departments to live within Budget 2015-16 and beyond. The measures include financial support for voluntary exits of staff across the NICS and the wider public sector.

In light of the prevailing budgetary climate, there is a need to renew, redesign, rethink, restructure and reform our government. Voluntary exit will be an important step in this process and will facilitate restructuring to provide a more streamlined public sector.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what advice and support is available to third sector organisations who are seeking to bid for public service contracts.
(AQW 42202/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: There are a number of initiatives to provide advice and support to organisations in Northern Ireland and there is a particular focus on assisting SEEs when bidding for public service contracts.

CPD has published procurement guidance note 01/11 Public Procurement: A Guide for Social Economy Enterprises. This note aims to increase their knowledge and understanding of public sector procurement and in so doing, help them to develop their capability to compete successfully for public sector contracts. It also highlights the benefits of forming a consortium or sub-contracting within the supply chain.

CPD also attends regular 'Meet the Buyer' events enabling organisations to meet with public sector buyers, gaining insight into the public procurement process.

Mr Girvan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether the concession to staff of the Fire Service allowing retirement at 55, will attract a financial penalty by Westminster to the block grant.
(AQW 42205/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: There is no financial penalty to the Executive's budget resulting from the concession to firefighters allowing retirement at 55.

Mrs McKevitt asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on the implementation plan for the devolution of Corporation Tax.
(AQO 7581/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The Stormont House Agreement set out the basis on which the Government has agreed to the transfer of Corporation Tax rate setting powers to the Northern Ireland Assembly. The passage of the Bill is conditional upon the implementation of key measures to deliver sustainable finances for Northern Ireland, in particular, the agreement of a balanced budget for 2015/16 and the passage of the Welfare Reform Bill in this House. As members know, good progress has been made on both fronts.

As such, the Corporation Tax (Northern Ireland) Bill was introduced to the House of Commons on 8th January. The Bill has now had two readings in the House of Commons and the Public Bill Committee concluded its consideration last Thursday. On this basis, it is anticipated that the Bill will receive Royal Assent before the dissolution of Parliament on 30 March 2015.

The legislation includes a commencement clause that will enable powers to transfer from April 2017 subject to the Executive demonstrating its finances remain on a sustainable footing for the long term.

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether he has received the NI Water pay remit.
(AQO 7583/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: No pay remit has been submitted to my Department for Northern Ireland Water staff.

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many government contracts have included social clauses since 2011.
(AQO 7584/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: All contracts that are based on CPD's standard forms of contract will contain social clauses that relate to equality and health and safety.

Departments can also include additional social clauses intended to deliver their departmental responsibilities and policy priorities and support the Programme for Government commitment.

The first year of reporting on the Programme for Government commitment was 2012/13.

Reports provided by departments show that, for financial years 2012/13 and 2013/14, 1,914 contracts included additional social clauses. However, not all departments provided a report. It is disappointing that reporting is incomplete.

CPD will ask departments to provide figures for 2014/15 in April 2015.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what discussions he has had with the Minister for Employment and Learning to identify options to realise the £1.8 million required to match fund European Social Fund projects.
(AQO 7585/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: As part of the 2015-16 draft Budget discussions, Minister Farry raised a number of pressures within his Department, including match funding for European Social Fund projects.

The Executive has agreed the 2015-16 Budget, including a settlement for the Department for Employment and Learning. It is now for Minister Farry to manage his budget within that envelope.

Mr Devenney asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline his Department's interaction with Carnegie Roundtable on Measuring Wellbeing.
(AQO 7586/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: In September 2013, I jointly opened the "Measuring What Matters in Northern Ireland" conference, organised by the Carnegie UK Trust. At this event I asked officials to draw together Northern Ireland data for the National Wellbeing set of indicators. This information was published in February 2014.

Following on from this work the Carnegie Roundtable was established in 2014 to create a route map for measuring wellbeing and for achieving wellbeing outcomes for citizens and communities across N Ireland. Throughout the last year, DFP officials have participated in the Carnegie Roundtable work. This has included attendance at the roundtable discussions and participation in a study visit to Edinburgh.

On the 20th January 2015, I addressed a seminar organised by the Carnegie Roundtable on Measuring Wellbeing in Northern Ireland.

Mr Brady asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how he will ensure that the Voluntary Exit Scheme will not lead to skills shortages in the public sector.
(AQO 7587/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: As the Minister of Finance and Personnel, I am responsible for seeking, allocating and monitoring the funding for voluntary exit schemes across the public sector. These schemes will support the pay-bill reductions required to address budgetary constraints. My Department is also responsible for the development and implementation of a specific voluntary exit scheme for the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS).

For the NICS scheme and bearing in mind the fact that the scheme is voluntary, the number and skills base of staff wishing to exit is not yet known. However, in the first instance, the staffing complement in terms of skills requirements will be managed locally within each department. Where requested, Corporate Human Resources (CHR) within DFP will assist with the deployment of staff between NICS departments to ensure skills are maintained across the NICS.

In the wider public sector, it will be for individual public bodies to decide on how pay-bill reductions will be achieved with business cases supporting for each scheme. Each body will need to address the service and skills implications for their own organisations.

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on the Voluntary Exit Scheme.
(AQO 7589/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: Plans to develop a Voluntary Exit Scheme for the NICS are well advanced. The Executive agreed the preferred option at its meeting on 5 February. It is intended that the Scheme will be launched on 2 March 2015. The Scheme will be open to virtually all Civil Servants, including part-time staff, below Permanent Secretary (and analogous) grades.

We anticipate those selected to leave under the Scheme will do so in tranches between 30 September 2015 and 31st March 2016, however there will not be a provision for staff to select a leaving date when making their applications.

Trade Union Side has been consulted throughout the development of the Scheme, both at departmental level and centrally through the Whitley Executive machinery. We will continue this consultation up to and beyond launch.

The overarching objective of the NICS Voluntary Exit Scheme is a permanent NICS pay bill reduction in the 2015/16 financial year and beyond. I would emphasise that a successful outcome can only be achieved if all departments adopt a collaborative and co-operative approach to releasing staff and manage the redeployment consequences tin a corporate fashion.

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the cost to his Department of (a) heating; and (a) electricity in 2014; and (ii) the capital costs and details of the five most cost effective projects which his Department could undertake to generate its own energy or reduce energy costs.
(AQW 40559/11-15)

Mr Wells (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): My officials have liaised with colleagues in DFP to seek to obtain as much information as possible for this response.

My Department is housed in a multi-occupancy building and the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) Properties Division is responsible for paying utility bills associated with multiple occupancy buildings in the Northern Ireland Civil Service Office Estate. In that context, DFP is also responsible for capital projects which could be undertaken to generate energy or reduce energy costs.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 40396/11-15, to provide further details on 'the difficulties in providing medical staff with expertise in pain management'; and what efforts are being made to address these difficulties.
(AQW 41251/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Western Health and Social Care Trust has advised that the recruitment of medical staff with both anaesthetic and chronic pain management qualifications is currently challenging at a national level. My reply to AQW 38677 11-15 provided advice on efforts that are being made to address these difficulties.

Mr Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the support services dedicated to the needs of young carers in the North West.
(AQW 41271/11-15)

Mr Wells: Support services to young carers in the North West are provided by Barnardo's, on behalf of the Health and Social Care Board, and include:

- A break from caring
- A listening ear
- Individual support
- Information about the illness of the person they are caring for
- Peer Support Groups
- Personal Development group work programmes
- Advocacy, advice and signposting
- Fun/social activities
- A voice
- A safe environment to express concerns and worries.

It is the policy of the Department to treat all children who are providing care as children first and carers second.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 39938/11-15, to detail all proposed new service developments, and their respective costing, which will not proceed in 2015/16.
(AQW 41315/11-15)

Mr Wells: At this stage, the Department has estimated that potential service developments amounting to £110m would not be able to proceed in 2015/16 in the following areas:

- Elective care;
- Unscheduled care;
- Family and childcare;
- Safety and quality including normative nursing levels;

- Public health initiatives including vaccinations;
- Revenue consequences of capital schemes;
- NICE drugs and specialist services;
- Mental health and learning disability; and
- TYC transitional funding.

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 39817/11-15, why he has not answered the original question.
(AQW 41335/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Western Health and Social Care Trust's Contingency Plan was developed in October 2014 and was focused primarily on those savings that could actually be delivered in the remaining months of the financial year, including constraining temporary bank/agency staffing and non-pay expenditure. As the plan was of a short-term nature, the trust advises that no direct consideration was given to rurality.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 40482/11-15, to detail (i) the number of staff receiving these bonuses; and (ii) their particular staff role, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust area.
(AQW 41520/11-15)

Mr Wells: Senior medical staff do not receive performance related bonuses.

They can however apply for a Clinical Excellence Award through an independent committee process managed by the Department. These awards are given to recognise exceptional performance by medical consultants in the services they provide to patients. Clinical Excellence awards are part of the Terms and Conditions of service for medical and dental staff employed by the Trusts.

The tables below detail the number of staff in the 5 Health and Social Care Trusts who are in receipt of a Clinical Excellence Award, broken down by speciality.

Table 1 – Belfast Trust

Speciality	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Anaesthetics	51	49	43	42	40
ENT	5	5	5	5	5
General Medicine & Allied Specialities	106	107	82	78	72
Geriatric Medicine	7	6	5	4	4
Mental Illness	6	5	2	1	1
Obs & Gynae	21	20	18	15	14
Ophthalmology	9	9	9	9	8
Orthopaedics	11	11	8	8	6
Paediatrics	24	22	20	20	20
Pathology	28	27	25	25	24
Public Health Medicine	0	0	0	0	0
Radiology	31	32	30	27	25
Oncology	12	13	11	11	11
Surgery	33	32	28	25	25
Dental Specialities	7	7	5	6	6
	351	**345**	**291**	**276**	**261**

Table 2 – Northern Trust

Speciality	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Anaesthetics	10	10	9	8	7
ENT	2	2	2	2	2
General Medicine & Allied Specialities	17	19	17	17	16

Speciality	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Geriatric Medicine	6	6	5	5	5
Mental Illness	14	14	13	13	11
Obs & Gynae	5	5	5	4	3
Ophthalmology	0	0	0	0	0
Orthopaedics	0	0	0	0	0
Paediatrics	9	9	8	8	8
Pathology	8	8	6	5	4
Public Health Medicine	1	1	1	1	1
Radiology	5	5	4	4	4
Oncology	0	0	0	0	0
Surgery	8	8	8	6	5
Dental Specialities	1	1	1	1	1
Total	**86**	**88**	**79**	**74**	**67**

Table 3 – Southern Trust

Speciality	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Anaesthetics	12	12	12	11	10
ENT	1	1	1	1	1
General Medicine & Allied Specialities	18	19	18	17	16
Geriatric Medicine	1	1	1	1	1
Mental Illness	12	11	10	9	9
Obs & Gynae	8	6	5	4	4
Ophthalmology	0	0	0	0	0
Orthopaedics	0	0	0	0	0
Paediatrics	6	6	6	5	5
Pathology	6	6	6	6	6
Public Health Medicine	0		0		
Radiology	6	6	6	6	6
Oncology	0	0	0	0	0
Surgery	8	8	7	7	7
Dental Specialities	1	1	1	1	1
	79	**77**	**73**	**68**	**66**

Table 4 – South Eastern Trust

Speciality	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Anaesthetics	24	24	23	22	22
ENT	1	1	1	1	1
General Medicine & Allied Specialities	16	16	15	14	14
Geriatric Medicine	3	3	3	3	2
Mental Illness	7	7	6	5	4
Obs & Gynae	8	8	8	7	7
Ophthalmology	0	0	0	0	0

Speciality	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Orthopaedics	4	4	2	2	2
Paediatrics	5	5	5	5	4
Pathology	6	6	6	6	5
Public Health Medicine	0	0	0	0	0
Radiology	10	10	10	10	10
Oncology	0	0	0	0	0
Surgery	16	16	15	15	14
Dental Specialities	2	2	2	2	1
	102	**102**	**96**	**92**	**86**

Table 5 – Western Trust

Speciality	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Anaesthetics	11	11	10	10	9
ENT	1	0	0	0	0
General Medicine & Allied Specialities	20	19	17	16	12
Geriatric Medicine	3	3	3	3	3
Mental Illness	7	5	5	5	5
Obs & Gynae	5	4	4	4	4
Ophthalmology	1	1	1	1	1
Orthopaedics	5	5	5	4	4
Paediatrics	6	6	5	5	5
Pathology	5	5	5	5	5
Public Health Medicine	0	0	0	0	0
Radiology	5	5	5	5	5
Oncology	2	2	2	2	2
Surgery	6	5	3	3	3
Dental Specialities	1	1	1	1	1
	78	**72**	**66**	**64**	**59**

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how the number of hospital beds available compares with the situation in (i) May 2011; (ii) how the number of Emergency Department attendances compares over the same period. **(AQW 41525/11-15)**

Mr Wells: Information on the number of available beds across all programmes of care, in HSC Trusts in Northern Ireland is collected on a quarterly basis. The number of available beds is the number of beds on each ward open overnight that were actually available for patients, measured at midnight. Beds reserved solely for day care admissions or regular day admissions are not included as these patients do not stay overnight.

The table below compares the average number of available beds during the quarter ending 30th June 2011 with quarter ending 31st December 2014P.

HSC Trust	Available beds quarter ending June 2011	Available beds quarter ending Dec 2014[P]	Difference in available beds
Belfast	2,431.4	2,114.2	-317.2
Northern	1,086.2	995.8	-90.5
South Eastern	943.2	959.3	16.1
Southern	1,025.5	894.5	-131.0

HSC Trust	Available beds quarter ending June 2011	Available beds quarter ending Dec 2014[P]	Difference in available beds
Western	1,011.3	994.6	-16.7
Total	**6,497.7**	**5,958.4**	**-539.3**

Source: KH03a

P Data relating to quarter ending 31st December 2014 is provisional and therefore subject to change

The Rapid Review of Northern Ireland Health and Social Care funding needs and the productivity challenge (Appleby, 2011) identified that in 2008/09, acute beds in Northern Ireland were approximately 25% higher than in England, that they were not used as intensively and that the lengths of stay were longer. Hospital bed numbers have therefore decreased since June 2011. This change has been managed by more efficient use of beds through changing clinical practice, increasing use of day surgery, better anaesthetics, and improved community rehabilitation options. These developments in changing the patterns of hospital bed use have resulted in shorter stays in hospital. Consequently the average length of stay for all patients in Northern Ireland has fallen. In 2010/11, average length of stay in the acute programme of care was 5.5 days; this decreased to 4.9 days in 2013/14. As a result fewer beds are needed to meet demand. Over the same period, percentage occupancy has fluctuated, increasing by 0.6 percentage points overall. Between 2010/11 and 2013/14, the day case rate increased from 74.2 to 77.8.

Information on the number of attendances (New and Unplanned Reviews) at emergency care departments during the quarters ending December 2014 and June 2011 is detailed in the table below, for the most recent period which information is available.

Quarter Ending	Number of New & Unplanned Review Attendances
June 2011	183,099
December 2014	171,747

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the budget of the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust for 2015/16.
(AQW 41531/11-15)

Mr Wells: Work is currently ongoing regarding financial planning for 2015/16; as such the budgets for each individual Trust have not as yet been finalised.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety by how much the budget for the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust will increase in 2015/16.
(AQW 41533/11-15)

Mr Wells: Work is currently ongoing regarding financial planning for 2015/16; as such the budgets for each individual Trust have not as yet been finalised.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 40847/11-15, to detail the (i) incidence; and (ii) survival rates for each year.
(AQW 41544/11-15)

Mr Wells:

(i) Information on cancer incidence rates including rates for each cancer, for each of the last 10 years, was provided in the response to AQW 40847/11-15.

(ii) The table below shows the age-standardised 5-year relative survival rates for cancer in Northern Ireland and where possible, for each cancer site. It should be noted that 5-year survival rates are available from the Northern Ireland Cancer Registry (NICR) and are not routinely calculated every year.

	1993-1997		1998-2002		2003-2007	
Site (ICD10)[1]	%	95% Confidence Interval	%	95% Confidence Interval	%	95% Confidence Interval
Bladder (C67)	56.0	(52.0%,59.7%)	58.0	(54.0%,61.8%)	60.8	(56.9%,64.5%)
Brain (C70-C72)	18.7	(15.6%,22.1%)	21.9	(18.7%,25.3%)	24.1	(20.8%,27.5%)
Breast (C50) female	73.3	(71.3%,75.3%)	78.0	(76.0%,79.8%)	80.4	(78.7%,82.0%)
Cervix (C53) female	54.9	(49.7%,59.8%)	61.5	(56.0%,66.6%)	62.7	(56.3%,68.3%)
Colorectal (C18-C21)	48.3	(46.5%,50.1%)	52.9	(51.1%,54.7%)	52.7	(51.0%,54.3%)

Site (ICD10)[1]	1993-1997 %	1993-1997 95% Confidence Interval	1998-2002 %	1998-2002 95% Confidence Interval	2003-2007 %	2003-2007 95% Confidence Interval
Corpus Uteri (C54-C55) female	61.7	(57.0%,66.2%)	70.0	(65.5%,73.9%)	72.3	(68.5%,75.7%)
Hodgkin Lymphoma (C81)	77.1	(69.1%,83.3%)	77.4	(71.3%,82.5%)	79.1	(73.6%,83.7%)
Kidney (C64-C66 C68)	50.7	(46.3%,54.9%)	47.9	(43.9%,51.8%)	50.9	(47.3%,54.3%)
Leukaemia (C91-C95)	31.0	(27.0%,35.2%)	38.9	(34.8%,43.0%)	44.3	(40.3%,48.3%)
Lip, Oral Cavity & Pharynx (C00-C14)	45.5	(40.9%,49.9%)	47.7	(42.9%,52.3%)	52.5	(48.2%,56.7%)
Liver & Intrahepatic Bile Ducts (C22)	6.0	(2.8%,11.0%)	3.8	(1.9%,6.9%)	7.5	(4.7%,11.1%)
Malignant melanoma (C43)	89.0	(85.3%,91.7%)	90.0	(86.8%,92.5%)	88.9	(86.1%,91.1%)
Non-Hodgkin Lymphoma (C82-C85)	43.6	(40.2%,47.0%)	50.0	(46.7%,53.1%)	62.3	(59.2%,65.3%)
Oesophagus (C15)	10.4	(8.0%,13.1%)	13.6	(10.9%,16.6%)	15.3	(12.6%,18.1%)
Ovary (C56) female	32.8	(29.1%,36.6%)	31.8	(28.3%,35.3%)	30.3	(27.2%,33.4%)
Pancreas (C25)	3.3	(1.8%,5.6%)	2.1	(0.9%,4.1%)	4.7	(3.2%,6.6%)
Prostate (C61) male	56.4	(52.7%,60.0%)	74.2	(71.3%,76.8%)	85.0	(83.1%,86.7%)
Stomach (C16)	16.4	(14.0%,18.9%)	16.3	(14.0%,18.7%)	17.5	(14.9%,20.3%)
Testis (C62) male	92.5	(88.1%,95.5%)	97.0	(93.6%,99.1%)	96.9	(93.9%,98.7%)
Trachea, Bronchus & Lung (C33 C34)	8.3	(7.3%,9.4%)	9.8	(8.6%,11.0%)	10.9	(9.8%,12.1%)
All cancers[2] (C00-C43 C45-C97)	41.2	(40.6%,41.9%)	45.7	(45.1%,46.4%)	50.6	(50.0%,51.2%)

Source: Northern Ireland Cancer Registry (NICR)

1 ICD 10 Codes: For a listing and explanation of topology or site codes see: International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems, Tenth Revision, World Health Organisation, Geneva. Or view online at: http://apps.who.int/classifications/icd10/browse/2010/en#/II.

2 Excludes Non-Melanoma Skin Cancer.

Confidence intervals are a measure of the precision of a statistic. Typically, when incidence is low, precision is poorer and confidence intervals will be wider. As a general rule, when comparing statistics, if the confidence interval around one statistic overlaps with the interval around another, it is unlikely that there is any real difference between the two (e.g. bladder cancer survival rate in 1993-97 vs. 2003-07).

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 40847/11-15, to detail the (i) incidence; and (ii) survival rates for each cancer in each year.
(AQW 41545/11-15)

Mr Wells:

(i) Information on cancer incidence rates including rates for each cancer, for each of the last 10 years, was provided in the response to AQW 40847/11-15.

(ii) The table below shows the age-standardised 5-year relative survival rates for cancer in Northern Ireland and where possible, for each cancer site. It should be noted that 5-year survival rates are available from the Northern Ireland Cancer Registry (NICR) and are not routinely calculated every year.

Site (ICD10)[1]	1993-1997 %	1993-1997 95% Confidence Interval	1998-2002 %	1998-2002 95% Confidence Interval	2003-2007 %	2003-2007 95% Confidence Interval
Bladder (C67)	56.0	(52.0%,59.7%)	58.0	(54.0%,61.8%)	60.8	(56.9%,64.5%)
Brain (C70-C72)	18.7	(15.6%,22.1%)	21.9	(18.7%,25.3%)	24.1	(20.8%,27.5%)
Breast (C50) female	73.3	(71.3%,75.3%)	78.0	(76.0%,79.8%)	80.4	(78.7%,82.0%)

Site (ICD10)[1]	1993-1997		1998-2002		2003-2007	
	%	95% Confidence Interval	%	95% Confidence Interval	%	95% Confidence Interval
Cervix (C53) female	54.9	(49.7%,59.8%)	61.5	(56.0%,66.6%)	62.7	(56.3%,68.3%)
Colorectal (C18-C21)	48.3	(46.5%,50.1%)	52.9	(51.1%,54.7%)	52.7	(51.0%,54.3%)
Corpus Uteri (C54-C55) female	61.7	(57.0%,66.2%)	70.0	(65.5%,73.9%)	72.3	(68.5%,75.7%)
Hodgkin Lymphoma (C81)	77.1	(69.1%,83.3%)	77.4	(71.3%,82.5%)	79.1	(73.6%,83.7%)
Kidney (C64-C66 C68)	50.7	(46.3%,54.9%)	47.9	(43.9%,51.8%)	50.9	(47.3%,54.3%)
Leukaemia (C91-C95)	31.0	(27.0%,35.2%)	38.9	(34.8%,43.0%)	44.3	(40.3%,48.3%)
Lip, Oral Cavity & Pharynx (C00-C14)	45.5	(40.9%,49.9%)	47.7	(42.9%,52.3%)	52.5	(48.2%,56.7%)
Liver & Intrahepatic Bile Ducts (C22)	6.0	(2.8%,11.0%)	3.8	(1.9%,6.9%)	7.5	(4.7%,11.1%)
Malignant melanoma (C43)	89.0	(85.3%,91.7%)	90.0	(86.8%,92.5%)	88.9	(86.1%,91.1%)
Non-Hodgkin Lymphoma (C82-C85)	43.6	(40.2%,47.0%)	50.0	(46.7%,53.1%)	62.3	(59.2%,65.3%)
Oesophagus (C15)	10.4	(8.0%,13.1%)	13.6	(10.9%,16.6%)	15.3	(12.6%,18.1%)
Ovary (C56) female	32.8	(29.1%,36.6%)	31.8	(28.3%,35.3%)	30.3	(27.2%,33.4%)
Pancreas (C25)	3.3	(1.8%,5.6%)	2.1	(0.9%,4.1%)	4.7	(3.2%,6.6%)
Prostate (C61) male	56.4	(52.7%,60.0%)	74.2	(71.3%,76.8%)	85.0	(83.1%,86.7%)
Stomach (C16)	16.4	(14.0%,18.9%)	16.3	(14.0%,18.7%)	17.5	(14.9%,20.3%)
Testis (C62) male	92.5	(88.1%,95.5%)	97.0	(93.6%,99.1%)	96.9	(93.9%,98.7%)
Trachea, Bronchus & Lung (C33 C34)	8.3	(7.3%,9.4%)	9.8	(8.6%,11.0%)	10.9	(9.8%,12.1%)
All cancers[2] (C00-C43 C45-C97)	41.2	(40.6%,41.9%)	45.7	(45.1%,46.4%)	50.6	(50.0%,51.2%)

Source: Northern Ireland Cancer Registry (NICR)

1 ICD 10 Codes: For a listing and explanation of topology or site codes see: International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems, Tenth Revision, World Health Organisation, Geneva. Or view online at: http://apps.who.int/classifications/icd10/browse/2010/en#/II.

2 Excludes Non-Melanoma Skin Cancer.

Confidence intervals are a measure of the precision of a statistic. Typically, when incidence is low, precision is poorer and confidence intervals will be wider. As a general rule, when comparing statistics, if the confidence interval around one statistic overlaps with the interval around another, it is unlikely that there is any real difference between the two (e.g. bladder cancer survival rate in 1993-97 vs. 2003-07).

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 41049/11-15, to detail (i) the extent of consultations; (ii) the groups consulted; and (iii) whether the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust intends to publish the outcomes of the consultation and screening process.
(AQW 41556/11-15)

Mr Wells: The South Eastern HSC Trust has confirmed that it consulted with a total of 250 existing Community Meals service users who were asked for their views via a survey. It also consulted with 100 prospective service users who participated in focus groups at day care centres. The outcome of the consultation helped to inform the development of the service specification which was used to tender the contract.

The Trust has advised that it has not published the outcome of the consultation and Equality Screening process. The Equality Screening documents are available on request. The Trust is committed to monitoring the impact of the proposal on an on-going basis.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the current number of people suffering with Multiple Sclerosis who are currently waiting for an appointment with a consultant neurologist following an emergency referral in each Health and Social Care Trust; and (ii) their respective average waiting time.
(AQW 41559/11-15)

Mr Wells: Reason for referral, or confirmed diagnosis, is not collected for patients waiting for a first consultant-led appointment. Therefore it is not possible to separately identify patients with Multiple Sclerosis waiting for a first appointment with a consultant neurologist.

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much has been spent on gluten free food issued by prescription in each of the last five years.
(AQW 41583/11-15)

Mr Wells: Patients with confirmed gluten-sensitive medical conditions are currently able to obtain a range of foods on prescription. To ensure efficient use of resources, the HSC Board has issued guidance to all prescribers recommending that only staple foods be supplied on prescription to patients diagnosed with gluten-sensitive enteropathies.

The table below provides a breakdown of the gross expenditure, prior to discounts, on all relevant products that can be identified by Business Services Organisation covering the last five financial years.

Financial Year	Expenditure
2009/10	£2,258,153
2010/11	£2,395,843
2011/12	£2,294,513
2012/13	£2,002,211
2013/14	£1,971,486

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what steps he is taking to address the current waiting time of 44 weeks for spinal appointments at the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust.
(AQW 41587/11-15)

Mr Wells: Waiting times for new spinal appointments within the Belfast Health and Social Care Trusts are 44 weeks for routine patients and less than 15 weeks for urgent patients.

The Belfast Trust has been successful in appointing a replacement, whole time equivalent, spinal surgeon, following the retirement of two, 0.5 whole time equivalent, spinal surgeons in December 2014. The Belfast Trust continues to prioritise patients based on clinical urgency in order to address long waiting times and is currently taking steps to re-allocate patients to the replacement surgeon.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust plans to close the Physiotherapy Department at Bangor Community Hospital.
(AQW 41592/11-15)

Mr Wells: Podiatry and Physiotherapy services are located within the Therapy and Rehabilitation department in Bangor Hospital. This provides outpatient appointments for Allied Health professions. These services continue as normal and there is no intention to withdraw these services or close the facility.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust plans to close the Podiatry Service at Bangor Community Hospital.
(AQW 41593/11-15)

Mr Wells: Podiatry and Physiotherapy services are located within the Therapy and Rehabilitation department in Bangor Hospital. This provides outpatient appointments for Allied Health professions. These services continue as normal and there is no intention to withdraw these services or close the facility.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the operating costs of Northfield House in each of the last five years.
(AQW 41597/11-15)

Mr Wells: The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust has provided the information set out in the table below on the operating costs of Northfield House in each of the last five financial years:

Year:	Operating Costs:
2009/2010	£1,108,281
2010/2011	£1,039,592
2011/2012	£ 998,526

Year:	Operating Costs:
2012/2013	£ 994,784
2013/2014	£1,055,586

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the operating costs of the intermediate care beds in Ards Community Hospital in each of the last five years.
(AQW 41598/11-15)

Mr Wells: The South Eastern Health and Social Care (HSC) Trust has provided the operating costs of 'GP Beds' which includes intermediate care beds, shown in the table below. It should be noted that the mix of GP and Intermediate Care Beds numbers is likely to have been changeable over this five year period.

Year	Total operating cost of GP Beds, Ards Community Hospital (£)
2009/10	1,457,868
2010/11	1,378,714
2011/12	1,321,925
2012/13	1,483,050
2013/14	1,607,177

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the cost of treating respite and intermediate care patients at Northfield House, Donaghadee, in each of the last five years.
(AQW 41600/11-15)

Mr Wells: The South Eastern Health and Social Care (HSC) Trust has provided the costs which are set out in the table below. Prior to year 2012/13, costs were not split between intermediate and non-intermediate care provision. It should also be noted that non-intermediate care includes respite care provision.

	Cost per Occupied Bed weeks (£)	
Year	Intermediate Care Provision	Non-Intermediate Care Provision
2009/10		666.34
2010/11		754.91
2011/12		958.25
2012/13	1079.66	877.37
2013/14	907.47	1329.00

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 40543/11-15, what additional payments or budget allocations will be made available to community pharmacies to provide the "Making it Better through Pharmacy in the Community Strategy".
(AQW 41630/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Department's implementation plan for the 'Making it Better through Pharmacy in the Community' strategy was published on 4 February 2015.

The plan recommends 16 key actions for implementation by the HSC Board, DHSSPS and Pharmacy Regulatory, Professional and Representative Bodies. The HSC Board has been asked to produce a detailed work plan to deliver their key actions. It is anticipated that some elements of the plan will be delivered within existing resources whilst others will be subject to business case approval processes.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust plans to relocate the breast screening unit from Newtownards Community Hospital to Bangor.
(AQW 41639/11-15)

Mr Wells: Women are invited for screening every three years. Breast screening is provided across Northern Ireland using a mix of static and mobile screening units. The mobile units are sited at suitable locations across each of the Health and Social Care Trust areas. This is to make the breast screening service more accessible to women and hopefully increase the uptake.

In the past women from Bangor were invited for screening to the mobile unit at Bangor Community Hospital. When the mobile was scheduled to visit Bangor in 12/13, the site at Bangor Community Hospital was not available due to ongoing capital works and women living in Bangor were invited to Newtownards instead.

A site had been found for the most recent visit to Bangor, scheduled to last from December 2014 to November 2015. However at short notice, the new site (Bangor Health Centre) became unavailable, due to problems with electricity. As a result the mobile screening unit was relocated to Ards Community Hospital and appointments were resent to Bangor women previously invited to offer screening at Newtownards.

The South eastern Trust is continuing to work to identify a suitable site in Bangor for the screening mobile unit.

Mr Clarke asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 30140/11-15, whether the current budget will allow for the implementation of the National Institute of Health and Care Excellence guidance of three treatment cycles of IVF, or whether a phased approach of two treatments will be considered.
(AQW 41643/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Health and Social Care Board has responsibility for commissioning fertility services in Northern Ireland. The Board is currently considering how best to implement NICE Clinical Guideline 156 within the context of the very challenging 2015/16 financial position and competing health and social care priorities. While the Board is committed to achieving the full implementation of this Clinical Guideline as soon as possible, the financial situation is likely to impact on its ability to increase the number of publicly funded IVF cycles.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the fire safety arrangements adopted by each Health and Social Care Trust.
(AQW 41644/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Department of Health and Social Services does not hold information centrally relating to the operational procedures of individual Health and Social Care Trusts. The Health and Social Care Trusts were asked to submit details on their fire safety arrangements and these responses are attached in Annex A.

Annex A: Trust Responses to information request

HSC Trust	Trust Response to Information Request AQW 41644/11-15
Belfast	Fire Safety Policy and Procedural Arrangements including procedure for Management of Oxyacetylene ref TP049/08 - attached Annex B.
Southern	The Southern Health and Social care Trust has comprehensive and integrated fire safety arrangements in place which is outlined as follows. The Trust invests available resources to fire safety through staffing resources for the Fire Safety Department; training; upgrading building infrastructure; and maintaining existing fire safety provisions such as fire alarm systems, fire doors, first aid firefighting equipment, etc. The Trust has a Fire Safety and Arson Prevention Policy which details the responsibilities for staff across the Trust and sets out governance arrangements. Such arrangements include a Fire safety Committee which monitors fire safety throughout the Trust and is comprised of senior representatives from each Directorate. Each facility has a Nominated Fire Safety Officer who has local management responsibility. Training is an essential part of the overall all fire safety strategy which is provided for all staff. Specialised training is provided for Nominated Fire Offices, staff using evacuation aids such as ski sheets/ ski pads and evacuation chairs, hands-on use of fire extinguishers and in some specialist roles such as bed managers, switchboard staff and staff in theatres. Life safety is paramount and the Trust has a specific focus on evacuation arrangements. Each facility has an evacuation plan and fire drills are carried out regularly by the Nominated Fire Officer. In hospital facilities simulated fire drills are undertaken by Fire Prevention Officers, actions are observed, staff interviewed and ward audited and a written report is forwarded to Nominated Fire Officer, Director responsible for ward and Executive Director responsible for fire safety. In our hospitals we have started to undertake major exercises which includes the Fire & Rescue Service, Ambulance Service, Police Service and local Council; the first such exercise was carried out in Craigavon Area Hospital in September 2014. There is a rolling programme of fire risk assessments which are undertaken by Trust Fire Prevention Officers which reviews fire safety arrangements in facilities. The findings of these risk assessments are issued as a written report to the Nominated Fire Officer for that facility, relevant Director and the Executive Director for fire safety.

HSC Trust	Trust Response to Information Request AQW 41644/11-15
	The Trust has comprehensive guidance and provisions in place as part of the contractual arrangement for building contractors. The Trust has a small Fire Safety Department which provides expertise and advice on all aspects of fire safety, review all work schemes, investigates all fire incidents, monitors fire safety, carry out simulated fire evacuations in wards and carry out fire risk assessments and specialist training. Fire safety information is published on the Trust Intranet and global mails are utilised when necessary.
Western	It is the policy of the Western Health and Social Care Trust to ensure as far as reasonably practical, that all steps are taken to prevent fire, and minimise its effects in all premises owned or occupied by the Trust (Fire Safety Policy – Trust Board approved 2014). Trust fire safety arrangements are governed by Fire & Rescue Services Order (NI) 2006, Fire Safety Regulations (NI) 2010, and DHSSPS Firecode guidance. The Trust Board through the Chief Executive has ultimate accountability to ensure effective fire safety arrangements. Directors are responsible for fire safety arrangements within Directorate to ensure compliance with Trust Policy, legislation and guidance. Director of Performance and Service Improvement is the Director with overall fire responsibility in accordance with NI Firecode, supported by Head of Estates and Trust Environment Manager (Estates). Fire Safety Management is fully integrated in the Trust's governance and risk management arrangements i.e. Fire Safety Management Group report to Trust Risk Management Sub-Committee and then to Governance Committee of Trust Board. The Trust Fire Safety Policy is implemented and operationalized across Trust facilities contained in a Trust Fire Safety Manual, and ensures insofar as is reasonably practical: ■ compliance with fire safety legislation and guidance (including Firecode) ■ persons with fire responsibilities are nominated ■ fire risks are assessed and recorded by fire risk assessment ■ monitoring and audit of fire safety arrangements ■ documented site specific emergency evacuation plans/procedures ■ provision of appropriate fire safety training to staff ■ co-operation and communication with other users ■ monitoring and reporting of fire incidents A Multi-discipline Trust Fire Safety Working Group (chaired by Head of Estates) meets quarterly to monitor overall fire safety performance, and provides a report annually to Trust Board.
Northern	The Northern Trust has a Fire Safety & Arson Policy which details the arrangements for Fire Safety management within the Trust. The policy is in accordance with the requirements of NI Firecode Health Technical Memorandum (HTM). There is a detailed management structure for Fire Safety. The Trust completes the annual Controls Assurance Standard for Fire Safety which examines all areas of fire safety within the Trust. The Trust has Fire Safety Officers who carry out audits and Fire Risk Assessments annually within the Trust facilities which highlights any deficiencies in Fire Safety. The Fire Safety Officers deliver tailored mandatory annual Fire Safety training to Trust staff. Additional training is delivered to high risk areas such as residential homes and acute hospital wards in accordance with Firecode HTMs. The Trust has an annual programme of Firecode upgrading works for physical compliance, which brings facilities up to current NI Firecode HTM standards. We currently have two years remaining of a nine year programme which is funding dependent. All items of Fire Safety Equipment are under relevant maintenance contracts or procedures eg Fire alarms, emergency lighting, Fire extinguishers, fire doors. The Trust holds an annual meeting with the NIFRS Area Commander to go through Fire Safety within the Trust.

South Eastern	The Trust reports up to the Department of Health on Fire Safety issues via its Control Assurance Returns. There is a Control Assurance return completed for Fire Safety and this is Audited by BSO internal Audit. The Trust's Chief Executive also reports on Fire Safety via his Accountability Review with DHSSPS, as required. The Trust 's internal fire management systems include:- ■ Trust Fire Committee ■ Fire Risk Assessments carried out by Trust Fire Officers ■ ISO 14001 covers fire management ■ NIFRS audit of the Trust's Fire Risk assessments ■ RQIA cover fire risk on their inspections of Trust Property ■ Trust Internal Policies on Fire Safety include an Arson Policy and the Trust Fire Policy, which covers staff responsible from the Chief Executive down to all staff The Trust reports on KPIs on fires which include real fires, unwanted fire signals and staff training numbers. In terms of Emergency Planning, the Trust has an ongoing programme of Major Incident Tests on high risk buildings and these involve workshops with public agencies such as NIFRS, PSNI, NIAS and local Councils. The Trust has also carried out a simulation exercise, code named Nightwatch, which included involvement of NIFRS, Ambulance and Ward staff and included smoke simulation
NIAS	The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service HSC Trust (NIAS) manage fire safety across the Trust, through the application of the NIAS Fire Policy and Procedures as below: ■ Annual compliance letter from Heads of department to Chief Executive, evidenced by monthly checks by supervisors and line mangers incorporating fire safety systems alarms and extinguishers. ■ Annual review of Fire Risk Assessments conducted by the local managers and audited by Senior Managers. ■ Annual sample audit of Fire Risk Assessment (all properties audited over 5 year cycle) conducted by Senior Managers ■ 5 yearly independent review of Fire Risk Assessments ■ Quarterly fire compliance group meetings to review fire safety issues, risks, alarms and incidents and provide assurance to the Assurance Committee and Trust Board in respect of Fire Safety across the Trust. NIAS comply with applicable Fire code NIHTM 85: Fire precautions in existing healthcare premises requirements and NI Fire Part 3 of The Fire Safety Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010; The Fire and Rescue Services (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 and The Fire Safety Regulations

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether the announcement of the closure of JTI Gallaher's Ballymena factory influenced his decision to bring forward plain packaging for tobacco products.
(AQW 41647/11-15)

Mr Wells: As Minister for health, my decision to recommend that Northern Ireland be included in UK-wide regulations for the introduction of standardised packaging was made on the basis of the available evidence relating to public health. This included the outcome of the Chantler Review, published in April 2014, and the summary of responses to the final UK-wide public consultation on standardised packaging, which my Department received on 22 January 2015.

Ms P Bradley asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether the savings of 9.9 per cent by the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service, as proposed in the 2015-16 budget, can be delivered within one year.
(AQW 41656/11-15)

Mr Wells: Given the scale of the financial challenges facing DHSSPS in 2015/16, each of my Department's arms length bodies initially prepared scenarios based on 5%, 10% and 15% reductions for 2015/16.

The NI Fire and Rescue Service, is working to a savings target of 5.5% for 2015/16. I will require full detailed plans on how such savings can be delivered, which are to be prioritised on the basis of those that minimise the impact on service delivery and which are focused on areas such as support functions and central staffing structures. Final agreement to the NIFRS savings

proposals will be on the basis of evidence-based reforms and that a priority is given to staff and public safety. Proposals will also be subject to consultation processes, as appropriate.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the introduction of pulse oximetry for newborns in Northern Ireland.
(AQW 41680/11-15)

Mr Wells: I refer the honourable member to the answer I gave to AQW 37431/11-15.

As you are aware, the UK National Screening Committee (NSC) has recommended piloting the use of pulse oximetry to screen newborn babies for congenital heart defects. The aim of the pilot is to evaluate the impact of implementing newborn pulse oximetry screening on NHS services and to establish feasibility for future national rollout as an addition to the existing suite of screening tests undertaken as part of the newborn programme.

Pilot sites have now been identified. Phase one is due to commence this month and will undertake baseline assessment and data collection in the selected pilot sites. Phase two will commence in May 2015 and will introduce or assure the agreed national screening protocol in those pilot sites already undertaking newborn pulse oximetry and collect data to record impact of any change. The data collection in this phase will run until 31st December 2015 after which the pilot will be evaluated.

The NSC will then consider the findings from the pilot and make a recommendation. I will await their recommendation before making a policy decision on this for Northern Ireland.

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the payments received by his Department in (i) Quarter 1; (ii) Quarter 2; and (iii) Quarter 3, from Year One of the 2014-18 Pharmaceutical Pricing Regulations Scheme.
(AQW 41681/11-15)

Mr Wells: Returns to Northern Ireland from Year One of the Pharmaceutical Price Regulation Scheme 2014 are detailed in the following table.

	Quarter 1 (Jan –Mar)	**Quarter 2 (Apr-Jun)**	**Quarter 3 (Jul-Sep)**
Amount	£3.53 m	£3.83 m	£3.92 m

It should be noted the returns apportioned to Northern Ireland go directly to the Health and Social Care Board and not to my Department.

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is the formula by which Northern Ireland will be allocated a share of future payments from the 2014-18 Pharmaceutical Pricing Regulations Scheme.
(AQW 41682/11-15)

Mr Wells: The method for apportioning future payments to Northern Ireland from the Pharmaceutical Price Regulation Scheme 2014 is based on the spend on licensed branded medicines for primary care in Northern Ireland using the prescribing data for the same period as the income relates.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the average waiting times of Multiple Sclerosis patients between initial referral to neurology and the first appointment with a Consultant Neurologist, broken down by each Health and Social Care Trust.
(AQW 41700/11-15)

Mr Wells: Reason for referral, or confirmed diagnosis, is not collected for patients waiting for a first consultant-led appointment. Therefore it is not possible to separately identify patients with Multiple Sclerosis waiting for a first appointment with a consultant neurologist.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the amount of financial resource spend on the Dementia Strategy since its publication.
(AQW 41701/11-15)

Mr Wells: Significant funding has been invested in the dementia strategy since its launch in 2011.

The HSC Board has provided funding of £1m in 2012/13 and £1m in 2013/14 across HSC Trusts. This funding has been used to develop and enhance memory services and to increase professional staffing levels and services.

Since 2011 the Department, along with Atlantic Philanthropies, has invested £400k each year in the Dementia Services Development Centre. This funding is used for the provision of training courses, advice on building design, library facilities and learning opportunities.

Further investments have come from Atlantic Philanthropies, investing £300k in a 3 year period from 2014-2017 in the NI Hospice to support end of life care for people with dementia; and a joint investment with the PHA of £194k as part of a £2m programme of research in dementia care.

The Atlantic Philanthropies/Delivering Social Change/DHSSPS initiative, which was launched in September 2014, also includes a £6.25m investment in dementia, over a three year period to 2017.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the specific cancers (i) treated by advanced radiotherapy; and (ii) whereby patients are referred to other parts of the UK for treatment.
(AQW 41703/11-15)

Mr Wells: (i)Advanced radiotherapy techniques including intensity modulated radiotherapy (IMRT) and stereotactic ablative body radiotherapy (SABR) is provided for the radical treatment of head and neck cancers, lung cancer, prostate cancer and all breast cancer. Other cancers (e.g. lower or upper GI, gynaecological cancers) can also be treated using IMRT where a clinical oncologist determines this would be more clinically beneficial than conventional treatment.

(ii)Patients for whom treatment with cranial-stereotactic radiotherapy is indicated are referred to cancer centres in England for treatment under extra contractual referral arrangements. It is hoped to have a cranial-stereotactic service established in Belfast in early 2016.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on when the Medicines Optimisation Quality Framework consultation will proceed.
(AQW 41704/11-15)

Mr Wells: I am advised that the Medicines Optimisation Quality Framework is currently being developed. A date for consultation is not yet confirmed although I expect it within the coming months.

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is the future intention for the care and rehabilitation of patients that will be moved from Loane House, Aughnacloy to facilitate its closure.
(AQW 41727/11-15)

Mr Wells: Following a public consultation on the future provision of inpatient non-acute hospital services for older people, the Southern Health and Social Care Trust approved a proposal to relocate non-acute inpatient beds to Craigavon Hospital.

The proposal is that beds will be relocated to a new build development as part of a wider site redevelopment plan for the redevelopment of Craigavon Area Hospital.

However, changes will not take place immediately as implementation of the plans could take up to three years to put in place. The Southern Trust will continue to engage with users, carers, staff and the local community as it develops the implementation plans for these changes which are vital to ensuring quality health care in Southern Trust.

Full details of the outcome of the consultation can be found on the Trust website:
http://www.southerntrust.hscni.net/pdf/FINAL_TYC_Consultation_Outcome_Report_November_2014(1).pdf

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the average usage and occupancy of spot purchased beds, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust area, in each of the last five years.
(AQW 41751/11-15)

Mr Wells: It is assumed that the term ‘spot purchased beds’ relates to the short term purchase of a bed in the private sector to facilitate an intermediate care patient.

The information requested is not held centrally and was therefore requested from Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts. Their responses can be found below.

Belfast HSC Trust

The Belfast HSC Trust do not spot purchase intermediate care beds.

Northern HSC Trust
Table 1. Total number of admissions for spot purchased beds in the Northern HSC Trust

	2012	2013	2014	2015
Northern HSC Trust	297	284	157	52

The occupancy rate for these admissions is 100% as the Northern HSC Trust only purchase beds that are required. The information available to formulate this response is only available from 2012.

South Eastern HSC Trust

Table 2. Average monthly number of spot purchased beds in the South Eastern HSC Trust

	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
South Eastern HSC Trust	53	49	44	30	14

There is 100% occupancy of all spot purchased beds as the Trust only pays for occupied bed days.Southern HSC Trust

Table 3. Average daily number of spot purchased beds in the Southern HSC Trust

	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
Southern HSC Trust	23.8	22.5	25.7	25.3	24.7

These figures detail the average daily usage at 100% occupancy.

Western HSC Trust

The Western HSC Trust do not spot purchase intermediate care beds

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what facilities are regarded as a place of safety under the Section 16 of Mental Health Act; and which Health and Social Care Trust is served by each facility.
(AQW 41790/11-15)

Mr Wells: I have assumed that your question refers to section 136 of the Mental Health Act, which does not extend to Northern Ireland. Article 129 of the Mental Health (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 is the equivalent provision in Northern Ireland and defines a place of safety as:

- any hospital designated as such by the managing Health and Social Care Trust;
- any police station, or
- any other suitable place the occupier of which is willing to temporarily receive the person requiring a place of safety.

The hospitals designated as places of safety by their managing Trusts are listed in the table below.

Hospitals designated as Places of Safety

Belfast HSC Trust	Emergency Department, Royal Victoria Hospital, Grosvenor Road, Belfast Emergency Department, Mater Hospital, Crumlin Road, Belfast
Northern HSC Trust	Emergency Department, Antrim Area Hospital, Bush Road, Antrim Emergency Department, Causeway Hospital, New Bridge Road, Coleraine
South Eastern HSC Trust	Emergency Department, Ulster Hospital, Upper Newtownards Road, Dundonald Emergency Department, Lagan Valley Hospital, Hillsborough Road, Lisburn
Southern HSC Trust	Emergency Department, Craigavon Area Hospital, 68 Lurgan Road, Portadown Emergency Department, Daisy Hill Hospital, Hospital Road, Newry
Western HSC Trust	Emergency Department, Altnagelvin Hospital, Glenshane Road, Londonderry Emergency Department, South West Acute Hospital, Enniskillen

At present all five Health and Social Care Trusts have identified their hospital emergency departments as their designated places of safety. If the individual has sustained injury, is suspected of having taken substances, or has other pressing medical needs, then a hospital emergency department is the most appropriate place of safety.

My Department is currently working with the HSC Board and the PSNI to develop a regional protocol, which will provide a framework for co-operation and joint working between the PSNI and Health and Social Care Trusts to ensure that people with a mental disorder are managed in a safe and effective manner.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the provision of full-time consultant neurologist cover in the South West Acute Hospital.
(AQW 41815/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Western Health and Social (HSC) Trust has advised me that there has been no change to the Neurology Service in South West Acute Hospital since November 2014. Consultant Neurology cover continues to be provided by the Regional Centre to the South West Acute Hospital.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much it is costing the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust to contest the judicial review of the temporary closure of the Bangor GP Ward.
(AQW 41817/11-15)

Mr Wells: The decision to temporarily close the 20-bed GP Ward is being considered by the Courts. The South Eastern Trust's costs to date of contesting the Judicial Review of this decision are not known at present. It is normal practice for parties to be billed after a case has been concluded.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether patients who attend an Emergency Department, and are subsequently transferred to an Acute Medical Unit, fall under the remit of Emergency Department performance standards in relation to meeting both 4 and 12 hour waiting targets.
(AQW 41833/11-15)

Mr Wells: The emergency care targets apply to all new and unplanned review patients attending emergency care departments, regardless of whether they are subsequently discharged, admitted or transferred. A patient's waiting time is measured from when they arrive in the emergency department until they leave. Transfer or admission to an acute medical unit completes their care in the emergency department and ends their emergency department waiting time.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the total number of patients attending Emergency Departments; and (ii) the number of these patients subsequently transferred to an Acute Medical Unit, in each of the last twelve months, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust.
(AQW 41834/11-15)

Mr Wells:

(i) It is assumed that this question refers to the number of attendances (new and unplanned reviews) at emergency care departments. It is important to note that the number of attendances does not equate to the number of patients treated, as it is possible for the same person to attend an emergency care department more than once during each month.

Information on the number of attendances at emergency care departments is detailed in the table below, for each of the last twelve months (January 2014 – December 2014).

HSC Trust	Jan-14	Feb-14	Mar-14	Apr-14	May-14	Jun-14	Jul-14	Aug-14	Sep-14	Oct-14	Nov-14	Dec -14
Belfast	14,192	13,241	15,168	14,598	15,214	15,311	15,082	14,349	15,044	14,963	14,337	14,746
Northern	10,650	10,058	11,745	11,632	12,010	12,025	12,221	11,392	11,710	11,311	10,360	10,084
South Eastern	11,296	10,525	12,405	12,109	12,333	12,510	12,769	12,117	12,962	12,451	11,208	11,829
Southern	11,228	10,719	12,682	13,121	12,922	13,539	13,310	12,510	13,052	12,615	11,797	11,994
Western	7,936	7,168	8,331	8,680	8,891	8,811	8,982	8,590	8,527	8,272	7,777	8,003
Northern Ireland	55,302	51,711	60,331	60,140	61,370	62,196	62,364	58,958	61,295	59,612	55,479	56,656

Source: EC1 Information Return

(ii) Information on the number of patients subsequently transferred to an Acute Medical Unit is not currently available. However information is available on the number of admissions from an emergency care department to hospital under the Acute Programme of Care, and is detailed in the table below for each of the last twelve months (January 2014 – December 2014).

HSC Trust	Jan-14	Feb-14	Mar-14	Apr-14	May-14	Jun-14	Jul-14	Aug-14	Sep-14	Oct-14	Nov-14	Dec-14
Belfast	3,133	2,879	2,650	2,778	2,972	2,887	3,032	3,028	3,017	3,187	3,135	3,029
Northern	2,395	2,094	2,017	2,250	2,341	2,177	2,316	2,392	2,321	2,257	2,213	2,326
South Eastern	2,326	2,125	1,995	2,274	2,243	2,168	2,228	2,170	2,233	2,289	2,174	2,241
Southern	1,953	1,780	1,742	1,980	2,008	1,908	1,985	1,958	2,102	2,212	2,172	2,325
Western	1,545	1,458	1,339	1,488	1,593	1,583	1,550	1,542	1,552	1,601	1,502	1,528
Total	**11,352**	**10,336**	**9,743**	**10,770**	**11,157**	**10,723**	**11,111**	**11,090**	**11,225**	**11,546**	**11,196**	**11,449**

Source: Hospital Inpatient System

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the measures his Department is taking to reduce dependence on agency staff.
(AQW 41835/11-15)

Mr Wells: Agency staff can be a vital resource to maintain delivery of service and I recognise that agency expenditure will never be zero. It is, however, an important policy aim for the health service, to endeavour to reduce expenditure on agency, locum and bank staff.

Health and Social Care Trusts are continually seeking to drive down these costs through a range of initiatives. One such initiative which seeks to more effectively manage the use of and expenditure associated with locum doctors, is the new e-locum system currently being piloted within HSC Trusts. This should help with the difficultly in securing cover for gaps in rotas by offering greater opportunity to systemise and organise staffing cover.

Furthermore I am delighted to advise that an additional £12million has been secured to support the implementation of Delivering Care (Nurse Staffing Levels in NI). This will result in additional permanent posts with medical and surgical in patient wards. As additional posts are created a key performance indicator is also being developed to incrementally reduce spend on nursing bank and agency spend as the posts are being filled.

In addition, and as I indicated in my Written Statement of 30 October 2014, in order to help address the financial deficit, elective care treatments will be focussed on

urgent procedures, assessed by clinicians in priority order, and potentially provided on different sites in order to reduce locum and agency spend.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline any discussions he has had with the Minister for Employment and Learning regarding the current number of nursing places at universities.
(AQW 41836/11-15)

Mr Wells: I have not had any discussions with Minister Farry in regard to this issue.

My Department is in regular contact with the relevant universities, QUB, UU and Open University, and has recently confirmed the number of commissioned nursing places for 2015/16.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the future of Greenfield Residential Home in Strabane.
(AQW 41837/11-15)

Mr Wells: No decision has yet been made on the future of Greenfield Residential Home.

The Western HSC Trust, along with the other four Health and Social Care Trusts, has completed its evaluation on the future role and function of its statutory residential care homes for older people against the new criteria approved by the Health and Social Care Board in June 2014. The new criteria were approved following an extensive public consultation exercise.

In line with the regional process, the Western HSC Trust has formally submitted its proposals for change to the Health and Social Care Board. My Department is now working with the Health and Social Board to develop a robust consultation plan for these proposals.

Mr Byrne asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how his Department can develop a practical and workable primary care strategy for all of Northern Ireland as an integral part of the Health Service.
(AQW 41864/11-15)

Mr Wells: Primary care services are an integral part of health and social care in Northern Ireland. In 2005, my Department published “Caring for People Beyond Tomorrow - A Strategic Framework for the Development of Primary Health and Social Care for Individuals, Families and Communities in Northern Ireland”.

The Strategic Framework outlines a 20-year vision for developing primary health and social care services. This vision includes maximising care and treatment in the community closer to people’s homes and minimising the need for hospitalisation or residential care. The Strategic Framework also sets out a series of principles, values and high level goals designed to steer and influence the future development and delivery of primary care services.

A key aspect of the work being taken forward under Transforming Your Care is a shift in health and social care services to a model focused on prevention, early intervention and the provision of enhanced services in primary and community care sectors.

Mr Byrne asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of out-of-hours GP services in rural areas.
(AQW 41867/11-15)

Mr Wells: GP out-of-hours services are delivered in line with a service specification and there are standard response times for dealing with calls which are based on the clinical urgency of a call. This is independent of the location of the person contacting the service.

GP out-of-hours centres are geographically spread across the region to facilitate ease of access for patients. If deemed necessary, home visits are also available as part of the GP out-of-hours service.

The Department and the Health and Social Care Board are committed to ensuring a safe and comprehensive GP out-of-hours service and the Board monitors performance by all GP out-of-hours providers. To help deal with demand for services an additional £1.5m has been invested in the GP out-of-hours services across Northern Ireland in 2015/16.

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) why patients have had to be bussed from the Royal Victoria Hospital Emergency Department to the Mater Hospital Emergency Department; (ii) the number of occasions this has happened; and (iii) how many patients have been bussed.
(AQW 41922/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Belfast Health and Social Care Trust continues to experience significant pressure on its emergency department services. In order to provide the best possible services to patients, on 4 February 2015 some patients were assessed by a consultant in the Royal Victoria Hospital Emergency Department and given the option of being transported to the nearby Mater Hospital Emergency Department where they were seen and treated in a much shorter time. Nine patients transferred to the Mater Hospital Emergency Department. This is the first time that this has happened. Clinicians had assessed that this alternative was an appropriate and safe method of treatment.

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action is being taken to ensure that the Emergency Department at the Mater Hospital is able to cope with the increase in admittance figures in Belfast Emergency Departments.
(AQW 41923/11-15)

Mr Wells: The increase in demand for emergency department services has been experienced chiefly at the Royal Victoria Hospital. The Mater Hospital has experienced a much smaller rise in the number of new and unplanned review attendances at its emergency department and a reduction in the number of admissions from the emergency department compared to the previous year. The Mater Hospital was however allocated £60,000 from winter pressures funding for a Medical Admission Unit 5 days per week.

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the total number of admissions to each department in the Mater Hospital in each of the last five years.
(AQW 41924/11-15)

Mr Wells: Information on the number of admissions under each specialty within the Mater Hospital in each of the last five years is detailed in the table below.

Specialty	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014
General Surgery	3,936	3,695	3,545	3,897	3,242
Urology	1,238	1,350	819	132	436
Trauma and Orthopaedic	<5	6	<5	0	0
ENT	10	0	0	0	0
Ophthalmology	3,425	3,672	3,770	3,497	3,410
Oral Surgery	349	427	406	329	439
Accident and Emergency	<5	0	203	698	887
Pain Management	473	507	531	422	318
General Medicine	6,094	6,502	6,372	5,138	3,799
Gastroenterology	0	0	0	995	1,985
Endocrinology	0	0	0	297	585
Cardiology	1,522	1,508	1,558	1,483	1,519
Thoracic Medicine	0	0	<5	952	1,202
Geriatric Medicine	0	0	75	358	475
Obstetrics	1,430	1,459	1,553	1,325	210
Gynaecology	1,083	1,095	1,195	1,452	1,400
Well babies - obs	1,152	1,180	1,227	1,106	195
General Practice other	<5	0	0	<5	<5
Mental Illness	452	426	371	379	400
Old Age Psychiatry	35	18	41	41	48

Source: KH03a

* In line with Branch policy, numbers less than five have been masked to protect patient confidentiality.

Mr Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the new Suicide Prevention Strategy.
(AQW 41925/11-15)

Mr Wells: Extensive pre-consultation engagement has been undertaken to inform the development of the new mental health promotion/suicide prevention strategy. It is anticipated that a draft of the new strategy will be issued for public consultation in June 2015. In the meantime, my Department will be liaising with other Departments, agencies, and the Suicide Strategy Implementation Body to finalise the draft document.

Mr Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many patients have been waiting longer than one year for an initial appointment with a surgical consultant at Altnagelvin Hospital.
(AQW 41927/11-15)

Mr Wells: No patients were waiting longer than 52 weeks for an initial consultant-led outpatient appointment within any specialty, at any hospital site within the Western Trust at 30th September 2014, the most recent quarter for which official statistics are available.

Mr Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of people who presented to the Emergency Department at Altnagelvin Hospital in each of the last five years.
(AQW 41928/11-15)

Mr Wells: It is assumed that this question refers to the number of attendances (new, unplanned and planned reviews) at Altnagelvin Area emergency care department. It is important to note that the number of attendances does not equate to the number of patients treated, as it is possible for the same person to attend an emergency care department more than once during the year.

Information on the number of attendances at Altnagelvin Area emergency care department is published on an annual basis, and available to view or download from:

http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/statistics/hospital/emergency-care/emergency-care-activity.htm

Mr Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of people who presented to Altnagelvin Hospital with flu-like symptoms in each of the last five years.
(AQW 41930/11-15)

Mr Wells: Information on the number of attendances at Altnagelvin Area emergency care department because of flu-like symptoms is not available.

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to list the consultancy firms that provided financial services to his Department in each of the last five years; and the amount paid to each firm for these services.
(AQW 41939/11-15)

Mr Wells: The table below shows the consultancy firms that provided external consultancy financial services to the Department and its ALBs from 2009-10 to 2013-14

Financial Year	Consultant	Amount (£)
2009/10	Deloitte	5,490
	Ernst & Young	25,701
	KPMG	17,500
Sub Total 2009/10		**48,691**
2010/11	Grant Thornton	55,470
	Ernst & Young	1,500
	Tribal Consulting	6,470
	Eugene Fee	7,584
	KPMG	66,300
Sub Total 2010/11		**137,324**
2011/12	Grant Thornton	18,942
	Prof Robert Kirk	500
Sub Total 2011/12		**19,442**

Financial Year	Consultant	Amount (£)
2012/13		nil
2013/14		nil
Total Expenditure		**205,457**

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what actions his Department has taken in recent years to (i) identify; and (ii) tackle health inequalities.
(AQW 41970/11-15)

Mr Wells: Health inequalities - the different health and wellbeing outcomes experienced by different groups within society - are wholly or partly a result of differences in the wider socio economic circumstances of people's lives. Reducing health inequalities is therefore an ongoing challenge which goes beyond the remit of my Department , and requires long-term coordinated effort.

At strategic level DHSSPS led the development of the Executive's overarching strategic framework for public health "Making Life Better," published in June 2014 to reinvigorate efforts to improve health and reduce health inequalities. It provides direction for action from government, to regional and local levels, and in many settings such as communities, workplaces, schools and homes, and health settings. Through strengthened co-ordination and partnership working in a whole system approach, a key aim is to create the conditions for individuals, families and communities to take greater control and be enabled and supported to lead healthy lives.

The HSC role in preventing poor health, promoting healthy living and keeping people well is also vital to reducing health inequalities. A wide range of strategies, programmes and activities are ongoing, for example through Public Health Agency and HSC Trust programmes, many of which are targeted to the identified needs of specific population groups. In addition Making Life Better seeks to increase the emphasis on prevention and early intervention across the commissioning, design and delivery of HSC services.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the future of The Cottages respite facility in Derry.
(AQW 41977/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Western Trust has advised me that it is still considering the best way forward in its review of children's respite services. Families affected will be advised of its decision in due course.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, following the recent BBC Freedom of Information request on the ban on gay men donating blood, whether he will now move to lift the ban.
(AQW 41979/11-15)

Mr Wells: The lifetime ban on blood donation applies to men who have had sex with men (MSM), not to gay men as such. It is based on sexual behaviour, not sexual orientation.

The judicial review hearing on blood donation by MSM concluded on 17th April 2013. The judgment was delivered on 11th October 2013 and the Court delivered its final order on 6th November 2013.

My Department and the Secretary of State for Health have appealed the judgment, which included a finding that this was a matter to be decided by the Secretary of State for Health, not the Northern Ireland Health Minister. The appeal hearing has been postponed pending a case being heard by the European Court of Justice. The NI Court of Appeal has not yet set a new date for the appeal hearing but may do so on 27th March.

It would not be appropriate to comment on matters that are before the courts.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in relation to patient complaints, to detail the target response time operated by each Health and Social Care Trust, including how each is performing against their target.
(AQW 41990/11-15)

Mr Wells: The HSC Complaints Policy requires HSC Trusts to provide a substantive response to the complainant within 20 working days of receipt of a complaint. Where this is not possible, a holding response explaining the reason for the delay must be sent to the complainant.

Information on the time taken to provide a substantive response to complaints received by all HSC Trusts is published on an annual basis by the Department, and available to view or download from:

http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/statistics/safetyquality/patient-safety/complaints-safety-and-quality.htm

Table 11 of the publication details the number of complaints received by HSC Trusts and the percentage provided with a substantive response within 20 working days, during each of the last three years.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of patient complaints made to each Health and Social Care Trust in each month of the last three years.
(AQW 41992/11-15)

Mr Wells: Information on the number of complaints received each month by Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts is not available.

However, information is available on the number of complaints received each year by HSC Trusts. This information is published on an annual basis by the Department, and available to view or download from:

http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/statistics/safetyquality/patient-safety/complaints-safety-and-quality.htm

Table 11 of the publication details the number of complaints received by HSC Trusts in each of the last three years.

Mr McAleer asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many recommendations of the Toner Report have been implemented.
(AQW 41995/11-15)

Mr Wells: One recommendation of the Toner Report is in the process of being implemented. This involves the rewriting of the Department's child protection guidance, Co-operating to Safeguard Children. A team was established to review and update this safeguarding policy for children and young people taking account of changes in legislation and structures and with input from other Government Departments, their agencies and arms length bodies. It is planned that the draft consultation document will be launched for public consultation during early 2015.

All remaining Toner recommendations have been implemented.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for a breakdown of the number of complaints submitted to each Health and Social Care Trust in the last three years.
(AQW 42015/11-15)

Mr Wells: Information on the number of complaints received by Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts is published on an annual basis by the Department, and available to view or download from:

http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/statistics/safetyquality/patient-safety/complaints-safety-and-quality.htm

Table 11 of the publication details the number of complaints received by HSC Trusts in each of the last three years.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the future of The Cottages children's respite facility in Derry.
(AQW 42018/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Western Trust has advised me that it is still considering the best way forward in its review of children's respite services. Families affected will be advised of its decision in due course.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for a breakdown of all spend on public health initiatives by the Public Health Agency since 2009.
(AQW 42019/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Public Health Agency was established on 1 April 2009 with the twin aims of improving and protecting the health of the population. Funding by the PHA on public health initiatives covers a wide range of programmes, which are often cross-cutting in their nature, and involve a multitude of organisations including HSC Trusts, voluntary and community groups, local government and other healthcare providers. Programme spend (i.e. PHA budget less admin costs) can be broken down as follows:

	2009/10 (£m)	**2010/11 (£m)**	**2011/12 (£m)**	**2012/13 (£m)**	**2013/14 (£m)**
Regional Health Improvement	*	*	8.1	9.0	12.4
Local Health Improvement	*	*	21.5	22.1	23.0
Health Protection	*	*	4.5	4.5	9.3
Nursing	*	*	4.9	6.2	6.0
Screening	*	*	9.4	10.8	10.8
R&D	12.4	11.3	10.3	10.7	11.9
Campaigns	*	*	1.8	1.4	1.8
Total programme	**55.5**	**50.4**	**60.6**	**64.6**	**75.2**

* Systems were not in place in 2009/10 and 10/11 to enable PHA to meaningfully break down spend by public health initiative in a way which is consistent with later years.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how campaigns aimed at increasing public awareness of cancers will be measured.
(AQW 42020/11-15)

Mr Wells: For the upcoming Public Health Agency's Be Cancer Aware public awareness campaign, due to be launched today, pre- and post-campaign surveys will be used to track the campaign, assess if there are any changes regarding barriers and assess spontaneous and prompted awareness of the signs and symptoms of lung, bowel and breast cancer. Post-campaign omnibus surveys will also measure campaign awareness or recognition.

The impact the campaign is having will also be assessed by monitoring the following indicators –

- The number of urgent referrals for suspected cancer
- The proportion of urgent referrals which result in a cancer diagnosis (conversion rate) and the proportion of cancers treated which were urgent referrals (detection rate)
- The proportion of people diagnosed in the early stages of cancer will be used to assess campaign impact in the longer term.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how his Department intends to respond to the recent Royal College of Nursing report, which stated that the morale of district nurses was at an all-time low.
(AQW 42021/11-15)

Mr Wells: The District Nurse is a valued and respected member of the healthcare profession. I recognise the continued commitment that our District Nurses provide under increasing pressures, to maintain their excellent delivery of care in the community. My Chief Nursing officer reiterates her support for the highly skilled, hard working, compassionate District Nurses that work in Northern Ireland.

I have made significant investment in District Nursing with a further investment expected within the next few weeks. The total investment will be approximately £2.5 million recurrent. I remain committed to increasing the number of District Nurses in training.

A review of District Nursing Services has been undertaken by my Chief Nursing Officer. A draft service development framework 'A District Nursing Service for Today and Tomorrow' is in the final stages of development. This framework will ensure that we develop and transform our District Nursing Service with the right nurses, with the right skills, in the right place, to deliver safe and effective person centred care.

Ms McGahan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many women in Fermanagh and South Tyrone have been diagnosed with ovarian cancer, in each of the last two years.
(AQW 42034/11-15)

Mr Wells: The latest information available from the Northern Ireland Cancer Registry (NICR) indicates that there were 7 women diagnosed with ovarian cancer in the Fermanagh and South Tyrone assembly area in 2011 and 9 in 2012.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to clarify the situation with regard to the continuation of the ban on blood donations from gay men following the BBC Freedom of Information request that no medical evidence exists.
(AQW 42072/11-15)

Mr Wells: The lifetime ban on blood donation applies to men who have had sex with men (MSM), not to gay men as such. It is based on sexual behaviour, not sexual orientation.

The judicial review hearing on blood donation by MSM concluded on 17th April 2013. The judgment was delivered on 11th October 2013 and the Court delivered its final order on 6th November 2013.

My Department and the Secretary of State for Health have appealed the judgment, which included a finding that this was a matter to be decided by the Secretary of State for Health, not the Northern Ireland Health Minister. The appeal hearing has been postponed pending a case being heard by the European Court of Justice. The NI Court of Appeal has not yet set a new date for the appeal hearing but may do so on 27th March.

It would not be appropriate to comment on matters that are before the courts.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the Better Futures project since it began in 2012.
(AQW 42073/11-15)

Mr Wells: I would commend the work of the Positive Futures Team and their volunteers for the high standard of commitment shown in connection with the Better Futures project which, by way of a partnership approach, aims to support carers of adults with a learning disability and develop new and innovative models of service for the future.

The Health and Social Care Board has also indicated that the work of Positive Futures, and specifically the Better Futures Project, is very much in line with the ethos and model of care as set out in Transforming Your Care.

I also note the positive assessment in the Interim Better Futures Project Report (April 2014) by Dr Laurence Taggart of the University of Ulster. This clearly showed that the aims and objectives of the project were on target, and that comments made by families and carers illustrated its success in providing practical advice and vital support to them. Outcomes of Public Health Initiatives

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the mechanism in place for the Public Health Agency to substantively measure real term outcomes of public health initiatives.
(AQW 42084/11-15)

Mr Wells: The specific mechanisms for measuring the outcomes of public health initiatives vary depending on the nature and scale of the programme. For example -

Screening and immunisation programmes - measures include invitee and participant numbers, analysis by target group, referrals and disease incident rates over time.

Health improvement initiatives - a range of qualitative and quantitive measures include pre - and post levels of knowledge/ attitudes, weight loss, mental health levels etc. Changes in population risk obtained from survey data eg of obesity or smoking rates act as shorter-term proxy measures for longer-term improvements in outcomes such as reductions in avoidable premature deaths from stroke, cancer etc.

Quality and safety initiatives - project-specific outcomes measure pre- and post-implementation of training or development. In some areas this will include qualitative feedback on initiatives which helps to assess programmes and direct future work.

Formal evaluation is commissioned either internally or externally particularly for large-scale projects.

A range of population health measures which are a mixture of uptake rates, measures such as infant mortality, disease incidence, potential avoidable premature death etc are incorporated into a wider PHA outcomes framework. A set of high level indicators will be monitored as part of the implementation of the public health framework Making Life Better.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 40581/11-15, to detail the mechanism in place to ensure that children in foster care, where appropriate, have access to classroom assistants.
(AQW 42088/11-15)

Mr Wells: I have been advised by the Department of Education that access to classroom assistant support is not determined by whether or not a child is in foster care; rather it is determined by the individual needs of the pupil, for example special educational needs. This is based on an assessment carried out by an Education and Library Board.

When a pupil enters the care system it is the responsibility of the Health and Social Care Trust responsible for the child's care to ensure that the relevant school is notified. Every looked after child of school age is required to have in place a Personal Education Plan (PEP), which aims to promote positive educational outcomes for the young person in order to achieve their full potential. It is the overarching Education Plan for the young person that takes account of the young person's views and brings together other education plans such as the Individual Education Plan and Statement of Special Educational Needs.

The Health and Social Care Board has advised that information in relation to the number of children in foster care who have access to a classroom assistant could only be provided at disproportionate costs.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service is not seen as a frontline service.
(AQW 42155/11-15)

Mr Wells: For the purposes of the draft Budget for 2015/16, the protection from reductions for frontline services by the Northern Ireland Executive, related solely to the Health and Social Care elements of the DHSSPS budget. The Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS), similar to other frontline services such as the PSNI, is not afforded the same protection.

Ms McGahan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many men have been diagnosed with prostate cancer in Fermanagh and South Tyrone in the last three years; and to outline the actions being taken to raise awareness of the disease.
(AQW 42156/11-15)

Mr Wells: The latest information available from the Northern Ireland Cancer Registry (NICR) on the number of men diagnosed with prostate cancer in the Fermanagh and South Tyrone assembly area in each of the last three years is detailed in the table below:

Year of diagnosis	Number of cases
2010	60

Year of diagnosis	Number of cases
2011	74
2012	72
Total	**206**

The new Northern Ireland public awareness campaign 'Be Cancer Aware' will be launched by the Public Health Agency (PHA) on 24 February 2015. This campaign aims to promote early diagnosis of cancer by raising awareness of cancer signs and symptoms and encouraging people with these to make an appointment to see their GP. The campaign will include mass media advertising and will be supported by public relations and social media activity as well as a new website www.becanceraware.info

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for a gender breakdown of board members of the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service.
(AQW 42157/11-15)

Mr Wells: The current NIFRS Board comprises 11 members, 10 males and 1 female.

A public appointments competition is currently underway in respect of the NIFRS Board seeking to fill four prospective vacancies on the board.

The advertisement for the posts recognises that women (and some other groups) are underrepresented on NIFRS Board and a welcome statement has been included to seek to encourage applications from the underrepresented groups.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the potential impact on response times of the proposed cuts to the budget of the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service.
(AQW 42162/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS) has been asked to risk assess and prioritise their savings proposals on the basis of those that minimise the impact on service delivery. Any changes to service delivery must ensure the continued safety of both the public and the firefighters who deliver the service.

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how his Department will measure the impact on increased risks of (i) hepatitis; (ii) HIV; and (iii) drug overdose, due to the budget cuts on The Addiction Service at Railway Street, Ballymena.
(AQW 42193/11-15)

Mr Wells: While I remain extremely disappointed by the decision of the Department of Justice (DoJ) to remove funding from Railway Street Community Addiction Service, I have been assured that the Northern Trust (NHSCT) will continue to operate a substance misuse service for the clients at Railway Street, and will endeavour to minimise the impact of the DoJ budget cuts.

However, the reduction in the budget for the service will impact on its capacity. It is very difficult to quantify the impacts of this directly, but it is likely to mean a decrease in the provision of harm reduction advice, which could lead to increased risk of users contracting (or not accessing treatment for) blood borne virus such as hepatitis and HIV. In addition, this could increase the risk of overdose among this client group.

The NHSCT has written to service users advising them of the change and assuring them of its commitment to continue to support them as much as possible. The NHSCT is also engaged in ongoing discussions with officials from the HSCB and the PHA to assess and review the implications of DoJ's decision. HSCB/PHA will continue to work with NHSCT to assess and minimise the negative consequences of the DoJ withdrawal of funding.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 41316/11-15, to detail the action being taken by his Department to alleviate waiting times for patients waiting for audiology services.
(AQW 42215/11-15)

Mr Wells: Across Northern Ireland the demand for audiology services exceeds the capacity that Health and Social Care Trusts (HSCTs) have to deliver through 5 audiology posts. This is predominately in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust and the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust. The Health and Social Care Board has plans in place with both HSC Trusts that will address these gaps and this will ensure that the audiology service across Northern Ireland is fully resourced to meet the demand for services.

It should be noted however that currently there is a recruitment and retention difficulty with audiologists across Northern Ireland and as a result Trusts have a number of vacant posts, resulting in longer waiting times for patients.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for a breakdown of the number of Integrated Care Partnerships in operation in each Health and Social Care Trust.
(AQW 42272/11-15)

Mr Wells: There are seventeen Integrated Care Partnerships operating across the five Local Commissioning Group areas in Northern Ireland as detailed below:

- Belfast: East Belfast ICP, North Belfast ICP, South Belfast ICP, West Belfast ICP;
- South: Armagh/Dungannon ICP, Newry/Mourne ICP, Craigavon/Banbridge ICP;
- North: Antrim/Ballymena ICP, Causeway ICP, Mid Ulster ICP, East Antrim ICP ;
- South East: Lisburn ICP, Down ICP, Ards ICP, North Down ICP; and
- West: Northern sector ICP (Derry/Londonderry/ Limavady and Strabane) and Southern Sector ICP (Omagh and Fermanagh).

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether the implementation of Integrated Care Partnerships has been consistent across Health and Social Care Trusts.
(AQW 42273/11-15)

Mr Wells: All seventeen Integrated Care Partnerships were established in June 2013 – initially meeting in shadow format. They have met on a quarterly basis since then. Their implementation has been overseen by a Regional ICP Implementation Project Board.

All ICPs are working to address the key areas of risk stratification, information sharing, care planning and evaluation. All of the ICPs have agreed action plans in place which they are working to implement to deliver more integrated care.

All ICPs submitted investment proposals to Local Commissioning Groups for service changes which meet the commissioners' specification. The scale of those proposals varied across the region, dependent on the LCGs' priorities and the anticipated resource available. Some of these proposals have already been approved by the LCGs and the Health and Social Care Board and work is underway to deliver the service change.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the (i) proposed; and (ii) actual date of implementation of the Integrated Care Partnerships, in each Health and Social Care Trust.
(AQW 42274/11-15)

Mr Wells: The proposed date for establishment of the 17 Integrated Care Partnerships was June 2013.

All seventeen ICPs were established in June 2013. The 17 partnership committees met for the first time in June 2013 but did not at that stage have full membership. Work continued over the following six months to ensure that all ICPs had full membership. The chairperson role was carried out by the ICP clinical lead until an elected chairperson was agreed.

By January 2014 the majority of committees had full representation and had elected a chairperson. The three ICP committees in the Southern area elected their chairpersons in June 2014.

All 17 committees continue to meet on a quarterly basis and work continues to ensure that there is consistent and full membership.

Ms McGahan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) how many children and young people from the Southern Health and Social Care Trust are currently in foster care; (ii) how many of the total number of children and young people are fostered within the geographical boundary of the Southern Health and Social Care Trust; and (iii) what percentage of the overall budget is set aside for fostering.
(AQW 42295/11-15)

Mr Wells: This information is not held centrally and was requested from the Southern Health and Social Care (HSC) Trust.

The Southern HSC Trust has informed me that

i) at 17th February 2015 there were 366 children in foster care in the Southern HSC Trust;

ii) of these, 323 were placed in foster care placements within the Trust's geographical boundaries;

iii) as a percentage of the overall Trust budget, 1.61% is set aside for fostering.

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what funding is being made available for The Addiction Service at Railway Street, Ballymena in 2015/16.
(AQW 42308/11-15)

Mr Wells: Further to the announcement in October of a withdrawal of funding from the Department of Justice (DoJ), the Northern Health and Social Care Trust (NHSCT) have been working with all partners to retain as much of the current Railway Street service as possible and to review options for a reduced service model to continue to meet the needs of service users and the community.

The NHSCT have had ongoing discussions with the DoJ about the potential for limited financial support over the next two years and with the Health and Social Care Board about resources for two clinical staff to enable core treatment provision which would otherwise be lost to the service.

Given that these discussions are still ongoing it is not possible to confirm exact funding for 2015/16, although the service will still experience a reduction in funding. However, I welcome the developments to date and the NHSCT has informed me it will continue to work with all partners to provide the best model of service moving forward.

Mr McAleer asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when he will introduce the Mental Capacity Bill.
(AQO 7600/11-15)

Mr Wells: My Department, alongside the Department of Justice, is working on the development of the draft Mental Capacity Bill. It is my aim to submit a draft Bill to the Executive next month, with a view to seeking approval to introduce, to enable passage through the Assembly by March 2016.

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the funding pressures in the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust.
(AQO 7598/11-15)

Mr Wells: The South Eastern Trust is working to manage a challenging financial position in 2014/15, which includes the delivery of its contingency plans and the implementation of additional constraints surrounding its workforce and other non-pay budgets.

Despite these measures, at this stage the Trust is still anticipating a small deficit for 2014/15. The Trust is therefore continuing to work closely with the HSCB to explore all available opportunities to address this deficit in order to secure financial breakeven by the end of the financial year.

Looking to next year, the final budget for 2015/16 is exceptionally challenging for my Department. Work is ongoing with all of the Trusts, HSCB and other Arm's Length Bodies to clarify the implications of the Executive's final budget and develop balanced financial plans for 2015/16.

However, given the need to live within budget and meet rising demand, I expect that there will inevitably be an impact on the pattern of delivery of some of our services.

In any case, I can also assure you that maintaining the safety of services for patients and clients will remain a priority.

Mrs Hale asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans he has to meet with his counterparts in the other devolved regions of the UK.
(AQO 7593/11-15)

Mr Wells: I will be meeting my counterparts from the other devolved regions on Thursday 19 February 2015.

This is the third such meeting. I hosted Ministerial colleagues in Belfast on 30 October 2014 and my predecessor Edwin Poots was in Edinburgh on 13 March 2014.

Mr Cree asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust brought forward plans to temporarily close the 20-bed unit in Bangor Hospital in November 2014 before announcing, in January 2015, that its preferred option is to close it altogether.
(AQO 7594/11-15)

Mr Wells: Mr Speaker, I trust that the Assembly will understand that I am mindful that the decision to temporarily close the 20-bed GP Ward is being considered by the Courts, so I am limited in what I can say on that. The South Eastern Trust is indeed consulting on proposals in relation to long term plans for intermediate care services in the North Down and Ards area, including the GP Ward.

The Trust is committed to engaging fully with stakeholders on this matter and I will await the outcome of that consultation before commenting further.

Mr McCartney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the services available for people under 18 dealing with substance misuse.
(AQO 7595/11-15)

Mr Wells: In line with cross-departmental strategy to prevent and address the harm related to substance misuse, a range of information and advice, intervention, harm reduction, and treatment and support services is available for those who misuse alcohol and drugs at all ages, including children and young people. Where appropriate, these services work in partnership with other Health and Social Care teams to respond to the complex needs of clients, including Children and Family Services, Mental Health teams, Probation and Criminal Justice teams.

A directory of all alcohol and drugs services currently funded by the Public Health Agency (PHA) in each HSC Trust area, including for children and young people, is available on the PHA website. Work is underway to commission a range of updated services in light of new guidelines and evidence, and it is anticipated these will be in place from July 2015.

Mr Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the proposed changes to children's respite care in the Western Health and Social Care Trust area.
(AQO 7596/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Western Trust has advised me that it is still considering the best way forward in its review of children's respite services. Families affected will be advised of its decision in due course.

The Trust's review of these services is primarily to meet new and increasing needs and to manage these within their existing funding – it is not solely a proposal to save money.

As part of this review, consideration has been given to the very different physical environments of the two respite homes, the different staffing skills and structures, the needs of the children using the service, and the requirement to provide safe and appropriate care and support to children and their families.

Mr Brady asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on a cancer drugs fund.
(AQO 7599/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Cancer Drugs Fund was developed by NHS England to provide funding for non National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) approved drugs. It is only operative in England. The Cancer Drugs Fund Operating Procedures were recently reviewed to include an assessment of a drug's cost alongside its clinical benefits.

In Northern Ireland access to NICE unapproved drugs is through the Individual Funding Request (IFR) process which is administered by the Health and Social Care Board.

The Member will be aware of the statement I made to the Assembly earlier which sets out a number of recommendations which I believe will strengthen the IFR process and allow for better access to this group of drugs where there is an agreed clinical need.

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action he is taking to improve services for adults with autism.
(AQO 7601/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Cross-Departmental Autism Strategy (2013-2020) and current Action Plan form the foundation for driving forward the improvement of Autism Services. They are being implemented in co-operation with other agencies and with input from service users, carers and families and the voluntary sector.

The Adult ASD Care pathway commenced in 2012 and much good work has been undertaken however, as with children's services, demand is greater than capacity. The HSC Board's review of ASD Services and audit of the Care pathways indicate that the focus for adults should include joint working; better information on the range of support available; improved advocacy and peer support; and exploring opportunities for development of life coaching and mentoring services. Individual Trusts have also developed initiatives to improve ASD Adult Services.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he plans to retain the current acute services at the Causeway Hospital, Coleraine.
(AQO 7602/11-15)

Mr Wells: I am committed to retaining Causeway Hospital as a small acute hospital.

The model for services in Causeway and the Glens area will be based around an acute hospital in Coleraine with an Emergency Department and supporting clinical services, a well-developed intermediate care service and community teams evenly distributed across the area.

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on waiting times for cancer treatment.
(AQO 7604/11-15)

Mr Wells: The latest published waiting time figures for cancer treatment for quarter ending September 2014 are available on my Department's website.

Regionally, the percentage of patients seen within 14 days by a breast cancer specialist following an urgent referral for suspected breast cancer improved from 45.9% in July 2014, to 87.2% in August 2014, and to 99.4% in September 2014, against a target of 100%. I welcome this improvement which must be maintained.

In contrast, regionally, the percentage of patients treated within 31 days following a decision to treat, fell from 97.1% in July 2014, to 96.1% in August, and 95.1% in September 2014, against a target of 98%. Whilst performance is just below the target, it has been achieved in the past, and I want to see it achieved again.

Ensuring that patients referred as urgent by their GPs with a suspected cancer receive their first treatment within 62 days is challenge, and performance remains well below the target set of 95%, being 72.6% in July 2014, 74.0% in August 2014 and 64.5% in September 2014.

The majority of those patients waiting beyond 62 days are waiting within the Urology speciality. Urology services across Northern Ireland remains very challenged and the Health and Social Care Board is leading a service improvement initiative across all Trusts to improve the position.

Department of Justice

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice to detail the number of (i) summonses; (ii) bills of indictment; and (iii) civil bills that were processed in each of the last five years through each of the eight courthouses proposed for closure.
(AQW 41613/11-15)

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): The tables below detail the number of Magistrates' Court summons, bills of indictment and civil bills processed at each of the eight courthouses proposed for closure during the last five years. The tables show the court office in which the cases were processed and does not necessarily reflect the court venue at which the case was heard.

Table 1 – Magistrates' court summonses

Summonses	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014 [P]
Newtownards	2535	2882	2319	2953	3456
Armagh	1320	1317	1403	1142	1014
Strabane	990	1125	1205	1166	1292
Enniskillen	1730	1965	1652	1277	1146
Magherafelt	1082	1017	956	976	832
Ballymena	1254	966	1354	1564	1563
Lisburn	2889	2776	2390	2097	1990
Limavady	1052	1022	853	967	748

Table 2 – Bills of Indictment

Crown Court	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014 [P]
Newtownards	0	0	0	0	0
Armagh	0	0	0	0	0
Strabane	0	0	0	0	0
Enniskillen	0	0	0	0	0
Magherafelt	0	0	0	0	0
Ballymena	0	0	0	0	0
Lisburn	0	0	0	0	0
Limavady	0	0	0	0	0

Table 3 – Civil Bills

Civil Bills	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014 [P]
Newtownards	1103	912	790	844	923
Armagh	0	0	0	0	0
Strabane	0	0	0	0	0
Enniskillen	0	0	0	0	0
Magherafelt	0	0	0	0	0
Ballymena	610	479	570	578	498
Lisburn	0	0	0	0	0
Limavady	0	0	0	0	0

Source: Integrated Court Operations System (ICOS)

P Data are currently provisional and may be subject to change

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice in how many court cases, in 2014, has cash bail been ordered for retreatment in whole or part after a breach but not paid, broken down by court division.
(AQW 41662/11-15)

Mr Ford: The number of court cases in 2014 in which cash bail had been ordered for estreatment in whole or part after a breach but not paid, is detailed in the table below. The information is broken down by court division.

Any outstanding amount will be treated in the same manner as a fine imposed by the court.

Court Division	Number of cases in which estreated bail was not paid
Antrim	2
Ards	4
Armagh and South Down	1
Belfast	10
Craigavon	1
Fermanagh and Tyrone	8
Londonderry	37
High Court	1
Northern Ireland	64

Source: Integrated Court operations System (ICOS)

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 41203/11-15, to detail the projects, including the partners, which have been delivered in East Londonderry to address fear of crime amongst older and vulnerable people, since 2013.
(AQW 41692/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Fear of Crime Strategic Action Plan 2012-14 sets out actions being taken by my Department and delivery partners in relation to reducing fear of crime and helping older and vulnerable people feel safer as outlined in the Community Safety Strategy 2012-2017.

With regard to East Londonderry, Coleraine, Derry and Limavady PCSPs continue to deliver local initiatives to address fear of crime amongst older and vulnerable people. In Derry, the Foyle Safer Homes initiative supplies and fits home security equipment for elderly and vulnerable people. Specific data are not available for the wards in East Londonderry.

Details of the projects delivered since April 2013 to date by Coleraine and Limavady PCSPs are set out below at Annex A.

Annex A
Coleraine PCSP

	Project Title	Date	Partners	Costs
1	**Good Morning Causeway** To help reduce the fear of crime felt by the more isolated and vulnerable members of the community through the provision of a daily telephone support service.	Apr 13 to Mar 14	West Bann Development	£6,000
2	**Causeway VIP Scheme** To supply and fit home security equipment in households identified by the Crime Prevention Officer in the Coleraine Council areas.	Apr 13 to Mar 14	PSNI Crime Prevent Officer Coleraine Borough Council Environmental Services Victim Support NI	£5,750
3	**Age Concern – Generation Now Project** This project contributed to age friendly activities where both younger and older people participated in a range of mutually beneficial and purposeful activities. The project centred on themes of stereotypes, perceptions, fear of crime, prejudice and a shared future to overcome these issues.	Oct 13 to Mar 14	Age Concern Linking Generations	£678.40

	Project Title	Date	Partners	Costs
4	**Age Concern – Safe & Sound Roadshow** The project aimed to improve community safety by tackling anti-social behaviour and the fear of crime through the provision of a Safe & Sound Roadshow. It was delivered at a Town Centre Marquee	Dec 13	Age Concern Staff & Volunteers PCSP Board Members Coleraine Borough Council	£1,215
5	**Intergenerational PCSP Cluster Conference** The conference provided information about LGNI's 'Intergenerational Safer Communities' project. It also give those present an opportunity to reflect on the potential of all-age approaches to contribute to building safer, shared and confident communities It provided a platform to learn about the support that LGNI can provide to organisations in developing inter-generational practice	Jan 2014	PCSP Board Members Age Concern West Bann Development Linking Generations	£1,320
6	**Good Morning Causeway** To help reduce the fear of crime felt by the more isolated and vulnerable members of the community through the provision of a daily telephone support service.	Apr 14 to Mar 15	West Bann Development	£6,000
7	**Causeway VIP Scheme** To supply and fit home security equipment in households identified by the Crime Prevention Officer in the Coleraine Council areas.	Apr 14 to Mar 15	PSNI Crime Prevent Officer Coleraine Borough Council Environmental Services Victim Support NI	£4,000
8	**Intergenerational Project – 'Down the Decades'** This project brought together a range of young & old citizens from within the Coleraine Borough with the aim of breaking down age barriers, perceptions of age groups and in assisting to reduce the fear of crime.	Aug 14 to Dec 14	PCSP Board Members Coleraine Free Presbyterian Church Coleraine Youth Group	£1,750
	Intergenerational Project – Riding for the Disabled (RDA) RDA project aimed to improve relationships between old and young people across the cluster area. They worked in partnership to provide a service to disabled clients and the local community. Breaking down barriers between age groups and perceptions. It assisted in reducing the fear of crime and enhanced greater community safety	Jan 14 to Mar 14	Good Morning Causeway Age Concern Coleraine Rural & Urban Network PSNI PBNI	£4,000
10	**Vulnerable Adult & Older Persons Consultation Exercise** In preparation of and to assist in the delivery of a new Causeway Coast and Glens (CC&G) PCSP Action-plan, Coleraine PCSP wish to appoint a service provider with appropriate expertise to undertake a consultation process with our vulnerable adult and older person population in terms of policing and community safety (including issues relating to the fear of crime). The exercise will include a requirement to provide a suggested range of projects and/or interventions which the new CC&G PCSP may wish to support. The findings will also provide evidence-based research to inform the local police Commander on policing and community safety issues relevant to the new Causeway Coast and Glens Council area in relation to our vulnerable adults and older persons.	Feb 15 to Mar 15	PCSP	£3,500

Limavady PCSP

	Project Title	Date	Partners	Costs
1	**Safe Home** Provision of home security products and advice to elderly and vulnerable people across the Limavady Borough Council area by way of home visits and an annual Safe and Sound Event.	Apr 13 to Mar 14	PSNI Be Safe Be Well.	£6,000
2	**PCSP Themed Public Meeting** Limavady PCSP Policing Committee held a public themed meeting for elderly and vulnerable on Monday 16th September 2013 in Foreglen Community Centre. This meeting was attended by approximately 124 elderly and vulnerable and included engagement, consultation and advice	Sep 2013	PSNI Be Safe Be Well.	£200
3	**Safe Home** Provision of home security products and advice to elderly and vulnerable people across the Limavady Borough Council area by way of home visits and an annual Safe and Sound Event.	Apr 14 to Mar 15	PSNI Be Safe Be Well.	£10,000
4	**Elder Abuse** Initiative focusing on elder abuse was developed and delivered by Limavady PCSP to raise awareness of the issue via the provision of information and advice, specifically focusing on education, harm reduction and signposting to local services	Apr 14 to Mar 15	Be Safe Be Well	£3,000

Coleraine PCSP

	Project Title	Date	Partners	Costs
1	**Good Morning Causeway (Service Level Agreement)** To help reduce the fear of crime felt by the more isolated and vulnerable members of the community The provision of a daily telephone support service to the more vulnerable members of the community.	Apr 13 to Mar 14	West Bann Development	£6,000
2	**Causeway VIP Scheme** To supply and fit home security equipment in households identified by the Crime Prevention Officer in the Coleraine Council areas.	Apr 13 to Mar 14	PSNI Crime Prevent Officer Coleraine Borough Council Environmental Services Victim Support NI	£4,000
3	**Causeway VIP Scheme** To supply and fit home security equipment in households identified by the Crime Prevention Officer in the Coleraine Council areas.	Dec 13 to Mar 14	PSNI Crime Prevent Officer Coleraine Borough Council Environmental Services Victim Support NI	£1,750
4	**Age Concern – Generation Now Project** This project contributed to age friendly activities where both younger and older people participated in a range of mutually beneficial and purposeful activities. The project centred on themes of stereotypes, perceptions, fear of crime, prejudice and a shared future to overcome these issues.	Oct 13 to Mar 14	Age Concern Linking Generations	£678.40 (£750)

	Project Title	Date	Partners	Costs
5	**Age Concern – Safe & Sound Roadshow** The project aimed to improve community safety by tackling anti-social behaviour and the fear of crime through the provision of a Safe & Sound Roadshow. It was delivered at a Town Centre Marquee	Dec 13	Age Concern Staff & Volunteers PCSP Board Members Coleraine Borough Council	£1,215
6	**Intergenerational PCSP Cluster Conference** The conference provided information about LGNI's 'Intergenerational Safer Communities' project. It also give those present an opportunity to reflect on the potential of all-age approaches to contribute to building safer, shared and confident communities It provided a platform to learn about the support that LGNI can provide to organisations in developing inter-generational practice	Jan 2014	PCSP Board Members Age Concern West Bann Development Linking Generations	£1,320
7	**Good Morning Causeway** To help reduce the fear of crime felt by the more isolated and vulnerable members of the community The provision of a daily telephone support service to the more vulnerable members of the community.	Apr 14 to Mar 15	West Bann Development	£6,000
8	**Causeway VIP Scheme** To supply and fit home security equipment in households identified by the Crime Prevention Officer in the Coleraine Council areas.	Apr 14 to Mar 15	PSNI Crime Prevent Officer Coleraine Borough Council Environmental Services Victim Support NI	£4,000
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11	**Vulnerable Adult & Older Persons Consultation Exercise** In preparation of and to assist in the delivery of a new Causeway Coast and Glens (CC&G) PCSP Action-plan, Coleraine PCSP wish to appoint a service provider with appropriate expertise to undertake a consultation process with our vulnerable adult and older person population in terms of policing and community safety (including issues relating to the fear of crime). The exercise will include a requirement to provide a suggested range of projects and/or interventions which the new CC&G PCSP may wish to support. The findings will also provide evidence-based research to inform the local police Commander on policing and community safety issues relevant to the new Causeway Coast and Glens Council area in relation to our vulnerable adults and older persons.	Feb 15 to Mar 15	PCSP	£3,500

Limavady PCSP

	Project Title	Date	Partners	Costs
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2	**PCSP Themed Public Meeting** Limavady PCSP Policing Committee held a public themed meeting for elderly and vulnerable on Monday 16th September 2013 in Foreglen Community Centre. This meeting was attended by approximately 124 elderly and vulnerable and included engagement, consultation and advice	Sep 2013	PSNI Be Safe Be Well.	£0
3	**Safe Home** Provision of home security products and advice to elderly and vulnerable people across the Limavady Borough Council area by way of home visits and an annual Safe and Sound Event.	Apr 14 to Mar 15	PSNI Be Safe Be Well.	£10,000
4	**Elder Abuse** Initiative focusing on elder abuse was developed and delivered by Limavady PCSP to raise awareness of the issue via the provision of information and advice, specifically focusing on education, harm reduction and signposting to local services	Apr 14 to Mar 15	Be Safe Be Well	£3,000

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether there is a requirement or policy for agencies tasked with placing convicted sex offenders in the community, to notify landlords of the circumstances or criminal record in each case.
(AQW 41710/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Public Protection Arrangements in Northern Ireland (PPANI) Manual of Practice provides the procedural guidance for the assessment and management of convicted sex offenders in the community. The Manual specifically provides guidance on disclosure of information to a third party such as a landlord. Any decision to disclose information would be considered as one component in the context of the overall risk assessment and risk management plan in respect of the individual offender.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice why are prisoners in some instances permitted to be released without being suitably rehabilitated; and whether the requirement of rehabilitation engagement could be built into sentences as a mandatory requirement prior to release.
(AQW 41712/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Northern Ireland Prison Service plays its part in building a safer community by working with people in custody to reduce their risk of re-offending.

Determinate sentence prisoners must be released at the end of their sentence; and indeterminate sentence prisoners, having served the period of their tariff, must be released when Parole Commissioners consider it appropriate and safe.

I have no plans to change the law in this regard.

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Justice what is the average length of time taken for a case to be heard in (i) magistrates court; and (ii) crown court, once a decision has been taken to prosecute.
(AQW 41717/11-15)

Mr Ford: During 2013/14, provisional performance data indicates that the average time taken between prosecution, decision and disposal in the Magistrates' Court is 51 days for Charge cases and 83 days for Summons cases (for defendants with one summons only i.e. repeated attempts at the service of a summons are not included). Comparable data for the youth court indicates an average of 70 days between prosecution decision and disposal for Charge cases and 115 days for Summons cases.

In the Crown Court, provisional performance data indicates that the average time between PPS indictable decision to disposal is 232 days.

Cases where the court ordered an Arrest Warrant, Bench Warrant or a deferral against a defendant are excluded from these statistics.

The table below sets out performance against published judicial performance standards for the progression of Crown and magistrates' courts cases. Consequently, backlog has been reported as those cases exceeding the target between April and December 2014.

Performance Standard	Number exceeding standard	% exceeding standard
80% of Crown Court defendants will be arraigned within six weeks of committal	85	6.4%
80% of Crown Court defendants will start their trial within 18 weeks of committal	188	14.1%
80% of Crown Court defendants will be sentenced within six weeks of a plea or a finding of guilt	205	17.8%
80% of magistrates' courts adult defendants will have their case disposed of within nine weeks of first listing	4,027	14.2%
A finding will be reached within 12 weeks from first listing for 80% of youth court defendants	120	11.3%

Source: Integrated Court Operations System (ICOS)

The consultation paper on proposals to rationalise the court estate sets out the arrangements for transferring business and there are no proposals to reduce the current number of scheduled sittings. Capacity will therefore be unchanged. In addition the colocation of judges dealing with a particular type of business offers greater scope for the judges to work collaboratively and deal more effectively with the cases before them.

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Justice what is the current backlog of cases in (i) magistrates court; and (ii) crown court.
(AQW 41718/11-15)

Mr Ford: During 2013/14, provisional performance data indicates that the average time taken between prosecution, decision and disposal in the Magistrates' Court is 51 days for Charge cases and 83 days for Summons cases (for defendants with one summons only i.e. repeated attempts at the service of a summons are not included). Comparable data for the youth court indicates an average of 70 days between prosecution decision and disposal for Charge cases and 115 days for Summons cases.

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A finding will be reached within 12 weeks from first listing for 80% of youth court defendants	120	11.3%

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Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Justice what impact the closure the court houses, which are the subject of his consultation proposals announced on Wednesday 28 January, will have on the backlog of cases currently in the justice system.
(AQW 41719/11-15)

Mr Ford: During 2013/14, provisional performance data indicates that the average time taken between prosecution, decision and disposal in the Magistrates' Court is 51 days for Charge cases and 83 days for Summons cases (for defendants with one

summons only i.e. repeated attempts at the service of a summons are not included). Comparable data for the youth court indicates an average of 70 days between prosecution decision and disposal for Charge cases and 115 days for Summons cases.

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Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Justice to detail the process for registering Power of Attorney in Northern Ireland, compared to the process in England and Wales.
(AQW 41769/11-15)

Mr Ford: In Northern Ireland, an Enduring Power of Attorney (EPA) enables a Donor to appoint a person to deal with their property and affairs. Subject to any conditions imposed by the Donor, the EPA can take effect as soon as it is signed by the Attorney. If the Donor becomes mentally incapable of managing their affairs, the EPA will remain valid provided that it is registered with the High Court (Office of Care and Protection). Registration is not required until the point where the Attorney believes the Donor is no longer capable of managing their affairs.

In England and Wales the EPA was replaced with a Lasting Power of Attorney (LPA) in 2007. There are two types of LPA, a property and financial affairs LPA and a health and welfare LPA. The Donor can set up one or both.

LPAs must be registered with the Office of the Public Guardian before they can be used. The health and welfare LPA can only be used when the Donor is unable to make their own decisions.

Information about the procedures in both jurisdictions is available on the government websites, NIdirect and Gov.uk.

Mr Ramsey asked the Minister of Justice which of the recommendations made by the independent assessment team on Roe House have been implemented.
(AQW 41770/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Northern Ireland Prison Service accepted the nine recommendations within its responsibility and continues to work towards their implementation. The Prison Service is fully committed to that ongoing process.

As said previously the implementation of the recommendations of the Stocktake Report is a responsibility shared by the Prison Service and the prisoners themselves.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice in how many court cases in 2014 has cash bail been estreated in whole or part after a breach, broken down by court division.
(AQW 41788/11-15)

Mr Ford: The number of court cases in 2014 in which cash bail been estreated in whole or part after a breach is presented in the table below. This information is broken down by court division.

Court Division	Number of cases in which bail was estreated
Antrim	2
Ards	7
Armagh and South Down	11
Belfast	12
Craigavon	4
Fermanagh and Tyrone	15
Londonderry	38
High Court	1
Northern Ireland	90

Source: Integrated Court operations System (ICOS)

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice (i) what onus is placed upon parents or guardians to ensure that the bail conditions of a young person in their guardianship are monitored and adhered to; (ii) what action can be taken against parents, guardians or others for failing to appropriately monitor young persons in these circumstances; and (iii) whether this also applies to young people residing in care facilities.
(AQW 41791/11-15)

Mr Ford: The granting of bail and any conditions set is a matter for the judiciary, while the monitoring of bail conditions is an operational matter for the PSNI.

In cases where court bail for a child requires a surety, then that surety would normally be a parent or guardian, where that person is available and appropriate. In such cases, the parent or guardian is required to ensure that the child appears at court on every occasion the case is listed and abides by any bail conditions which may be imposed, otherwise any recognizance agreed by the surety may be forfeited.

The Youth Justice Agency assists in the supervision, surveillance and support of young people subject to bail in specific cases where the court has requested it. This may include conditions relating to parental involvement. In situations where there has been no specific mention of parent/guardian responsibility in bail conditions, the Agency's dedicated Bail Support and Supervision Team, in partnership with the PSNI Reducing Offending Unit teams, will seek to work alongside the young person's support systems in order to maximise adherence to their bail conditions.

In the case of young people residing in care facilities, this is a matter for the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice to detail the total costs of each courthouse in each of the last five years.
(AQW 41801/11-15)

Mr Ford: Total costs for every courthouse within the court estate in each of the last five years are detailed below. Costs include maintenance, upkeep, capital expenditure and depreciation costs but excludes staff costs.

	2009-10 £	2010-11 £	2011-12 £	2012-13 £	2013-14 £
Belfast					
Royal Court of Justice	3,575,778	3,894,150	3,850,671	3,650,290	3,699,148
Laganside Courts Complex	8,151,324	7,838,214	7,746,770	7,847,693	7,743,661
Old Town Hall	972,353	814,034	828,067	727,435	709,776
Mays Chambers (NI Coroners Service)	970,643	1,141,870	1,363,967	1,144,465	2,085,224
Division of Antrim					
Ballymena Court Office	1,023,139	1,992,274	897,951	809,009	730,782
Coleraine Court Office	976,786	1,003,451	963,573	1,062,480	815,218
Antrim Court Office	1,958,986	1,500,199	1,529,383	1,668,008	1,703,750
Larne Court Office	191,796	154,558	154,279	147,529	104,432
Division of Armagh & South Down					

	2009-10 £	2010-11 £	2011-12 £	2012-13 £	2013-14 £
Armagh Court Office	542,088	705,472	691,919	689,274	735,973
Newry Court Office	1,623,702	1,864,221	1,641,553	1,756,918	1,400,432
Banbridge Court Office	125,071	47,541	57,372	48,288	65,909
Division of Craigavon					
Craigavon Court Office	1,139,709	1,666,665	1,388,247	1,891,568	1,208,442
Lisburn Court Office	501,054	627,179	566,544	551,764	419,306
Division of Londonderry					
Londonderry Court Office	1,644,971	1,601,849	1,443,780	1,427,451	1,381,628
Limavady Court Office	190,169	189,077	140,218	108,182	110,625
Magherafelt Court Office	279,448	198,197	252,907	210,685	189,996
Division of Ards					
Newtownards Court Office	686,197	1,162,016	1,044,478	837,403	677,464
Bangor Court Office	235,517	189,716	191,869	159,400	81,025
Downpatrick Court Office	1,036,449	932,985	987,323	960,048	927,752
Division of Fermanagh & Tyrone					
Omagh Court Office	789,835	1,118,368	1,041,276	824,414	787,441
Enniskillen Court Office	451,066	423,763	433,400	483,844	331,750
Strabane Court Office	203,525	263,110	308,409	276,031	263,398
Dungannon Court Office	1,601,261	1,602,532	1,455,343	1,691,345	1,466,183
	28,870,867	**30,931,439**	**28,979,299**	**28,973,525**	**27,639,314**

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice how many cases were held in each courthouse in each of the last five years.
(AQW 41802/11-15)

Mr Ford: Details of the number of criminal, civil and family cases dealt with in each court office in each of the last five years are outlined below.

Criminal Cases[1] Disposed, by Court Office: 2010 to 2014[P]

Court Office	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014[P]
Antrim	2,552	2,308	1,873	1,788	1,586
Armagh	1,373	1,352	1,442	1,170	1,047
Ballymena	1,344	1,008	1,419	1,628	1,608
Banbridge	1,239	910	920	749	765
Coleraine	3,022	2,782	2,505	2,552	1,947
Craigavon	3,199	3,195	3,352	3,058	2,833
Downpatrick	1,992	2,309	1,858	1,755	1,724
Dungannon	3,216	3,286	3,008	2,318	1,978
Enniskillen	1,856	2,073	1,749	1,448	1,249
Laganside	16,587	17,704	17,758	15,377	13,645
Limavady	1,068	1,045	873	992	774
Lisburn	3,009	2,913	2,533	2,197	2,072
Londonderry	3,462	3,666	4,196	4,372	4,004
Magherafelt	1,122	1,065	1,001	1,016	865

Court Office	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014[P]
Newry	3,673	3,922	3,651	2,984	2,794
Newtownards	2,741	3,098	2,547	3,217	3,696
Omagh	2,314	2,316	2,185	1,772	1,545
Strabane	1,042	1,177	1,240	1,201	1,324
Total	**54,811**	**56,129**	**54,110**	**49,594**	**45,456**

Source: Integrated Court Operations System (ICOS)

1 Include criminal cases disposed in the Crown, Adult Magistrates' and Youth Magistrates' Court.

P Data are currently provisional and may be subject to change.

Civil Cases[2] Disposed, by Court Office: 2010 to 2014[P]

Court Office	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014[P]
Antrim	32	53	66	24	50
Armagh	246	215	230	209	125
Ballymena	1,053	764	1,105	993	790
Banbridge	0	0	0	1	0
Coleraine	107	313	91	12	45
Craigavon	864	977	743	527	539
Downpatrick	61	42	150	179	145
Dungannon	7	18	36	39	39
Enniskillen	310	231	244	234	155
Laganside	4,148	3,998	4,230	3,446	4,262
Limavady	1	0	1	4	2
Lisburn	404	220	398	400	418
Londonderry	1,083	846	845	801	632
Magherafelt	2	5	7	6	14
Newry	843	645	587	545	623
Newtownards	1,680	1,642	1,334	1,202	1,301
Omagh	866	666	580	586	633
Strabane	3	3	11	2	8
Total	**11,710**	**10,638**	**10,658**	**9,210**	**9,781**

Source: Integrated Court Operations System (ICOS)

2 Includes small claims and ordinary civil bill cases disposed in the County Court. Excludes business disposed in the Civil Processing Centre.

P Data are currently provisional and may be subject to change.

Family Cases[3] Disposed by Court Office: 2010 to 2014[P]

Court Office	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014[P]
Antrim	127	200	22	12	7
Armagh	139	123	160	115	120
Ballymena	558	464	670	635	681
Banbridge	1	0	0	0	2
Coleraine	117	153	108	126	109
Craigavon	499	599	499	562	592

Court Office	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014[P]
Downpatrick	11	10	3	1	10
Dungannon	439	463	468	385	391
Enniskillen	0	0	1	2	0
Laganside	1,715	1,930	2,189	2,005	2,209
Limavady	1	2	2	2	0
Lisburn	343	427	314	363	341
Londonderry	759	695	638	702	641
Magherafelt	1	3	3	0	1
Newry	385	481	515	426	434
Newtownards	790	814	922	1,175	1,247
Omagh	11	5	12	8	12
Strabane	0	0	0	0	0
Total	**5,896**	**6,369**	**6,526**	**6,519**	**6,797**

Source: Integrated Court Operations System (ICOS)

3 Includes Children Order Applications disposed in the Family Proceedings Courts and Family Care Centres and Decrees Nisi granted in the County Court.

P Data are currently provisional and may be subject to change.

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister of Justice to detail the departmental spend on translators to facilitate non-English speaking persons in (i) 2011-12; (ii) 2012-13; and (iii) 2013-14.
(AQW 41850/11-15)

Mr Ford: Spend by the Department of Justice, including its agencies but not its arm's-length bodies, on translators to facilitate non-English speaking persons in

(i) 2011-12, (ii) 2012-13; and (iii) 2013-14 is shown in the table below.

2011-12	2012-13	2013-14
£635,733	£531,587	£534,778

These figures exclude expenditure on written translation and sign language.

A small element of travel time costs may be included within these figures.

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Justice how much has been spent on maintenance and repairs for Ballymena Courthouse in each of the last five years; and to list the items of work.
(AQW 41861/11-15)

Mr Ford: Total costs for maintenance and repairs for Ballymena courthouse in each of the last five years are outlined below. The majority of spend each year is allocated to planned maintenance works which includes statutory testing in relation to Legionella prevention and Fire Alarm testing. Grounds maintenance, pest control and external cleaning also fall under the maintenance spend. Major items of work carried out in 2010 – 2012 included a replacement boiler, internal signage, fixed wire testing and a refurbishment programme including repairs to the roof and disability access upgrades.

	Maintenance & Repairs (£)	Work Items
2009-10	425,178.17	■ Annual Planned Maintenance.* ■ Refurbishment Project ■ Feasibility and scoping exercise commissioned to assess work required to refurbish the Courthouse due to damp and Health & Safety issues.

	Maintenance & Repairs (£)	Work Items
2010-11	1,277,254.76	■ Annual Planned Maintenance work.* ■ Refurbishment Project ■ A section of the roof was water-proofed. Affected areas were re-wired and re-plastered. Installation of a new Fire alarm system and upgrading of the Custody Suite. ■ DDA Adjustments ■ Installation of a disabled toilet and 2 new lifts.
2011-12	138,321.86	■ Annual Planned Maintenance work.* ■ Fixed wire testing ■ New Boiler ■ CCTV upgrade ■ Security enhancements
2012-13	134,163.33	■ Annual Planned Maintenance work.* ■ Asbestos survey ■ Adjustments to Custody Suites to ensure compliance with Corporate Manslaughter and Corporate Homicide legislation. ■ Installation of security bollards.
2013-14	71,171.54	■ Annual Planned Maintenance work.* ■ Heating pump replaced. ■ External steps resurfaced with anti-slip covering to comply with Health & Safety legislation.

* The annual Planned Maintenance Programme includes: Legionella prevention; maintenance of fire alarms and fire suppression systems; Portable appliance testing; air conditioning and air handling ventilation and ductwork maintenance; maintenance of emergency lighting; boiler house and fuel storage maintenance ; maintenance of the security system; grounds maintenance; lift inspection and maintenance; pest control; external cleaning; window cleaning; window and door inspections.

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Justice to detail the departmental and arm's-length body buildings that are equipped with defibrillators; and how many staff in each of these buildings are trained in (i) the use of defibrillators; and (ii) C.P.R.
(AQW 41870/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Department of Justice occupies a mixture of Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) owned, leased and DOJ owned property. The following tables list the buildings occupied by DOJ Core and arm's length bodies that are equipped with defibrillators.

DOJ Core

Building	Number of Staff Trained in Use of Defibrillators	Number of Staff Trained in CPR
Castle Buildings	8	5

Arms-Length Bodies

Building	Number of Staff Trained in Use of Defibrillators	Number of Staff Trained in CPR
Maryfield Complex, Holywood	14	8

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 40694/11-15, (i) why was the verbal statement of mistaken identity issued through his departmental agencies permitted, but a written statement refused; (ii) what grade of staff within the relevant agencies authorised this verbal statement, but decided it could not be affirmed in writing; and (iii) was the manner of providing this information procedurally erroneous.
(AQW 41875/11-15)

Mr Ford: As outlined in my answers to all the previous questions on this matter Probation Board for Northern Ireland does not comment or issue statements in respect of specific cases. There was no procedural error.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 40183/11-15, as this case has concluded and reporting restrictions have been removed, will he answer the original question.
(AQW 41876/11-15)

Mr Ford: The case had been listed for trial and subsequently taken out of the list on nine separate occasions. The listing of a case is a judicial function.

Three trials were started and subsequently stopped at the direction of the trial Judge. The first two trials were stopped for legal reasons; the third trial was stopped as a number of jurors knew a witness in the case. The trial was then moved to Belfast to avoid further juror issues.

In this case the complainant has an automatic right to lifetime anonymity and therefore nothing can be reported that could lead to the complainant being identified.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 41233/11-15, whether he will review his answer specifically in respect of the statement that the bollards are considered to be operationally reliable and fulfil their function of minimising the security risk to the courthouse; and if so (i) how many bollards are broken; (ii) when were they reported broken; (iii) when they will be fixed; (iv) when was the last time all bollards were fully functional; and (v) when were the bollards last used.
(AQW 41878/11-15)

Mr Ford: I do not intend to review my previous answer. It is not the policy of my Department to comment in detail on security matters.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 41604/11-15, (i) in the event of a non-disabled blue badge holder refusing to move, what is the procedure; (ii) why is there no enforcement; (iii) in absence of enforcement whether his Department or the Court Service fully compliant with disability law; and (iv) what action is being taken to deal with this disparity.
(AQW 41879/11-15)

Mr Ford: The blue badge scheme is administered by Transport NI and provides concessions for on street parking. The scheme does not apply to off-street car parks, or private roads. The Department of Justice and the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service (NICTS) do not have powers to enforce the blue badge scheme. In line with disability legislation, NICTS makes reasonable adjustments for disabled users of its services. Disabled persons who must attend court are made aware that they may contact the court in advance to ensure steps are taken to accommodate them. All car park users are encouraged to act responsibly and observe the rights of disabled persons.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice (i) what agencies are involved in the community management of Owen Roe McDermott and James McDermott; (ii) who risk assessed their current residence and classed it suitable; (iii) whether it is normal practice for offenders of this nature to be housed close to a school; and (iv) whether he will order a review into the management and structures of decision-making of this and similar cases.
(AQW 41947/11-15)

Mr Ford: PSNI are the designated risk managers with support from the Western Health and Social Care Trust. There is a risk management plan which is tailored to the circumstances of the individuals and the risk they present to the public and their location has been carefully considered as part of the risk management process.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice what consideration has been given to the publication of photographs of persons wanted by bench or arrest warrant following failures to attend court, particularly in relation to serious allegations and convictions awaiting sentencing,
(AQW 41949/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Police Service of Northern Ireland may photograph persons detained under The Police and Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order 1989 in connection with the investigation of an offence. Any decision to publish photographs for other purposes would be an operational matter for the PSNI.

I am committed to respecting the operational independence of the Chief Constable and the role of the Policing Board. You may wish to direct your question to the PSNI.

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 41076/11-15, (i) what actions are being implemented to deal with the increasing number of drug smuggling cases in Magilligan and Hydebank; (ii) what actions followed the 2013 spike in Magheraberry; (iii) whether prison service staff are liasing with PSNI in relation to drug smuggling in prisons; and (iv) how these illicit drugs are being brought into prisons.
(AQW 41997/11-15)

Mr Ford:

(i) The rise in drug finds at Hydebank and Magilligan is explained by the move away from randomly selected searches of prisoners and cells to an intelligence led process. There is a real and concerted effort by the Northern Ireland Prison Service to address substance misuse based around a three strand approach – to restrict supply, to reduce demand and to assist recovery.

(ii) This spike is also explained by the new searching methods. The misuse of drugs is robustly challenged with searching and sanctions (including prosecution by PSNI) and with support for those with drug dependencies.

(iii) NIPS and PSNI have well embedded processes for working together in challenging illegal behaviour in prisons; PSNI staff are based in each prison.

(iv) There are a number of known methods for smuggling drugs into prisons, Procedural security exists to deter those who might attempt to smuggle drugs and prevent trafficking where possible. The current review of the NIPS Drugs Strategy will consider how this can be improved in the future and the completion of physical improvements to the main search areas for goods and individuals entering the prison will strengthen capability.

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 41134/11-15, to detail the (i) disciplinary action against prisoners who have breached prison rules in the last four years; (ii) prosecution of prisoners for offences committed whilst in custody in the last four years; and (iii) convictions following such prosecutions.
(AQW 41998/11-15)

Mr Ford:

(i) Any prisoner found to be in breach of prison rules may be placed on report and subject to an adjudication heard by a Governor. The sanctions that the Governor may award for a guilty verdict range from a caution to a maximum of 14 days cellular confinement. Other sanctions include fines, loss of privileges and loss of privileged visits. (ii) and (iii) My Department does not hold this information.

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Justice what assessments have been carried out since the power to randomly search a prisoner was removed from prison staff.
(AQW 42049/11-15)

Mr Ford: Searching is now more focused on intelligence and not on random selection by computer. However, all prison officers continue to have the authority to search any prisoner that they reasonably suspect may be concealing an illicit or unauthorised article.

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Justice how many searches have been conducted in each prison in each of the last five years.
(AQW 42050/11-15)

Mr Ford: The number of searches conducted in each prison for the stated time is set out below.

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Maghaberry	25821	43769	42256	47527	24976
Magilligan	27162	35361	33002	24546	17545
Hydebank	15409	12721	12579	10600	8754

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Justice how prisoner on staff or prisoner on prisoner assaults are recorded; and how his Department categorises assaults.
(AQW 42051/11-15)

Mr Ford: In the case of staff, assaults are recorded in Accident Books. All assaults, including those involving prisoner on prisoner, are recorded on the NIPS IT system. What constitutes an assault will be open to the interpretation of those involved in an incident, but NIPS examines each case to ensure that records are accurate and appropriate action is taken.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice what lessons the Prison Service has learnt from the recent protest at Maghaberry prison.
(AQW 42063/11-15)

Mr Ford: As is normal practice, following any serious incident in a prison, the Northern Ireland Prison Service will conduct a review to establish the exact facts surrounding the incident and what lessons might be learnt.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice whether the Prison Service has conducted a review of security after the recent protest at Maghaberry prison.
(AQW 42064/11-15)

Mr Ford: As is normal practice, following any serious incident in a prison, the Northern Ireland Prison Service will conduct a review to establish the exact facts surrounding the incident and what lessons might be learnt.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice whether he has met with the Chief Constable to discuss the recent protest at Maghaberry prison.
(AQW 42065/11-15)

Mr Ford: I met with a Chief Superintendent from the Police Service of Northern Ireland on Wednesday 11 February. The recent protest at Maghaberry was discussed at that meeting.

The Director General of the Northern Ireland Prison Service has also discussed the protest with the Deputy Chief Constable.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice what assessment has been made of the impact on the timescales for hearing court cases as a result of the closure of Newtownards courthouse.
(AQW 42067/11-15)

Mr Ford: The consultation paper sets out the arrangements for transferring business from Newtownards to Belfast and there are no proposals to reduce the current number of scheduled sittings. Capacity will therefore be unchanged.

In addition the colocation of judges dealing with a particular type of business offers greater scope for the judges to work collaboratively and deal more effectively with the cases before them. Case progression and timescales will continue to be closely monitored.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 41194/11-15, (i) why these costs are not known; and (ii) whether he will order an audit to establish these publicly funded costs.
(AQW 42076/11-15)

Mr Ford: Record accounting for income and expenditure must be retained for seven years. Given that this expenditure was incurred in 2005 it falls outside the retention period and therefore no audit can take place.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice following the dissident republican prisoner actions in Roe House and the associated protest outside HMP Maghaberry, how many prisoners have been charged with offences; and what are the nature of the offences.
(AQW 42083/11-15)

Mr Ford: One prisoner has been charged with the offence of “Disobeys a Lawful Order (Rule 32 Paragraph 22)” as a result of the incident in Roe House on 2 February 2015.

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Justice to list the consultancy firms that provided financial services to his Department in each of the last five years; and the amount paid to each firm for these services.
(AQW 42096/11-15)

Mr Ford: External consultancy expenditure by the Department of Justice (DOJ) is included in the Annual Compliance Report on the Use of External Consultants which is published annually by the Department of Finance and Personnel and is available on their web site www.dfpni.gov.uk.These figures include the Department, its Agencies and its arm’s length bodies. Please note 2013/14 figures are not yet published.

For convenience the table below shows DOJ external consultancy expenditure since the Department came into existence in April 2010. The names of consultancy firms have been withheld in line with DOJ policy.

2010-11	£1.69m
2011-12	£0.53m
2012-13	£0.30m
2013-14	£0.21m

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Justice whether employees affected by the proposals to close eight courthouses will be offered alternative employment or offered redundancy terms.
(AQW 42128/11-15)

Mr Ford: There will be no requirement for redundancies as a result of the proposals. However, all eligible Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service (NICTS) staff will have the opportunity to apply to the Public Sector Voluntary Exit Scheme when it is introduced. Any redeployment of NICTS employees would be subject to the protections provided under existing Northern Ireland Civil Service policies and procedures, taking into account individual circumstances.

The rationalisation would also reduce the level of contracted services currently provided although the impact on jobs is a matter for those contractors.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice what was the operating cost of the Ministerial car in each of the last three financial years.
(AQW 42140/11-15)

Mr Ford: Costs for the Ministerial Car used by the Minister for Justice are covered by the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

These costs are not recharged to the Department.

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Justice what action his Department is taking to ensure that relatives of prisoners have access to transport to and from Magilligan and Maghaberry prisons.
(AQW 42147/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) supports and provides a range of services to assist relatives of prisoners in maintaining contact with family members in custody. This includes the transport service currently provided by NIACRO to each prison establishment.

With the recent confirmation of the departmental budget for 2015-16, my officials are currently working to determine what level of resources will be available to fund services provided by the Voluntary and Community Sector. One of the priority areas where this funding will be targeted is supporting the families of prisoners.

Once the level of funding is confirmed, my officials will be working with Voluntary and Community Sector organisations to identify those services which can best assist in maintaining family links while people are in custody.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 2730/11-15 and AQW 27299/11-15, (i) whether the September 2013 transitional Professional Code of Ethics and Values and Code of Conduct were reviewed and updated by October 2014, as was pledged; (ii) whether any amendments have been promulgated to prison staff; (iii) if so, on what date; and (iii) to place a copy list of all incorporated amendments in the Assembly Library.
(AQW 42158/11-15)

Mr Ford: Once the new Codes became operational it became apparent to the Northern Ireland Prison Service that for any review to be meaningful these internal NIPS documents needed to be in operation for longer than 12 months. This review process has now commenced and will be completed in due course.

Once this review has been completed Prison staff will be made aware of any documents that have been revised and any revised documents will be placed in the Assembly library.

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Justice what discussions he has had with Executive colleagues on the retention of the Supporting People Programme.
(AQW 42209/11-15)

Mr Ford: I have not discussed the retention of the Supporting People Programme with Executive colleagues. I understand that the Department for Social Development-led review of the Supporting People Programme will bring forward recommendations to improve its effectiveness and efficiency; there are no plans to stop the Programme. Officials in my Department and the Probation Board for Northern Ireland work directly with the Northern Ireland Housing Executive to ensure that the accommodation needs of people who have offended or are at risk of offending are addressed via the Supporting People Programme.

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Justice whether he requested and received a savings delivery plan that set out the impact of saving measures on service delivery and an assessment of section 75 equality impacts, prior to the prioritisation of budget cuts.
(AQW 42232/11-15)

Mr Ford: Draft Savings Delivery Plans were completed by each DOJ spending area prior to the finalisation of 2015-16 budgets. All spending areas have now been asked to update their Plans, based on their final budget allocation, including section 75 equality impacts. A final version of the consolidated DOJ Savings Delivery Plan will then be presented to the Justice Committee and published.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice what steps are being taken to reduce prison costs.
(AQW 42262/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Northern Ireland Prison Service is taking all steps possible to reduce costs in prisons, and to live within current budget allocations. Some of the actions taken and underway include the Voluntary Early Retirement Scheme, reduction in estates and utilities expenditure, a review of Headquarters functions, and a review of service providers.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice what rate Prison Service staff are paid for excess leave.
(AQW 42354/11-15)

Mr Ford: I refer the Member to the answer provided to AQWs 34595, 34596 and 34597.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice what policy the Prison Service has in place for payment of excess leave to staff; and to outline the rationale for the policy.
(AQW 42355/11-15)

Mr Ford: I refer the Member to the answer provided to AQWs 35321 and 35323.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice who many hours per annual leave day were paid to Prison Service staff, who had remained in service, compared to those who had left under the voluntary retirment scheme, as per the Northern Ireland Civil Service; and to outline the reasons for any difference in the rates.
(AQW 42356/11-15)

Mr Ford: I refer the Member to the answers provided to AQWs 34595, 34596, 34597, 35321 and 35323.

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister of Justice to outline the impact of the proposed closure of Newtownards courthouse.
(AQO 7616/11-15)

Mr Ford: With permission Speaker/Deputy Speaker I will take questions 1, 9, 11, 12 and 13 together, and I will require an additional minute for this answer.

On 29 January I launched a consultation exercise aimed at seeking the views of the public on the closure of up to eight courthouses across Northern Ireland. The consultation has been launched against the backdrop of the Executive's Programme for Public Sector Reform and Restructuring.

In the context of a significant reduction in funding available to my Department it has been necessary to reduce budget allocations to all spending areas including the NI Courts and Tribunals Service. It is simply no longer sustainable to operate 20 courthouses in a place the size of Northern Ireland.

In response the NI Courts and Tribunals Service has established a Modernisation Programme aimed at ensuring the organisation is structured and resourced to provide an efficient and effective service that is affordable.

The Programme will involve a comprehensive review of current processes and practices with a view to designing an enhanced, integrated and affordable service delivery model. NICTS is also seeking to rationalise the court estate in order to deliver efficiencies and to ensure that a reduced estate is used to its maximum potential.

The recently published consultation document explains in detail how rationalisation could be achieved. The NICTS has strategically reviewed the current court estate to identify venues which could be closed and business transferred to an alternative court venue with minimal impact and ensuring continuing efficient and effective service delivery.

The proposals seek to make greater use of the more modern or larger court buildings within the court estate. The transfer of business from Newtownards to Laganside Courts, for example, will afford court users, including victims and witnesses, a better standard of facilities and accommodation. There is also a proposal for a dedicated Family Court Centre in Belfast.

In relation to impact and delays, there are no proposals to reduce the current number of scheduled sittings. Capacity will therefore be unchanged. In addition the colocation of judges dealing with a particular type of business offers greater scope for the judges to work collaboratively and deal more effectively with the cases before them.

Under the proposals there would be a number of Local Government Districts, including Mid and East Antrim, which will not have a court building. It is important to note that there is no requirement for each council area to have a courthouse, nor is it the case that there is a courthouse within each of the existing local government districts.

I look forward to receiving and will consider carefully the views of the public following the closure of the consultation exercise on 30 April.

Mr Dickson asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the development of facilities for female prisoners at Hydebank Wood.
(AQO 7610/11-15)

Mr Ford: Following approval of the Strategic Outline Case by the Department of Finance and Personnel in July 2014, NIPS Officials are in the process of finalising an Outline Business Case for a new women's facility at Hydebank.

I am pleased to advise the House that work to construct a step-down facility on the Hydebank Wood site for women prisoners nearing the end of their sentence and preparing to return to the community has started. This facility should be available by the late summer.

Work to upgrade the facilities in Ash House was completed in September 2014. The new facility, known as Ornella, provides a range of additional educational, training and support services for female prisoners.

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Justice when he will publish a response to the consultation process on the termination of pregnancy in respect of lethal foetal abnormality and sexual crime.
(AQO 7611/11-15)

Mr Ford: A large number of responses to the consultation have been received, including detailed submissions from the relevant medical professional bodies. Although the process of analysing these responses is not yet complete, and I do not want to pre-

empt the outcome, it is my understanding at this stage that the main professional medical bodies have not raised any issues about the ability of clinicians to diagnose accurately foetal conditions which are lethal.

A full assessment of these responses will be reflected in the summary document which I hope to publish as soon as possible.

Mr Girvan asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the changes made to the Police Pension Reform.
(AQO 7612/11-15)

Mr Ford: Pension Reform is not a DOJ proposal. My Department is simply putting in place regulations to give effect to the Public Service Pensions Act (Northern Ireland) 2014, as agreed by the Assembly.

The new 2015 police pension scheme which gives effect to the Public Service Pensions Act (Northern Ireland) 2014, as agreed by the Assembly, will mirror much of the existing pension scheme.

The main changes are:

- The new pension scheme is upon career average revalued earnings, rather than final salary; While normal pension age is 60, members may retire at age 55 with actuarial reduction; and will be given the option to work beyond 60 with actuarial advancement.

The Regulations are subject to the negative resolution process and it is anticipated that they will be laid next week.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Justice to outline the role the National Crime Agency will have in tackling diesel laundering operations especially in border areas.
(AQO 7614/11-15)

Mr Ford: Excise evasion on fuel is a reserved matter and, therefore, is already within the remit of the National Crime Agency. The lead agency is HM Revenue and Customs. It can call on the National Crime Agency for support and additional expertise where necessary.

There are however many areas the NCA has been unable to undertake since 7 October 2013, including operational support to PSNI and civil recovery in the devolved arena.

Department for Regional Development

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what is the estimated cost to repair the broken street lights in North Down.
(AQW 40880/11-15)

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): The estimated cost to repair the broken street lights in North Down is typically in the range of £30 to £50 per inoperative light. The actual cost will depend on the type and wattage of lamp or other components required, and factors such as the lantern mounting height and traffic management arrangements.

Most street lighting lamp replacements can be completed under ‘mobile working’ arrangements, with minimal signing. However, in certain cases where traffic conditions demand it, additional traffic management arrangements must be established which adds to the costs.

Mr Humphrey asked the Minister for Regional Development what the average time period is for the repair of faulty street lights, following the fault having been reported.
(AQW 40966/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: In normal circumstances, the majority of street lighting repairs are carried out within five working days of the fault being reported.

However, as you will be aware, due to the pressures on my Department’s resource budget, I had to suspend the use of external contractors for routine street lighting repairs on 8 August 2014, but my Department’s staff continued to fix as many street lights as possible and a significant backlog of defective lights has been developing since last August.

This is not the service that my Department wished to provide, however, I could not spend money that I did not have. I made bids for the money needed to repair street lighting at every possible opportunity throughout this financial year, but it was only in the latest Monitoring Round in January that the Executive finally provided the funding required, allowing the normal street lighting repair arrangements to resume.

I have immediately reinstated the use of external contractors to carry out street lighting repairs, to supplement my Department’s internal resources, and I am committed to having the backlog cleared as quickly as possible.

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on his Department’s plans for a Holywood arches bypass.
(AQW 41227/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan identified the Holywood Arches Bypass and the Connsbank Link as works to be provided by private developers seeking improved linkages to Titanic Quarter. Protection lines were included in the Belfast Urban Area Plan and draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan. However, the funding source originally envisaged for both schemes no longer remains in place and in the current economic climate with no funding identified for their delivery, neither of these proposals will be taken forward.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Regional Development what is meant by the term 'income generating options for NI Water' in his Budget 2015-16.
(AQW 41515/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: As part of the 2015-16 Budget Consultation process my Department requested that NI Water assess the impact of operating with substantially less funding than indicated through the Price Control process. I asked the Company to consider all options which could potentially reduce that gap including additional savings and increasing their income stream from current activities and charging levels. I would clarify that this would not involve the implementation of water charges for domestic customers which the Executive has decided to continue to defer.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the consideration of extending the railway line from Portadown to Dungannon, Omagh, Enniskillen and Sligo.
(AQW 41577/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I am committed to the future development of our rail network and will be exploring all funding opportunities to deliver the proposals of the Railway Investment Prioritisation Strategy, including proposals for feasibility studies of a number of possible extensions. The extent to which such feasibility studies can be taken forward will be very much dependent upon the availability of additional funding in future budgets.

As stated in my strategy document however the costs of providing rail services directly to Enniskillen and Strabane are likely to be prohibitive over the lifetime of this strategy. Extensions west along the road network on the A6 in the vicinity of the Castledawson roundabout and either the M1/A4 or A3/A29 corridors in the vicinity of Dungannon and Armagh could provide more affordable and viable options, particularly given the significant number of commuters currently using the A6 and A4 corridors.

Furthermore extending rail links across the border into Donegal and Sligo would only be an option if the Irish Government created the lines to link with those in Northern Ireland. I note that Irish Rail in the company's "2030 Rail Network Strategy Review" stated that the proposal to create new rail connections from the west into Northern Ireland would not be economically viable.

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister for Regional Development what monies are included for his Department in the final 2015/16 budget; and how this will impact upon funding for Translink town services.
(AQW 41625/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Final Budget provided my Department with £333.6 million non-ring fenced resource and £328.3 million Capital. However, as you will be aware substantial cuts have been enforced across all departments through the Budget 2015-16 settlement. In the case of my own Department we are facing non-ring fenced Resource DEL pressures in the region of £65 million, around 19% of my Department's non ring fenced DEL. This makes the task of maintaining public transport services a very difficult one, particularly when balanced against maintaining other essential services provided by my Department and its ALBs, including water, sewerage, streetlighting and road maintenance, all of which have considerable implications for public health and safety.

The additional £5 million allocation provided in the Final Budget for 'town bus services and road repair programmes' is a welcome one and will considerably ease the impact on town services across Northern Ireland.

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the future sustainability of the Newcastle and Downpatrick Translink town services, in light of the recent budget announcements.
(AQW 41626/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: During the draft budget consultation for my Department one possible result of the drastic reduction in budget highlighted was the potential withdrawal of some town services and potential service reductions and consolidation of others.

The financial constraints are so great next year there are no doubt difficult decisions ahead.

The detailed implication of the budget for 2015/16 is yet to be worked out. There will be difficult decisions to make.

In light of the new agreed budget position Translink is currently reviewing its overall levels of service provision, with all local bus services currently being considered, with the aim of conducting consultation with local representatives in due course.

Details will be advised via the Translink website, by correspondence directly to elected representatives and locally in Translink passenger facilities.

It is anticipated that this process will be communicated in the near future.

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Regional Development, following the planning application by NI Water for an Integrated Constructed Wetland operation at Shackleton Barracks, Ballykelly, what is the estimated cost of the (i) installation; and (ii) annual running costs.
(AQW 41659/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: NI Water's Integrated Constructed Wetland application for the Shackleton Barracks site at Ballykelly has an estimated cost for installation of £3.4 million. Annual running costs are estimated to be approximately £45,000.

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Regional Development for a gender breakdown of the directors, including non-executive directors, serving on (i) Northern Ireland Transport Holding Company; (NITHC); (ii) the eight companies under the remit of the NITHC; and (iii) NI Water.
(AQW 41694/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I can advise that the current Board of the Northern Ireland Transport Holding Company (NITHC) comprises six Non-Executive Directors (5 male and 1 female) and two Executive Directors (both male). The Board members also act Directors for NITHC's subsidiary companies.

The current Board of Northern Ireland Water consists of five Non-Executive Directors (all male) and four Executive Directors (3 male and 1 female).

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the value of capital investment in roads in each region over the last ten years.
(AQW 41695/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department analyses capital investment in road infrastructure by District Council. Details of expenditure, in each of the last ten financial years, are provided in the table below:

District Council Area	**2004-05 £k**	**2005-06 £k**	**2006-07 £k**	**2007-08 £k**	**2008-09 £k**	**2009-10 £k**	**2010-11 £k**	**2011-12 £k**	**2012-13 £k**	**2013-14 £k**
Antrim	4,952	1,901	2,801	1,970	848	3,475	3,611	4,361	3,255	4,748
Coleraine	2,555	2,152	1,380	2,090	1,745	3,428	2,170	4,255	3,286	5,721
Limavady	2,615	1,390	1,145	1,450	1,406	2,547	2,018	4,003	2,517	4,267
Moyle	333	383	177	287	464	1,631	1,104	1,568	1,758	1,952
Ballymoney	948	3,753	1,223	510	670	2,785	1,696	2,426	1,951	2,857
L'derry	9,325	9,165	3,754	8,492	19,397	28,661	11,292	11,099	6,954	9,246
Ballymena	1,259	2,343	1,910	6,170	4,920	10,781	6,100	5,387	3,100	10,658
Larne	650	1,825	346	1,216	2,074	3,138	3,129	5,913	24,317	23,486
Northern Division	**22,637**	**22,912**	**12,736**	**22,185**	**31,524**	**56,445**	**31,120**	**39,012**	**47,138**	**62,934**
Belfast	20,160	7,246	26,628	6,116	11,503	10,475	6,206	11,889	11,028	12,965
Castlereagh	1,551	8,440	835	1,316	444	3,822	1,438	1,574	1,376	3,567
Newtownabbey	5,694	3,476	1,578	1,965	2,219	3,674	2,675	3,536	1,620	26,946
Carrickfergus	721	1,712	2,566	4,849	4,165	5,155	1,388	2,457	19,366	8,464
North Down	1,310	1,892	1,916	1,770	1,218	2,569	2,062	3,145	2,084	3,329
Lisburn	3,097	3,855	3,673	2,686	2,345	5,228	4,062	4,933	4,081	5,491
Eastern Division	**32,533**	**26,621**	**37,196**	**18,702**	**21,894**	**30,924**	**17,832**	**27,534**	**39,555**	**60,762**
Ards	1,859	1,790	1,725	1,960	8,667	6,088	3,765	5,405	1,875	4,641
Armagh	2,561	2,270	1,677	3,005	2,446	6,764	4,813	11,827	7,084	7,703
Newry & Mourne	19,922	17,692	62,010	14,863	4,627	6,938	4,186	7,380	7,950	7,861
Banbridge	4,018	2,568	2,221	887	1,251	2,991	3,253	4,451	4,290	5,216
Craigavon	3,973	4,879	1,803	1,658	1,704	4,006	4,008	6,274	4,501	6,241
Down	1,721	2,679	1,539	986	1,341	3,877	3,136	4,898	4,566	6,209
Southern Division	**34,054**	**31,878**	**70,975**	**23,359**	**20,036**	**30,663**	**23,161**	**40,235**	**30,266**	**37,872**

District Council Area	2004-05 £k	2005-06 £k	2006-07 £k	2007-08 £k	2008-09 £k	2009-10 £k	2010-11 £k	2011-12 £k	2012-13 £k	2013-14 £k
Magherafelt	1,964	1,344	966	2,651	2,544	3,190	2,843	3,216	2,432	4,698
Omagh	6,201	7,869	3,455	4,387	11,534	22,211	15,718	18,939	14,024	13,105
Strabane	2,274	3,006	2,067	1,296	695	4,629	3,564	4,969	13,128	6,922
Cookstown	948	975	1,078	865	1,135	2,365	2,520	3,779	3,274	3,929
Fermanagh	3,675	4,137	2,121	4,017	8,607	7,276	7,667	12,404	12,013	9,369
Dungannon	3,556	5,401	15,361	14,235	4,622	6,750	5,509	7,574	15,487	7,422
Western Division	**18,618**	**22,732**	**25,048**	**27,451**	**29,137**	**46,420**	**37,820**	**50,881**	**60,358**	**45,445**
Overall Totals	**107,842**	**104,143**	**145,955**	**91,697**	**102,591**	**164,453**	**109,932**	**157,662**	**177,317**	**207,013**

Following the Northern Ireland Civil Service move to International Financial Reporting Standards in 2009-10, and to comply with International Accounting Standards (IAS 16), the structural maintenance activities of resurfacing, reconstruction, surface dressing and structural drainage were reclassified as capital expenditure. These were classified as resource expenditure prior to 2009-10.

It should also noted that while the actual investment may be within one district council area, the benefits of such investment are not confined to the district council, constituency or county in which they are located.

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the number of buses operated by Translink which have caught fire in each of the last five years.
(AQW 41697/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The details are as follows:

Year	Number of Buses
2010	1
2011	7
2012	5
2013	7
2014	3

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the number of reports of breaches of the regulations relating to trespass on railways and level crossings in each of the last five years.
(AQW 41698/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I can confirm that Translink have advised that the following breaches of the regulations relating to trespass on railways and level crossings, as recorded on Translink's TSMIS (Translink Safety Management Information System) are as follows:

Trespass incidents recorded on TSMIS (NIR)

2014	530
2013	492
2012	555
2011	542
2010	721
2009	493

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) the number of septic tanks in each district council area; (ii) septic tanks in each council area which have received a desludge in each of the last three years; and (iii) the number of septic tanks have not received a septic tank desludge or domestic treatment plant desludge in the last five years.
(AQW 41724/11-15)

Mr Kennedy:

(i) NI Water and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) have informed me that this information is not available by District Council area. NIEA however have confirmed that the total number of consented domestic septic tanks is 113,735.

(ii) NI Water provides a septic tank desludging service upon request. NI Water does hold records of the desludging requests received and attended to but this information is not held in District Council area. They have however provided me with the number of septic tanks visited and desludged in the last three financial years, which I have set out below.

- 2011/12 - 28162 tanks
- 2012/13 - 29831 tanks
- 2013/14 - 31793 tanks

(iii) Unfortunately, neither NI Water nor the Northern Ireland Environment Agency holds this information.

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the road safety measures undertaken by Transport NI at each post-primary school in North Down, over the last five years; and to outline any future plans for improving road safety at post-primary schools in the area.
(AQW 41730/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department is currently preparing its work programmes for 2015/16, details of which will be published in TransportNI's Spring and Autumn Reports to Councils. Once completed, the Council Reports for the 2015/16 financial year will be published on my Department's internet site.

Information on completed roads schemes can be found in TransportNI's Spring and Autumn Reports to Councils. These reports can be accessed from my Department's internet site at the following web address: http://www.drdni.gov.uk/index/publications.htm

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the road safety measures undertaken by Transport NI at each primary school in North Down, over the last five years; and to outline any future plans for improving road safety at primary schools in the area.
(AQW 41731/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I would refer the Member to my answer to his Assembly Question AQW 41730/11-15.

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Regional Development when the water treatment works will be increased in capacity to meet the needs of developers in the Kilrea area.
(AQW 41755/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Kilrea is one of 71 Wastewater Treatment Works (WwTW) with a population equivalent (PE) greater than 250 with no headroom at the start of the PC15 regulatory period (April 2015). It is anticipated that at the end of the PC15 period (March 2021), 58 WwTWs > 250 PE including Kilrea will remain subject to headroom and planning constraints.

There are however some caveats which may influence the extent and need for the continuation of constraints:

- NI Water cannot make a final commitment on the PC15 Final Determination (FD) until there is clarity on budget allocation and as such, the Company is presently unable to make a full commitment to delivery; and
- NIW is presently reviewing the headroom constraint data to ensure an accurate representation of constraint is provided. This work entails checking the individual elements of treatment through the WwTW and the operational issues being encountered. It would be expected that some amendment will be made to the number of locations with planning constraints. NIW anticipates completion of this review by the end of March 2015.

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Regional Development what alternative means of sewage disposal is available to developers in Kilrea seeking planning approval for new dwellings.
(AQW 41756/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: In Kilrea, where the public sewerage system has a negative headroom capacity, NI Water will not make a recommendation to DOE Planning Service in favour of a new sewer connection to the public sewerage system. The decision to approve or refuse a planning application is the responsibility of DOE Planning Service.

NI Water will approve a connection from a new development if there is 1) a planning approval still in existence, 2) the proposed development reduces the loading both biologically and hydraulically on the sewer network, or 3) the development has a like for like discharge in the event of brown field redevelopment.

DOE Planning Service may make a decision in favour of a conditional approval where the applicant proposes an alternate means of disposal in the interim period until the public infrastructure has been updated. This may be by means of a private package waste water treatment works. This will be at the developers own cost and compliance with the other statutory agencies.

NI Water has no role in approving or adopting private temporary waste water treatment works, but will recognise this within an agreement for future adoption of the sewers within a development. The operation and maintenance of a temporary waste water treatment works remains with the developer until the permanent connection is made to the upgraded public sewerage system

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Regional Development what is the financial cost of the recent deal between NI Water and trade unions; and how it will be funded.
(AQW 41797/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NI Water) that an initial agreement on potential settlement terms has been agreed with the Water Group of Trade Unions (WGTU) on a without prejudice basis. This has allowed WGTU to agree to a suspension of the current industrial action.

NI Water is now in the process of completing Business Cases and Pay Remit documentation for submission to DRD and DFP for review and approval. Details of the financial cost of the deal, and how it will be funded cannot be provided at this time.

Mr Spratt asked the Minister for Regional Development, in relation to the flood alleviation scheme in Finaghy, whether his Department considered placing storm tanks within Balmoral Golf Course to minimise the negative impact on the course.
(AQW 41804/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by NI Water that Balmoral Golf Club has proposed a buried concrete storm tank within their grounds, located within an unused area of the course, to retain flood water. Whilst this option is unlikely to be economically viable, NI Water welcomes the input and suggested use of the site. NI Water designers are continuing to work with the club to further refine an option that will contain flood waters as close as possible to the existing flood plain and not impact on the normal use of the course.

Mr Spratt asked the Minister for Regional Development whether his Department has considered other locations or alternative options for the flood alleviation scheme at Finaghy should Balmoral Golf Club not accept the current option.
(AQW 41805/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: NI Water follows Department of Finance and Personnel procedures for public expenditure in relation to the appraisal and evaluation of capital investment projects. A detailed appraisal study was undertaken for this phase of the Glenmachan Strategic Project, which included a scheme to alleviate flooding in the Finaghy area.

This process requires the assessment of a range of options and the recommendation of an option to be developed, based on a broad range of criteria such as the assessment of monetary costs and benefits, risk appraisal, as well as non-monetary costs and benefits including sustainability, disruption, environmental considerations and ease of implementation.

I have been advised by NI Water that alternative options for the flood alleviation scheme at Finaghy were considered and assessed within this appraisal and evaluation process. However, alternative options were not recommended, due mostly to the significantly greater costs and the wider scope of engineering works required to meet the project's needs and its primary objective of reducing the risk of flooding to homes and businesses within the area.

NI Water continues to work with Balmoral Golf Club to refine the option and endeavour to reach an amicable agreement.

Mr Spratt asked the Minister for Regional Development whether Balmoral Golf Club was consulted, prior to the abandonment of other sites, to measure the reaction or acceptability of the flood alleviation scheme in the area.
(AQW 41807/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by NI Water that the Golf Club Committee was advised of the concept options under consideration during the appraisal process. Once the recommended option was identified, the detailed design was developed as is normal practice. At present, NI Water designers are continuing to work with the club to further refine an option that will contain flood waters as close as possible to the existing flood plain and not impact on the normal use of the course.

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister for Regional Development for the number of times rail lines have been disrupted by security alerts in the past year; and the location of these alerts.
(AQW 41823/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The table below details instances of disruption to rail services due to security alerts in the period 1 January 2014 to 31 December 2014.

Date	Line	Total Closure
03/02/14	Portadown line	2 hr 06 mins
27/02/14	Portadown line	1 hr 20 mins
28/04/14	Portadown line	3 hr 04 mins
20/12/14	Portadown line	45 mins

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline the criteria that community groups are required to fulfil in order to be eligible for rural transport support through the Rural Transport Fund; and how an assessment of eligibility is carried out.
(AQW 41829/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department currently administers a Voucher Scheme from the Rural Transport Fund (RTF). This scheme provides a voucher to the value of £100 towards their travel costs, to Community groups where more than 17 people are travelling.

The criteria for eligibility is that the group must have a formal Constitution for their organisation; be charitable / non-profit making; include 17 or more people travelling; and be based in a rural area (at least 50% of the group members from a rural area). Priority is given to elderly and disability groups; in line with the overall priorities of RTF funding.

Rural Community Transport Partnerships (RCTP's) also operate a Group Hire Transport Service either self drive or driver provided to Member Groups who meet the membership criteria requested by the partnerships.

We are currently assessing the overall budgetary context for next year and this may impact on the services listed above.

Mr McMullan asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the departmental and arm's-length body buildings that are equipped with defibrillators; and how many staff in each of these buildings are trained in (i) the use of defibrillators; and (ii) C.P.R.
(AQW 41859/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department currently meets its legislative requirements for the provision of first aid (including Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR)) in all buildings under its control. Whilst there are no defibrillators in departmental buildings at present, one is currently being installed at Ballymena County Hall and a project group has been established to consider the potential for introducing these at further DRD locations. A total of 79 DRD staff have received first aid training, which includes training in CPR.

I am advised that defibrillators are currently installed in 11 of Northern Ireland Water's premises, with training in their use (including CPR training) having been received by a total of 94 staff.

I understand that Translink provides defibrillators at six key transport locations and has a small number of volunteer staff at each of these premises who are trained in both the use of this equipment and in CPR.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the Craigantlet Hills road safety improvements.
(AQW 41869/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I can confirm that my officials are continuing to discuss this scheme with colleagues from Planning NI and in particular the potential impact on the local environment.

Once this process has been concluded, I will make an announcement on the most appropriate way forward.

In the interim, my Department is currently implementing a Collision Remedial scheme for the existing road layout. This will comprise of high friction surfacing and additional signs. The new surfacing has already been laid and the signs should be erected within the next four weeks.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development how much money has been spent on upgrading footpaths in the Beechfield and Ashfield estates in Donaghadee, over the last four financial years.
(AQW 41955/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I can advise the Member that my Department has invested approximately £145,000 upgrading footways/footpaths in the Beechfield and Ashfield estates in Donaghadee over the last four financial years.

Mr Humphrey asked the Minister for Regional Development who (i) plans; (ii) manages; and (iii) controls the NI Water mechanical and engineering staff on a (a) daily; and (b) weekly basis during normal business hours, while they carry out work on, or at, NI Water sites and depots.
(AQW 41958/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: NI Water (i) plans the work activity, (ii) manages and (iii) controls all mechanical and electrical staff on a (a) daily and (b) weekly basis by a combination of Field Managers and Work Control Centre staff using a Mobile Work Management System to collate, prioritise, allocate and record work activities.

Mr Humphrey asked the Minister for Regional Development who (i) planned; (ii) managed; and (iii) controlled all embedded contract staff engaged under tender C0 71 and CO 58 on a (a) daily; and (b) weekly basis during normal business hours, while they carried out work on, or at, NI Water sites and depots.
(AQW 41960/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: NI Water Mechanical and Electrical (M&E) staff (prior to the company's change in status, DRD Water Service M&E staff) (i) planned the work activity; (ii) managed through the provision of direct instruction; and (iii) controlled through the allocation of work all contract staff engaged under tender C071 and C058 on a (a) daily and (b) weekly basis during normal business hours, while they carried out work on NI Water (previously DRD Water Service) sites and depots. In the latter stages of these contracts, the respective employers took on an increased responsibility for the day-to-day management of their employees.

Mr Humphrey asked the Minister for Regional Development who (i) plans; (ii) manages; and (iii) controls the embedded contract staff engaged under tender C527 on a (a) daily; and (b) weekly basis during normal business hours, while they carry out work on, or at, NI Water sites and depots.
(AQW 41963/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: NI Water Mechanical and Electrical staff and Work Control Centre staff (i) plan work and (ii) manage this group through the provision of work instruction on a (a) daily and (b) weekly basis. Control of this group is delivered in part by NI Water staff who provide work instruction and in part by the employer (TES Ltd) who, in conjunction with NI Water staff, carry out associated work quality and health and safety compliance checks on a (a) daily basis; and (b) weekly basis.

Mr Humphrey asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) how NI Water ensures, monitors, controls and enforces that all mechanical and engineering staff have two sets of hand tools for working at clean and dirty water sites in order to prevent cross contamination; and (ii) whether he has made the NI Environment Agency is aware of the situation.
(AQW 41965/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: NI Water has guidelines in place relating to the avoidance of cross-contamination. The guidelines state that an additional set of designated tools will be procured for each craft fitter, electrician and technician and these restricted tools should be stored appropriately and separately from other possible sources of contamination. Tools or equipment that are shared and are at risk of providing cross contamination should be disinfected prior to use on clean water sites using an appropriate disinfectant. NI Water monitors compliance with its procedures through routine checks in order to ensure that separate tools are available if required or that suitable disinfection has taken place. The Drinking Water Inspectorate (DWI) monitors NI Water on behalf of the Northern Ireland Environment Agency and any incidents of cross contamination must be reported to the DWI.

Mr McAleer asked the Minister for Regional Development, in light of the additional funding received in the January monitoring round and the 2015-16 final budget, whether his Department will carry out the street light schemes on Moylagh and Laragh Roads, Beragh, Co. Tyrone.
(AQW 42000/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The additional funding received following January monitoring round is being targeted towards the repair of existing street lighting and is not being used to extend the street lighting network.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Regional Development what assurances he has had from Translink that Enniskillen will continue to receive a town bus service adequate to the needs of its people.
(AQW 42007/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: During my Department's draft budget consultation, it was highlighted that one possible result of the drastic reduction in my Department's budget may be the potential withdrawal of some town services, and reduction and consolidation of other services.

The financial constraints are so great next year there are no doubt difficult decisions ahead. The detailed implication of the budget for 2015/16 is yet to be worked out.

However the Executive has allocated my Department some additional funding specifically for town bus services and this will help to mitigate the impacts of the substantial cuts for Translink passengers and maintaining, as far as possible, Translink's provision of much needed town services. Translink is currently reviewing its overall levels of service provision, with all local bus services currently being considered. It will engage in a consultation exercise soon.

I can advise that details will be communicated in writing directly to elected representatives and locally in Translink passenger facilities and recorded on the Translink website.

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the support that Ballymena, Ballymoney and Moyle Councils provide to established community groups, in relation to salt boxes or salt to cater for their own area's needs.
(AQW 42024/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department does not maintain information on Ballymena, Ballymoney or Moyle Council's interaction with local community groups in relation to salt boxes or salt provision and my local officials are unaware of any current winter service support arrangements provided by these Councils to established community groups within these areas.

My Department undertakes an assessment and provides salt boxes on public roads where a need is identified and current policy is met.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the impact on water services of inadequate funding for the operational and capital costs of NI Water.
(AQW 42054/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Final decisions on the Departmental 2015/16 public expenditure budget allocation for NI Water have not yet been taken.

In response to my Department's consultation on the Draft Budget, NI Water had highlighted that if it was required to live within the PE allocation identified in the Draft Budget document, this would not be adequate to deliver the outputs required under the PC15 Final Determination and could have a significant detrimental impact on the services provided to customers. Further detail is provided below.

My Department will work closely with NI Water and the Utility Regulator in order to provide adequate funding to seek to maintain the regulatory environment which provides sustainable high quality water and sewerage services to the public.

Consequences of Draft Budget 2015-16 Resource DEL

The company has identified that in an effort to protect water quality, the most significant impact would be borne by the wastewater side of the business. This could increase out of sewer flooding and pollution incidents.

In addition, to achieve the levels of reductions in operational costs anticipated in the Draft Budget, loss of service could occur on the drinking water side of the business. Instances of low pressure and supply interruptions could be experienced as a result of a cessation of out-of-hours and proactive leakage detection. Water quality at the tap could deteriorate and measures such as cessation of orthophosphate dosing could result in lead failures.

There will be a consequential increase in customer contacts and complaints and a decrease in satisfaction with the service being provided.

Consequences of Draft Budget Capital DEL

The level of Capital DEL indicated by the DRD Social and Environmental Guidance is already significantly constrained in terms of improving services to NI Water customers to match services in Great Britain.

The Draft Budget document identified a reduction of £23m in the 2015-16 capital budget and this level of funding would result in a significant number of enhancement schemes being delayed. There will continue to be constraints on connecting developments to the wastewater network in many areas and plans to address flooding in some areas could be impacted.

NI Water would need to consult with the environmental regulators on projects which it would propose to delay to achieve the draft capital budget. These will have significant impacts on customers, development and the environment. The projects will need to be reviewed by the environmental regulators however, due to the limited scope of funding and the short timescale, it will be difficult to reduce the impacts significantly.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Regional Development how much the Executive subsidises NI Water in lieu of domestic water charging.
(AQW 42055/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department pays the subsidy to NI Water on behalf of the Executive on an annual basis. The most recent published figures are for the year 2013/14 when NI Water was paid £275.4m in the absence of domestic water charging; in addition an amount of £2.2m was paid in respect of the septic tank emptying subsidy which is unregulated.

The current estimate for 2014/15 is £278.4m for domestic water subsidy plus £2.4m for the septic tank emptying subsidy.

Mr Humphrey asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) how NI Water ensured, monitored, controlled and enforced that all contract staff engaged under tenders C0 71 and CO 58, had two sets of hand tools for working at clean and dirty water sites to prevent cross contamination; and (ii) if not, to detail the reasons; and (iii) whether the NI Environment Agency was aware of the position.
(AQW 42056/11-15)

Mr Kennedy:

(i) NI Water Mechanical and Electrical (M&E) Field Managers were required to carry out routine checks on all contract staff that included verifying the requisite sets of tools were available in accordance with cross contamination guidelines. NI Water M&E Field Managers were also required to communicate any associated deficiencies to the relevant employer to enable suitable corrective action.

(ii) Not applicable.

(iii) The Drinking Water Inspectorate (DWI) monitors NI Water on behalf of the Northern Ireland Environment Agency and any incidents of cross contamination must be reported to the DWI.

Mr Humphrey asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) how NI Water ensures, monitors, controls and enforces that all contract staff engaged under tender C 527, have two sets of hand tools for working at clean and dirty water sites to prevent cross contamination; and (ii) if not, to detail the reasons; and (iii) whether the NI Environment Agency is aware of the position.
(AQW 42057/11-15)

Mr Kennedy:

(i) NI Water Mechanical and Electrical (M&E) Field Managers were required to carry out routine checks on all contract employees, which include verifying the requisite sets of tools were available in accordance with cross contamination

guidelines. NI Water M&E Field Managers were also required to communicate any associated deficiencies to the employer (TES Ltd) to enable suitable corrective action. Additionally, the employer (TES Ltd) was required to carry out routine checks that include verifying the requisite sets of tools were available and address any deficiencies accordingly.

(ii) Not applicable.

(iii) The Drinking Water Inspectorate (DWI) monitors NI Water on behalf of the Northern Ireland Environment Agency and any incidents of cross contamination must be reported to the DWI.

Mr Humphrey asked the Minister for Regional Development whether NI Water breached any of the terms and conditions of the CO 71 and CO 58 contracts; and to detail the nature and impact of any breaches.
(AQW 42058/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: No contractor engaged in either the C071 contract or the C058 contract has alleged that NI Water breached the terms of either contract.

Mr Humphrey asked the Minister for Regional Development whether NI Water breached any of the terms and conditions of the C 527 contract; and to detail the nature and impact of any breaches.
(AQW 42059/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The contractor engaged under the C527 contract has not alleged that NI Water has breached the terms of the contract.

Mr Humphrey asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) to list the information that NI Water currently holds and records on its databases, spreadsheets or other, in relation to the embedded contract staff engaged under tender C0 71 and CO 58; and (ii) why it is necessary for NI Water to hold this information.
(AQW 42060/11-15)

Mr Kennedy:

(i) NI Water is not aware of holding information on any contractor employee who was engaged under the C058 or C071 contracts and is not currently engaged via the current C527 contract.

(ii) Anonymised TUPE-related information associated with the C527 contract has been retained as it forms part of the contract award process.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Regional Development who has responsibility for the payment of transport services which enable people with a range of disabilities, to access rural charitable community day centres.
(AQW 42089/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department provides funding from the Rural Transport Fund (RTF) for the Dial A Lift scheme, managed by the Rural Community Transport Partnerships (RCTP's). Dial A Lift is aimed at reducing social exclusion in rural areas for people with reduced mobility. This service is provided to all members of the scheme including people with disabilities who can avail of transport for various purposes that would include transport to rural charitable community day centres. Decisions on the use of grants are the responsibility of the RCTP's.

Demand for Dial A Lift services has grown over the last number of years and each Partnership now has to prioritise services to ensure that transport is available to its most vulnerable members.

Mr Anderson asked the Minister for Regional Development whether his Department will investigate the need for traffic calming measures at Whinny Hill, Gilford.
(AQW 42114/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department assesses all requests for traffic calming measures using established criteria. The assessment considers traffic speed and volume as well as the nature of the local environment and recorded injury collision information provided by the PSNI. This ensures the large number of requests are treated fairly and equitably.

I can confirm that Whinny Hill, Gilford has recently been assessed for traffic calming which indicated the proposal does have merit, however, there are other sites in the Banbridge District Council area which attract a higher priority rating. As such, a scheme is not being taken forward at this time but the request will remain on record for potential inclusion in future work programmes.

I am pleased to be able to confirm that work to increase the size of the speed limit roundels has been completed recently at this location.

Mr Clarke asked the Minister for Regional Development how many route options were considered for the A8; and what were the estimated costs for each of these options.
(AQW 42124/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I can confirm that eighteen route options were considered during the development of the A8 Belfast to Larne Dualling scheme. These options were assessed against the Government's five overarching objectives for Transport, i.e. safety, environment, economy, integration and accessibility. The estimated cost, based on Q1 2009 prices, for these options ranged from £108 million to £119 million.

Further information on each of the options considered is contained within the Stage 2 Assessment Report for the scheme which can be downloaded from: www.drdni.gov.uk/index/roadimprovements/schemes/a8belfastlarne.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what was the operating cost of the Ministerial car in each of the last three financial years.
(AQW 42137/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The operating cost of the Ministerial car in each of the last three financial years is set out in the table below:

	2012/13	**2013/14**	**2014/15 (at 31 January 2015)**
Operating Cost (£)	£7,040	£5,780	£5,148

Mr Humphrey asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) to list the information that NI Water currently holds and records on its databases, spreadsheets or other, in relation to the embedded contract staff engaged under tender C 527; and (ii) why it is necessary for NI Water to hold this information.
(AQW 42141/11-15)

Mr Kennedy:

(i) NI Water holds the following details in relation to contractor employees engaged under contract C527. Name (Surname, initials etc), NI Water Cost Centre, NI Water Working Area, Linked NI Water Depot (where applicable), Craft Discipline (Mechanical, Electrical ICA Technician), employer details, start date, Mechanical and Electrical (M&E) associated Field Manager, M&E associated Area Manager, Telephone number, Address, Standby status.

(ii) This information has been retained to enable (a) suitable costing to be applied, (b) work activity to be appropriately allocated based upon normal geographical working area and home address and (c) suitable means of contact both during the normal working day and periods of standby work outside normal working hours.

Mr Humphrey asked the Minister for Regional Development whether TUPE regulation 1981 applied to the NI Water tender contracts CO 71 and CO 58 and the supplier; and if not, why this was the case.
(AQW 42142/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: NI Water was not responsible for determining if TUPE applied to contracts C058 and C071.

Mr Humphrey asked the Minister for Regional Development whether TUPE regulation 1981 applied to the NI Water tender contract CO 527 and the supplier; and if not, why this was the case.
(AQW 42143/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: NI Water was not responsible for determining if TUPE applied to contract C527.

Mr Humphrey asked the Minister for Regional Development whether fixed-term employees regulations, on the prevention of less favourable treatment, applied to the NI Water tender contracts CO 71 and CO 58 and the supplier; and if not, why this was the case.
(AQW 42144/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: It was the responsibility of the relevant employer to determine whether fixed-term employees regulations, on the prevention of less favourable treatment applied to these contracts.

Mr Humphrey asked the Minister for Regional Development whether fixed-term employees regulations, on the prevention of less favourable treatment, applied to the NI Water tender contract CO 527 and the supplier; and if not, why this was the case.
(AQW 42145/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: It was the responsibility of the relevant employer to determine whether fixed-term employees regulations, on the prevention of less favourable treatment applied to these contracts.

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Regional Development for a gender breakdown of (i) train drivers; and (ii) conductors employed by Northern Ireland Railways.
(AQW 42151/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I can confirm that Northern Ireland Railways (NIR) currently employ 117 train drivers. Of this 7 are female and 110 male. NIR also employs 109 conductors; 16 of which are female and 93 male.

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development how many departmental staff are deployed to fill grit boxes in North Down.
(AQW 42170/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The manpower deployed to filling salt bins in North Down will vary according to the prevailing weather conditions, the weather forecast and the relative priority of other work activities as determined by the North Down & Ards Section Office.

When no winter hazards are prevailing or forecast, a routine replenishment may involve a two-man squad. In circumstances where significant winter hazards are continuing, manpower deployment could be increased to a further ten two-man squads. This would be at the expense of all other work activities from the local Balloo depot.

My Department also has the option to temporarily deploy additional staff from neighbouring depots to assist with the North Down efforts, should circumstances warrant it.

Mr Frew asked the Minister for Regional Development how many grit boxes there were in North Antrim, in each of the last three years.
(AQW 42192/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The number of grit boxes provided by my Department in North Antrim, in each of the last three years is as follows:

2012/2013	315
2013/2014	317
2014/2015	322

Mr Devenney asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the number of street lights awaiting repair in the Londonderry and Strabane council areas; and what timeframe is in place to have these repaired.
(AQW 42201/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Currently, 1364 lights are out in the Strabane District and Derry City Council areas. This backlog should be cleared in approximately 14 working days.

Mr Humphrey asked the Minister for Regional Development how a breach of the C 527 contract would impact on the C 527 contract.
(AQW 42224/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The outcome of any breach would depend on the nature of the breach. It is therefore not possible to provide a more detailed response.

Mr Humphrey asked the Minister for Regional Development, during the term of the CO 71 and CO 58 contracts, whether NI Water instructed Mechanical and Engineering and ICA Field Managers and Area Managers to (i) distance themselves from embedded contract staff engaged under contract CO 71 and CO 58; and (ii) no longer approve embedded contract staff leave, given that these same staff approved this leave when their posts were classed as Mechanical and Engineering Professional Technical Officer and Higher Professional Technical Officer, under the Water Service, and since NI Water's inception.
(AQW 42225/11-15)

Mr Kennedy:

(i) NI Water confirms that Mechanical and Electrical (M&E) staff were not instructed to distance themselves from contractor employees engaged under contract C071 and C058. NI Water M&E staff have been reminded of the importance of promoting the employer-employee relationship which should exist between contractor employees and their contractor employer.

(ii) NI Water also confirms that the practice adopted by its staff and previously by Water Service staff of approving leave requests for contractor employees engaged under C058 and C071 ended with approval of leave being undertaken by the respective employers.

Mr Humphrey asked the Minister for Regional Development whether NI Water has instructed Mechanical and Engineering and ICA Field Managers and Area Managers to (i) distance themselves from embedded contract staff engaged under contract C 527; and (ii) no longer approve embedded contract staff leave, given that these same staff approved this leave when their posts were classed as Mechanical and Engineering Professional Technical Officer and Higher Professional Technical Officer, under the Water Service, and since NI Water's inception.
(AQW 42226/11-15)

Mr Kennedy:

(i) NI Water confirms that Mechanical and Electrical (M&E) staff were not instructed to distance themselves from contractor employees engaged under contract C527. NI Water M&E staff had been reminded of the importance of promoting the employer-employee relationship which should exist between contractor employees and their contractor employer.

(ii) NI Water is not aware of any instances of its M&E staff approving leave for contractor employees under contract C527 as the approval of leave for all contractor employees engaged under this contract was undertaken by the contractor employer.

Mr Humphrey asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) what assurances he can give that tender C 527 represented best value for money; and (ii) to outline the process followed in carrying out the tender evaluation, including who carried out the evaluation and at what level.
(AQW 42227/11-15)

Mr Kennedy:

(i) C527 was tendered in compliance with the Utilities Contracts Regulations 2006 (as amended). As such, the contract was awarded to the bidder who presented the most economically advantageous tender. The tender was advertised in the Official Journal of the European Journal.

It is NI Water's policy not to disclose the names of staff below the grade of senior manager. All staff involved in the actual tender development and evaluation were below senior manager level. The two senior managers who performed a quality assurance role on the tender process were:

(ii) Jane Mellor (Head of Operational Procurement) and Terry Quinn (Head of Mechanical and Electrical Services). The contract award was approved in accordance with NI Water's Financial and Procurement Delegations, which required the contract award to be approved by NI Water's Board of Directors.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the likely cumulative impact of roadworks at Ballyhackamore, Upper Newtownards Road and Mersey Street on transport in east Belfast from 16 February 2015.
(AQW 42231/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The roadworks in the Ballyhackamore area, associated with the Belfast Rapid Transit scheme, are scheduled for completion on 1 March 2015. Until this time, in order to keep traffic disruption to a minimum the contractor is only permitted to work on the road outside of the peak periods. In addition, full closure of the carriageway, to allow the resurfacing to be completed, is restricted to overnight and Sundays.

The site staff have been fully briefed in relation to the potential for traffic disruption and have been asked to ensure appropriate traffic management measures are applied.

NI Water is currently completing essential sewerage upgrade works in the Mersey Street area of East Belfast. This essential improvement work will improve the local storm water sewerage infrastructure.

Due to the nature of the work, a certain amount of disruption will be inevitable. However, every effort will be made to mitigate this and keep such disruption to an absolute minimum.

A road closure will be required to allow safe access to the site at Mersey Street. The road closure will be between the junction of Parkgate Avenue and Dee Street. Traffic diversions will be in place for all other traffic, with routes clearly signposted, and vehicle access for residents will be maintained as far as possible. These diversionary routes will direct traffic away from the Ballyhackamore diversionary routes.

It is estimated this scheme will be completed in June 2015.

Any customer with any queries or special requirements relating to access should contact Waterline on 08457 440088.

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Regional Development how many apprentices Translink has taken in each of the last three years; and in which work categories have they been placed.
(AQW 42235/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: A detailed breakdown of Translink apprenticeships for each of the last three years is as follows:

Year	Job Title	Division			Cumulative Total
		Bus Services	Infrastructure / Property	Rail Services	
2012	Apprentice Body Trades	3	-	-	3
	Apprentice Fleet Technician	-	-	6	6
	Apprentice Tech Trades	8	-	-	8
	Apprentice Technician	-	2	-	2
	Total for 2012	**11**	**2**	**6**	**19**
2013	Apprentice Tech Trades	4	-	-	4
	Total for 2013	**4**	**-**	**-**	**4**

Year	Job Title	Division			Cumulative Total
		Bus Services	Infrastructure / Property	Rail Services	
2014	Apprentice Body Trades	1	-	-	1
	Apprentice Tech Trades	7	-	-	7
	Total for 2014	**8**	**-**	**-**	**8**
Cumulative Total		**23**	**2**	**6**	**31**

Department for Social Development

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how much funding the Ulster-Scots Agency received from his Department in the last three financial years.
(AQW 40998/11-15)

Mr Storey (The Minister for Social Development): Within the last three financial years the Department for Social Development has not received any applications from the Ulster Scots Agency seeking funding. Therefore, no funding from the Department has been provided.

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister for Social Development, in relation to the £70 million set aside to compensate for losses due to social welfare cuts, what procedures or process have been agreed to implement this policy.
(AQW 41566/11-15)

Mr Storey: I brought a paper to a meeting of the Executive on the 22 January 2015. That paper set out the detail of what had been agreed during the inter-party talks in Stormont Castle on the 19th December 2014. The Executive agreed the recommendations contained in my paper including a commitment that my department bring forward a number of schemes which are intended to support claimants adversely impacted by the changes to the welfare system. The Executive also agreed that they would wish to consider the detail of the schemes before they would be issued for public consultation and before the subordinate legislation is drafted for scrutiny by the Assembly. These schemes will detail the modalities of how claimants are to be supported by the Executive.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development whether the Housing Executive plans to replace wooden eves in Willowbrook, Bangor.
(AQW 41595/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised that their properties in Willowbrook estate in Bangor are due to have External Cyclical Maintenance works carried out in a scheme which is currently programmed to start in the last quarter of 2015/16. Any repairs or replacement of eaves deemed necessary will be included in the scheme. In the meantime any defects reported will continue to be addressed through response maintenance.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the Supporting People Programme; and whether a new strategy will be developed in the future.
(AQW 41683/11-15)

Mr Storey: Supporting People is my Department's programme for housing related support which aims to help vulnerable people live as independently as possible in the community.

The Supporting People Programme was introduced in April 2003 and has been central to the development and provision of quality accommodation and support services that have improved the lives of some of the most vulnerable members of our society, tackling social exclusion by preventing crisis and more costly service interventions.

Supporting People currently manages a budget of £71.58m and funds 100 providers to deliver housing related support through around 800 services to over 23,000 people across Northern Ireland.

The original strategy "Supporting People, Changing Lives" covered the period 2005-2010. Its aim was 'to commission housing support services aimed at improving the quality of life and independence of vulnerable people'. Since then significant progress has been made in raising quality standards in existing services and commissioning new housing support services in line with strategic priorities to meet identified needs.

The current "Housing Related Support Strategy (2012-2015)" sets out to ensure that "there are sufficient and suitable housing related support services for vulnerable people so that they can live as independently as possible in their own communities". The objectives of the strategy are that:

- Services are affordable and of good quality

- Services are targeted at the areas of most need
- Services provide value for money
- Services are able to respond to individual needs and preferences
- Services are accessible to those who need them
- Services promote independence and prevent loss of independence
- Services are planned and delivered in partnership

Some of the achievements over the duration of the current strategy have included:

- The extension of floating support services across a range of client groups to support homelessness prevention.
- Funding of criminal justice workers for domestic violence clients.
- The extension of supported accommodation options for offenders in partnership with the Probation Board of Northern Ireland (PBNI).
- Extension of accommodation and support options for young homeless and care leavers through joint commissioning structures.
- The delivery of a range of housing and support services in partnership with health and social care to enable the resettlement of long stay patients with learning disabilities and mental health issues from hospital to housing options in the community.

The Supporting People Programme is currently subject to a Department for Social Development (DSD) led review of the Supporting People Policy and Legislative framework. The review will:

- provide an overview of existing provision and current expenditure broken down by category of service, and an assessment of the extent of which needs are being adequately met;
- evaluate the Supporting People Policy and Programme and the extent to which it has met its core aims in an economic, efficient and effective way since its launch in 2003;
- consider whether an adequate strategic, legislative and administrative framework is in place for the efficient and effective delivery of the Supporting People Policy and Programme in future; and
- where appropriate, make recommendations to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the service.

The review is expected to complete during 2015 and a future Strategy, informed by the findings from the review, will then be developed.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of houses which have benefitted from housing support services through the Supporting People Programme, in East Londonderry, since 2012.
(AQW 41685/11-15)

Mr Storey: Supporting People is my Department's programme for housing related support which aims to help vulnerable people live as independently as possible in the community. Programme information is, therefore, focused on the number of vulnerable people benefitting.

There have been a total of 38 Supporting People schemes active in East Londonderry for the duration of the period from April 2012 to present.

35 of these schemes have offered accommodation-based support and 3 schemes have offered floating support (to clients in their own homes).

The total capacity of these schemes, which is the total number of people who can be helped at one time, has grown over the period and is currently 772 people. This is summarised in the table below:

	Capacity at April 2012	Capacity at February 2015
Accommodation-based Service	667	670
Floating Support	57	102
Total	**724**	**772**

The Information provided in this response is governed by the Principles and Protocols of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. This is enforced by UK Statistics Authority.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) organisations that received Neighbourhood Renewal monies to provide nursery places; (ii) the amount of money each listed organisation receives annually; and (iii) how many nursery places each organization is funded to provide, in each of the last ten years.
(AQW 41690/11-15)

Mr Storey: My Department does not specifically fund nursery places through its Neighbourhood Renewal Investment Fund, however it does support a number of projects by way of salaries and running costs which facilitate the provision of childcare

across various age ranges. These projects range from those that are designed to address barriers to employment that allows parents to access education and training to homework/afterschool clubs.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the amount of housing benefit paid directly or indirectly to private landlords in Fermanagh District Council in each year since 2008/09.
(AQW 41736/11-15)

Mr Storey: The table attached provided by the Housing Executive, shows private Housing Benefit expenditure in the Fermanagh District Council Area in each year since 2008/09.

Year	Amount of Housing Benefit Paid
2008/09	£6,383,524.98
2009/10	£8,011,147.86
2010/11	£9,143,841.00
2011/12	£10,055,178.23
2012/13	£10,483,828.95
2013/14	£10,991,620.92
Total	**£55,069,141.94**

Note: The Housing Executive currently reports Housing Benefit expenditure on the basis of public sector (NIHE) tenants and private sector (non NIHE tenants). The private sector expenditure figure in the table therefore includes expenditure for Housing Association related housing benefit claims. It is not currently possible to report private sector landlords payments separately.

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 40866/11-15, what evidence he has been given that The Charity Commission for Northern Ireland's review process is "straightforward, quick and cost-effective"; and how many reviews of statutory inquiries have The Charity Commission for Northern Ireland overturned.
(AQW 41743/11-15)

Mr Storey: The process of asking the Commission for a review of its decision is straightforward, quick and cost effective as the individual simply has to ask the Commission to review its decision, this is at no cost and the process usually takes 2 to 3 months.

The Charity Commission does not review statutory inquiries. The opening of a statutory inquiry by the Commission is a matter reviewable by the Charity Tribunal.

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 40866/11-15, for his assessment of the significant savings resulting from The Charity Commission for Northern Ireland adopting a more supportive approach to charities, as is the case in England and Wales, instead of instituting statutory inquiries with all of the associated legal costs; and whether he intends to commission an independent review to compare practice with England and Wales to see what lessons can be learned.
(AQW 41744/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Charity Commission for Northern Ireland has investigated nearly 400 concerns to date, instituting 7 statutory inquiries. I have made no assessment around the potential for savings associated with the approach to regulation adopted in England and Wales.

I do not intend to commission an independent review to compare practice with England and Wales.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister for Social Development, in relation to the Landlord Registration Scheme, to detail the rationale behind landlords who are joint owners of a property each paying the registration fee.
(AQW 41761/11-15)

Mr Storey: Article 3(2) of the Landlord Registration Scheme Regulations 2014 states that, where a dwelling house is jointly owned by more than one individual, each individual is required to register, provide all of the information and pay the required fee. This is because each owner has both joint and individual responsibility for adhering to the landlord's duties as laid out in the Private Tenancies (Northern Ireland) Order 2006. As such, to comply with legislative and council requirements, there is no facility to nominate a lead landlord.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Social Development to list the groups who have benefitted from funding through the Supporting People Programme, each year since 2012 ; and how they are likely to be impacted if funding is cut.
(AQW 41762/11-15)

Mr Storey: The classification of the main groups of people who have benefitted from the Supporting People Programme each year since 2012 is as follows:

- Learning Disability
- Homeless
- Mental Health
- Older People (including with Mental Health Problems / Dementia)
- Domestic Violence
- Young People at Risk
- People with addictions including alcohol problems
- Criminal Justice, Offenders or People at risk of Offending
- Physical Impairment
- Multiple / Complex Needs
- Ethnic Minorities

It is difficult to comment in view of the number and variety of Supporting People services what would happen if the level of Supporting People funding were to be reduced and not replaced by funding from other sources but at present there are no plans to reduce funding from current levels.

Mr Ramsey asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on his plans for the future of the Housing Executive.
(AQW 41767/11-15)

Mr Storey: No decisions have been made with regard to social housing reform. The Social Housing Reform Programme has a mandate to explore the potential for reform of housing structures and policies in NI which includes the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. It will present a range of proposals for consultation throughout 2015.

Mr Ramsey asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of homes, including their current value, that have been transferred to Housing Associations in (i) Foyle; and (ii) Northern Ireland in the last two years.
(AQW 41768/11-15)

Mr Storey: Stock transfer is overseen by the Housing Executive and they have advised that during the past two years no properties have been transferred to Housing Associations in Foyle and 125 properties have been transferred in Northern Ireland. The table on the following page sets out the details regarding the 125 transferred properties including the value as at the date of transfer/ purchase.

Date Transferred	NIHE Region	Address/ Reason for Transfer	Housing Association	No. of Properties	Transfer Value/ Purchase Price
March 2013	Belfast	Village Rehabs Phase 1	Fold	9	£155k
March 2013	Belfast	Lower Oldpark Rehabs	Clanmill	26	£350k
June 2013	North	3 Renown Court, Antrim (SPED)	Apex	1	£55k
November 2013	South	27 Ardcaoin Drive, Poleglass (SPED)	Connswater	1	£50k
March 2014	Belfast	Village Rehabs Phase 2	Fold	12	£175k
June 2014	South	Bloomfield Bungalows	Oaklee	72	nil
September 2014	Belfast	Parkside Gardens	Newington	2	£18.5k
October 2014	South	11 Willowbrook Park, Bangor (SPED)	Connswater	1	£82.5k
November 2014	North	4 Ballinderry Road, Coagh (vacant cottage)	Triangle	1	£35k

The Housing Executive has indicated that the value of the properties at Bloomfield at the time of transfer is as follows:

- Open Market Valuation (i.e. assuming vacant possession) - £2.175m;
- Existing Use Valuation (i.e. social tenants in occupation) - £1.135m.

The Bloomfield Bungalows transfer was initiated in 2012 as a second pilot scheme in advance of a proposed Stock Transfer Programme – the Programme aimed to secure capital investment from Housing Associations to deliver much needed major improvements to Housing Executive properties without public subsidy.

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 40866/11-15, to detail (i) whether decisions to institute statutory inquiries under the Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008 are taken by the Charity Commissioners; (ii) his assessment of whether it would be a breach of natural justice for those Commissioners to review their own decisions, given that no person should be a judge in their own cause; and (iii) where a statutory inquiry has been instituted, the only proper route of appeal open to charities is the Charities Tribunal.
(AQW 41780/11-15)

Mr Storey:

(i) Decisions to institute statutory enquiries are approved the Charity Commissioners.

(ii) The Commissioners do not review their own decisions. The opening of a statutory inquiry by the Commission is a matter reviewable by the Charity Tribunal.

(iii) The decision of the Tribunal can be appealed to the High Court on a point of law.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development whether a business case in respect of the stock transfer at Rinmore, Londonderry was presented to the Board of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive; and if so, when.
(AQW 41798/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised that a paper regarding the Economic Appraisal Report prepared by Savills plc was presented to the Board of the Housing Executive at its meeting on 15th December 2010.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development what plans the Housing Executive has to install double glazing in homes in Craigantlet Cottages, Craigantlet.
(AQW 41818/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised that they do not own any dwellings at Craigantlet Cottages, Craigantlet.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development what plans the Housing Executive has to replace the kitchens in Craigantlet Cottages, Craigantlet.
(AQW 41819/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised that they do not own any dwellings at Craigantlet Cottages, Craigantlet.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development what plans the Housing Executive has to fix the rotten wooden eves in the homes at Craigantlet Cottages, Craigantlet.
(AQW 41820/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised that they do not own any dwellings at Craigantlet Cottages, Craigantlet.

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of missed calls to the Social Fund and Crisis Loan helpline in 2013/14, broken down by each Jobs and Benefits office.
(AQW 41824/11-15)

Mr Storey: There are 2 separate Freephone numbers available for customers to contact the Social Security Agency in relation to Social Fund Enquiries and Crisis Loan applications. The Social Fund Enquiry number is dedicated to handling enquires about Social Fund while the Crisis Loan Claims number is used by customers wanting to make a claim to a Crisis Loan by telephone. It should be noted that not all Jobs & Benefits offices deal with these calls. The tables below set out the available information in respect of each number:

Social Fund Enquiries – 2013/14

Site	Calls Offered	Calls Answered	Calls Not Answered
Knockbreda	33602	32913	689
Falls Road	60540	59636	904
Lisburn	70234	68448	1786
Foyle	37159	36394	765
Antrim	66226	65130	1096
Omagh	58440	57280	1160
Totals	**326201**	**319801**	**6400**

Crisis Loans Tele Claims Service – 2013/14

SITE	Calls Offered	Calls Answered	Calls Not Answered
Antrim	105904	102053	3851
Andersonstown	16980	16145	835
Armagh	2382	2078	304
Banbridge	1039	972	67
Downpatrick	37223	31038	6185
Dungannon	931	738	193
Enniskillen	1349	981	368
Falls Road	260592	236083	24509
Foyle	155068	144134	10934
Knockbreda	86613	79585	7028
Lisburn	2780	2580	200
Lurgan	1814	1515	299
Newry	769	665	104
Omagh	1792	1593	199
Portadown	373	366	7
Shaftsbury Square	3708	804	2904
Totals	**679317**	**621330**	**57987**

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 27240/11-15, what steps have been implemented to improve the Crisis Loan telephone service.
(AQW 41825/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Social Fund Crisis Loan Service remains primarily a face to face service delivered at the front office; in addition claimants can also make an application for a crisis loan by telephone. Having recognised that the telephony service did not provided an acceptable standard of service, the Social Security Agency has made a significant investment to modernise and support an improved delivery of its telephone service. A new telephony service for claims for Crisis Loans is being delivered from Omagh Jobs and Benefit Office, with the service expected to be fully operational by April 2015.

Claimants who cannot currently access the Crisis Loan telephony should call into their local Social Security Office.

Mrs McKevitt asked the Minister for Social Development whether the Programme for Government 2011-15 target to improve thermal efficiency of Housing Executive stock and ensure full double glazing in its properties will be met by March 2015.
(AQW 41838/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has confirmed that, in line with the Programme for Government target, all relevant double glazing schemes will have commenced by the end of March.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development whether the Housing Executive plans to replace kitchens in the Jubilee area of Bangor.
(AQW 41852/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised that the kitchens in their properties in Jubilee Drive were replaced in 2006 and the kitchens in Jubilee Court are programmed for replacement in 2015/16. They further advise that the kitchens in Jubilee Place, which was built in 1997, are programmed for replacement in 2017/18.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development whether the Housing Executive plans to replace wooden eves in Jubilee area of Bangor.
(AQW 41853/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised that all dwellings in the Jubilee estate, Bangor are programmed to have External Cyclical Maintenance works carried out during 2015/16. Part of these works will involve any repairs or replacement of eaves deemed necessary. In the meantime any defects reported will continue to be addressed through response maintenance.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the Bangor and Holywood Public Realms Scheme.
(AQW 41854/11-15)

Mr Storey: On-site construction works on the £8 million public realm scheme in Bangor and £2.4 million public realm scheme in Holywood commenced in early May 2014. The schemes are progressing as planned with Holywood on schedule to complete in April 2015 and Bangor in the Spring of 2016. These works will address all aspects of street design including new paving, kerbstones, street furniture, lighting and planting.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the Queen's Parade Project, Bangor.
(AQW 41855/11-15)

Mr Storey: My Department is taking the lead to progress proposals for the comprehensive development of the Queen's Parade. Over recent months good progress has been made and the Department has agreed the purchase on a number of properties required to complete the proposed site boundary and negotiations to acquire the remaining property are ongoing with owners. In March 2014 DSD appointed Turley Associates to work with officials to develop a planning application and attain planning permission for the Queen's Parade scheme by March 2015.

Mr McMullan asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the departmental and arm's-length body buildings that are equipped with defibrillators; and how many staff in each of these buildings are trained in (i) the use of defibrillators; and (ii) C.P.R.
(AQW 41871/11-15)

Mr Storey: At present the Department (including its Arms Length bodies) does not provide defibrillators in its Offices. As such there are no staff trained in their use. Defibrillators are used to compliment cardiac pulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and are not an alternative or substitute for CPR itself. CPR is included in the First Aid at Work (FAW) training courses attended by the Department's staff and there are trained First Aiders in all of the Department's buildings with a First Aider for every 50 staff, approximately.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Social Development what policy measures are under consideration to increase the security of tenure provided to tenants in the private rented sector.
(AQW 41892/11-15)

Mr Storey: Increased security of tenure is one of a number of issues that will be considered as part of the review of the role and regulation of the Private Rented Sector which is currently underway.

The purpose of this review is to identify ways in which the sector can be enabled to provide a viable, attractive and good quality housing option for a broad range of households.

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Social Development when single glazing units will be replaced by double glazed units in Tigers Bay, Belfast, specifically in Alexandra Park Avenue, Hogarth Street, Limestone Road, Mervue Street, Parkmount Street, Ponsonby Avenue, Syringa Street and Upper Mervue Street.
(AQW 41894/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised that the replacement of existing single glazing in the streets specified has largely been completed through the Tigers Bay double glazing installation scheme. The Cliftonville/Cavehill scheme, which is currently on site, includes further dwellings in Alexandra Park Avenue, Limestone Road and Mervue Street.

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Social Development when new kitchens will be fitted in properties in Cosgrave Heights, Belfast.
(AQW 41895/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised that the kitchens in Cosgrave heights, Belfast are scheduled to be replaced in a scheme currently programmed for April 2016.

Mr Clarke asked the Minister for Social Development Minister to detail the number of properties in Rathenraw, Antrim; and of these properties, how many are owned by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive.
(AQW 41897/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised that there are currently 275 properties in Rathenraw, Antrim. They own 134 of these properties (125 houses and nine bungalows) and all are tenanted. The remaining 141 properties have all been sold.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development whether a business case in respect of the stock transfer at Rinmore, Londonderry was presented to his Department; and if so, when.
(AQW 41905/11-15)

Mr Storey: Savills plc was commissioned by the Department to undertake an Economic Appraisal Report regarding the improvement of 55 dwellings at Rinmore which were owned and managed by the Housing Executive. The Report was presented to the Department in March 2010.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of cold weather payments since 1 November 2014, broken down by constituency.
(AQW 41961/11-15)

Mr Storey: The information is not available in the format requested as Cold Weather Payments cannot be broken down by constituency. A Cold Weather Payment is triggered when the average temperature has been recorded, or is forecast to be zero degrees centigrade or below for 7 consecutive days between November and March at any of Met Office's seven weather stations. The weather stations are located across Northern Ireland and cover a range of designated post code areas. Only those eligible claimants living in the postcode areas covered by the relevant weather station where the average temperature has been recorded or forecast to be zero degrees centigrade or below for 7 consecutive days will receive a payment.

One Cold Weather Payment has been triggered since 1 November 2014 based on temperature recordings at the Katesbridge weather station during the period 16-22 January 2015. An estimated 15,055 people living in postcode areas BT24-26 and BT30-34 have received the £25 payment.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how much has been spent on the Areas at Risk programme for Beechfield Estate in Donaghadee, since funding was awarded.
(AQW 41984/11-15)

Mr Storey: Funding of £85,207.84 has been allocated to the Beechfield Estate, Donaghadee since its inclusion in the Areas at Risk programme.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how much has been spent on the Neighbourhood Renewal programme for Kilcooley Estate in Bangor, since funding was awarded.
(AQW 41986/11-15)

Mr Storey: £3,241,388.37 has been allocated to Neighbourhood Renewal projects in the Kilcooley Estate, Bangor since the programme began.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how much has been spent on the Small Pockets of Deprivation programme for Rathgill Estate in Bangor, since funding was awarded.
(AQW 41988/11-15)

Mr Storey: Since the commencement of the Small Pockets of Deprivation programme, the amount spent on Rathgill Estate in Bangor has been £475,681.90. The annual breakdown of this spend is set out in the attached table.

Details of the actual spend for 2014/15 will not be available until financial year end, however I can confirm that Rathgill Community Association was awarded funding of £69,818.05 for this financial year.

Small Pockets of Deprivation Funding for Rathgill Estate, Bangor

Organisation/ Project Title	Actual Expenditure 2007/08	Actual Expenditure 2008/09	Actual Expenditure 2009/10	Actual Expenditure 2010/11	Actual Expenditure 2011/12	Actual Expenditure 2012/13	Actual Expenditure 2013/14
Rathgill Community Association	£49,564.92	£49,795.00	£73,648.98	£78,248.00	£78,136.00	£76,400.00	£69,889.00

Mr Spratt asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on measures taken to resolve technical issues which have arisen recently with the cladding and window replacement works in Cuchulainn House in North Belfast; and to outline the timescale for the roll-out of these works to other multi-storey blocks.
(AQW 42043/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised that as the overcladding and window replacement works progressed, a technical issue arose with fixing the cladding panels to the existing concrete framed structure. The Housing Executive is currently assessing the suitability of a range of products to remedy this defect and this has caused a delay. The cladding and window replacement element of the works should recommence in the very near future. The Housing Executive has notified all Cuchulainn residents of the current situation by letter.

The timescales for these schemes and the need for this type of work in other blocks will be determined through the new Tower Block Strategy that is currently being developed. This strategy will set out how the Housing Executive intends to invest in all of the blocks in the years ahead, and will be an integral part of a new Asset Management Strategy that will emerge primarily from the work that is currently being undertaken by Savills (UK) Limited as part of the Department for Social Development/Housing Executive's Asset Management Commission.

However, whilst this work is ongoing and awaited, I tasked the Housing Executive to prepare an interim investment priorities plan based on their current understanding of the stock. This Priorities Plan is built around a number of themes, including bringing forward work to be carried out to a number of multi -storey tower blocks. The purpose of the interim approach is to

effectively bridge the gap that exists between now and the development of a comprehensive strategy for maintaining all of the Housing Executive's housing assets leading, in turn, to a clear long term funding strategy.

Mr Spratt asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on kitchen replacement schemes for multi-storey blocks, broken down by constituency.
(AQW 42044/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised that there are a number of kitchen schemes that are currently being considered for several of the multi-storey flats blocks. These include: -

- Belfast East - Woodstock, Willowbrook and Kilbroney Houses;
- Belfast South - Moylena House;
- Belfast North - Mount Vernon and Ross Houses; and
- Lagan Valley - Parkdale, Ferndale, Riverdale, Coolmoyne and Rathmoyne Houses.

The timescales for these schemes and the need for this type of work in other blocks will be determined through the new Tower Block Strategy that is currently being developed. This strategy will set out how the Housing Executive intends to invest in all of the blocks in the years ahead, and will be an integral part of a new Asset Management Strategy that will emerge primarily from the work that is currently being undertaken by Savills (UK) Limited as part of the Department for Social Development/Housing Executive's Asset Management Commission.

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Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 41334/11-15, whether his Department liaised with the PSNI regarding their investigation; and if so, whether the police pursued any legal action in relation to the missing funds.
(AQW 42075/11-15)

Mr Storey: My Department did not liaise with the PSNI regarding the investigation. As I noted in my previous answer, my Department's investigation was unable to secure sufficient evidence to determine how much, if any, of the funds provided by the Department were not properly expended. Furthermore, there was insufficient evidence to determine whether criminal activity had taken place. Since there was no clear evidence either that any funds had gone missing or that criminal activity had taken place, there were no grounds for passing the case to the PSNI.

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Social Development to list the consultancy firms that provided financial services to his Department in each of the last five years; and the amount paid to each firm for these services.
(AQW 42093/11-15)

Mr Storey: The information requested is included in the table below and relates to strategic finance and operational finance services provided to my Department including the Social Security Agency, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland.

Year	Consultancy Firm	Amount Paid
2009/10	ASM Howarth McClure Watters PWC KPMG Deloitte Ernst & Young BDO Stoy Hayward Jane Field	£70,300 £34,839 £30,000 £19,220 £13,692 £8,500 £2,000 £1,495
2010/11	ASM Howarth Mercer PWC MBS	£14,775 £10,810 £2,940 £1,787
2011/12	Deloitte	£1,440
2012/13	-	£0
2013/14	PWC RSM McClure Watters	£119,524 £40,228

Mr Ramsey asked the Minister for Social Development, in relation to community care grants in Foyle, to detail (i) the number of (a) successful; and (b) unsuccessful applicants; and (ii) the amount paid in the last three years.
(AQW 42118/11-15)

Mr Storey: The number of total applications, successful applications, unsuccessful applications and amount paid in the last three financial years in Foyle are set out in the table below.

Year	Applications	Successful	Unsuccessful	Amount
2011-12	5,340	3,430	1,910	£1,550,000
2012-13	4,840	3,210	1,630	£1,480,000
2013-14	4,900	3,340	1,560	£1,902,000
Total	**15,070**	**9,970**	**5,100**	**£4,932,000**

* Frequencies rounded to the nearest 10, Amounts rounded to nearest £1,000. Totals may not sum due to roundings.

The figures in this table are based on applications instead of applicants as a person can make more than one application for a Community Care Grant during the year.

The information provided is an Official Statistic. The production of all such statistics is governed by the Principles and Protocols of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. This is enforced by the UK Statistics Authority.

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Social Development whether people who receive welfare benefits will be given an assurance that they will not be disadvantaged by any changes to the welfare system.
(AQW 42173/11-15)

Mr Storey: My Department is continuing to develop proposals for providing additional financial support to those claimants that will be adversely impacted by the Welfare Reforms. Work is ongoing to determine appropriate eligibility criteria and the level of payments that can be made from within allocated funds to each claimant group affected.

I can provide an assurance that, following agreement with Executive colleagues, the details of any scheme will be issued for public consultation. My department will also be communicating with claimants and the general public in Northern Ireland on the details of the changes to the benefit system brought about by the Welfare Reform Bill.

Mrs Overend asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the groups that received funding under the Women's Centres Childcare Fund in 2006.
(AQW 42208/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Women's Centres Childcare Fund commenced in April 2008.

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the business case which would allow the Housing Executive to pay an employee a salary increase of 2.2 per cent and a one-off non-consolidated payment of £100.
(AQW 42223/11-15)

Mr Storey: I can confirm that the business case for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, allowing the Executive to pay the required salary increases to staff has now been approved.

Northern Ireland Housing Executive officials have been notified and work is ongoing to ensure that NIHE staff receive their payments as soon as possible.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development what is the total in benefits paid to families expected to benefit from compensatory payments in consequence of the £26,000 benefits cap; and how many families are expected to receive such payments.
(AQW 42251/11-15)

Mr Storey: My Department is continuing to develop proposals for providing additional financial support to those claimants that will be adversely impacted by the Welfare Reforms. Work is ongoing to determine appropriate eligibility criteria and the level of payments that can be made from within allocated funds to each claimant group affected.

I will be bringing a paper to the Executive in the near future setting out how it is proposed to move forward with the modalities of implementing the different schemes agreed at Stormont House.

It is currently estimated that 470 households will be impacted by the benefit cap.

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Social Development whether the removal of the proposed bedroom tax will be accounted for in the calculation of any proposed hardship top up fund.
(AQW 42285/11-15)

Mr Storey: The provisions within the Welfare Reform Bill (NI) 2012 which enables the calculation of the maximum housing benefit payable to those claimants whose tenancies are deemed to meet the eligibility criteria for the Social Sector Size Criteria, sometimes referred to as the bedroom tax, passed consideration stage in the Assembly on 11th February 2015. The Executive has agreed as part of the Stormont House Agreement to mitigate the impact of these provisions by creating a separate Discretionary Housing Payment.

Officials are finalising proposals which will be brought to the Executive for approval on how such a mitigation scheme could be made available.

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Social Development whether there is a cap on how much an individual can claim from the proposed hardship top up fund.
(AQW 42379/11-15)

Mr Storey: My Department is continuing to develop the eligibility criteria and level of payments that could be made under the different schemes which the Executive has agreed as part of the Stormont House Agreement. This work is considering a number of different payment scenarios to identify the levels of support that could be provided to affected claimants being made available to fund the different schemes.

At this time it is not possible to confirm whether there will be a cap on the level of payments made to individual claimants.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 27 February 2015

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Mr Anderson asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether they discussed Welfare Reform with the Prime Minister at their meeting in July 2014 to review progress on the joint economic pact.
(AQO 6540/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness (The First Minister and deputy First Minister): We met with David Cameron on 2 July 2014. The main focus of this meeting was to discuss and review progress on the 'Economic Pact, Building a United and Prosperous Community' one year on from its publication. Members will be aware that within that pact, a series of measures were agreed which are consistent with the Executive's Economic Strategy and our shared objective to rebalance the economy and build a shared future. One year on from the publication of that package, the meeting provided an opportunity to reflect on the progress made in areas such as job promotion, research and development, investment and infrastructure, and consider the further challenges that lie ahead. We also updated him on other key aspects of the pact, including shared campuses and the United Youth Programme and reaffirmed our continuing commitment to work towards a prosperous and united community here.

While it was not the purpose of this meeting, the issue of Welfare Reform did arise, which provided an opportunity to outline both the challenges its presents and express concerns directly with David Cameron on this matter.

Mr Nesbitt asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how the capital allocations for Together Building a United Community in 2015/16 will be allocated to each project; and whether the resource requirements have been factored into the 2015/16 draft Budget.
(AQW 39428/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The 2015-16 Budget allocates some £10m of revenue funding to Together: Building a United Community. OFMDFM is presently working with departments to finalise the cost profiles of work to be taken forward across the 7 Headline Actions during 2015/16. These profiles will be categorised under Resource and Capital expenditure and will inform decision making.

With the challenging public expenditure environment it is essential that departments work together to ensure that resources are targeted and spent in a way that maximises their impact and ensures progress against actions and commitments.

Mr Lyttle asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister why a baseline budget has yet to be established for Together: Building a United Community.
(AQO 7229/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: OFMDFM is working with departments in respect of their plans to deliver against their actions and commitments as set out in the Together: Building a United Community Strategy. This work also involves determining each departments' resource requirements, capital and revenue, necessary to deliver their actions and commitments. Given the position of some of the headline actions and commitment it is not possible to determine the full cost implications at this stage and therefore a baseline budget cannot yet be established.

That said however, the 2015/16 budget includes a baseline allocation of £10 million to progress T:BUC actions and commitments during 2015/16.

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what will the Implementation and Reconciliation Group, as anticipated in the Stormont House Agreement, do for the first five years of its existence.
(AQW 40962/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: As indicated in the Stormont House Agreement, the Implementation and Reconciliation Group will oversee themes, archives and information recovery and promote reconciliation.

Mr Lunn asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the United Youth programme of Together: Building a United Community.
(AQW 41415/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: One of the seven core headline actions committed to within Together: Building a United Community is the development of the United Youth Programme.

To date there has been comprehensive and detailed engagement with youth related organisations and young people themselves to ensure the programme has maximum buy-in and consensus.

The co-design process begun, by OFMDFM, is being continued by the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) and is being supported by a Design Team which includes representation from DEL, OFMDFM, the Department for Social Development, the Department of Education, Community Relations Council, Youthnet, Youth Council, International Fund for Ireland, Public Health Agency and Education and Library Boards.

The First Pilot to help inform the design for the United Youth Programme which was rolled out by Springboard has concluded and has now been evaluated. A call for concept proposals to deliver pilot projects was issued in early September. Following a development phase in the Autumn, over 150 pilot applications were submitted in December. An assessment of these proposals was completed with assistance from the programme's Design Team.

As a result, 50 successful organisations (57 proposals) have been selected to proceed to a further development stage, following which a number of pilot schemes will be operational during the 2015/16 financial year. It is expected that the selected pilot projects will be aimed at the 16 – 24 age group who are not in education, employment or training and offered to approximately 300 young people. By summer 2016 the programme will extend the eligible age range to the 14 -24 age group.

Mr Lunn asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the removal of interface barriers, in line with the commitment to have all of barriers removed by 2023.
(AQW 41418/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: At the outset there were a total of 59 interface barriers, 22 of which were owned by the Housing Executive. Work to date has reduced this number to 52 and engagement is currently ongoing with around 40 of the 52 remaining areas.

Mr McElduff asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the range of schemes and services available to assist children and young people, in areas of social deprivation which do not qualify for Neighbourhood Renewal or Sure Start provision.
(AQW 41569/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: There are a number of schemes and services provided by various Executive departments, including OFMDFM to assist children and young people in areas of social deprivation, in addition to that provided by Sure Start and Neighbourhood Renewal. Within these different policies and schemes the pool of people in need will invariably be different. The entitlement criteria may be defined by reference to the individual, groups, or areas or a collaboration of all three.

For example, in relation to schemes and services provided by OFMDFM, the Bright Start Childcare Grant Scheme aims to create childcare provision in the top 25% most disadvantaged Super Output Areas as identified using the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Measure. It is available in some areas of social deprivation which do not qualify for Neighbourhood Renewal or Sure Start provision, but there is clearly some overlap.

There is also a range of schemes and services available in areas of social deprivation which use wholly, or in part, non-area based criteria to target children and young people in need. Examples of such schemes initiated by OFMDFM include:

- The Delivering Social Change Signature Programmes for Literacy and Numeracy and Family Support Hubs;
- Summer schools and camps during school holiday periods as set out in the Together: Building a United Community Strategy; and
- The £80 million Social Investment Fund, which aims to improve social conditions and encourage economic growth in areas where there is poverty, unemployment and dereliction, directly or indirectly assisting children and young people.

Mr Campbell asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the number of Confucious Institute arrangements in the rest of the United Kingdom in addition to the Northern Ireland project; and whether development plans by the Chinese authorities for each are organised separately.
(AQW 41649/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We understand from information available from Hanban, the office of Chinese Language Council International, in Beijing that there are 25 Confucius Institutes across the United Kingdom. This figure includes the Confucius Institute based at the Ulster University in Belfast. Associated with the Institutes are 92 Confucius classroom hubs in schools, which are spread geographically across the UK, of which 8 are located in Northern Ireland.

The management and governance arrangements for Confucius Institutes are the responsibility of Hanban.

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what are the arrangements and scales of payment applicable to legal representatives appearing before, and on behalf of, the Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry, specifying whether brief fees or daily attendance fees, or both, are paid, and whether preparation time is separately remunerated.
(AQW 41686/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The legislative framework governing expenses is set out in primary and subordinate legislation, namely: sections 14 and 15 of the Inquiry into Historical Institutional Abuse Act (Northern Ireland) 2013 ("the Act"); and rules 22-34 of the Inquiry into Historical Institutional Abuse Rules (Northern Ireland) 2013 ("the Rules").

Section 6(1) of the Act states: "Subject to any provision of this Act or of rules under section 21, the procedure and conduct of the inquiry are to be such as the chairperson may direct." Rule 35 of the Rules states: "Save as otherwise expressly or by necessary implication provided by these Rules, the chairperson shall decide the procedures to be followed by the inquiry and the inquiry team ...."

The Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry is, of course, independent from the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, so we cannot answer questions on its behalf. However, you may be interested to note that the Inquiry has its own Costs Protocol, which is published on the Inquiry's website.

Mr Lyttle asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the review of good relations indicators.
(AQW 41785/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We are currently considering a revised set of good relations indicators. This set was drafted following a public consultation period and with the assistance of an Advisory Group, comprising internal and external stakeholders.

Mr Lyttle asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the delivery of good relations funding.
(AQW 41786/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Department allocates good relations funding through a number of different funding schemes. A list of the funding schemes and the allocation to each scheme for 2014/15 is as follows:

Fund	**Amount Allocated**
District Council Good Relations Programme	£3,268,975
North Belfast Strategic Good Relations Programme	£750,000
Central Good Relations Fund	£1,621,514
Summer Interventions/Pilots	£700,000
Contested Spaces	£747,899
Total	**£7,088,388**

The level of funding allocated clearly demonstrates our commitment to the delivery of Together: Building a United Community and to achieving good relations outcomes across our society.

Mr McMullan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the departmental and arm's-length body buildings that are equipped with defibrillators; and how many staff in each of these buildings are trained in (i) the use of defibrillators; and (ii) C.P.R.
(AQW 41934/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: OFMDFM shares Castle Buildings with DHSSPS and DOJ and we are able to access defibrillators and trained staff in those departments as detailed in the table below.

	No. of defibrillators	**staff trained to use defibrillators**	**staff trained in C.P.R**
Castle Buildings	3 (DHSSPS)	8 (DHSSPS)	10
Stormont Castle	2	3	5
NSMC	1	8	1

Across other buildings where there are currently no defibrillators, a further 35 staff are trained in CPR.

Mr Dallat asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to list the consultancy firms that provided financial services to their Department in each of the last five years; and the amount paid to each firm for these services.
(AQW 41936/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: No consultancy firms have provided financial services to the Department in any of the last five years.

Mr Eastwood asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail any discussions which have taken place in relation to achieving City Deal status in Northern Ireland.
(AQW 42189/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Executive Ministers have ongoing discussions with the UK Government in respect of a range of measures to support local economic development, including those agreed as part of City Deals.

For example, as part of the June 2013 Economic Pact, the Government agreed to the establishment of an Enterprise Zone here, with Coleraine confirmed as the location in Budget 2014.

More recently, as part of the Stormont House Agreement, the Government committed to taking forward the legislation to devolve responsibility for Corporation Tax rate setting powers.

City Deals have been developed in the context of the roles and responsibilities of local government in Great Britain which is a matter for the Department of the Environment here.

Mr Nesbitt asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what discussions have taken place regarding, or consideration given to, using Peace IV money to fund the comprehensive Mental Trauma Service referred to in paragraph 27 of the Stormont House Agreement.
(AQW 42206/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: There are ongoing discussions between our officials and DHSSPS on how best to provide and fund a Mental Trauma Service for the benefit of victims and survivors.

Ms Sugden asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether their Department will use Intermediary Funding Bodies to implement the Social Investment Fund; and to detail who these bodies are and their role.
(AQW 42245/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Intermediary Funding Bodies will not be used to implement the Social Investment Fund (SIF).

SIF funding has been awarded to 33 projects managed by either a lead partner or project promoter, who will, depending on the type of project, tender for either design teams or delivery agents. These teams/agents will be paid directly by the project and not the Department.

Ms Sugden asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how many successful applicants of the Social Investment Fund in the Northern Zone received a letter of offer; and further to the receipt of a letter of offer, how many have received funding.
(AQW 42246/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Four projects in the Social Investment Northern Zone have received Letters of Offer. These are Coleraine Rural and Urban Network (CRUN), Fuel Poverty, Community Capacity Hubs and Employment through Education. Of these only CRUN has begun, the remainder are working on the pre-conditions which must be met before they can be given permission to start.

Ms Sugden asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what are the identified themes further to the completion of the Social Investment Fund application process.
(AQW 42311/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The high level strategic concept, objectives and overall methodology of the Social Investment Fund can be found on the OFMDFM website at http://www.ofmdfmni.gov.uk/social-investment-fund. Details of the Social Investment Fund projects can also be found there.

Ms Sugden asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the Minority Ethnic Development Fund.
(AQW 42312/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We have committed £1.1 million to the 2015/16 Minority Ethnic Development Fund and expect to be making a formal call for applications soon.

Ms Sugden asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister who is the primary point of contact for the Social Investment Fund Northern Steering Group.
(AQW 42313/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: William Adamson, the Chair of the Social Investment Fund Northern Zone Steering Group is the primary contact. Details of other members of the Steering Group can be found on the OFMDFM website at http://www.ofmdfmni.gov.uk/index/delivering-social-change/social-investment-fund/sif-steering-groups.htm#sif-sg-northern.

Ms Sugden asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the role of the Northern Ireland Executive within the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission.
(AQW 42333/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: There is currently no role for a representative of the Northern Ireland Executive within the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission.

Mr McQuillan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the projects funded by the Social Investment Fund.
(AQO 7568/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Funding of approximately £50million has been committed, or is about is be committed, to 33 projects across the 9 Social Investment Zones. This represents 63% of the £80million allocated to the Fund.

To date two capital projects, the Coleraine Rural and Urban Network in the Northern Zone and Bryson Street Surgery in the Belfast East Zone have commenced. Six revenue projects from across the Zones are tendering for delivery agents and four capital projects from the Western and South Eastern Zones are due to go to tender shortly for design teams. Others will follow.

On 20 January, we announced a further 9 projects and issued 7 Letters of Offer. The remainder will issue shortly.

Considerable effort is being invested in all remaining projects to get them through the necessary appraisal process and to the Letter of Offer stage as soon as possible.

Details of all projects prioritised within the funding allocation for each of the nine Social Investment Zones are available on the OFMDFM website.

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what actions have been taken pursuant to section 28D of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.
(AQW 42393/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Executive business and all aspects of the Executive decision-making process are confidential.

Ms Ruane asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline any progress made in the development of the Gender Equality Strategy, including any associated budget to see the Strategy realised.
(AQO 7570/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The current Gender Equality Strategy, which is due to end in 2016, sets out an overarching framework to promote gender equality.

A review of the Strategy was undertaken during 2013, and in January 2014 we approved the development of a new Gender Equality Strategy.

Work on a Strategy is underway and a pre-consultation period has commenced. A number of meetings have taken place with a range of key stakeholders and the Gender Advisory Panel, to update them on progress and involve them in the development of the new Strategy.

Officials briefed the OFMDFM Committee on the progress of the Review of the Gender Equality Strategy on 12 February 2014 and provided a further written update on 3 June 2014.

Whilst there is no associated budget with the current Gender Equality Strategy, we will work closely with departments, their agencies and other relevant statutory authorities in developing a new Action Plan that will give effect to and enable the achievement of the aims and objectives of the new Strategy through a variety of departmental initiatives.

The new Strategy will be subject to a full 12 week period of public consultation and following Committee consideration will require Executive approval. The current Strategy will remain in place until a new one is developed and operational.

Mr I McCrea asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the benefit the £1.4 million allocation from the Social Investment Fund to community hub projects will bring to Mid Ulster.
(AQO 7571/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: On 28 January 2015 the Letter of Offer for the Northern Zone's Community Capacity Hub Project was issued. It was worth £1,129,021.

The project aims to regenerate community facilities which have fallen into disrepair and have substantial energy efficiency issues. SIF money will permit their upgrade to full community usage and also address statutory requirements related to Disability Discrimination and the Energy Efficiency Directive (2012).

The buildings are 5 Orange halls and 2 community halls across the Zone.

Mr Clarke asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how they intend to improve victims' services.
(AQO 7572/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We are committed to ensuring that victims and survivors receive the best services we can provide and that funding goes to those who need it most. To this end, funding for the victims sector for 2015-16 has been increased with over £14 million being provided to support the Victims and Survivors Service and the Commission for Victims and Survivors. This includes the highest ever opening budget for the Victims and Survivors Service and reflects our continued commitment to victims and survivors.

In collaboration with key stakeholders, our Department plans to examine the service delivery model which currently provides services to Victims and Survivors. The collaborative design programme of work will help to design and inform the types of services required for victims and survivors.

The input from stakeholders gleaned through this collaborative programme coupled with the valuable feedback from the recent reviews of the Victims and Survivors Service on what is working well and the areas which require further analysis will provide a useful steer to build on the improvements to services which have occurred in recent months.

Mr Poots asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the implementation of their departmental responsibilities for the Stormont House Agreement.
(AQO 7573/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: A number of the commitments in the Stormont House Agreement fall specifically to our department, particularly in relation to the establishment of a Commission on Flags, Identity, Culture and Tradition; support for victims; institutional reform; and civic engagement. Our officials have commenced work on all of these issues in accordance with the timescales set out in the Agreement and an Implementation Plan which has been drawn up for each of its provisions.

Mr Buchanan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister when they will publish the restructuring plans for Executive Departments.
(AQO 7574/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Stormont House Agreement contains a commitment to reduce the number of departments from 12 to 9 in time for the 2016 Assembly elections, with the new allocation of departmental functions to be agreed by the parties. The restructuring is the subject of ongoing consideration and we will bring forward details of the proposed restructuring once they have been finalised.

Mr Hussey asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the Racial Equality Strategy.
(AQO 7575/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We completed a 16 week public consultation exercise to ensure the detail of the revised Racial Equality Strategy is relevant to the needs and hopes of our minority ethnic population and the broader community.

Officials are currently analysing the responses to the consultation and these will inform the new Strategy. Officials are due to report to the OFMDFM Committee on the outcome of the consultation on 18 March.

Mr McCallister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister when a legislative programme for 2015/16 will be published.
(AQW 42400/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Executive's legislative intentions for the remainder of the current Assembly mandate are being reviewed and further consideration will be given as to how best these might be conveyed to the Assembly.

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many staff, at Deputy Principal grade and above, based in Dundonald House have indicated their willingness to relocate to Ballykelly.
(AQW 41098/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): A total of 18 staff, at Deputy Principal and above, based in Dundonald House have indicated their willingness to relocate to Ballykelly. A further 16 staff, at Deputy Principal and above, have indicated that they may move.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development which breeds of dogs are required to be muzzled and on a lead when in public.
(AQW 41917/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Control of Greyhounds Act 1950 requires any greyhound, whippet and any breed, strain or cross thereof to be muzzled and kept on a lead in a public place.

Under the Dogs Order 1983, as amended, Council Dog Wardens may impose certain control conditions on a dog, where the Dog Warden has reasonable cause to believe that an offence has been committed in respect of that dog such as attacking a person, livestock or certain other animals. These control conditions include the requirement to keep that dog muzzled, and on a lead, when in a public place.

You may wish to note that in the south, 11 breeds of dog, and every other strain or cross of those breeds, must be kept on a short lead and securely muzzled. These breeds are the American Pit Bull Terrier, Bull Mastiff, Doberman Pinscher, English Bull Terrier, German Shepherd (Alsatian), Japanese Akita, Japanese Tosa, Rhodesian Ridgeback, Rottweiler, Staffordshire Bull Terrier, and Ban Dog.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what is the rationale for the requirement for greyhounds to be muzzled and kept on a lead when in public.
(AQW 41918/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Control of Greyhounds Act 1950 was introduced to prevent the possible distressing attacks by greyhounds on other animals and people in public areas.

To be a successful courser or racer, a greyhound's instinct to pursue and, if possible, kill a small animal must be highly developed. Consequently greyhounds are bred and trained to have those characteristics which are rare amongst domesticated dogs in general. Moreover greyhounds are necessarily large, powerful and fast moving.

The Control of Greyhounds Act 1950 provides for the muzzling and control of any greyhound in a public place to prevent it from biting or otherwise injuring any human being or other animal and to ensure that proper control is exercised over the greyhound by the person leading it.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what regulations, or departmental guidance, advises that greyhounds should (i) not be kept as pets; (ii) not be encouraged for rehoming; and (iii) be kept in external kennels.
(AQW 41919/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department has not made any regulations or issued any guidance advising that greyhounds should (i) not be kept as pets; (ii) not be encouraged for rehoming; or (iii) be kept in external kennels.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development why there are legal distinctions drawn between greyhounds and other domestic breeds of dogs.
(AQW 41920/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Control of Greyhounds Act 1950 was introduced to prevent the possible distressing attacks by greyhounds on other animals and people in public areas.

To be a successful courser or racer, a greyhound's instinct to pursue and, if possible, kill a small animal must be highly developed. Consequently greyhounds are bred and trained to have those characteristics which are rare amongst domesticated dogs in general. Moreover greyhounds are necessarily large, powerful and fast moving. That is why there is specific legislation for their control.

In instances in which a dog of another domestic breed reveals itself to be dangerous, it may be dealt with under the provisions contained within the Dogs Order 1983 as amended. Therefore there are now legislative requirements on all dog owners for better dog control in public places, not just the owners of greyhounds.

All dog owners have a responsibility to ensure that their dog does not become a problem to themselves or other people.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the prevalence of bovine viral diarrhoea in cattle.
(AQW 41983/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Production diseases such as BVD can have a significantly negative impact on productivity but as they are not subject to a national control programme my Department does not formally record their prevalence. It is the responsibility of industry to take the lead in tackling such diseases.

Animal Health and Welfare NI (AHWNI) has been set up by industry to lead on the development and promotion of programmes to tackle such diseases and has already initiated a voluntary BVD programme of 'tag and testing', which began in January 2013.

If it is helpful AHWNI can be contacted through:

Mr Sam Strain, Chief Executive, 97 Moy Road, Dungannon, Co. Tyrone BT71 7DX

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what actions are being taken to eradicate bovine viral diarrhoea from cattle.
(AQW 41985/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Production diseases such as BVD can have a significant negative impact on productivity and are not subject to a national control programme. It is the responsibility of industry to take the lead in tackling such diseases. Animal Health and Welfare NI (AHWNI) has been set up by industry to lead on the development and promotion of programmes to tackle such diseases and has already initiated a voluntary BVD programme of 'tag and testing', which began in January 2013.

My Department provided start-up funding of up to £125,497 to help AHWNI deliver this voluntary BVD eradication programme and contribute towards the development of a Johne's disease control programme. Previously I announced to the industry that I was minded to introduce legislation to make it compulsory for herd keepers to test new born bovines for BVD. Since then, my Department has been working closely with industry representatives in developing a legislative framework to support an eradication programme. Subsequently the legislation has been considered by the EU Commission under the Technical Standards Directive and could now be entered into the legislative process here. This would involve consideration by the ARD Committee and the Executive before it can become law.

However, before I can introduce legislation here, it will be necessary for AHWNI to demonstrate to my Department that they have sufficient industry funding to enable them to maintain the implementation of the eradication programme going forward without the need for further public funding. This is particularly important, not only because of the pressures on available public funding, but also because of the need for industry to lead in tackling this production disease. I am aware that AHWNI is currently preparing a viability and sustainability plan for the organisation which will be considered by my officials on completion.

Under this arrangement AHWNI will have responsibility for implementing aspects of the legislation and they need to be able to demonstrate that they have an IT System that is fit for this purpose. This system is currently under development and I am hopeful that they can conclude this work soon so as to allow me to introduce the legislation later in 2015.

Using the Tag and Test method of identifying those cattle that are persistently infected with BVD enables farmers to remove those animals from their herd. This method will lead to a ten-fold economic benefit, based on the initial herd keeper outlay and recognising that these financial benefits can be recovered within a very short period of time.

I would urge all farmers to join the voluntary programme right away even before legislation can be introduced. This would help ensure that they would not be competitively disadvantaged compared with herd keepers elsewhere in the EU who have BVD eradication programmes under way.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development why there is no independent monitoring body for the greyhound racing industry; and whether she has any plans to establish such a body.
(AQW 41987/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I have no plans to establish an independent monitoring body for the greyhound racing industry.

The Welfare of Animals Act 2011 provides legal protection for all animals, including greyhounds, from unnecessary suffering. This is enforced by local Councils, which will investigate any animal welfare concerns, including any in relation to the greyhound racing industry.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development who is responsible for the regulation of the greyhound racing industry.
(AQW 41989/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Greyhound racing has traditionally been self-sustaining and unregulated in the north.

As greyhound racing is not regarded as an agricultural activity and does not take place on agricultural land, my Department's only interest in it is from an animal welfare perspective in relation to statutory obligations under the Welfare of Animals Act 2011. While the Act provides legal protection for all animals from unnecessary suffering, it contains no specific provisions relating to the greyhound racing industry.

The Irish Coursing Club is the industry representative body for greyhound racing and has published a best practice guide for the care and welfare of greyhounds. It checks the activities of its members to ensure adherence.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she has any plans to update legislation on the control of greyhounds.
(AQW 41991/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Whilst no specific Department has responsibility for the Control of Greyhounds Act 1950, my Department has policy and legislative responsibility for animal welfare, dog control, the identification and licensing of dogs and dog breeding.

Any amendment to the Control of Greyhounds Act 1950 would need to be taken forward through the Assembly, and any decision about whether to bring forward an amendment would be preceded by an examination of the available evidence on greyhounds and engagement with stakeholders, particularly Councils given their role in enforcing dog control legislation here.

I am already committed to the introduction of a number of pieces of legislation in the Assembly in this current mandate and have no plans to bring forward additional proposals in relation to this issue.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what consideration has been given to microchipping greyhounds rather than the current identity method of tagging the dogs' ears.
(AQW 42066/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: From 1 January 2013, under the Dogs (Licensing and Identification) Regulations 2012, all dogs, including greyhounds, kept under a block licence issued on or after 9 April 2012 have had to be microchipped from eight weeks of age. In addition, anyone applying for a block licence, on or after 1 January 2013, must have any dog aged eight weeks or over mircochipped before they apply for the licence.

Any dog, including a greyhound, which is not kept under a block licence, must be microchipped in accordance with the Dogs Order 1983 as amended.

If a dog is not microchipped in accordance with the Dogs Order 1983 or the Dogs (Licensing and Identification) Regulations 2012, it is not considered licensed, which is an offence liable to prosecution.

Greyhounds are not required under legislation to be identified by ear marking.

Mr Byrne asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what proposals her Department has to improve the genetic quality of the beef stock herd.
(AQW 42109/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I am very much aware of the opportunities that genetic tools can bring in achieving permanent and cumulative improvement in the competitiveness of livestock production, and in animal health.

The need to address the relatively low levels of genetic progress being achieved, particularly in the beef and sheep sectors, has been highlighted in several strategic industry reports, including Going for Growth. To address this important issue, the Agri-Food Strategy Board has recently established a sub-group to provide strategic direction and co-ordination of work on livestock genetics. My officials are represented on this key group.

AFBI research and development, funded by DARD and co-funded by AgriSearch, has led to the development of important innovations for the industry to inform breeding and management decisions and in doing so drive forward production efficiency. These projects are addressing a broad range of issues affecting the sustainability of the industry, and by highlighting them I want to acknowledge the important research work that is taking place and the significant investment my Department is placing in this work.

CAFRE also provides training programmes and assists farmers to adopt relevant technologies which lead to genetic improvement within their farm business.

There may be opportunities for the new RDP to assist the industry overcome some of the barriers to genetic progress which exist, particularly in the red meat sectors. We have therefore ensured that there is sufficient flexibility within our draft RDP submitted to the Commission and other workstreams to accommodate further developments.

I am aware of Minister Coveney's announcement last autumn to increase support for the use of genomics in the south for beef genetic improvement. I will keep a watching brief on the outcomes of that work and explore how our industry can benefit from the new knowledge that will be generated.

Achieving genetic improvement in the beef sector is an important challenge and in addition to any support my department can offer, it will require a combined effort from producers, processors, researchers and farm advisors to move the industry forward.

Mr Byrne asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what proposals have been agreed with the EU Commissions in Brussels to ensure the sustainability of family based farming enterprises, within the parameters of the Single Farm Payment and the new Rural Development programme.
(AQW 42110/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Since the introduction of decoupled support in 2005, the Single Farm Payment under CAP Pillar I has not sought to promote or sustain agricultural production levels or agricultural productivity. CAP Pillar I direct payments seek to support agricultural incomes. Under the latest CAP Reform, this general approach continues.

The draft Rural Development Programme 2014 – 2020 has not yet been agreed with the European Commission. It was submitted to the Commission on 14th October 2014 and we are awaiting the EU Commission formal observation letter on the proposed content of the Programme.

Mr Byrne asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what role her Department will have to play to ensure a successful implementation of statutory based rural proofing.
(AQW 42111/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The policy proposals for a Rural Proofing Bill are currently out for public consultation. The proposed Bill would place a statutory duty on all government departments and local councils to consider the needs of rural dwellers in the

development and delivery of policy and public services. This duty will help to ensure that rural proofing is carried out effectively across government.

The proposed role of my Department would be: to promote rural proofing across government, which would help improve awareness and consistency of approach; to provide advice and guidance, which would help build capability across government; and to gather and compile information on rural proofing and publish a monitoring report to be laid before the Assembly, which would provide an accountability mechanism for the process and greater transparency on the extent to which rural proofing is carried out.

Mr Byrne asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what reform proposals are envisioned for her Department in order for it to be more farmer centred, with less cumbersome bureaucracy.
(AQW 42112/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: In recent years, DARD has achieved a 10.4% overall reduction in bureaucracy across what are considered to be the ten most burdensome areas of agri-food regulation. I want to build on this encouraging work.

Despite my desire for a simpler CAP regime, the new schemes are greater in number and more complex. However, my officials are working to ensure that they are as easy as possible to understand with information and tools available to help farmers and others comply with the least amount of bureaucracy attached as possible.

Given the budgetary pressures facing my department and the significant staff reductions that will occur over the next number of years, work is ongoing to re-design the Department's operational structure. To inform this process we are reviewing key aspects of the Department including the inspection regime, advisory services and corporate functions.

I want to utilise the opportunity to make the Department a more modern, leaner and more efficient organisation that reflects the needs of the agricultural industry. In particular, this will mean extending digital delivery of services. For example, I want to provide greater on-line provision so that the modern day busy farmer can complete their administration at a time of their choosing and not just when our offices are open. This type of 24/7 access is important in supporting an industry that is ambitious and wants to grow.

I want to provide digital services that are so good that customers who can use them prefer to do so. It means designing systems that are focused on customer needs and simplifying processes so that the services are easy to use. Where customers are having difficulty making the switch to digital, there will be support to ensure they can receive the same benefits as others.

My Department provides a wide range of advisory and educational services to farm businesses and the wider rural community through CAFRE and will continue to provide a valuable support service to the farming community through our network of DARD Direct offices. These regional offices are specifically designed to improve the delivery of DARD services for customers by ensuring that the majority of enquiries are satisfactorily answered at the first point of contact, whether by telephone, online or in person.

The new office in Strabane will be a welcome addition to the DARD service provision and completes the roll-out of DARD Direct. It will ensure that the farming community in the North West benefits in the same way as others have across the north.

Mr Byrne asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how the Young Farmers Entrance Scheme is being progressed.
(AQW 42113/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: A Guidance booklet for the Young Farmers' Payment was published on the DARD website on 6 February 2015. It contains detailed information on eligibility criteria and the evidence young farmers will need to submit in support of their application.

Farmers who qualify for the Young Farmers' Payment (including those who never held entitlements and those who will otherwise establish entitlements with a unit value below the regional average) may also be eligible to apply to the Young Farmers' category of the Regional Reserve to have entitlements allocated at the annual regional average value or the value of entitlements increased to the regional average. A Regional Reserve guidance booklet will be published by the end of February.

My Department has published these guidance booklets in advance of the Single Application Form (SAF) application period so that potential applicants have time to consider whether the Young Farmers' Payment and/or an application to the Reserve is appropriate to their circumstances and draw together the necessary documentation.

A Young Farmers' Payment registration process and Regional Reserve application process will open from mid March to 15 May 2015. During this time, young famer applicants will be required to complete a Young Farmers' Registration Form, a Reserve application form if appropriate and submit their supporting evidence in person at a DARD Direct office. They must complete a SAF, including applications to the Basic Payment Scheme and the Young Farmers Payment. The closing date for applications is 15 May 2015.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how much in Single Farm Payment funding was paid to farm businesses in each constituency, in the last year for which data is available.
(AQW 42116/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The amount of Single Farm Payment paid during the 2014/15 financial year, by constituency, is detailed in the table below:

Constituency	Single Farm Payment (£) funding for financial year 2014 / 2015
Belfast East	552,445
Belfast North	153,760
Belfast South	449,352
Belfast West	43,855
East Antrim	9,474,204
East Londonderry	21,232,749
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	36,874,125
Foyle	2,580,649
Lagan Valley	9,557,181
Mid Ulster	25,725,151
Newry and Armagh	24,972,843
North Antrim	26,826,737
North Down	1,466,300
South Antrim	12,142,216
South Down	21,624,966
Strangford	10,147,854
Upper Bann	7,209,935
West Tyrone	33,855,985
No Constituency*	4,581,414
Total	**249,471,721**

* The constituency information is drawn from the postcodes of businesses that received Single Farm Payments in the 2014 / 2015 financial year. The "No Constituency" figure represents businesses that either do not have a valid postcode recorded against their business or are businesses where the addresses held is outside the 18 constituencies listed above.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what steps she has taken to identify the ownership of the two high risk reservoirs discussed at a recent Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development meeting; and when their ownership will be identified.
(AQW 42119/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: As part of developing the policy on Reservoir safety, my officials made every effort to identify the owners of the 151 reservoirs considered to come under the scope of the Reservoirs legislation when enacted. The steps taken included searches of land registry records, the scrutiny of farm subsidy maps and examination of impoundment licence registrations held by the NI Environment Agency. These efforts have resulted in ownership being established for all but the two reservoirs in question, however it must be stressed that responsibility for providing information to the department will ultimately rest with the Reservoir Managers, as they will be required to register their structures when the legislation comes into force.

Attempts will continue to establish the owners of the two reservoirs in question until the formal registration process begins following the commencement of the Bill.

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the efficiency of her Department in processing Single Farm Payments in 2015 compared to 2014.
(AQW 42132/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department has delivered record payment performances for Single Farm Payments over the last two scheme years. For the 2014 scheme year, a record 95% of claims were finalised in December including the majority of inspection cases. Payments continue to be issued on a daily basis in 2015. The December 2013 equivalent was 90% - itself a record at that time.

My Department has achieved a greater level of efficiency for the 2014 scheme year compared to 2013 as these improvements were delivered without engaging additional staff. My Department is continuing to finalise the remaining claims as quickly as possible. It is anticipated that all remaining inspection cases will be processed for payment by the end of March 2015.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what was the operating cost of the Ministerial car in each of the last three financial years.
(AQW 42138/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The table below outlines expenditure on fuel costs and routine maintenance which includes servicing, tyre replacement and cleaning, incurred in operating the Departmental car used by the Minister in each financial year:-

Year	Cost
2011/12	£5,718.16
2012/13	£8,937.14
2013/14	£6,739.35

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to list the consultancy firms that provided financial services to his Department in each of the last five years; and the amount paid to each firm for these services.
(AQW 42146/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The consultancy firms that provided financial services to DARD, and the amounts paid to each firm, in each of the last five years were:

Financial Year	Consultancy Firm	Expenditure £
2009/10	Hymans Robertson	827.00
2009/10	Pricewaterhouse Coopers	52,700.00
2010/11	Deloitte	13,011.25
	Pricewaterhouse Coopers	1,275.00
2011/12	Nil	Nil
2012/13	Deloitte	13,500.00
2013/14	Deloitte	19,000.00

The information provided includes expenditure by the Department, including Agencies and NDPBs/other Arms Length Bodies.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether Rivers Agency would consult with Waterways Ireland on a decision to change the differential water levels between Upper and Lower Lough Erne by three feet at one time; and what impact such a change would have on the ability of cruisers to safely navigate Lough Erne.
(AQW 42150/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Prescribed water levels for both Upper and Lower Lough Erne have been in place since 1950 and were arrived at after consideration of the potential impacts on a range of relevant stakeholders, including recreational users of the Lough. More recently, the water level management regime was the subject of examination as part of the Ministerial Taskforce, following the flooding in Fermanagh in 2009. This work confirmed that the current approach to water level management is the best compromise, given the competing needs of some of the user groups, therefore Rivers Agency has no plans to consult with Waterways Ireland on changes to the prescribed water levels.

Rivers Agency does, however, regularly discuss the management of the Loughs with Waterways Ireland through liaison meetings between the two organisations and also when the control structure at Portora is in operation to ensure that leisure and other craft can safely navigate the lock gates.

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what discussions she has had with Executive colleagues on the retention of the Supporting People Programme; and for her assessment of the importance of support in rural communities to facilitate independence and tackle isolation.
(AQW 42211/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I have had no formal discussions with Executive colleagues on the retention of the Supporting People Programme. However I recognise the importance of support for rural communities and the benefits that programmes such as the Supporting People Programme can provide for vulnerable people living in rural areas.

My Department continues to operate the Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation (TRPSI) Framework which aims to reduce poverty and social isolation in rural areas through a range of measures targeted at helping the most vulnerable groups. Projects operating under the TRPSI Framework such as the Maximising Access in Rural Areas (MARA) project (which aims to maximise access to benefits, grants and local and regional services for vulnerable rural dwellers) and the Connecting Elderly Rural Isolated (CERI) project (which operates in the Western Trust Area and assists the elderly with shopping support and individual

support services such as chaperoning, minor home maintenance services and befriending) have made a real and positive impact on the lives of some of the most vulnerable rural dwellers.

I continue to lead on two other complementary rural initiatives, rural proofing and the Rural White Paper Action Plan, which are aimed at improving the quality of life for rural dwellers. All Departments are signed up to rural proofing and DARD is currently consulting on proposals for legislation which will help ensure that the needs of rural communities are routinely considered by government both in policy making and in the delivery of services. I have also asked my Executive colleagues to identify new and challenging actions by their Departments for inclusion in a refreshed Rural White Paper Action Plan which I hope to finalise later this year.

Ensuring that vulnerable rural dwellers have access to the necessary support is a key priority of mine and I continue to work with my Executive colleagues to ensure that all Departments fulfil their responsibilities in rural areas.

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what representations she has made to the UK Government regarding its participation in the analysis of member states implementation of the Birds & Habitats Directive, ahead of the proposed refit of this directive.
(AQW 42266/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I have made no representations to the British Government regarding its participation in the analysis of member states implementation of the Birds and Habitats Directives.

However, my Department does engage with the NI Environment Agency, which has lead responsibility for the implementation of the Birds and Habitats Directives, in relation to the protection and management of areas designated under these Directives.

Agri-environment schemes implemented by my Department make an important contribution to the management of areas designated under the Directives.

Land in these areas was prioritised for entry into the NI Countryside Management Scheme under Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2007-2013. In addition, the Targeted Level of the Environmental Farming Scheme, the new agri-environment scheme under RDP 2014-2020, will aim to support appropriate management of environmentally designated land.

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail to legalities of using barbed wire or similar wire products on fencing in fields where animals are kept.
(AQW 42267/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Farmers are required to ensure that livestock are kept securely, and that welfare standards are observed in accordance with the Welfare of Animals Act 2011and the Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations 2012, as amended. The use of barbed wire is acceptable as a means of establishing stockproof boundaries in fields however boundary fencing should be selected according to the type of stock which will utilise the field.

DARD agri-environment schemes provide funding for participants to erect protective fencing to facilitate the management of a farmland habitat, to protect newly planted trees from grazing livestock or to protect field boundary restoration which has been funded under the Scheme.

Normally a woven wire (sheep) fence with two strands of barbed wire is the minimum requirement for all types of fencing and this must be completed to at least BS 1722 and both barbed wire and woven wire must comply with BS 4102. Where public access or livestock requirements may require an alternative form of fencing such as the use of plain wire, this must be agreed in advance of any approval for funding.

Farmers are advised to seek approval from DRD, Roads Service, before new fences are erected alongside roadways.

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether any research has been undertaken on the impact on animal welfare of using barbed wire in fields where animals are kept.
(AQW 42268/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department is not funding any research, or is aware of any research being conducted elsewhere, regarding the impact on animal welfare of using barbed wire in fields where animals are kept.

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to AQW 41182/11-15, why there have been no discussions with the Department of the Environment on river pollution by fuel launderers and subsequent possible poisoning of water sources available to livestock and destruction of fish stock.
(AQW 42284/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I have had no discussions with the DOE Minister as policy relating to environmental damage is the responsibility of his Department.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to AQW 41001/11-15, how many of the 2,748 assisted households were in East Londonderry.
(AQW 42395/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: 243 of the 2,748 rural households that benefitted from DARD supported fuel poverty interventions up to the end of December 2014 were in the East Londonderry constituency.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the Rural Youth Entrepreneurship Programme; and whether it is on course to reach its Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation framework objective by March 2015.
(AQW 42397/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Rural Youth Entrepreneurship Programme is an innovative initiative that aims to help reduce youth migration and increase the sustainability of rural communities by encouraging rural young people to consider self-employment and entrepreneurship as a viable career path. At present 167 participants are engaged in the RYE Programme and work is well underway to achieve the target of 450 participants leading to 100 new Business Action Plans and onward referrals by 31 March 2016.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on the Rural Borewells Scheme; and whether she has plans to open the scheme for applications in 2015.
(AQW 42401/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Sixty-three borewells have been drilled for eligible applications received in 2012 and 2013. Site-works for the twenty-six eligible applications received in 2014 have also commenced.

A decision on whether to open again in 2015 must take account of departmental priorities within both DARD and DRD and also the level of demand for the Rural Borewells Scheme. A review of the Scheme is currently being undertaken by DARD and DRD officials. This review will influence the decision on future delivery of this Scheme; a decision which I anticipate will be made within the coming weeks.

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline her proposals for the expansion of the Forest Service to help meet the demand for native timber by the construction industry.
(AQO 7650/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: In 2006 the forestry strategy set a long term aim of doubling the area under forest. A Public Opinion survey in 2014 found that 96% of respondents believed that forestry was worth supporting, to provide places for wildlife to live and for recreation. 79% of respondents said that they would like to see more woodland locally.

The role that conifer forests play in producing home grown timber is different. The Forest Service sells £8.0 million worth of trees to produce 400,000 cubic metres of logs which sawmills turn into construction timber, wood fuel pellets and the like. Over 300 jobs in sawmills depend on the home grown timber industry, to say nothing about jobs in forests and timber haulage. The income varies according to market forces, and goes towards the costs of replanting forests and other expenses including public access, conservation and, increasingly, plant health measures.

There are risks to sustaining this level of production, from plant diseases, the storms of recent years, and because the programme of tree planting reduced considerably from the 1970's onwards.

My policy vision remains that there should be more forests to provide a broad range of public benefits.

To do this, we brought in a new Forestry Act. This created public rights of pedestrian access, controlled tree felling, and broadened the scope of forestry activity. We brought information about the extent of woodland up to date so that we know that forests cover 8% of the land area. We published a map showing areas where additional tree planting was most likely to be environmentally acceptable. Since 2007 the Rural Development Regulation funded planting of 2,700 hectares of woodland, of which 200 hectares are coniferous plantations intended to produce construction timber.

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on Going for Growth.
(AQO 7653/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: First of all I am pleased to say that the DETI Minister and I have recently re-appointed the current Chair and Members of the Agri-Food Strategy Board for a further two years. Our decision to reappoint the Board recognises the significant contribution and commitment Tony and his Board members have already made to growth of the sector and their continued role as we progress implementation.

As you will be aware, Going for Growth is a comprehensive strategic action plan and contains over 100 recommendations directed to both government and the industry. In our Executive Response, published last year, we set out actions to be taken by government departments and agencies over the short, medium and long term to address over 80 of those recommendations.

My Department has already made progress on a number of fronts, addressing key priorities of marketing, innovation, sustainable land use and, of course, developing proposals for a Farm Business Improvement Scheme, worth up to £250 million, to improve competitiveness and productivity in farming through up-skilling, knowledge transfer, advice and capital investment. Proposals for FBIS, a complementary Agri-Food Processing Investment Scheme, an Environmental Farming Scheme and a Land Management Programme have been included within the draft RDP 2014-2020, and work is continuing to develop these schemes and associated business cases.

The Board will continue to play a leading role in taking forward agreed industry actions to deliver its vision of a sustainable, profitable and integrated supply chain, focused on delivering the needs of the market. The Chair and members will also be a valuable sounding-board for government as we seek to progress our actions to support the industry's growth aspirations. I look forward to continuing to work closely with them.

Ms Fearon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how her Department is contributing towards the development of access to broadband for rural dwellers.
(AQO 7654/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: By the end of March 2015, my Department will have invested £7.5m in rural broadband. This investment has already helped some 17,000 rural dwellers, farms and businesses to access broadband services. The NI Broadband Improvements Project, which is led by DETI, and to which I am contributing £5m, has already been responsible for an additional 7,000 rural premises being able to connect to broadband if they wish.

Broadband is a priority of mine. I now want to encourage as many rural dwellers as possible to connect to broadband to give themselves and their families the same opportunities as those living in urban areas. My Department is looking to see how we can encourage more and better use of broadband so that rural businesses and farmers can benefit from the wide range of government services now available on line.

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many young farmers from South Antrim are currently studying for the Level II Qualification in Agriculture in order to attain eligibility for the Young Farmers' Scheme.
(AQO 7655/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Within the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE) there are currently 107 students from the South Antrim area enrolled on the Open College Network (NI) Level II Qualification – Agriculture Business Operations. This number includes students whose addresses have postcodes within the South Antrim Parliamentary Constituency.

Mr Girvan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how her Department plans to develop an export market for Northern Ireland beef in the USA.
(AQO 7656/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I am keenly aware that access to the US market for exports of beef from the north of Ireland is a key priority for local producers and processors and I was delighted when the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) lifted the EU wide BSE ban in March 2014. Considerable effort has already been made by my department to expedite the market access process for beef exports from the north.

I am pleased to confirm we have submitted a final version of the Self Reporting Tool (SRT) on 5 February which represents a key stage in accessing this market. The SRT outlines our controls on beef production and how government and industry will ensure the US specific export standards will be met. The next stage in the process is an inspection of our controls by the US authorities.

I am anticipating this inspection in the first half of 2015 and two meat processing establishments in the north will be visited. In preparation for the audit my officials participated in a mock inspection of processors by ex USDA inspectors in November 2014. They are continuing to work with industry to ensure that they are fully prepared to meet the stringent USDA requirements.

A successful inspection will see our production and audit systems approved for exports and will allow my officials to audit and approve other processors in the north interested in this market without the need for another inspection by the US authorities. I am pleased to note that the USDA have agreed that this inspection team will also visit a lamb processor in the north in anticipation of the US lifting their ban on EU lamb in the second half of 2015. Access will give the north an early foothold into this market ahead of other Member States.

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the impact on local mussel producers should Northern Ireland fail to meet its obligations under the EU Water Framework Directive.
(AQO 7658/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The EU Water Framework Directive is the responsibility of the Department of the Environment. I understand that most of the water bodies containing shellfish businesses are on target to meet Good Status in 2015. However, 4 water bodies are likely to meet moderate status by 2021. These are Inner Dundrum Bay, Inner Belfast Lough, Strangford Lough South and Carlingford Lough.

The shellfish businesses within Belfast, Strangford and Carlingford Loughs consistently meet at least Class B classification and remain productive. The Water Framework Directive classification is not compromising mussel producers. This is because these water bodies are failing to meet 'good' on their nutrient status. Mussels continue to grow well in nutrient-rich areas.

Inner Dundrum Bay is the only site which struggles to meet Class B consistently under the EU Food Hygiene Regulations. The regulatory authorities are working closely with NI Water (NIW) to ensure that improvements continue to be made to the sewerage network and waste water treatment works. This is NIW's highest priority waste water improvement scheme in 2015.

The mussel sector is a key component of the aquaculture industry in the north. In 2013, the Mussel Industry produced over 3300 tonnes of mussels with a value to the economy of £5.7 million.

Mr Cree asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the increase in woodland cover since 2007.
(AQO 7659/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: In 2006 the forestry strategy set a long term aim of doubling the area under forest. A Public Opinion survey in 2014 found that 96% of respondents believed that forestry was worth supporting, to provide places for wildlife to live and for recreation. 79% of respondents said that they would like to see more woodland locally.

The role that conifer forests play in producing home grown timber is different. The Forest Service sells £8.0 million worth of trees to produce 400,000 cubic metres of logs which sawmills turn into construction timber, wood fuel pellets and the like. Over 300 jobs in sawmills depend on the home grown timber industry, to say nothing about jobs in forests and timber haulage. The income varies according to market forces, and goes towards the costs of replanting forests and other expenses including public access, conservation and, increasingly, plant health measures.

There are risks to sustaining this level of production, from plant diseases, the storms of recent years, and because the programme of tree planting reduced considerably from the 1970's onwards.

My policy vision remains that there should be more forests to provide a broad range of public benefits.

To do this, we brought in a new Forestry Act. This created public rights of pedestrian access, controlled tree felling, and broadened the scope of forestry activity. We brought information about the extent of woodland up to date so that we know that forests cover 8% of the land area. We published a map showing areas where additional tree planting was most likely to be environmentally acceptable. Since 2007 the Rural Development Regulation funded planting of 2,700 hectares of woodland, of which 200 hectares are coniferous plantations intended to produce construction timber.

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what proposals she has to help grow Northern Ireland's fruit and vegetable industry.
(AQO 7660/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: It is anticipated that there will be opportunities for our fruit and vegetable industry to avail of public support through the new Rural Development Programme (RDP), including the proposed Farm Business Improvement Scheme (FBIS).

The Agri-Food Strategy Board in its Going for Growth report, recommended a £250 million 'Farm Business Improvement Scheme'. The Scheme is the major recommendation addressed to DARD with the objectives to improve competitiveness and productivity in farming through increased efficiency, up-skilling on farm, farm modernisation and a commitment to working with supply chain partners to improve performance.

Officials are continuing to develop the proposed Farm Business Improvement Scheme, which is subject to the necessary approvals, both internally and at the European Commission.

In rolling out the FBIS, it is proposed that the early focus will be on making advice and support available to farmers to help them clearly identify their needs and make the right decisions about developing their business.

A number of horticulture projects which are aligned to the DARD Strategic Goal to improve Performance in the Marketplace are being funded under the DARD / Agri-Food Biosciences Institute's (AFBI) Evidence and Innovation Research Programme including projects aimed at improving Performance in the Marketplace and Improvements in Plant Health Research.

Mr Lynch asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on the processing of unpaid Single Farm Payments for applicants in Fermanagh/South Tyrone.
(AQO 7661/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I am pleased to say that some 94%, or 4,795 of 5,077, claims from farm businesses in the Fermanagh and South Tyrone constituency have been finalised. A total of £37.7m has been paid. Of the 282 outstanding claims, 77 have been subject to inspection. This is a remarkably low number at this stage in the processing cycle.

My Department has delivered another record payment performance for the 2014 Single Farm Payment year. In December 2014, 95% of claims overall were finalised for payment, exceeding a target of 93%. A total of £234.6 million was paid to local farmers in December.

To date, 98% of claims have been finalised for payment and £245.8 million has been paid out with the lowest number of outstanding claims that there has ever been.

My Department is continuing to finalise the remaining claims as quickly as possible. It is anticipated that all remaining inspection cases will be processed for payment by the end of March 2015. This again is earlier than ever before. A number of claims are outstanding due to factors outside my Department's control such as probate proceedings, disputes between farmers and information, such as bank account details, not being provided by farm businesses.

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what budget has been set for the new Liofa book clubs initiative; and whether this comes out of the libraries budget.
(AQW 42540/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): The cost for the new Líofa Book Club initiative is £5,100. This funding will not come out of the libraries budget.

Mr Newton asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she is planning to work with the Linen Hall Library as part of the creation of a Troubles legacy project.
(AQO 7662/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: There are no plans in place to work with the Linen Hall Library during the creation of its Troubles Legacy project as this initiative is fully funded.

I understand that the Linen Hall Library holds over two hundred and fifty thousand items within its political archive. This is a unique resource and no other institution in a localised conflict is known to have systematically collected such a volume of material collected from all sides.

Given the historical significance of this archive, the Linen Hall Library is currently involved in a project to digitise a selection of this archive for future generations.

The project's total cost is likely to be four hundred thousand pounds. The Heritage Lottery Fund is contributing three hundred and seventy four thousand pounds of this amount, and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in Dublin is providing nineteen thousand pounds.

The Linen Hall Library's Director has informed me that this Project will be entirely funded from these sources. As such, as I previously mentioned, there are no plans to approach my Department for funding or other assistance.

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline any discussions she has had with the Minister for Employment and Learning following the decision by Ulster University to remove approximately 20 courses linked to film studies as a result of budget cuts.
(AQO 7666/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am aware of the Ulster University's recent announcement in relation to its plans to cut 53 undergraduate courses. I have concerns about the potential impact of the removal of courses linked to film studies given the thriving and successful film production sector here. It is important to ensure there is a pipeline of highly skilled and talented individuals graduating from our universities and colleges to work in and support the creative sectors.

The Minister for Employment and Learning has accepted an invitation to meet with me as part of the Ministerial Action Group on the Creative Industries where we can explore the issue further.

Mr Girvan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, following the recent pollution incident, to outline any discussions she has had with the Minister of the Environment with regard to re-stocking the Sixmilewater River.
(AQO 7670/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: A significant fish kill occurred on the Sixmilewater near Ballyclare on the 29th of October 2014. The cause of the incident is being investigated by the Environment Agency and my Department's Inland Fisheries staff assisted in this by collecting, counting, and identifying the dead fish and confirming the stretch of river affected. As this is an on-going investigation I cannot comment any further on the details of the incident.

I can confirm that my Department's Chief Fisheries Officer met with representatives of the local angling club on 12 February to discuss a number of issues following on from the fish kill. Inland Fisheries staff will also be available to discuss the potential for the future reinstatement of the affected stretch of the Sixmilewater.

In the event that someone is made amenable for the fish kill, my Department will prepare costings on re-stocking and reinstatement of the affected stretch, to inform the court on making on order for damages.

Mrs McKevitt asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether all departmental arm's-length body buildings are equipped with defibrillators.
(AQO 7671/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My Department is responsible for a number of arm's length bodies (ALBs). There are three ALB buildings equipped with defibrillators which are:- Waterways Ireland headquarters; Armagh Observatory; and Sports Institute NI.

In addition to this Sport NI, Libraries NI and Foras na Gaeilge are undergoing a procurement exercise for the supply of defibrillators for the House of Sport, Tollymore National Outdoor Centre, a number of libraries and Foras na Gaeilge in Belfast.

At present National Museums has not equipped its sites with defibrillators. However, for events which attract large audiences it engages first aiders from the Red Cross or St John's Ambulance Service ensuring that defibrillators are available.

In addition, Heartsine one of the sponsors of the 2013 World Police and Fire Games, provided defibrillators at venues. On completion of the Games the 45 defibrillators were gifted for distribution to local schools.2013 WPFG Ltd ran a competition which was open to all local schools and designed to improve awareness and understanding of Sudden Cardiac Arrest and the value of defibrillators.

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline any discussions she has had with OFCOM regarding the devolution of further broadcasting powers.
(AQO 7672/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I have had no discussions with OFCOM regarding the devolution of further broadcasting powers as this is largely a political matter.

I have written to Ed Vaizey, Minister of State for Culture and the Digital Economy to ask that the North of Ireland be given parity with Scotland in regard to the particular recommendations made in relation to broadcasting in the recent Smith Commission Report and I await his response.

I believe there is a huge accountability gap with government responsibility for broadcasting held in Westminster and that our Assembly should have a say on the future of broadcasting here. I believe that the licensing of broadcasters, or Charter in the case of the BBC, must at the very least include a mechanism that makes broadcasting companies accountable and answerable to the Assembly.

Mr Boylan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on the progress of an overarching strategy for the arts.
(AQO 7673/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am developing an Arts and Culture strategy to ensure recognition is given to the value the arts have in enriching the lives of individuals, communities and wider society. Recent developments include the establishment of a Ministerial Arts Advisory Forum and an inter-Departmental Steering Group to help inform the development of the Strategy. I attended the inaugural meeting of the forum which has now met on two occasions while the Steering Group has met on one occasion.

My vision for the strategy is that it is fully inclusive and I have asked the forum to ensure that all stakeholders including arts groups, communities and individuals play an active part in the creative development of the strategy during this co-design phase which will lead to a public consultation starting early summer 2015.

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on the Ulster Scots Language, Heritage and Culture strategy.
(AQO 7674/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: In line with the 2011-15 Programme for Government, I published a Strategy to Enhance and Develop the Ulster-Scots Language, Heritage and Culture 2015-2035 on the 30 January 2015.

The Strategy had been revised and strengthened following a comprehensive public consultation exercise and was also informed by engagement with other Executive Ministers. The crucial role of stakeholders and the community has been reflected in the Strategy.

The Strategy set out a roadmap for Ulster Scots language, heritage and culture over the next 20 years in a wide range of areas. The Strategy seeks to promote increased awareness about Ulster Scots and highlight the positive and significant role of Ulster Scots for all our community.

The next steps will involve establishing the structures for implementing the Strategy as set out in the Implementation Section of the Strategy. I will work closely with the other Departments, all of whom will have a role to play in delivering the Strategies.

Mr Cree asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline the departmental and arm's-length bodies' capital assets that are available for disposal in 2015/16.
(AQO 7675/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am very conscious, especially in the current budgetary environment, of the need to identify surplus assets and to dispose of these in the most appropriate way- either to other public bodies, to community organisations or on the open market.

Regular reviews to identify surplus assets form an important part of the asset management plans of my Department and its ALBs.

Three former Library properties are currently surplus to requirements and are for sale. No other assets have been identified at this point for disposal in 2015/16

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline the steps she intends to take to achieve support across communities for an Irish Language Act.
(AQO 7676/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: As I have stated previously legislation to provide protection and equality for the Irish language should not be viewed as divisive or a threat to any member of our community.

Based on the experience of other jurisdictions, legislation will be an effective way of protecting Irish and according it proper equality and status.

I am greatly encouraged with the level of interest in Irish that already exists among the Unionist community and want to build on this. I have taken a number of steps to break down the negative preconceptions that some have about the Irish language including:

My Department through Foras na Gaeilge funds the Irish Language Officer post in East Belfast Mission and Irish language lessons are held regularly there. My Department's Líofa Development Officer has met with East Belfast Mission to discuss how we can assist their work and provide practical support. The Líofa initiative is about making Irish accessible to people of every background. Such developments indicate an increasing interest in the language among those from Protestant and Unionist backgrounds.

Líofa took part in a major cross-community event in Derry organised by the Grand Orange Lodge and the GAA to bring together young people from Protestant and Catholic schools to explore our cultural richness including the Irish language through sharing and learning. Such events provide a good opportunity to promote Irish to all communities.

During the consultation, my officials will respond to requests to engage with all sections of the community and others in order to provide clarification on issues relating to the proposals for an Irish Language Bill. This will include officials attending meetings and other relevant events as requested.

Department of Education

Ms Ruane asked the Minister of Education to detail the (i) number of schools who have benefited from the School Building Programme and/or Minor Works investment in South Down, and schools that serve South Down, in each of the last eight years, broken down by (a) school; and (b) investment received.
(AQW 41397/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): I have arranged for the information requested to be placed in the Assembly Library.

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Education what measures his Department have implemented in recent years to (i) protect frontline services; (ii) target social need; and (iii) increase investment in new school builds.
(AQW 41972/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department has implemented the following measures in recent years as follows:

(i) **Protection of frontline services**

As part of the budget settlement for the 4 year period 2011-12 to 2014-15, the Education budget had to be managed with a significant shortfall against anticipated requirement. I agreed an approach which protected spend on my Departmental priorities; bore down on unnecessary bureaucracy; and protected, as far as possible, funding for front line services. This included protection of a number of areas such as Special Education, Extended Schools, Counselling, Youth & Early Years. The Education and Library Boards (ELBs) were required to deliver savings in identified areas, and to protect frontline services as much as possible in the management and control of the funding allocated to them from my Department.

(ii) **Targeting Social Need (TSN)**

A key focus of changes implemented to the funding arrangements for schools in 2014-15, following a fundamental Review, was to enhance the funding arrangements to support those identified as most in need in schools.

Alongside changes to the focus for TSN funding to reflect Social Deprivation in primary schools, I injected an additional £10 million into school budgets, to help schools with the greatest concentrations of disadvantage to address underachievement among their disadvantaged pupils.

In addition to the formula funding changes, I have introduced a change (from September 2014) in the entitlement criteria for post-primary age pupils, to bring these pupils into line with eligibility criteria that previously applied only to nursery and primary-age pupils. Consequently, the funding arrangements to target social needs applies equally to pupils at all stages.

For early years children Sure Start offers support to parents and children under four from the most disadvantaged areas to promote their physical, intellectual social and emotional development. Sure Start services are provided in at least the top 20% most disadvantaged wards in the north of Ireland with expansion to the top 25% most disadvantaged wards underway (as resource allows) over this CSR period 2011-15. The annual budget for Sure Start is now approximately £25 million.

The Department currently provides funding to a mix of approximately 160 playgroups, early years centres and crèches through the DE Early Years Fund. Funding, which is administered by the Early Years Organisation (EYO), under SLA

with DE, is approximately £1.7 million for 2014/15. The funded groups provide direct early years care and education to children in areas of low provision, disadvantaged areas, or where the service is considered critical for children.

DE currently funds the Toybox project for travellers. Toybox is delivered by the Early Years Organisation (EYO) to Traveller families across the North of Ireland in nine localities. Funding is £356k for 2014/15.

A key action in "Learning to Learn" provides eligible voluntary and private providers in the Pre-School Education Programme with the same opportunities to help address barriers to learning as those eligible for Extended Schools funding in nursery schools. Settings eligible for this funding have been identified because they draw the majority of their children from areas of disadvantage or a significant proportion of their children are entitled to Free School Meals. 94 out of 396 non-statutory funded pre-school settings were eligible for the funding which has a total budget of £196,700.

The eligibility criteria for free school meals were extended in 2010/11, on a phased basis, to nursery and primary school pupils in low income working families and were further extended to post-primary pupils from September 2014. This has resulted in around 23,000 additional nursery and primary pupils and 12,000 post-primary pupils becoming eligible for a free meal. With the exception of nursery school pupils this entitlement also generally brings with it an entitlement to receive the school uniform grant.

In conjunction with the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) the Education Maintenance Allowance Scheme was revised in 2013/14 to ensure that it was better targeted to provide more effective support to those families most in need. In addition, funding of £1.85 million in 2013/14 and £3.6 million each year from 2014/15 has been transferred from the DE budget to DEL to ensure that the bonus payments are retained as these have played a particularly important role in incentivising young people to remain in education.

(iii) Increased Investment in new School Builds

Since I took up the role of Minister for Education in May 2011, my Department has:

- Introduced a rolling programme of capital builds during this mandate and into the next;
- Introduced and published a new project selection protocol that decouples development proposals from capital projects therefore allowing announced projects to be delivered more quickly;
- Introduced a streamlined economic appraisal preparation and approval process;
- Introduced a 'client advisor' role to identify and resolve technical and practical issues as early as possible in the project to help speed up the planning and construction process.

This has resulted in 56 major capital investment projects being announced since 2012 with one completed and eight currently on site. All of the other projects are being actively progressed and are either in the process of procurement or planning.

The recent and anticipated capital investment in major works is as follows:

- £15.5m in 2013/14;
- £23.4m projected in FY14/15;
- £55m budgeted spend in FY15/16.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Education how many mainstream post-primary schools in Fermanagh and South Tyrone have (i) failed; and/or (ii) had concerns noted, following Special Educational Needs inspections in each of the last two academic years.
(AQW 42078/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Of the mainstream post-primary schools in Fermanagh and South Tyrone which were inspected during the last two years (since January 2013) none has:

i failed or

ii. had concerns noted

following inspection of their special needs provision.

Mrs Hale asked the Minister of Education to detail the cost of building Fairhill Primary School, Kinallen.
(AQW 42241/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Fair Hill Primary School, Kinallen was originally built in 1997.

The combined capital spend of all the works capitalised at the school since its initial construction in 1997 until 31 March 2014 is £1,089,245.10.

This included a new Nursery Unit in 2011/12 and a two classroom extension with Storage, Toilets & PV Panels in 2013/14.

Mrs Hale asked the Minister of Education to detail the cost of placing any additional mobile classrooms since the building of Fairhill Primary School, Kinallen.
(AQW 42242/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The North Eastern Education and Library Board (NEELB) who has responsibility for capital minor works at Fairhill Primary School, has advised that the cost of placing any additional mobile classrooms since the building of the school is as follows:-

**2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	Overall Total
£10,661	£1,100	*£-438	£23,610	£0	£0	£0	£34,933

* relates to accrued expenditure

** costs have only been provided for a period of six financial years in addition to the current financial year in line with the record retention policy of the NEELB.

Mrs Hale asked the Minister of Education to detail the cost of building Donacloney Primary School, Donacloney.
(AQW 42243/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Donacloney Primary School was originally built in 1979.

The combined capital spend of all the works capitalised at the school since its initial construction until 31 March 2014 is £1,820,802.71.

This included a new Nursery Unit in 2008/09, a refurbishment and extension in 2009/10 and a Traffic Management Scheme in 2013/14.

Mrs Hale asked the Minister of Education to detail the cost of placing any additional mobile classrooms since the building of Donacloney Primary School, Donacloney.
(AQW 42244/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The North Eastern Education and Library Board (NEELB) who has responsibility for capital minor works at Donacloney Primary School, has advised that the cost of placing any additional mobile classrooms since the building of the school is as follows:-

**2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	Overall Total
£25,129	£10,354	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0	£35,483

** costs have only been provided for a period of six financial years in addition to the current financial year in line with the record retention policy of the NEELB.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of pupils considered ineligible for inclusion in the Summary of Annual Examination Results exercise in a (i) grammar school; and (ii) secondary school because the pupil (a) has died; (b) was unable to sit any examinations, either through serious illness, including mental health issues, or pregnancy; (c) has transferred to another school or has emigrated; (d) is in a special unit approved by the Department; (e) has a statement of Special Educational Needs; (f) has been placed in the EOTAS1 scheme; (g) has serious welfare issues that have culminated in the inability to sit any examinations; or (h) has been withdrawn from the school with the consent of their parent or guardian, in each of the last five years.
(AQW 42250/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information requested is detailed in the table below;

Year 12 pupils ineligible for inclusion in the Summary of Annual Examination Results exercise, by reason (1-8), 2009-10 to 2013/14

		Reason for Ineligibility							
		1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**
2009/10	Non-grammar	*	65	#	#	320	#	62	138
	Grammar	0	13	*	*	5	*	6	8
	Total	*****	**78**	**#**	**113**	**325**	**283**	**68**	**146**
2010/11	Non-grammar	*	55	#	135	458	#	96	167
	Grammar	0	18	*	6	13	*	13	9
	Total	*****	**73**	**#**	**141**	**471**	**349**	**109**	**176**

		Reason for Ineligibility							
		1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**
2011/12	Non-grammar	*	95	50	#	497	339	168	181
	Grammar	0	17	10	*	19	8	15	5
	Total	*****	**112**	**60**	**#**	**516**	**347**	**183**	**186**
2012/13	Non-grammar	*	98	53	#	525	352	236	212
	Grammar	*	20	6	*	12	9	19	15
	Total	*****	**118**	**59**	**#**	**537**	**361**	**255**	**227**
2013/14	Non-grammar	*	57	#	#	698	310	132	107
	Grammar	0	15	*	*	61	24	15	11
	Total	*****	**72**	**#**	**71**	**759**	**334**	**147**	**118**

Source: Summary of Annual Examination Results

Notes:

1 '*' denotes fewer than 5 pupils.

2 '#' figure not disclosed under rules of statistical suppression.

Reasons for Ineligibility:

1 A pupil has died

2 A pupil, either through serious illness (including mental health issues) or pregnancy, was unable to sit any examinations. - In the case of pregnancy, please indicate if the pupil was referred to the School Age Mothers programme.

3 A pupil has transferred to another school or has emigrated.

4 A pupil is in a special unit approved by the Department.

5 A pupil has a statement of special educational needs.

6 A pupil has been placed in the EOTAS scheme. – Please note that only pupils placed in EOTAS through the Education and Library Board referral service will be deemed ineligible.

7 A pupil has serious welfare issues that have culminated in the inability to sit any examinations. - Please indicate in the return if the pupil was referred to the ELB or any other agency for support.

8 A pupil has been withdrawn from the school with the consent of their parent/guardian. - Pupils will only be deemed ineligible under this reason code if this return is accompanied by documentary evidence, such as a letter signed and dated by the parent/guardian. (DE Circular 2013/13 provides advice on the removal of a pupil from the school register).

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Education whether he will consider convening a cross-party working group to devise a more sustainable approach to the transfer system.
(AQW 42257/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The majority of our post-primary schools (138 for Transfer 2015) already use a sustainable approach to transfer from primary school to post-primary. A minority of post-primary schools (65 for Transfer 2015) continue to use so-called academic selection. These schools have made a conscious decision to do so. They have made a conscious decision to make pupils who apply to their schools sit either two tests under GL or up to three under AQE. They continue to do so despite the fact that all schools now teach to the same curriculum and, under the Entitlement Framework, all schools are now required to offer access to a broad range of subjects.

What is needed is an end to excuses being made for schools which consciously choose to practise a system of academic selection and rejection of 10 and 11 year old children when in fact another system is in place and operational.

Those opposed to academic selection need to actively campaign for its end in all schools to ensure equality of educational opportunity for all children.

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 41585/11-15, how many pupils in each Education and Library Bard waited longer than 9 months from the referral from the school until their first appointment with an educational psychologist in 2014.
(AQW 42277/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Education and Library Boards have advised that the number of pupils who had their first appointment with an educational psychologist, at Stage 3 of the Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs, in the calendar year 2014 and who had been waiting longer than 9 months for that appointment is as follows:-

BELB	*
NEELB	26
SEELB	14
SELB	10
WELB	0

* denotes fewer than five pupils suppressed due to potential identification of individual pupils.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education whether his Department plans to raise with Translink the lack of a direct bus service between Bangor and the Ards Peninsula for school pupils and their parents.
(AQW 42314/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department of Education has no duty with respect to transport for ineligible pupils and parents. With respect to eligible pupils, I would refer the Member to my answer to AQW 39806/11-15 which was tabled by Steven Agnew MLA and published in the Official Report on the 18 December 2014.

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Education to detail the proportion of female headteachers to total headteachers in primary schools with (i) under 700; and (ii) over 700 pupils.
(AQW 42316/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The table below details the proportion of female principals to total principals in primary schools split by school size.

	700 or more pupils	**Fewer than 700 pupils**
Percentage of female principals	*%	56.7%

* Percentage suppressed as based on a number fewer than 5

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of quangos linked to his Department on (i) 8 May 2007; and (ii) 11 February 2015; and how many people served on the quangos on these respective dates.
(AQW 42329/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: There were 14 public bodies linked to my Department on 8 May 2007 and according to the Public Appointments Annual Report there were 259 public appointees serving on these bodies as at 31 March 2007.

There are currently 14 public bodies linked to my Department (although this will drop to 9 on 1 April 2015) and 150 public appointees serving on them at 11 February 2015.

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education whether any application to the Change Fund was made to promote science, technology, engineering, and mathematics subjects in primary schools or to give further resources to Sentinus.
(AQW 42330/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: An application was made to the Executive Change Fund to promote STEM in primary and post-primary schools. This application was unsuccessful.

No application was made to the Executive Change Fund to give further resources to Sentinus.

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education where in Northern Ireland teachers can be trained specifically for Special Educational Needs skills; and if they have to travel to Birmingham for training, what financial support is given to help them attend the course.
(AQW 42331/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: In order to support pupils' special educational needs across school sectors, there is a wide range of training courses available to teachers across the north of Ireland. Training is offered by providers from the statutory, private and voluntary/community sectors. It is for each school principal to work in partnership with the relevant Education and Library Board to identify the most appropriate method for meeting the training needs identified for teachers in their school.

Each Education and Library Board will consider funding, on an individual basis, for a teacher who wishes to attend SEN training in Birmingham, or elsewhere outside of the north of Ireland.

Furthermore, student teachers in our local universities and colleges are educated in and expected to demonstrate understanding of the SEN Code of Practice. Their training covers the recognition of pupils' special needs and focuses on strategies to meet those needs.

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 42098/11-15, how many of the 21 temporary Senior Executive Officer posts created within the Western Education and Library Board during 2014 were made permanent.
(AQW 42341/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Pursuant to AQW 42098/11-15, 5 of the 21 temporary Senior Executive Officer posts created within the Western Education and Library Board during 2014 were made permanent.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Education to outline his Department's efforts, working with higher education institutions and the Irish government, to reduce the obstacles, relevant to his Department, to student mobility between north and south and to implement the recommendations of the IBEC-CBI Joint Business Council report on student mobility.
(AQW 42345/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The IBEC-CBI Joint Business Council report has made a positive contribution to this issue, as have the recommendations it contains, the majority of which fall under the policy remit of the Department of Employment and Learning (DEL).

The main focus for my Department has been Recommendation 6, which relates to the issue of A Level grades and their recognition in the south. My Department has tasked the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA), as the regulator of general qualifications here, to take forward this issue with the Irish Universities Association (IUA). Discussions are ongoing regarding entry requirements to Higher Education Institutions in the south and the Central Applications Office (CAO) policy on tariff points.

There have been a number of positive developments by Trinity College Dublin, Dublin City University and most recently, by the National University of Ireland (NUI) Galway, to address the issues that have arisen in relation to students from here applying to universities in the south. I welcome these initiatives and I hope that this will encourage other universities in the south to follow suit.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 41364/11-15, for an update on the pilot Full Service Programmes and whether the Full Service approach will be pursued further by his Department in 2015.
(AQW 42396/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department has continued to fund the Full Service Extended Schools programme in place at the Belfast Boys Model and Belfast Model School for Girls in North Belfast and the Full Service Community Network in West Belfast. Both programmes received £385k in the 2014/15 financial year.

I am currently finalising my 2015-16 spending plans and the continuation of any Full Service funding beyond 31 March 2015 will be considered in the context of my overall spending plans for education which I hope to announce in the near future.

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Education to detail the total number of children who were awarded pre-school places funded by each Education and Library Board in 2013/14.
(AQW 42408/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The aim of the Pre-School Education Programme (PSEP) is to provide one year of funded pre-school education for children who have reached three years and two months and are in their final pre-school year. The PSEP is non-compulsory and places are available in nursery schools and units attached to primary schools and in voluntary and private settings.

Under current legislation, statutory nursery education is available to children who are two years old but who have not reached compulsory school age. Only children in their pre-school year can be admitted to voluntary and private pre-school settings.

The table below shows the total number of children and the total number of two year olds in pre-school places broken down by Education and Library Board:

Board	BELB	WELB	NEELB	SEELB	SELB	Total
Total no. of Children*	3565	3939	5244	4874	5542	23164
No of 2 year olds*	96	137	236	119	107	695

* Information source - School Census 2013/14

For the reasons set out below, it is not possible to specify actual costs for pre-school children: identifiable funding available for pre-school education in 2013/14 was, however, approximately £56m

Budgets for grant-aided schools include nursery schools and nursery units attached to primary schools and it is not possible to disaggregate funding for nursery class pupils in primary schools from the overall budget delegated to the primary school.

In addition, funding for schools is based on year-group enrolment totals and, for grant-aided pre-school settings, it is not possible to disaggregate funding elements for age-specific pupils.

Schools receive a fully delegated budget and it is for each school's Board of Governors to determine spending priorities, in meeting the needs of all pupils within the school.

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Education to detail the total number of two year old children who were awarded pre-school places funded by each Education and Library Board in 2013/14.
(AQW 42409/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The aim of the Pre-School Education Programme (PSEP) is to provide one year of funded pre-school education for children who have reached three years and two months and are in their final pre-school year. The PSEP is non-compulsory and places are available in nursery schools and units attached to primary schools and in voluntary and private settings.

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In addition, funding for schools is based on year-group enrolment totals and, for grant-aided pre-school settings, it is not possible to disaggregate funding elements for age-specific pupils.

Schools receive a fully delegated budget and it is for each school's Board of Governors to determine spending priorities, in meeting the needs of all pupils within the school.

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Education to detail the total cost of (i) all funded pre-school places; and (ii) funded pre-school places for two year olds in 2013/14, broken down by Education and Library Board.
(AQW 42411/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The aim of the Pre-School Education Programme (PSEP) is to provide one year of funded pre-school education for children who have reached three years and two months and are in their final pre-school year. The PSEP is non-compulsory and places are available in nursery schools and units attached to primary schools and in voluntary and private settings.

Under current legislation, statutory nursery education is available to children who are two years old but who have not reached compulsory school age. Only children in their pre-school year can be admitted to voluntary and private pre-school settings.

The table below shows the total number of children and the total number of two year olds in pre-school places broken down by Education and Library Board:

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In addition, funding for schools is based on year-group enrolment totals and, for grant-aided pre-school settings, it is not possible to disaggregate funding elements for age-specific pupils.

Schools receive a fully delegated budget and it is for each school's Board of Governors to determine spending priorities, in meeting the needs of all pupils within the school.

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Education to outline the decision making process and criteria used by each Education and LIbrary Board when awarding a funded pre-school place to a two year old child.
(AQW 42412/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The aim of the Pre-School Education Programme (PSEP) is to provide one year of funded pre-school education for children who have reached three years and two months and are in their final pre-school year.

The PSEP is non-compulsory and non-sectoral. Places are available in nursery schools and units attached to primary schools and in voluntary and private settings.

Under current legislation, statutory nursery education is available to children who are two years old but who have not reached compulsory school age. Two year olds may be offered a funded pre-school place once the pre-school admissions process reaches stage two and only in the statutory sector: they should, however, not be offered a place which could accommodate a target age child.

Admissions criteria are a matter for individual schools and are applied when a school offers places to two year olds. Legislation, however, requires that the top criterion for each provider prioritises children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds.

Evidence and experience have shown that many two year olds are not at a stage of development where they can benefit from the pre-school experience provided through the PSEP and when I launched Learning to Learn – a Framework for Early Years Education and Learning in late 2013 – I, therefore, announced my intention to bring forward a Bill, subject to the necessary approvals, to legislate to ensure that only children in their immediate pre-school year can be admitted as pupils for the purposes of the Pre-School Education Programme..

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Education to detail the average cost of referring a child to Educational Psychology Services.
(AQW 42413/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Due to the breadth of services delivered across each of the five Education and Library Boards' Educational Psychology Services (EPS), it is not possible to accurately separate the costs associated with referring a child to a Board's EPS. A meaningful calculation for an average cost cannot, therefore, be provided.

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of teaching posts that will be declared redundant in the next academic year.
(AQW 42451/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department does not employ teachers. Teachers are employed by the relevant Board of Governors for each school setting. They are responsible for determining decisions regarding their staffing complement and are currently considering staffing requirements for the 2015/16 academic year, taking into account such factors as curricular demand, pupil enrolment and the financial projections for the school setting.

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Education what steps have been taken to ensure that school meals are, and continue to be, nutritional following reductions in funding.
(AQW 42452/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Nutritional Standards for school lunches have been in place since September 2007 and are compulsory for all grantaided schools. Standards for other food and drinks provided in schools (breakfast clubs, tuck shops, vending machines etc) were introduced in April 2008 and schools are expected to adhere to them. These Standards have changed the approach to school catering services ensuring that all school meals and other food provided in schools are healthier and more nutritious. Both schools and the catering service will continue to implement the Standards by seeking to achieve greater efficiencies in providing school food.

Schools will also continue to play an important role in educating children and young people in the importance of a balanced diet and a healthy lifestyle, providing healthy and nutritious food choices and giving consistent health messages.

I am still in the process of finalising my 2015-16 spending plans for education and hope to announce these in the near future.

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of (i) males; and (ii) females excluded from post-primary schools in the last five years, broken down by school.
(AQW 42453/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department's website publishes statistics on pupil expulsions, providing the three most common reasons for expulsion. These figures are provided annually by the Education and Library boards (ELBs) and the total numbers of expulsions in the last five years are as follows:

Year	Number of Expulsions
2009/2010	22
2010-2011	38
2011/2012	24
2012/2013	19

Year	Number of Expulsions
2013/2014	29
Total	**132**

The majority of pupils expelled from in each year were male and of post- primary age.

These statistics cannot be broken down in any further detail as doing so would potentially allow for the identification of individuals, due to the small numbers involved. This reflects the Statistics Authority Code of Practice on Official Statistics, in particular Principle 5, relating to confidentiality.

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Education whether his Department has any plans to introduce permanent English as an Additional Language teaching posts in post-primary schools.
(AQW 42454/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department is not the Employer of teachers.

Teachers are employed by Employing Authorities (EAs) such as the Education and Library Boards (ELBs) and the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS), or in the case of Voluntary Grammar and Grant Maintained Integrated Schools, the individual Boards of Governors.

The decision to introduce permanent English as an Additional Language teaching posts is at the discretion of the Employing Authority or Board of Governors for individual schools.

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education what progress has been made in advancing the 22 new build projects announced on 22 January 2013.
(AQW 42455/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I was pleased to announce 22 new build projects in January 2013 to a value of £220m. There are currently 8 business cases approved and work is progressing well on the remainder. Eight of the projects are currently expected to move to site in 2015/16 subject to availability of capital budget in subsequent years.

It is anticipated that the remaining business cases will be approved in the next financial year. Regular project meetings are being held to ensure momentum is maintained.

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education what progress has been made in advancing the fifteen new build projects announced on 24 June 2014.
(AQW 42456/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I was pleased to announce 15 new build projects on 24 June 2014 and a further project announced on 3 July 2014 to a total value of £170m. Most of these projects are at an early stage of development. A business case has been approved for one project and it is anticipated that a further 2 business cases may be approved by the end of this financial year. These projects are all progressing and initial meetings with stakeholders have taken place.

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education what facility his Department has to enable schools to understand where they are in the waiting list to receive capital funding for new build projects, or the schools enhancement programme.
(AQW 42458/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Currently I am not holding a waiting list of New Build capital projects or Schools Enhancement Programme projects.

Also, with the constrained capital budget position I currently have no plans for a further capital announcement. The timing of any future announcement will be dependent on the capital budget available to Education in the next budget cycle (April 2016 onwards).

In relation to Major Works and Schools Enhancement Programme projects that are currently underway, funding for the capital works will be allocated on completion and approval of all design stages, in line with the available capital budget at that time.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 41968/11-15, whether he will take action to increase the number of Special Educational Needs inspections in these instances, on the grounds that seven years between inspections is too long and may not even be enough to ensure the requirements of a special needs pupil are being met adequately in the duration of their time at the school in question, even if they remain in the same school for the minimum five years.
(AQW 42501/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: As part of the ETI's proportionate risk-based approach towards inspection, any school can and may be inspected sooner than seven years should the need arise. Also, schools that are in the follow-up inspection process as a result of having an inspection with an outcome of satisfactory or below will automatically have a follow-up inspection within 18 to 24 months.

In addition to the formal inspection activity, all post-primary schools receive routine inspection visits by their district inspector.

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 40927/11-15, what discussions his departmental officials have had with looked after children throughout the development of the policy.
(AQW 42502/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I had the pleasure of meeting with a group of young people in care last year. They shared with me their experiences of education, some good, some not so good. They also gave me some ideas on how things could be improved and what was important to them.

The looked after children policy, which my officials are currently developing, will encompass the good work that has already been undertaken and provide the platform to consider the suggestions and ideas given to me during that meeting.

My officials have been listening to the voice of young people through looked after children teams in the Education and Library Boards (ELBs) and the Health and Social Care Trusts (HSCTs) and through engagement with Fostering Network and VOYPIC. They plan to engage directly again with looked after children and young people as the policy is developed.

My officials are also revising the guidance on Personal Education Plans along with the DHSSPS, the Health and Social Care Trusts (HSCTs) and ELBs. Young people in care have assisted with redesigning their contribution to the Personal Education Plan to make it more user friendly and meaningful for them.

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 41103/11-15, to detail when the 2014/15 Entitlement Framework Audit data will be available.
(AQW 42503/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I am advised that validated data from the 2014/15 Entitlement Framework Audit will shortly be provided to the Department. Upon receipt of this officials have a process to follow in order to analyse the data and they expect to have this completed by the end of March 2015.

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education what assessment has been made of the Special Educational Needs Early Years Capacity Building Programme in the South Eastern Education and Library Board.
(AQW 42524/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The South Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB) Early Years pilot is part of a wider pilot across all ELBs, which finished in pre-school settings at the end of September 2014. This was followed by an evaluation phase, which ended in December 2014.

An interim report from the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) found that some progress had been made by the pilot teams; a final report is expected shortly. As an interim measure, pending the final ETI evaluation, arrangements have been put in place until 31 March 2015 across all ELBs to enable some of the earlier momentum to continue.

In advance of the Early Years interim arrangements ending in March, the Department in conjunction with the ELBs, is considering the future shape of SEN early years provision subject to resources being available.

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Education how many (i) full time; and (ii) part time teaching positions were available in each of the last three years.
(AQW 42527/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Each year the Department commissions the Teacher Vacancy Return, which asks schools how many vacancies that existed at the end of the previous academic year and by the first Monday in November are either filled or unfilled. These are also broken down by full-time/part-time and permanent/temporary.

The table below details the number of full-time teaching vacancies in each of the last three years.

Table 1: Full-time teaching vacancies; 2012/13-2014/15

	2012/13		2013/14		2014/15	
	Filled	Unfilled	Filled	Unfilled	Filled	Unfilled
Permanent	264	134	362	105	230	113
Temporary	263	57	342	52	267	52

Source: Teacher Vacancies Return

The table below details the number of part time teaching vacancies in each of the last three years.

Table 2: Part-time teaching vacancies; 2012/13-2014/15

	2012/13		2013/14		2014/15	
	Filled	**Unfilled**	**Filled**	**Unfilled**	**Filled**	**Unfilled**
Permanent	29	15	38	17	18	12
Temporary	146	27	165	26	137	29

Source: Teacher Vacancies Return

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Education when the construction will begin of new premises for the next primary and post-primary schools in the controlled sector in East Londonderry.
(AQW 42547/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: There are currently no new school builds planned in the controlled sector for East Derry, however, in July 2014 I announced the first of three projects to be taken forward under the Shared Education Campuses Programme, one of them being Limavady. This project will provide two shared facilities, a shared sixth form centre on the St Mary's High School site and a shared Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) centre on the Limavady HS site. Work is currently underway on the Feasibility Study/Business Case for the scheme and exact costs and timescale for commencement of the builds will be determined once this has been finalised.

With the constrained capital budget position I currently have no plans for a further capital announcement. The timing of any future announcement will be dependent on the capital budget available to Education in the next budget cycle (April 2016 onwards).

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education how much funding has been provided to Rathgill Community Association for delivering Sure Start Programmes.
(AQW 42606/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Rathgill Community Association does not deliver Sure Start programmes. Bangor Sure Start rents premises from the Association from which they deliver stay and play programmes. Bangor Sure Start has been delivering services since September 2014. Prior to this date, a similar rental arrangement was in place between the Association and Ards Sure Start.

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Education how many children benefited from the Delivering Social Change Improving Literacy and Numeracy Signature Programme.
(AQW 42650/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Delivering Social Change Improving Literacy and Numeracy Signature Programme is now in its second year providing support to Key Stage Two primary school pupils and post-primary pupils taking GCSE English and maths.

In the 2013/14 academic year pupils received support as follows:

In the primary sector -

- 1561 pupils received support for literacy;
- 1402 pupils received support for numeracy;
- 79 pupils received support for Irish; and

In the post-primary sector -

- 3023 pupils received support for English;
- 3635 pupils received support for Maths;

The number of pupils receiving support this academic year is not yet available but it is estimated that a similar number of pupils are being supported.

Mr Anderson asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of primary school teachers, broken down by gender.
(AQW 42707/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The number of primary school teachers broken down by gender is published annually as part of the Teacher Workforce Statistical Bulletin and the most recent bulletin, published June 2014, is available at the below link. The information requested is contained within Table 6. http://www.deni.gov.uk/workforce_stats_press_release_for_web_revised.pdf

Department for Employment and Learning

Mr McCausland asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many Protestant staff are employed at St Mary's University College, Belfast.
(AQW 41776/11-15)

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): My Department does not collate information regarding the religious affiliation of staff at higher education institutions.

However, my official contacted St. Mary's University College and it has confirmed that as of 6 February 2015 the College employs 12 members of staff from the Protestant background.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what consideration he has given to the addition of the Queen's University Belfast and Ulster University to the CAO system as well as the UCAS system to increase the number of students from across the border attending these two universities.
(AQW 41813/11-15)

Dr Farry: Universities are responsible for their own policies and procedures including those concerned with admissions criteria and student application services.

As members of UCAS, Queen's University Belfast and Ulster University have advised that they are required to fully comply with the UCAS terms and conditions of service as set out below:

- A provider that is a member or customer of UCAS must recruit to all its full-time and sandwich first degrees through UCAS.
- Anyone, from the UK, rest of EU or rest of the world applying to a provider that is a member of UCAS for any of its full-time first degree and other full-time undergraduate level courses, including those applying for admission with credit, must apply through UCAS.

The Universities cannot, therefore, use both systems.

However, both Queen's and Ulster University are taking a number of actions to increase the number of students from across the border. Ulster University, as part of its marketing programme promotes its activities in both Northern Ireland and in the Republic of Ireland attending a range of recruitment events in the Republic of Ireland, for example, 'Higher Options' and 'GradIreland'. Talks at schools are also provided, especially those in the border counties.

Queen's University Belfast also engages in extensive student recruitment activities including: attendance at the 'RDS Higher Options' event in September 2014; engagement with border county and Dublin schools, domestic recruitment staff visits to schools; and attendance at careers events. Queen's has also issued invitations to border county schools to attend the Careers Teachers' Event in March 2015.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on his consideration on dealing with zero hour contracts; and when he will bring forward legislative proposals.
(AQW 41863/11-15)

Dr Farry: I am currently consulting with Executive colleagues on the findings of the public consultation on zero hours contracts and a range of specific legislative proposals that I wish to bring within the scope of the Department's Employment Bill. The Employment Bill is being drafted for potential introduction to the Assembly before the end of June 2015.

My officials briefed the Employment and Learning Committee on 18th February 2015 as to how I intend to proceed regarding zero hours contracts in the light of the public consultation responses and quantitative and qualitative research evidence.

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the cost of the Steps 2 Success programme, broken down by region.
(AQW 41926/11-15)

Dr Farry:

1 The Steps 2 Success contract values for the initial contract period of four years are forecast by the Department to be as follows:

   - Contract Lot One: £29,001,851
   - Contract Lot Two: £27,362,035
   - Contract Lot Three: £25,437,249

   The above figures are based on a forecast number of participants expected to join the programme and expected contractor performance over the initial contract period of four years. Actual programme expenditure will be dependent on programme performance by each of the contractors and the actual number of participants who join the programme.

2 The Department does not hold this information in the format requested.

3 The Department does not hold this information in the format requested.

4 The Department does not hold this information in the format requested.

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the cost of the Steps 2 Success programme in each of the centres in Contract Area 1.
(AQW 41929/11-15)

Dr Farry:

1 The Steps 2 Success contract values for the initial contract period of four years are forecast by the Department to be as follows:

- Contract Lot One: £29,001,851
- Contract Lot Two: £27,362,035
- Contract Lot Three: £25,437,249

The above figures are based on a forecast number of participants expected to join the programme and expected contractor performance over the initial contract period of four years. Actual programme expenditure will be dependent on programme performance by each of the contractors and the actual number of participants who join the programme.

2 The Department does not hold this information in the format requested.

3 The Department does not hold this information in the format requested.

4 The Department does not hold this information in the format requested.

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the cost of the Steps 2 Success programme in each of the centres in Contract Area 2.
(AQW 41931/11-15)

Dr Farry:

1 The Steps 2 Success contract values for the initial contract period of four years are forecast by the Department to be as follows:

- Contract Lot One: £29,001,851
- Contract Lot Two: £27,362,035
- Contract Lot Three: £25,437,249

The above figures are based on a forecast number of participants expected to join the programme and expected contractor performance over the initial contract period of four years. Actual programme expenditure will be dependent on programme performance by each of the contractors and the actual number of participants who join the programme.

2. The Department does not hold this information in the format requested.

3. The Department does not hold this information in the format requested.

4. The Department does not hold this information in the format requested.

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the cost of the Steps 2 Success programme in each of the centres in Contract Area 3.
(AQW 41932/11-15)

Dr Farry:

1. The Steps 2 Success contract values for the initial contract period of four years are forecast by the Department to be as follows:

- Contract Lot One: £29,001,851
- Contract Lot Two: £27,362,035
- Contract Lot Three: £25,437,249

The above figures are based on a forecast number of participants expected to join the programme and expected contractor performance over the initial contract period of four years. Actual programme expenditure will be dependent on programme performance by each of the contractors and the actual number of participants who join the programme.

2. The Department does not hold this information in the format requested.

3. The Department does not hold this information in the format requested.

4. The Department does not hold this information in the format requested.

Mr McMullan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the departmental and arm's-length body buildings that are equipped with defibrillators; and how many staff in each of these buildings are trained in (i) the use of defibrillators; and (ii) C.P.R.
(AQW 41935/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Department for Employment and Learning does not have any departmental buildings equipped with defibrillators or any staff trained in the use of defibrillators. There are 101 departmental staff trained in CPR.

The Labour Relations Agency (LRA), 2-16 Gordon Street, Belfast, and the Ulster Supported Employment Limited (USEL), Cambrai Street, Belfast, have advised they have one defibrillator in each building. LRA has eight staff trained in the use of the defibrillator and USEL has two.

LRA has four staff trained in CPR; USEL has three and the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB), Nutts Corner Training Centre, 17 Dundrod Road, Crumlin, has three.

The department does not hold information on the number of defibrillators or staff trained in their use for the two universities, university colleges and further education colleges. You may wish to contact them directly.

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to list the consultancy firms that provided financial services to his Department in each of the last five years; and the amount paid to each firm for these services.
(AQW 41940/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Department and its Non-Departmental Public Bodies have spent a total of £204,805 on financial services provided by consultancy firms (rounded to the nearest pound) in the last five years to 31 December 2014. The breakdown per supplier is attached at Annex A.

1 January 2010 to 31 March 2010

Supplier	**Expenditure £**
Total	**0**

1 April 2010 to 31 March 2011

Supplier	**Expenditure £**
FGS McClure Watters	19,722
Deloitte	1,356
Total	**21,078**

1 April 2011 to 31 March 2012

Supplier	**Expenditure £**
Professor Robert Kirk	400
Deloitte	15,452
Total	**15,852**

1 April 2012 to 31 March 2013

Supplier	**Expenditure £**
Deloitte	4,200
Total	**4,200**

1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014

Supplier	**Expenditure £**
Deloitte	83,885
KPMG	16,086
Grant Thornton	6,400

Supplier	Expenditure £
Total	**106,371**

Annex A
1 April 2014 to 31 December 2014

Supplier	Expenditure £
Deloitte MCS Ltd	17,784
Tribal ITS	39,520
Total	**57,304**

Note: The latest available data broken down by supplier is for the quarter ended 31 December 2014.

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, pursuant to AQW 40429/11-15, (i) how many applications were received to the previous round of funding; and how many of the 135 applications were succesful; and (iii) to list the groups that were successful in reaching Stage 2 of the application process.
(AQW 41967/11-15)

Dr Farry:

(i) Under the last call for applications to the ESF Programme 2007-2013, 112 applications were received.

(ii) The assessment process for the call for applications to the new ESF Programme 2014-2020 is currently ongoing and therefore I am unable to confirm the number of successful applications until the assessment process is complete.

(iii) Under the Data Protection Act 1998 my Department would not be in a position to publish the list of groups that were successful in reaching Phase 2 of the application assessment process.

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning why former employees of City Link, Nuts Corner are facing delays in receiving basic payments from the National Insurance Fund administered by the Redundancy Payments Service in the Insolvency Service.
(AQW 41976/11-15)

Dr Farry: The member's assertion that former City Link employees face delays in receiving basic redundancy payments is incorrect. My Redundancy Payments Service's published commitment is to have all redundancy applications processed within 6-8 weeks from the date of receipt. My Department received 18 applications from former NI employees of City Link, 15 of which were received between 15th & 26th January 2015. My Department started making payments directly into the bank accounts of eligible applicants w/c 16 February 2015, well within our published customer service level commitment.

Mr Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many groups' application to the current round of the European Social Fund have been rejected at Stage one for failure to include management accounts.
(AQW 42010/11-15)

Dr Farry: 43 organisations applying to the European Social Fund, for whatever reason, did not submit their most recent management accounts. Those affected by the decision to reject their applications on this basis believe that failure to produce the requested information was due to a lack of clarity in the guidance notes concerning what constitutes management accounts.

Taking account of representations on this issue I have now decided to allow those organisations which did not submit their most recent management accounts with their applications to do so at this stage.

Applicants affected have now been contacted by the Department and notified of the process which they now need to follow.

Mr Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether he has launched an investigation into tendering process for applications to the European Social Fund.
(AQW 42011/11-15)

Dr Farry: Along with officials in my Department I have reviewed the first phase of the European Social Fund assessment process in relation to the submission of management accounts.

A significant proportion of organisations applying to the European Social Fund, for whatever reason, did not submit their most recent management accounts. Those affected by the decision to reject their applications on this basis believe that failure to produce the requested information was due to a lack of clarity in the guidance notes concerning what constitutes management accounts.

Taking account of representations on this issue I have now decided to allow those organisations which did not submit their most recent management accounts with their applications to do so at this stage.

Applicants affected have now been contacted by the Department and notified of the process which they now need to follow.

Mr Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many organisations have appealed the decision to eliminate them from the latest European Social Fund application process.
(AQW 42012/11-15)

Dr Farry: Further to my response to AQW 42011, and as the assessment process is ongoing, it is not possible to confirm the exact number of appeals received on the basis of decisions to eliminate organisations from the European Social Fund application process.

Mr Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how community voluntary sector organisations, which do not keep management accounts, can apply to the European Social Fund.
(AQW 42013/11-15)

Dr Farry: Eligible community and voluntary sector applicants to the European Social Fund which are sufficiently financially robust to be supported should be able to provide management accounts. My Department's ESF Managing Authority can provide advice and guidance to any applicant who is unsure as to what should be contained in their management accounts.

For the purpose of the financial capability assessment to be undertaken as part of the European Social Fund application process, the most recent management accounts should consist of a balance sheet and a year to date income and expenditure statement.

Mr Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many applications to the European Social Fund were received either in full, or in part, after the deadline for submissions.
(AQW 42036/11-15)

Dr Farry: There were 2 applications to the European Social Fund received after the closing date of noon on the 9th January 2015.

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the appeals process for European Social Fund applications.
(AQW 42046/11-15)

Dr Farry: Any applicant to the European Social Fund receiving a letter of rejection is afforded the right of appeal which will require the applicant to demonstrate that; the outcome was a decision no reasonable person would make on the basis of the information provided in the application, and/or there was a failure in adherence to procedures or systems.

The Department allows applicants five working days for appealing any application rejection decision.

Once a written appeal is received this is reviewed by an independent appeals panel.

The applicant is then informed of the appeals panel decision.

Mrs McKevitt asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what is the formal process and timeline for projects entering the appeals process for the present funding round of the European Social Fund programme.
(AQW 42071/11-15)

Dr Farry: Any applicant receiving a letter of rejection is afforded the right of appeal which requires the applicant to demonstrate that: the outcome was a decision no reasonable person would make on the basis of the information provided in the application; and/or there was a failure in adherence to procedures or systems.

The Department allows applicants five working days for appealing any application rejection decision.

Once a written appeal is received, this will be reviewed by an independent appeals panel.

A significant number of appeals were received from organisations which had not submitted their most recent management accounts with their applications. In view of the large number of such organisations and the possibility that the guidance for applicants was not sufficiently clear on this point, I have now given these organisations a further opportunity to submit these documents. This will impact on the overall timescale for the appeals process, but I would expect it to be concluded by mid-March.

Mr Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning when the appeal process into applications which failed at stage one of the European Social Fund will conclude.
(AQW 42120/11-15)

Dr Farry: As a result of addressing the issue of management accounts for applicants to the European Social Fund Programme the timeframe for the completion of appeals to the European Social Fund has had to be revised. It is anticipated that the appeals process for Phase I of the assessment process will now be concluded by 16 March 2015.

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether he will ensure a co-ordinated approach by the Regional Colleges in the analysis of the success of jobs fairs that they host or help to organise, so best practice is replicated across the sector.
(AQW 42131/11-15)

Dr Farry: Job Fairs that are hosted by my Department is subject to a full evaluation process following the event. Information is analysed to assess the success of the event and comments received from Employers and Jobseekers are used to improve future events.

This area of work is standard practice for all of my Job Fairs and is carried out by staff from the Employment Service Division of my Department.

Regional Colleges do not play any role in the hosting, organising and analysis of any of my Department's Job Fairs.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the number of quangos linked to his Department on (i) 8 May 2007; and (ii) 11 February 2015; and how many people served on the quangos on these respective dates.
(AQW 42185/11-15)

Dr Farry: There are currently 15 bodies classified as NDPBs of the Department for Employment and Learning. On 8 May 2007, there were eight. The increase is accounted for by the change in status of the six colleges of Further Education and the University Colleges, plus the creation of one additional advisory post. This has been offset by the formal cessation of a statutory employment training organisation, and the abolition of a non-executive advisory body.

The total number serving on these NDPBs, not including support staff, was 301 on 8 May 2007, and 402 on 11 February 2015. You will wish to note that all but one of the 108 Members and judiciary who serve on the Fair Employment Tribunal also serve on industrial tribunals and are therefore double-counted. Further information may be found in the 'Public Bodies &

Public Appointments Annual Reports' published by OFMDFM and available from the Assembly Library.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what was the operating cost of the Ministerial car in each of the last three financial years.
(AQW 42218/11-15)

Dr Farry: The operating cost of the Ministerial car in the last three financial years was as follows:

- 2012-13: £4,419
- 2013-14: £4,017
- 2014-15 (to 31 January 2015): £3,741

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many external students St Mary's Teacher Training College has accepted solely to complete the Catholic Certificate of Religious Education, in each of the last five years; and the facility from which each student transferred to complete the qualification.
(AQW 42237/11-15)

Dr Farry: No external students have requested to be admitted to St Mary's University College in the last five years solely for the purpose of completing a programme leading to the award of the Certificate of Religious Education.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on the pilot Welding Academy which he launched in partnership with Harland and Wolff and Belfast Metropolitan College.
(AQW 42258/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department worked with Harland and Wolff and local Further Education colleges to set up a Welding Academy, beginning in September 2014, as a first step to upskill local unemployed welders to the Harland and Wolff specification.

The Welding Academy, facilitated by Belfast Metropolitan College and Northern Regional College, had an intake of eighteen people.

Of the eighteen Welding Academy trainees who successfully completed training, six are now employed by Harland and Wolff, with five of these on probationary contracts with a view to extending, if satisfactory.

A further cohort of five trainees is to commence a two week placement from Monday 23 February, with a view to contracted employment thereafter.

This is an important first step in addressing the welding skills need identified by the engineering sector and its success will help determine further initiatives. The skills and certification these individuals have gained through the Welding Academy will allow the local skills base to grow with highly skilled welders that can support not only Harland and Wolff, but other specialist manufacturers.

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether the provisions for employees who are dismissed on the insolvency of their employer, contained in the Employment Rights Act 1996, apply fully in Northern Ireland.
(AQW 42305/11-15)

Dr Farry: The provisions for employees dismissed on the insolvency of their employer, as set out in the Employment Rights Act 1996, are replicated in Northern Ireland by the Employment Rights (Northern Ireland) Order 1996.

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether Northern Ireland residents have the same employment and redundancy rights in law as other UK citizens, in terms of protection in cases where their employers become insolvent and enter administration.
(AQW 42306/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Employment Rights (Northern Ireland) Order 1996 sets out the procedure for handling redundancies (consultation, protective award, compliant to Tribunal, notification): Insolvency of employers (for example, employee's rights). Employers proposing to dismiss between 20 and 99 employees should begin consultation at least 30 days before the redundancy notices take effect. Where 100 or more employees are concerned, consultation must begin at least 90 days before the redundancy notices take effect. If employers fail to carry out collective redundancy consultation, affected employees may claim a protective award from an industrial tribunal

The Employment Rights Act 1996 sets out the procedures applicable to the UK. The minimum consultation periods provided are 30 day minimum period for redundancies affecting between 20 and 99 employees and 45 day minimum period for redundancies of 100 or more.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether he will promote other courses of potential economic benefit to fill spaces left by the withdrawal of full-time and part-time undergraduate courses from the Ulster University prospectus.
(AQW 42343/11-15)

Dr Farry: While my Department sets the strategic direction for the higher education sector, each university is responsible for its own course provision and curriculum.

Ulster University has advised that the decision to withdraw a number of full-time and part-time courses in 2015/16 is part of the normal annual cycle. In making the decision the University has taken account of a number of factors including the needs of the economy, student demand and my Department's priorities, in addition to potential budget constraints.

I have also received assurance from the University that it has followed a request from my Department to protect STEM numbers, so where a STEM related course may close, the numbers will increase in other relevant STEM courses.

The University has advised that the course closures do not equate to subject closures and that a decision on final student numbers has not yet been made. This decision will be made when the university has had the opportunity to consider the final budget allocation.

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many complaints have been received, in each of the last five years, in the Coleraine Campus of the Ulster University regarding actions or decisions taken by senior management personnel; and how many of these are unresolved two years after the initial complaint.
(AQW 42346/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department does not hold the information you have requested. The University is responsible for its own policies and procedures on complaints and it may collate information on the number of complaints received. You may wish, therefore, to contact Ulster University directly on this matter.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, pursuant to AQW 40118/11-15, for further details on the review of higher education funding, including (i) the commencement and completion dates; (ii) the areas to be reviewed; and (iii) the individuals or groups who will carry out the review.
(AQW 42347/11-15)

Dr Farry: The higher education funding review commenced in September 2013 and was being taken forward internally by my Department. The review focussed on five main policy areas: the higher education teaching funding model; the Maximum Student Number (MaSN) mechanism; alternative providers of higher education; student finance; and postgraduate awards. Prior to the budget negotiations, my officials had prepared a consultation document with detailed policy proposals to be launched towards the end of last year, with any policy decisions resulting from the consultation process to be announced in June 2015.

However, in December 2014 it was agreed that it would not be appropriate to undertake a consultation of the funding review amidst uncertainties about my Department's future budgets, particularly given the extent of the cuts which had been proposed within the draft budget for the 15-16 financial year. The consultation was therefore put on hold until the outcomes of the budget settlement for 15-16 became clearer.

The higher education sector, as result of the budget settlement, is facing a one-year budget reduction of 8.4%, and this situation is unlikely to improve beyond 15-16. This equates to a reduction of £16.1million in the 15-16 financial year. This has led to serious questions over the future financial sustainability of the higher education sector in Northern Ireland, which I do not believe can be addressed through the limited scope of the higher education funding review.

Resultantly, I have identified the need to have a wider discussion with all stakeholders about how Northern Ireland can support a financially sustainable and internationally competitive higher education sector. The work that had been undertaken in regard to the higher education funding review will be crucial in informing and facilitating this wider discussion.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning (i) to detail (a) the Maximum Student Numbers (MaSN); (b) the number of full time students, for each of the higher education institution in each of the last three years; (ii) when the review of MaSN will commence; and (iii) who will carry out the review.
(AQW 42348/11-15)

Dr Farry: MaSN Allocations

Tabled below are the MaSN allocations for Queen's University Belfast (QUB) and the Ulster University (UU) over the last five years. The MaSN cap applies to Northern Ireland and non-UK EU domiciled full-time undergraduate enrolments only. The university colleges are not subject to the same MaSN controls as the universities. Instead they receive student number allocations for both initial teacher education (ITE) student places and non-ITE student places; the former are set by the Department of Education.

Table 1: MaSN allocations 2010/11 to 2014/15

Year	QUB	UU	Total
2010/11	11,311	12,668	23,979
2011/12	11,284	12,646	23,930
2012/13	11,259	12,676	23,935
2013/14	11,388	12,870	24,258
2014/15	11,510	13,098	24,608

Full-time Enrolments

Tabled below are the full-time enrolments at each Northern Ireland higher education institution over the last three years for which data is currently available. Over and above those enrolments subject to MaSN controls, total full-time enrolments also comprise postgraduate students and those domiciled elsewhere in the UK and outside of the EU.

Table 2: Full-time enrolments 2010/11 to 2012/13[1]

	QUB	UU	Stranmillis	St Mary's	Total
2011/12	16,600	18,565	935	885	36,985
2012/13	16,655	18,405	900	880	36,845
2013/14	17,020	18,650	970	865	37,505

1. Full-time enrolment figures for 2013/14 and 2014/15 are not yet available. To prevent the identification if individuals, figures are rounded to the nearest 5, with 0, 1, and 2 rounded to 0. Due to rounding, the sum of numbers in each row may not match the total shown.

The Review of the MaSN

The review of the MaSN commenced in September 2013 as a constituent part of my Department's review of higher education funding, and it was undertaken internally by my Department. Prior to the budget negotiations, a review had been carried out and a consultation document with detailed policy proposals had been prepared. It was my intention to launch a consultation period towards the end of last year and announce any policy decisions resulting from that process in June of this year.

However, due to my Department's challenging budgetary position it is now my intention to facilitate a much wider discussion about the sustainability of our higher education funding system, which will commence in the coming months. This discussion will further inform the review of the MaSN mechanism.

Student Mobility

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail his Department's efforts, working with higher education institutions and the Irish government, to reduce obstacles to student mobility between north and south and to implement the recommendations of the IBEC-CBI Joint Business Council report on undergraduate mobility.
(AQW 42351/11-15)

Dr Farry: I have made a commitment in my Department's higher education strategy, to facilitate cross-border co-operation and student mobility. A project group which includes representation from the Irish Higher Education Authority and the Institutes of Technology has been established to take this forward.

The project team has considered the relevant recommendations (1, 4, 6 and 9) of the IBEC-CBI report on undergraduate mobility and progress has been made in the following areas:

- in relation to improving information (recommendation 1), careers teachers and my Department's careers advisers have received additional training on the higher education opportunities available in the Republic of Ireland and on the Central Applications Office processes. Extensive information, to support our local students in their higher education decisions and also to act as a gateway for other students, including from the Republic of Ireland, who may be interested in studying in Northern Ireland, is now available through the NIDirect portal;
- the recommendation in relation to student funding (recommendation 4) has been achieved as Northern Ireland students studying in the South now have access to funding support;
- in relation to A Level and Leaving Certificate grades (recommendation 6), the project group has received updates from the Department of Education that discussions between CCEA and Irish Universities Association are still ongoing. However the group has noted the progress made by individual institutions e.g. Trinity College Dublin and Dublin City University; and
- in relation to the impact of future demographics on cross border student flows (recommendation 9), my officials have been working with officials in the Department for Education and Skills to research and analyse the current position in order to inform future policy development. A joint report is being finalised and will form the basis for the next project team meeting.

Last year I met with Minister for Education and Skills, Ruairi Quinn, and later his successor, Jan O'Sullivan, to discuss a number of areas where there could be greater cross border collaboration including the issue of student mobility. I will continue to meet with Minister O'Sullivan in the future to discuss progress on these issues and my officials will continue to work closely with their counterparts in the South on these and other cross border issues.

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail (i) when Industrial Tribunals started to digitally record its substantive hearings; and (ii) why this practice began.
(AQW 42459/11-15)

Dr Farry: Industrial Tribunals started to record substantive hearings in November 2011 as a pilot scheme to establish whether the digital recording system was fit for purpose.

Following the conclusion of the pilot scheme, on 7 May 2012, the President of the Tribunals issued a Practice Direction which outlined when and how a transcript of such recordings might be provided to claimants.

The discretionary power to issue practice directions is conferred upon the President by industrial tribunal procedure regulations. The issuing of such directions is entirely a matter for the President.

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail (i) whether all substantive Industrial Tribunal hearings are digitally recorded; and (ii) the criteria applied in determining whether or not to digitally record a hearing.
(AQW 42460/11-15)

Dr Farry: Not all substantive industrial tribunal hearings are digitally recorded.

The decision as to whether to make a digital recording of a hearing lies within the discretion of the chairman of the tribunal hearing the case. Industrial tribunal procedure regulations do not prescribe any particular requirements in relation to this issue; rather, they confer general case management powers, giving chairmen wide discretion to proceed as they consider appropriate in relation to each case before them.

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail (i) the number of litigant requests for digital recordings of Industrial Tribunal hearings since practice directions were issued on 7 May 2012; and (ii) the number of digital recordings subsequently issued to litigants.
(AQW 42461/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Office of Industrial Tribunals and the Fair Employment Tribunal does not maintain a record of litigant requests for digital recordings or a record of the number of digital recordings subsequently issued to litigants involved in industrial tribunal hearings.

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the training programmes available for unemployed people between the ages of 18 and 64 years.
(AQW 42465/11-15)

Dr Farry: This programme is open to those who have attained the minimum school leaving age, are either entering or already in employment and contracted to work a minimum of 21 hours per week. Apprentices follow a national training framework which leads to attainment of a competence-based and knowledge-based qualification at Level 2 or 3 and Essential Skills. The frameworks are designed by Sector Skills Councils and Industry Representative Bodies to meet the need of each particular sector.

Off- the- job training is 100% funded, by the Department, for 18-24 year olds in all sectors and 50% funded for apprentices aged 25+ in defined economically important sectors.

Training for Success (TfS) 2013

The Department provides a guarantee of a training place to those who are unemployed and in the 16 & 17 year old age group, and there is extended eligibility criteria in TfS for those aged under 22 with a disability; and under 24 for those young people who qualify under the Children (Leaving Care) Act (NI) (2002).

The programme provides training to give young people the tools and skills they need to secure employment. The training offers participants the opportunity to gain relevant work experience and qualifications as well as the personal and behavioural skills required to progress into work.

Steps 2 Success

The Department's new employment programme, Steps 2 Success (S2S) commenced on 20th October 2014. Its primary purpose is the delivery of a flexible personalised service tailored to meet individual need which will help people move into and remain in employment. Training within the programme is matched to individual job goals. S2S is available to all eligible jobseekers irrespective of their employability need or age.

Clients who are in receipt of Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) and aged between 18 and 24 will be mandated onto S2S after 9 months on benefit and those aged 25+ and on JSA for 12 months will be mandated onto the programme after 12 months on benefit. Early entry for all other JSA claimants, clients on Employment Support Allowance (Work Related Activity Group) (ESA (WRAG)) and existing ESA clients is available with the agreement of their Employment Service Adviser. Industrial Tribunal

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether there is provision for waiver of Industrial Tribunal fees for litigants of limited financial means.
(AQW 42496/11-15)

Dr Farry: Whereas fees have been introduced to access and proceed through Employment Tribunals in Great Britain, together with an associated remittance scheme, no fees are payable for the use of industrial tribunals or the Fair Employment Tribunal in Northern Ireland.

Initial engagement with stakeholders as part of my Department's employment law review led me to conclude that it would not be appropriate to introduce tribunal fees here at this time.

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many students have qualified as (i) primary; (ii) post-primary teachers, in each of the last three years.
(AQW 42533/11-15)

Dr Farry: The number of Northern Ireland domiciled students that have gained a teaching qualification from a Northern Ireland Higher Education Institution in the preceding three academic years is detailed below.

- 2011/12 (i) Primary 220 (ii) Post-primary 340
- 2012/13 (i) Primary 235 (ii) Post-primary 300
- 2013/14 (i) Primary 225 (ii) Post-primary 295

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what public consultation or equality impact assessments were completed prior to the decision to end support for the Learner Access and Engagement Programme.
(AQW 42550/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Department has consulted on the overall draft Departmental Budget 2015-16, including proposed cuts to further education funding. Equality screening was undertaken in support of the decision to close the Programme. The conclusions from the equality screening were that there were no impacts on section 75 groups and that an equality impact assessment was not required.

The Learner Access and Engagement (LAE) programme was initially introduced in 2008 as a pilot programme to engage with and encourage those most hard to reach and to provide learner support and subsequently mainstreamed following an evaluation in 2012. The last full year of the pilot programme recorded a total of 3,359 enrolments. However, since mainstreaming, enrolment figures have been steadily declining, with 2013/14 activity reflecting a total of 1,698 enrolments, against a target of 4,500. Third party providers have not been as successful in attracting and retaining learners on the programme.

One of the significant impacts of the programme has been that further education colleges themselves, outside of LAE and within mainstream provision, have since built the capacity, awareness and expertise in targeting and engaging those most hard to reach into further education provision and increasing retention and delivering successful outcomes. There is evidence to support that the sector is engaging as many, if not more, students from the lower quintiles and in addition the sector's retention rates on mainstream Essential Skills programmes for example, have been consistently higher than those being achieved by third party providers on LAE. Taking account of these issues and the continued decrease in enrolment numbers on the LAE programme, the Department took the decision to discontinue the Programme with effect from 31 March 2015. Officials are working with colleges and providers to ensure all those currently enrolled can complete their course of study and gain their qualifications.

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the childcare provision in each regional college, including the number of places and the cost to students of a place.
(AQW 42601/11-15)

Dr Farry: Two of the six regional further education (FE) colleges have childcare facilities, the details are provided below:

FE College	Number of Places	Cost to Students
South West College has independent crèche facilities in the Dungannon and Omagh campuses.	23 places in Omagh and 26 places in Dungannon .	£138 per week or £6 per hour.
Belfast Metropolitan College has its own day care centre at the Castlereagh Campus.	22 full-time places. The college currently has 40 children registered at the centre due to differing student timetables.	£130 per week (full-time 5 days per week). £65 per week (part-time up to 2 and a half days per week).

My Department provides financial assistance towards childcare costs to eligible full and part-time students enrolled in an FE college with dependent children in registered or approved childcare through the FE Awards, college Hardship Funds and the Care to Learn (NI) Scheme. The FE Awards and college Hardship funds are means tested and how much a student receives depends on their household income. The maximum amount paid to students from these funds is detailed below:

- FE Awards – full-time students aged 19 and over can receive up to maximum of £130 per week for one child and up to £220 a week for two or more children. Part-time students aged 19 and over can receive up to a maximum of £65 per week for one child and up to £110 a week for 2 or more children.
- Hardship Fund - full-time students aged 18 and over can receive up to maximum of £110 per week for one child and up to £188 a week for two or more children. Part- time students aged 18 and over can receive up to a maximum of £56 per week for one child and up to £95 a week for 2 or more children.
- Care to Learn (NI) Scheme – applies to full and part-time students aged 16–19. The maximum assistance available is up to £165 per week for each child, with payment based on actual costs and where reductions are granted for more than one child.

Those students participating in higher education in further education colleges can access two support schemes.

- The Childcare Grant allows students to apply for 85% of the actual childcare costs during term times and holidays. The grant is dependent on household income and a student can receive up to £148.75 a week for one child or up to £255 a week for more than one child.
- The Parents' Learning Allowance is up to £1,538 a year and is intended to help with course-related costs if a student has dependent children. The amount paid is based on the income of the student, their partner and any dependents.

Students availing of crèche facilities in colleges are eligible to apply for funding support under the schemes identified above.

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether Queen's University, Belfast and Ulster University accept Essential Skills qualifications as acceptable alternatives to GCSEs.
(AQW 42602/11-15)

Dr Farry: Queen's University, Belfast accepts Level 2 Essential Skills in Communication in lieu of a grade C in GCSE English Language. However, applicants whose first language is not English are required to pass an approved English Language test. Level 2 Essential Skills in Communication does not satisfy this requirement.

Whether Level 2 Essential Skills in Application of Number is a suitable alternative to GCSE Mathematics Grade C is decided by Queens's University on a case by case basis. An applicant's overall academic profile and any additional qualifications in numerically related subjects are also taken into account. However, for Social Work, Nursing and Midwifery courses Essential Skills in Application of Number will not be accepted. Queens has advised that this will be reviewed in the event of changes to the specifications or content of either the GCSE or Essential Skills qualification.

Essential Skills in Communication at level 2 or above and Essential Skills in Application of Number at level 2 or above satisfy Ulster University's general entry requirement for English and Mathematics respectively. Ulster University has advised that whilst these are general entry requirements a higher level of achievement (in English and/or Mathematics) is required for some courses.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the number of employment tribunal cases involving (i) teachers; and (ii) non-teaching members of school staff where the decision taken by the school Board of Governors has been rejected following input from a third party organisation; and to provide the name of third party organisations who would provide input into an employment tribunal.
(AQW 42632/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Office of Industrial Tribunals and the Fair Employment Tribunal does not collate information by occupation type or employer type.

Furthermore, the requested information could not be ascertained from a general inspection of claim forms received by the Office.

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the number of staff employed by InterTradeIreland, broken down by religion.
(AQW 41885/11-15)

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): As at 9 February 2015 the number of staff employed by InterTradeIreland broken down by religion is

- Protestants - 7
- Roman Catholics - 31
- Non- determined - 1

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to list the consultancy firms that provided financial services to his Department in each of the last five years; and the amount paid to each firm for these services.
(AQW 41941/11-15)

Mrs Foster:

2013-14

Consultancy Firm	Amount
None	nil

2012-13

Consultancy Firm	**Amount**
Deloitte & Touche	£11,940.00
Total	**£11,940.00**

2011-12

Consultancy Firm	**Amount**
ASM Horwath	£21,654.00
BHA Management Consultants	£10,080.00
Capital For Enterprise	£2,931.42
Cogent Management Consulting	£21,495.60
Deloitte & Touche	£11,588.00
DHA Consulting	£5,148.90
Frontline Consultants	£1,296.00
Futureneering Ltd	£3,120.00
Grant Thornton	£810.00
GWB Associates – Dr Gary Burnett	£7,269.74
KPMG	£44,665.34
KR Consulting Services	£11,969.84
Network Strategies Ltd	£6,222.00
RSM McClure Watters	£10,287.00
Urbis Regeneration	£24,710.51
Total	**£183,248.35**

2010-11

Consultancy Firm	Amount
Aminol Ltd	£12,701.95
ASM Horwath	£25,032.00
Barry Hagan Consulting	£6,580.00
BDO Stoy Hayward	£13,218.75
Capital For Enterprise	£2,005.02
Cogent Management Consulting	£10,000.00
Conduit Partners	£13,237.00
Deloitte & Touche	£10,316.00
FGS McClure Watters	£1,007.68
FIG Solutions	£1,575.00
Frontline Consultants	£8,131.62
Full Circle	£4,029.78
Goldblatt McGuigan	£29,000.00
KPMG	£113,350.00
Kremer Consultancy Services	£1,250.00
Marketing Stategy & Planning	£675.63
Obrar Ltd	£4,935.00
Pan-Leisure Consulting	£940.00
Tribal Helm	£25,436.40
Total	**£283,421.83**

2009-10

Consultancy Firm	Amount
Analysis Mason	£1,425.00
ASM Horwath	£10,582.00
BHA Management Consulting	£32,262.25
Cogent Management Consulting	£33,439.00
CSP Solutions	£5,265.29
DC Ives	£3,113.30
DHA Consulting	£4,351.20
Downes Strategic Marketing	£22,089.46
Ernst & Young	£5,000.00
FGS McClure Watters	£52,838.00
Frontline Consultants Ltd	£7,963.45
Goldblatt McGuigan	£20,000.00
GWB Associates	£5,184.49
Marketing Strategy & Planning	£4,785.00
McCann / McBurney	£8,750.00
Northern innovation (NI) Ltd	£4,180.48
Pan-Leisure	£5,596.81
Sagentia	£14,807.00
Wilden Management Services	£3,527.95
Total	**£245,160.68**

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what support her Department can provide to local newspapers, given their importance to the local community.
(AQW 41953/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI's role is to grow the local economy by helping new and existing businesses to compete internationally, and by attracting new investment to Northern Ireland.

As local newspapers are existing businesses focussed on their local communities, and not directly exporting outside of Northern Ireland, they are unlikely to be eligible for direct financial support from Invest NI.

However, all businesses can avail of a range of advisory assistance and free workshops from Invest NI on a number of business related topics including sales & marketing, design and finance. Further information, advice and tools for businesses are also available and can be accessed via the nibusinessinfo website.

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 40788/11-15, whether the £1.2million cost of the investigation into the NI Events Company included the £166,084 spend by the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure on audits, reviews of financial transactions and contracts.
(AQW 42041/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The £1.2 million cost of the company inspection of the Northern Ireland Events Company does not include the £166,084 spend by the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure on audits, reviews of financial transactions and contracts.

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the analysis undertaken to arrive at the aspiration to make tourism a £1billion industry in Northern Ireland by 2020.
(AQW 42047/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The long term aim of achieving visitor expenditure of £1 billion by 2020 came out of the extensive consultation on tourism undertaken in 2010. The intention was to grow income from visitors faster than visitor numbers, and a challenging target was set to double the income Northern Ireland earns from tourism in the decade to 2020.

The visitor expenditure target was set following independent analysis of past tourism performance back to 2001 and modelling of growth projections for visitor numbers from key target markets and increases in average spend per visitor during the period from 2010 to 2020. The aim was to increase average spend per visitor across all markets and to identify growth markets and target these for higher than average growth in visitor numbers.

Interim targets for tourism expenditure were set in Programme for Government (PfG 2011-15) to ensure our long term goals are achieved. All PfG targets on tourism have been achieved to date.

The latest full year Official Statistics on tourism are for 2013 and these figures show that the PfG milestone target on expenditure was met with visitor expenditure of £723 million against a target of £637 million.

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether her Department will undertake an assessment of any new council tourism targets, to ensure that her Department meets her aspiration of making tourism a £1billion industry by 2020.
(AQW 42048/11-15)

Mrs Foster: In order to meet our overarching targets, tourism growth must be realised right across Northern Ireland and Tourism Northern Ireland has been engaging closely with the 11 new Councils to determine tourism development priorities in each of the new Local Authority areas.

This is in line with key recommendations from the Hunter Review which point to the need to strengthen relationships within the tourism sector and for Tourism Northern Ireland to develop new strategic partnerships with Councils. As a statutory partner Tourism Northern Ireland will support the new Councils in developing their Tourism Plans as part of their Community Planning role.

The Community Plans will identify the long term objectives and will be aligned to destination plans and development themes reflecting Northern Ireland strategic tourism priorities.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on the performance of the small business loan fund.
(AQW 42068/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The NI Small Business Loan Fund has distributed more than £2.5 million across 124 loans. The fund has helped support companies from a very wide range of sectors including IT, food processing, construction, leisure, tourism and many others.

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what consideration has been given to extending the gas network in the East Down area to Newcastle.
(AQW 42117/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Utility Regulator is considering the issues involved in providing natural gas to a number of towns in East Down.

Any potential extensions to the gas network must be assessed on grounds of economic viability, with the need for sufficient gas loads to justify the cost of providing new gas networks.

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for a gender breakdown of (i) senior management; and (ii) junior management employed by InvestNI.
(AQW 42152/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Within Invest NI there are:

(i) 15 males and 6 females employed at senior management level (Grade 5 and above); and

(ii) 218 males and 186 females employed at junior management level (SO to Grade 6).

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what steps must be taken to facilitate the establishment of an enterprise zone in Derry.
(AQW 42165/11-15)

Mrs Foster: There are currently no plans to designate other Enterprise Zones in other areas of Northern Ireland.

The Enterprise Zone announced by the Chancellor in his Budget statement in March 2014 is a pilot project in the Coleraine area focusing specifically on Enhanced Capital Allowances.

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment when the assessment of the pilot enterprise zone designated for Coleraine will be completed.
(AQW 42166/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department's role in establishing the pilot Enterprise Zone in Coleraine has been as a facilitator to ensure designation of the Enterprise Zone by HM Treasury once all negotiations have concluded between relevant stakeholders.

As those discussions have not concluded, the pilot Enterprise Zone has not yet been formally designated by Treasury. It is therefore too early to say when an assessment will be undertaken.

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether she will take steps to extend the operations of URICA to Northern Ireland, to support small businesses with slow payment problems.
(AQW 42167/11-15)

Mrs Foster: URICA is an independent company which use an online supply chain platform that improves customer cash flow and provides early payment to suppliers. As such, neither I nor the British Business Bank would have any direct influence on their operations.

However the British Business Bank has indicated that URICA are seeking to develop their platform and welcome new introductions from suitable companies which may consider using this type of chain funding.

The Business Bank is raising awareness of all alternative sources of finance, including offerings such as URICA, by holding events such as the upcoming "The Future of Funding: Northern Ireland" event in Belfast on 26 February 2015.

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 41056/11-15, whether InvestNI has a role in the evaluation or processing of tourism grant payments in the Rural Development Programme.
(AQW 42168/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI does not have a role in the evaluation or processing of tourism grant payments in the Rural Development Programme.

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 41057/11-15, whether the fund will be on a match funding basis with individual councils.
(AQW 42169/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The development of a Tourism Growth Fund will be taken forward over the next year as part of the Hunter Review Action Plan.

The new Chairman and new Chief Executive of Tourism Northern Ireland, when appointed, and in collaboration with the new super councils, will develop the specifics of the Fund.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 40905/11-15, to detail the Departmental infrastructural projects which have been put out to tender; and for an update on each project.
(AQW 42247/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Details of all Capital projects including infrastructure projects that my Department has put out to tender can be found on the Investment Strategy Northern Ireland website at www.isni.gov.uk.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the grant aid awarded by InvestNI to Firstsource for its Derry plant; and whether this grant aid was conditional on the plant operating for a period of time without a reduction in employee numbers.
(AQW 42293/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI has offered Firstsource Solutions Selective Financial Assistance of £8,259,200 since November 2006 to support the creation of 1,061 jobs specifically at its premises in Londonderry.

It is a condition of the offer that the company uses its best endeavours to maintain that employment.

The average employment is monitored over a 5 year control period, which currently extends until 31 May 2019. If the company fails to maintain average overall employment in line with the Letter of Offer then Invest NI would be in a position to initiate clawback of grant.

Mr Dickson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what actions are being taken to encourage competition and compel transparency in pricing in the domestic gas supply market.
(AQW 42304/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The natural gas market in Greater Belfast is fully open to gas supply competition. The gas market in the "10 Towns" licence area outside Belfast is already open to supply competition for larger energy users and will open fully for all consumers from April 2015.

Unlike the situation in Great Britain, prices of incumbent gas suppliers in Northern Ireland are subject to regulation. The Utility Regulator's spring 2015 reviews of Airtricity Gas Supply and firmus energy, the incumbent gas suppliers in Greater Belfast and the "10 Towns" respectively, are underway. These reviews scrutinise the constituent elements of retail gas tariffs, ensuring transparency, and providing assurance for consumers.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether there is any regulation that requires retailers, particularly large retailers, to provide seating for customers.
(AQW 42319/11-15)

Mrs Foster: DETI is not responsible for any regulation that requires retailers to provide seating for customers.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline any action taken by her Department to encourage cable companies to expand their services to provide greater consumer and business choice in broadband provision.
(AQW 42320/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I and my officials have met with representatives of cable companies to encourage network expansion and offer advice and information that would help achieve that outcome.

However, the telecommunications market is fully privatised and independently regulated and at present there is no Universal Service Obligation on providers to deliver broadband services. Network operators make investment decisions based on commercial considerations and, while my Department can make interventions to encourage such investment, this must be taken forward on a competitive and technology neutral basis.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether she will take the necessary steps to create an Enterprise Zone, around and including the current the JTI site in Ballymena.
(AQW 42406/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The decision to designate a particular area offering ECAs is ultimately for HM Treasury.

The Enterprise Zone announced by the Chancellor in his Budget statement in March 2014 is a pilot project in the Coleraine area focusing specifically on Enhanced Capital Allowances.

There are currently no plans to designate other Enterprise Zones in other areas of Northern Ireland.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the differences between conventional and unconventional drilling specifications on a drilling licence application.
(AQW 42410/11-15)

Mrs Foster: In the oil and gas industry the terms conventional and unconventional are usually applied to the types of reservoir in which oil or gas may be trapped. In conventional reservoirs (e.g. sandstones, naturally fractured limestones) the oil or gas is trapped in well-connected spaces (pores) between the grains of the rock and flows readily from the rock into and up the well. In contrast, in unconventional reservoirs the hydrocarbons may be adsorbed (attached) onto the grains or trapped in poorly connected micropores and fractures. In this case High Volume Hydraulic Fracturing (HVHF) is used to enhance the fracture network so that the hydrocarbons will flow from the reservoir into the well at the required rate.

The drilling specifications for an exploration well will depend on the design of the well including the inclination, total depth and the lithologies (rock types, including aquifers) through which the drill will pass. It will make little difference whether the target is a conventional or unconventional reservoir.

However, if the well is intended to test an unconventional shale gas reservoir, for example, the application for consent to drill would include an HVHF programme followed by flow testing of any hydrocarbons present.

When a conventional reservoir is tested the oil or gas may flow to surface naturally or reduced permeabilities may inhibit this flow. Drill stem tests and mini fall-off tests may be used to evaluate the reservoir properties and procedures such as an acid wash and squeeze and conventional hydraulic fracture stimulation may be used to initiate or increase the flow of hydrocarbons from the reservoir. Before drilling it is impossible to predict which of these procedures will be required but they would be included as options in the application for consent to drill.

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, following recent announcements of price reductions by Electricity Companies, whether she plans to have any discussions with gas companies as to when they hope to be in a position to reduce their prices.
(AQW 42470/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Utility Regulator is currently engaged in a review of regulated gas tariffs in respect of Airtricity Gas Supply (for the Greater Belfast area) and firmus energy (for the Ten Towns area). My Department and the Consumer Council are consulted as part of this process. It is expected that these reviews will conclude soon to allow any changes to gas bills to take effect from 1 April 2015.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for a breakdown of the £2.1 billion pound bid submitted to the European Investment Fund by her Department's Energy Division.
(AQW 42536/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The EU President Juncker's 'Investment Plan for Europe' published on 26 November 2014 proposed measures to increase investment across the EU, including creation of a European Fund for Strategic Investments to guarantee new lending volume by the European Investment Bank (EIB).

Money from the existing EU Budget and EIB will be used as a guarantee for the proposed €315bn investment. The focus is on private investment. There remains considerable uncertainty about how the Commission intends to use EU Budget money for this purpose and where money will be reallocated from to establish the guarantee. The Commission has also published limited information on the type of projects that would be considered strategic, how they will be assessed and when.

Against this backdrop my Department was asked to identify a range of energy proposals as part of the initial response to the announcement. The proposals put forward are aligned to priorities set out in the Strategic Energy Framework and cover security of supply, interconnection, gas networks and conversion, smart grid/meters, energy storage and electricity grid reinforcements. They have not been developed in any detail or been subject to assessment of costs/benefits in the absence of clarity on the EU investment proposal.

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (i) what postcode areas are included on the final list for roll out of the Broadband Improvement Scheme; (ii) what is the expected time of completion for each postcode area; (iii) what improvements will be made in each area; and (iv) what infrastructural change this will entail.
(AQW 42544/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I would refer the member to the NI Direct website at www.nidirect.gov.uk/broadband-improvement-project where the implementation plan for Northern Ireland Broadband Improvement Project can be found. This site includes a postcode checker where constituents can find out if and when upgrades are due to be completed in their area.

The project is being delivered in eight phases each of which requires an extensive survey and design process which takes account of technical feasibility, quality of existing infrastructure in the area, reasonable costs, number of anticipated customers etc and seeks to achieve the greatest value for money and the highest number of beneficiaries. It is this process which determines the speed of service that can be delivered and the technology to be deployed.

It is anticipated that by project completion in December 2015, improvements will have been delivered for at least 45,000 premises across many areas of Northern Ireland resulting in the provision of basic wire-line broadband services of at least 2 Megabits per second in areas that previously had no service and improvements in the availability of superfast fixed-line broadband services (24 Megabits per second or higher) in areas where choice is poor or broadband speeds are low.

Changes to infrastructure includes the installation of equipment that runs fibre optic cables from the telephone exchange to premises or to an existing/ new roadside cabinet which then connects to customers premises over existing telephone lines to provide broadband.

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how the Northern Ireland Tourist Board intends to market the Temple art project by David Best, which takes place in Derry between March 14 and 21 March 2015.
(AQW 42592/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Tourism Northern Ireland is currently promoting the event through a range of channels.

The event is listed on Discover Northern Ireland's website at www.discovernorthernireland.com/Temple-by-Artichoke which is expected to receive 3.7 million visits in 2015/16 and will also be promoted through a series of posts on Tourism Northern Ireland's suite of Social Media channels in the run up to the event.

Tourism Northern Ireland is also working closely with colleagues in Tourism Ireland in London to facilitate a media visit to the event of up to 5 journalists. It is hoped they will be joined by media from the Republic of Ireland.

Mr Douglas asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment which airline routes from Belfast provide provision for pet travel.
(AQW 42711/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The provision for pet travel is a commercial matter for the airlines.

While DETI does not hold this information, I understand that airlines such as Thomson may make provision for pet travel.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment when will she answer AQW 42406/11-15.
(AQW 42771/11-15)

Mrs Foster: AQW 42406/11-15 has already been answered.

Department of the Environment

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment whether the full extent of the mineral extraction currently taking place at 17 Shinnagh Road, Mullaslin, Carrickmore, County Tyrone (i) has planning permission; (ii) is fully compliant with all necessary regulation; and (iii) has been screened for environmental effects under the Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012.
(AQW 41910/11-15)

Mr Durkan (The Minister of the Environment): Planning approval at Shinnagh Road was granted under K/2009/0807/F for 'Proposed mineral extraction of sand and gravel with associated passing bays and entrance with reinstatement to agricultural land afterwards' and K/2012/0585/F for 'Re-positioning of access to previously approved application K/2009/0807/F'.

Planning approval for the access issued in July 2013 but the original quarry permission required extraction to cease in July 2014. The operator did not apply to extend this time period.

Officials are currently investigating operations beyond the conditioned time limit of July 2014 and more recently the allegation that the operator is extending beyond the approved boundary and I have asked that this is expedited.

Both applications were screened pursuant to The Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations (NI) 2012.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of the Environment whether there are any concessions for Republic of Ireland taxis and wedding cars operating in Northern Ireland, in terms of obligations to fully comply with Northern Ireland regulations; and if so, for his assessment of whether this would distort fair competition.
(AQW 42025/11-15)

Mr Durkan: There are no regulatory concessions for taxis or wedding cars registered in Ireland which cross the border during their work; nor are there any regulatory concessions for operators established here who cross the border into Ireland during their work.

My officials have engaged with colleagues in the Irish Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport about cross-border operations of this nature, seeking a means by which to regulate journeys which cross the border (in either direction) in an appropriate and proportionate manner, to ensure that passenger safety is protected and that fair competition is maintained. I intend to raise this issue at the next Transport Sectoral meeting of the North South Ministerial Council in order to progress appropriate arrangements.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 22801/11-15, for an update on the action taken to date to address the issue of the disused building formerly known as Drumglass Hospital.
(AQW 42090/11-15)

Mr Durkan: I understand that you received an update in regard to urgent repair works at Drumglass House (27 May 2013), in response to AQW 22801/11-15, followed up by further update in response to AQW 25623/11-15 (19 September 2013).

This department's Historic Buildings Unit (HBU) issued several 'Urgent Works' 'warning' letters in 12/2013 to the last known owners of this property.

In July 2013, the department's Environmental Crime Unit (ECU) sought to identify the buildings' owners, and a letter was received by ECU advising that it is the understanding of the Liquidator 'that the property reverts to the Crown'.

Further legal advice was sought, and officials subsequently contacted the [then acting] Chief Executive of Dungannon Council on 26 February 2014 about the possibility of the Council becoming actively involved in taking on a role in securing key derelict listed buildings in Dungannon, particularly Drumglass Hospital. No reply has yet been received in respect of Drumglass House.

To conclude, the building is essentially 'ownerless'. The building certainly requires urgent attention to prevent further loss of fabric. I am advised that my officials have recently contacted the local Council to establish what may be done in this instance.

I must note, however, that in circumstances such as these, combined with the unprecedented financial restrictions that my department is currently facing, it will be very difficult to enforce the maintenance of this property.

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of the Environment to list the consultancy firms that provided financial services to his Department in each of the last five years; and the amount paid to each firm for these services.
(AQW 42092/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The table below provides details relating to payments made by my Department to 4 consultancy firms that provided financial services to my Department in the last five financial years.

	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
CIPFA*	**39,735**	**52,575**	**7,509**	**7,421**	**20,850**
Brown Mack Accountants	18,975	-	-	-	-
Connon Associates	2,475	-	-	-	-
Goldblatt McGuigan	-	-	-	-	1,000
Total	**61,185**	**52,575**	**7,509**	**7,421**	**21,850**

* CIPFA - Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy

The total amount is comprised of: £128,090 for work undertaken by CIPFA in relation to the commissioning of the annual accounting direction to councils and the provision of technical accounting support services to councils; £18,975 for work undertaken by Brown Mack Accountants who provided assistance to this Department and DRD during the implementation of the Account NI Project; £2,475 for technical accounting advice provided to the Department in relation to the implementation of International Accounting Standards; and £1,000 for advice provided to NILGOSC in relation to corporation tax.

Mrs Cameron asked the Minister of the Environment what steps his Department is taking to address the illegal dumping of tyres in New Mossley, Newtownabbey.
(AQW 42123/11-15)

Mr Durkan: NIEA received notification of two separate incidents involving the illegal dumping of tyres from Newtownabbey Borough Council on Wednesday 4 February 2015 and Friday 6 February 2015. Both cases related to the dumping of tyres and wooden pallets in the New Mossley area.

The NIEA is working with Newtownabbey Borough Council to see if the source of the waste and those responsible for producing it and transporting it can be identified.

Staff from NIEA have inspected the area and will continue to monitor the situation with a view to obtaining investigative opportunities that would allow both the source of the waste and those responsible for dumping it to be identified.

If evidence is forthcoming, the NIEA will use its powers under the Waste and Contaminated Land (NI) Order 1997 to investigate and take enforcement action.

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of the Environment what level of income will be derived in the first year of the increased carrier bag levy.
(AQW 42130/11-15)

Mr Durkan: From 19 January 2015, retailers are required to charge 5p for all carrier bags which are sold for less than 20p, effectively extending (not increasing) the levy beyond single use bags to cheaper reusable bags. The extension of the scope of the levy to include cheaper reusable bags is intended to encourage shoppers to change their attitudes and to halt the negative behavioural pattern which saw the use of these bags increase significantly since the levy was introduced.

There was limited information on which to base a receipt calculation from the extension of the levy to reusable's but it is anticipated that the additional receipts will be relatively small. Official validated statistics (including revenue paid to the Department) for the second year of the levy will not be released until August 2015. These figures will cover the period 1 April 2014 – 31 March 2015 and as such will only incorporate two months of levy business that has been conducted under the amended legislation. Official validated figures for year 3 of the levy will be released in August 2016 which will cover the period 1 April 2015 – 31 March 2016.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of the Environment which statutory agency has lead responsibility for the collection of litter and enforcement action in relation to the illegal dumping of litter in to Lough Erne.
(AQW 42153/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The district councils have this responsibility. The Litter (Northern Ireland) Order 1994, as amended by The Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, contains a number of legislative measures to improve the quality of the local environment by giving district councils powers to deal with litter, including enforcement powers.

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of the Environment whether the Environmental Impact Assessment relating to drilling for gas adjacent to Woodburn Reservoir is complete; and whether it considered the presence of the reservoir.
(AQW 42175/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Department carried out an Environmental Impact Assessment determination for the operation which considered the potential impacts on the local hydrology, fresh water aquifers and wider water environment. The Department concluded however that the exploration drilling will have no significant environmental impact.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of quangos linked to his Department on (i) 8 May 2007; and (ii) 11 February 2015; and how many people served on the quangos on these respective dates.
(AQW 42178/11-15)

Mr Durkan: At 8 May 2007, the Department of the Environment was responsible for the following public bodies:

- The Northern Ireland Local Government Officers' Superannuation Committee (NILGOSC);
- The Local Government Staff Commission for Northern Ireland (LGSC);
- The Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside (CNCC);
- The Historic Buildings Council (HBC); and
- The Historic Monuments Council (HMC).

At 11 February 2015, this position has not changed. Please note that the Local Government Staff Commission will be wound up in 2017.

The number of members serving on each of the bodies at 8 May 2007, and at 11 February 2015 is detailed in the table below.

Public Body	Number of Members at 8 May 2007	Number of members at 11 February 2015
NILGOSC	11 (Chair & 10 members)	13 (Chair & 12 members)
LGSC	15 (Chair & 14 members)	12 (Chair and 11 members)
CNCC	19 (Chair, Deputy Chair & 17 members)	12 (Chair, Deputy Chair and 10 members)
HBC	17 (Chair & 16 members)	15 (Chair and 14 members)
HMC	15 (Chair & 14 members)	15 (Chair and 14 members)
Total	**77**	**67**

Mr Devenney asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the current planning application for North West One in Londonderry; and what timeframe is in place for a decision.
(AQW 42196/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The consideration of both planning applications is ongoing. Further Environmental Information was received by my Department in January 2015 with the 4 week period for the submission of public representations expiring on 25th February 2015.

DRD Transport NI is currently reviewing the most recent submission from the applicant's Transport Consultant and shall respond directly to my officials. Once this consultation response has been received my officials will finalise both reports and forward to me for my consideration.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment what was the operating cost of the Ministerial car in each of the last three financial years.
(AQW 42219/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The table below provides details of the operating cost of the Ministerial car for the years 2011-12 to 2013-14.

	2011-12 £	2012-13 £	2013-14 £
Maintenance Costs	250	1,011	728
Fuel Costs	1,097	3,652	5,482

	2011-12 £	2012-13 £	2013-14 £
Total Costs	**1,347**	**4,663**	**6,210**

The increase in fuel costs reflects increases in distances travelled by different Ministers.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the groups in North Down that have received funding from the carrier bag levy; and the funding each group received.
(AQW 42259/11-15)

Mr Durkan: In North Down 8 groups received Carrier Bag Levy monies through the 2013/14 NGO Challenge Fund. They successfully completed 10 projects in March 2014.

This year 6 groups have been offered funding to complete a further 7 projects in North Down. Each group's level of funding has been outlined in Appendices 1 and 2.

This year's Challenge Fund programme is due to complete in March 2015 and I look forward to again seeing the positive environmental and community outcomes this support enables.

Appendix 1

Organisations that completed projects in North Down using Carrier Bag Levy monies (through the 2013/14 NGO Challenge Fund).

Group	Project Title	Amount of funding received
Camphill Community Glencraig	Glencraig Woodland Walk	£5,316.20
Conservation Volunteers	Growing Local Provenance	£12,246.00
Conservation Volunteers	Tower Wood Sycamore Removal	£3,946.13
Fabb (For a Better Bangor)	Bangor's Environment and Heritage	£3,000.00
Millisle Youth Forum	Cornering the Environment	£10,000.00
Natural Copeland	Over-flying sensitive sites - best practice guidance	£6,180.00
South Eastern Regional College	SERC Woodland Project	£7,073.97
The Holywood Rudolf Steiner School	Forest school Project	£4,996.00
Ulster Wildlife	Revisioning Balloo Wetlands	£7,008.00
Ulster Wildlife	Bringing Biodiversity Awareness	£11,819.92
		2013/14 Total £71,586.22

Appendix 2

Organisations that have been offered Carrier Bag Levy monies to complete projects in North Down (through the 2014/15 NGO Challenge Fund).

Group	Project Title	Amount of funding offered
British Trust for Ornithology	Measuring And Monitoring Biodiversity Offshore 2 Conference	£4,320.00
Copeland Bird Observatory	A roof over their heads	£22,983.00
National Trust	North Down Coastal Improvement Path Project	£26,640.00
South Eastern Regional College (SERC)	SERC Woodland:School Programme	£5,000.00
St Malachy's Primary School	St. Malachy's Eco School Garden	£4,180.00
The Conservation Volunteers	Improving the Clandeboye Way at Helen's Bay	£6,093.00
The Conservation Volunteers	Growing more local provenance trees from seed	£12,927.00
		2014/15 Total £82,143.00

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment what assessment he has made of the delivery of services for users in Northern Ireland of driver and vehicle licensing functions.
(AQW 42260/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Driver & Vehicle Agency (DVA) holds the prestigious Customer Service Excellence® standard, which tests in great depth those areas that research has indicated are a priority for customers, with particular focus on delivery, timeliness, information, professionalism and staff attitude. The DVA obtained the standard in December 2010 and retained it in 2011, 2012 and 2013. A further assessment is to be carried out later this month.

However, I also recognise that there are improvements that can be made to the delivery of services for drivers in Northern Ireland, for example the IT system that is currently used by the DVA cannot deliver online services. Therefore, the DVA has begun a project to develop a new IT system, to be introduced by April 2016, which will improve the customer experience, deliver service efficiencies and will enable a range of online services.

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of the Environment to detail any rivers polluted by fuel launderers, including fish kills as a result of the pollution, in each of the last five years.
(AQW 42288/11-15)

Mr Durkan: A list of incidents related to fuel laundering attended by Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) Water Quality Inspectors by council area and river name is attached. NIEA's old water pollution incidents database did not provide data in a readily accessible form, therefore data for the last 3 years is presented.

No fish kills have been caused as a result of fuel laundering.

Incidents Caused by Fuel Laundered Waste by Council Area and River Name for the Past 3 Years

Council	River	Year		
Armagh	Ballymacone			2014
	Ballymortrim	2012		
	Callan			2014
	Callan River 4 Upper	2012		2014
	Clontibret Stream		2013	2014
	Corcrain River		2013	
	County Water	2012	2013	2014
	River Blackwater 2012		2013	2014
	River Blackwater (Benburb)	2012		
	Tall River		2013	
Banbridge	Newry River Trib		2013	
Cookstown	Ballinderry		2012	
	Claggan (Gortavoy)			2014
	Doon Burn	2012		
	Kells Point Neagh		2013	
	Kingsmill River	2012		
	Lough Neagh	2012		
	Salterstown Burn			2014
Craigavon	River Lagan		2013	
	Waringstown Stream			2014
Derry	Cullion Burn		2013	
Down	Glasswater River			2014
D'gannon & Sth Tyrone	Claggan River (Skea Bridge)		2013	
	Derrygorry Trib			2014
	Torrent River			2014
Fermanagh	Silees River			2014
Limavady	River Roe		2013	

Council	River	Year		
Magherafelt	Back Burn		2013	
Moyle	Glenshesk River		2013	
Newry & Mourne	Creggan River	2012	2013	2014
	Cully Water	2012	2013	2014
	Cusher	2012	2013	
	Dorsy River	2012	2013	2014
	Fane River	2012	2013	2014
	Flurry River	2012	2013	2014
	Forkhill River	2012	2013	2014
	Forkhill River Lower		2013	2014
Omagh	Camowen River			2014
	Glenscollip Burn		2013	
	Quiggery River	2012		
Strabane	River Derg			2014

Ms Lo asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (i) the options open to his Department if it discovers it has granted a planning permission unlawfully; (ii) the mechanisms that exist for it to rectify that error; and (iii) whether he is aware of any precedent in Northern Ireland where a decision maker has sought to challenge and quash its own planning decision.
(AQW 42375/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The question of whether a planning permission has been granted unlawfully falls to the Courts to determine. The permission is presumed to have been lawfully granted unless a court of competent jurisdiction decides to the contrary.

Decisions to grant planning permission are susceptible to challenge by way of judicial review on standard administrative law grounds, that is to say illegality, irrationality and procedural impropriety. On occasion, the Department may consent to the High Court (in the event of a remedy being granted by the Court) quashing a particular permission, or declaring that the permission was not lawfully granted.

The Department also has the power under Article 38 of the Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1991 to make an order revoking or modifying a planning permission, prior to it being implemented, where it considers it expedient to do so, having had regard to the development plan and any other material considerations (which include financial implications). Revocation or modification of a permission may enable an applicant to claim compensation.

The power in Article 38 can only be used before the development is complete. After that date, the Department can order discontinuance under Article 39 of the Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1991. Again, liability to pay compensation may arise.

My officials have advised that they are not aware of a time when my Department has sought to challenge one of its own planning decisions through the courts. The Planning Appeals Commission is also a planning decision maker in Northern Ireland. It is, however, an independent appellate body. Given its status, it is not appropriate that I comment on their behalf. By way of assistance, you may wish to seek an answer directly from the Commission on this matter. Correspondence should be addressed to:

Chief Commissioner

Planning Appeals Commission
Park House
87-91 Great Victoria Street
Belfast
BT2 7AG

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 30406/11-15, whether an estimated total cost of the clean up operation at Campsie has been reached; and who will pay for the clean up.
(AQW 42381/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The remediation and clean up solution for the Campsie waste sites has not yet been finalised and therefore the associated potential costs are not known.

The Department initiated a new project in January 2015 that aims to collect new site data to (i) further inform the potential risks arising from the illegal waste deposits to the environment, (ii) implement necessary short-term leachate management works, (iii) implement a 12 month environmental monitoring and (iv) to identify potential remediation options to manage the environmental impacts with whole life costs. Details on these potential remediation options and associated costs are expected by August 2015.

Implementation of potential remediation measures will be subject to a separate procurement and contract arrangement pending further clarification of who will pay.

Who will pay for the clean-up is being investigated. Possible mechanisms for the polluter to pay are being explored with viable options to be identified for consideration.

Mr Ó hOisín asked the Minister of the Environment whether any guidelines have been produced and applied in planning applications for hydro-electric schemes in rivers; and whether restrictions, other than extraction distances, are in place regarding the number and location of dams, weirs and turbines.
(AQW 42422/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The policy context for the assessment of hydro-electric schemes is set out in Planning Policy Statement (PPS) 18 'Renewable Energy' and the accompanying Best Practice Guidance (BPG) which were published in August 2009. The aim of the PPS is to facilitate the siting of renewable energy generating facilities in appropriate locations within the built and natural environment in order to achieve Northern Ireland's renewable energy targets, and to realise the benefits of renewable energy.

Planning policy does not place restrictions on the number and location of dams, weirs and turbines associated with hydro-electric schemes. Each scheme is determined on its own merits having regard to matters such as the scale and location of the proposal, its siting and design, environmental and cumulative impacts of multiple schemes, impacts upon protected species, the proximity of development sites to protected areas and mitigation measures. Where necessary, this assessment will be informed by consultation with a number of bodies including the Northern Ireland Environment Agency, the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure and Loughs Agency.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the current enforcement position in relation to unauthorised sand extraction from Lough Neagh Special Area of Protection.
(AQW 42528/11-15)

Mr Durkan: This matter is currently the subject of a current enforcement investigation and it would be inappropriate to comment further at this stage.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment how many staff will be transferred to the new Ards and North Down council from the Planning Service.
(AQW 42572/11-15)

Mr Durkan: A total of 25 Professional & Technical Officers and 8 administrative staff will transfer from Planning to the new Ards & North Down Council on 1 April 2015.

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of the Environment what plans his Department has put in place to process planning applications for sites that will move from Castlereagh Council into Belfast City Council as a result of RPA.
(AQW 42591/11-15)

Mr Durkan: My preparations for the transfer of planning functions to the new 11 councils have involved a major programme of work which is now almost complete.

In addition to changes to legislation, policy and guidance, my Department has put in place plans to ensure that the necessary systems and structures are in place for the successful transfer of planning functions.

These plans have involved a considerable amount of work on the ground, identifying key issues to be addressed and actions to be taken forward. The local planning offices have been restructured in line with the new 11 council model and staff allocated to the relevant councils. The creation of the 11 planning offices requires changes to IT services and accommodation as well as the transfer of equipment and files. Of the 6 councils who have decided that planning staff should move from their existing offices to council premises, 4 (including Lisburn and Castlereagh) have completed the moves and the remaining 2 will have moved by the end of March. All of my Department's work takes into account not only the amalgamation of existing councils but also the changes to council boundaries, such as to those between Belfast and Castlereagh.

Until 1 April 2015 all applications will continue to be determined by the Department, irrespective of which council area they belong to. After 1 April, applications will be processed by planning staff located in the relevant council area; the changes in council boundaries referred to in your question means that Belfast City Council planning staff will determine all relevant applications that have moved from Castlereagh to Belfast.

Whilst the programme is on track there is still work to be done. My staff are continuing to work closely with the local government sector to ensure that all transitional arrangements are in place and also to ensure the necessary practical issues, relating to matters such as accommodation, IT and communications, are addressed.

I am confident that the preparations I have made will ensure that a fast, fair and fit for purpose planning system transfers on 1 April 2015 and that councils are equipped to fulfil their new planning functions from day one.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of the Environment what recent engagement he has had with district councils in respect of utilising council space which will now be vacant following the reformed council structures, from April 2015.
(AQW 42611/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The rationalisation of the current configuration of 26 councils to create 11 new councils will require the transfer of ownership of council accommodation from the current councils to the new councils.

Provisions have been included in the Local Government Act (NI) 2014 to facilitate the transfer of the legal title of the assets, and the liabilities associated with those assets, to the new local government structure without incurring any costs to either the existing or new councils.

Any decision regarding the use of current council accommodation will be a matter for the new councils, and will be one of the issues that new councils should be considering. I have encouraged the new councils to be ambitious in how they can maximise the use of their estate to cut costs, whilst maintaining the levels of service that ratepayers deserve.

Department of Finance and Personnel

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of whether people who will see an increase in their rates through Reval 2015 NI will be those who have suffered the consequences of the recent recession most heavily.
(AQW 41882/11-15)

Mr Hamilton (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): The current Valuation List was compiled in 2003 based on 2001 rental values and the updating of these values is long overdue. The purpose of the revaluation is to achieve a fairer redistribution of the rating burden amongst non domestic ratepayers using up to date market rental values.

These new values reflect current economic conditions and the relative success or decline of trading locations and sectors of business. Clearly this has been affected by the recession but the changes that are picked up by the Revaluation go further back than this to 2001.

Generally speaking, locations and sectors that have not fared so well over this longer period should experience a reduction in rate liability rather than an increase.

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to list the consultancy firms that provided financial services to his Department in each of the last five years; and the amount paid to each firm for these services.
(AQW 41937/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The following consultancy firms provided financial services to the Department in the last 5 years:

	2013-14 £000	2012-13 £000	2011-12 £000	2010-11 £000	2009-10 £000
Grant Thornton	10	60	69	1	-
Brownmack Chartered Accounts	-	-	-	8	66
Institute of Revenues Rating and Valuation	-	-	-	-	13
Goldblatt McGuigan	20	-	-	-	-
Not disclosed	-	-	-	3	-

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether he will carry out a structural review of the business rates system in Northern Ireland, following the announcement of a review of the business rates system in England by the Chancellor of the Exchequer.
(AQW 41948/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: In November 2013 I first stated to the Assembly that I was committed to a full review of the non-domestic rating system, which was well before the Chancellor's announcement. At that time I outlined that this would begin after the non-domestic revaluation has bedded in, which will be before the summer.

I would like the review to consider if the current system is fit for purpose and whether there are alternative ways of raising revenue from those who do business in Northern Ireland; either as a complete replacement or as a means of reducing the bills of those who currently pay business rates.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of how the rise of e-commerce is likely to impact upon the current high street business rates system in Northern Ireland.
(AQW 41959/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: Although the Revaluation has redistributed the rating burden in a way that is helpful to High Streets in many parts of Northern Ireland, it has not had the effect that many expected in some areas.

I would like this year's review of non-domestic taxation to consider if the current system is fit for purpose and whether there are alternative ways of raising revenue from businesses in Northern Ireland.

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether he will publish the business case related to the Executive's Voluntary Exit Scheme.
(AQW 42003/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: I do not intend to publish the business case related to the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) Voluntary Exit Scheme.

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether the flexibility to use £200 million borrowing for a Voluntary Exit Scheme, identified for the 2015/16 budget period, can be carried forward into later years if it is not utilised in 2015/16.
(AQW 42006/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: There is no scope to carry forward flexibilities relating to the use of borrowing for a voluntary exit scheme.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, should Corporation Tax powers be devolved, how decisions on the domicile of corporations will be made.
(AQW 42026/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The transfer of Corporation Tax rate setting powers to the Northern Ireland Assembly does not alter the residency status of any business. However, the new rules would provide for the allocation of certain trading profits to be charged at the Northern Ireland rate. This profit allocation will be based primarily on where the trading profits of affected companies are generated.

All UK trading profits from qualifying activities of a Small and Medium sized Enterprise will be subject to the Northern Ireland rate of Corporation Tax provided that at least 75% of the company's UK employment is based in the region.

Larger firms will need to demonstrate that they have a regional establishment in Northern Ireland, that is, a permanent place of business or a dependent agent acting on their behalf. They must then allocate to Northern Ireland the profits which the Northern Ireland part of the company would have earned if it was a distinct and separate enterprise.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to AQW 33958/11-15, to detail the estimated costs of the proposal; and whether it has been budgeted for in 2015/16.
(AQW 42030/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The paper I circulated to Executive colleagues put forward a range of potential options for payment for Executive consideration: estimated costs will depend on an Executive decision not only to make a payment but also on the criteria and scope of any such scheme.

Until this issue is discussed and the criteria determined, a budget cannot be settled, therefore no money is budgeted in 2015/16 to make such payments.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to AQW 33958/11-15, whether his proposal paper has been discussed by the Executive, including whether discussions have concluded; and to outline any indicative schedule for the resolution of this matter.
(AQW 42031/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: I await the agreement of Executive colleagues for the paper to be brought forward for discussion. I am unable therefore to outline an indicative schedule for resolution of this matter.

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to AQW 39830/11-15, to detail the number of people who died in their own home during 2013, broken down by constituency.
(AQW 42104/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: By way of context, a total of 14,968 deaths were registered during 2013. The attached table details the 4,014 deaths (26.8 % of all deaths) that occurred in the deceased's own home during 2013.

Number of deaths registered in Northern Ireland that occurred in the deceased's own home by parliamentary constituency, 2013

Parliamentary Constituency	Number of Deaths
Belfast East	210
Belfast North	232

Parliamentary Constituency	Number of Deaths
Belfast South	209
Belfast West	264
East Antrim	192
East Londonderry	242
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	245
Foyle	228
Lagan Valley	219
Mid Ulster	225
Newry and Armagh	249
North Antrim	236
North Down	207
South Antrim	180
South Down	279
Strangford	189
Upper Bann	218
West Tyrone	188
Unknown	2
NI	4,014

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether he will take steps to extend the operations of URICA to Northern Ireland to support small businesses in dealing with slow payments.
(AQW 42161/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: URICA currently operates in Northern Ireland and its system is accessible to local businesses.

As regards small businesses' dealings with government, a range of measures is in place to ensure prompt payment, including the Northern Ireland Executive's commitment to paying suppliers as quickly as possible, within 10 days. A fair payment charter is also included in the code of practice for government construction clients and their supply chains.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel when he will approve the business case which would allow the Northern Ireland Housing Executive to pay their employees the agreed salary increase of 2.2 per cent due 1 January 2015 and a one-off non-consolidated payment of £100, pro-rata for part time staff, which was due in December 2014.
(AQW 42181/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The Public Sector Pay approval process requires that pay remits are approved by both the sponsor department, in this case DSD, and the Finance Minister.

I can confirm that I approved the NIHE pay remit on 13 February 2015. This was within the best practice 15 day target set for such approvals. It is for DSD to implement the pay remit.

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (i) when the Northern Ireland Housing Executive salary increase of 2.2 per cent payable from 1 January 2015 will come into effect; and (ii) when the one-off non-consolidated payment of £100, pro-rata for part time staff, due in December 2014 will be paid.
(AQW 42182/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The Public Sector Pay approval process requires that pay remits are approved by both the sponsor department, in this case DSD, and the Finance Minister.

I can confirm that I approved the NIHE pay remit on 13 February 2015. This was within the best practice 15 day target set for such approvals. It is for DSD to implement the pay remit.

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel why he has not given final clearance to the pay remit for Housing Executive staff for their salary increase of 2.2 per cent, which was due in January 2015.
(AQW 42183/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The Public Sector Pay approval process requires that pay remits are approved by both the sponsor department, in this case DSD, and the Finance Minister.

I can confirm that I approved the NIHE pay remit on 13 February 2015. This was within the best practice 15 day target set for such approvals. It is for DSD to implement the pay remit.

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on the delay in processing salary increases for Northern Ireland Housing Executive staff; and to detail when a resolution to this matter is expected, including when increases and arrears will be paid to those affected.
(AQW 42187/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The Public Sector Pay approval process requires that pay remits are approved by both the sponsor department, in this case DSD, and the Finance Minister.

I can confirm that I approved the NIHE pay remit on 13 February 2015. This was within the best practice 15 day target set for such approvals. It is for DSD to implement the pay remit.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of public procurement as a means of stimulating innovation.
(AQW 42203/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: Public procurement has a track record of securing innovative approaches including strategic partnerships, design and build, and exploiting the potential of technology as part of public sector reform.

A recent Innovation Lab run by the Department explored how in the future we can further stimulate innovative products and services through public procurement. It highlighted the role of those who are commissioning procurements in framing outcome-based specifications that provide options for innovative approaches; the importance of market engagement; and the need for a proportionate approach to risk management.

Public Contracts Regulations 2015, coming into effect on 26 February, provide for new Innovation Partnership models. Moreover, I am proposing that the Northern Ireland Public Governance Review, led by OECD, will take public procurement as one of its case studies, focussing, amongst other points, on the objectives that can be pursued through procurement. I also await with interest the publication of a NICVA report on innovation and procurement in March. In the meantime, CPD is drawing up plans to offer further support to commissioners in exploiting commercial knowledge and using procurement as a tool for change.

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what discussions he has had with his Executive colleagues on the retention of the Supporting People Programme.
(AQW 42210/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The Minister for Social Development is responsible for the Supporting People Programme. As part of the Draft Budget consultation process, I discussed the Supporting People Programme with the Minister for Social Development at a budget bilateral meeting held on 15th December 2014.

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the outstanding wage settlements in the public sector.
(AQW 42234/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: This information is not held by the Department of Finance and Personnel.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on the equal pay claim from Northern Ireland Office and PSNI administrative staff; and to outline the reasons for the delay.
(AQW 42252/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: It has been established that there are no valid equal pay claims for both PSNI and NIO staff upon which to base a settlement. The paper I circulated to Executive colleagues before last summer recognises the moral argument put forward, and I hope it will satisfactorily resolve the issue for this group of staff.

However, my recommendation and any associated expenditure require the approval of the Executive. Until Executive colleagues agree that the paper can be brought forward for discussion, no further update can be given.

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to AQW 37627/11-15, for an update on the resolution of equal pay claims for PSNI and former Northern Ireland Office staff.
(AQW 42265/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: It has been established that there are no valid equal pay claims for both PSNI and NIO staff upon which to base a settlement. The paper I circulated to Executive colleagues before last summer recognises the moral argument put forward, and I hope it will satisfactorily resolve the issue for this group of staff.

However, my recommendation and any associated expenditure require the approval of the Executive and I therefore await the agreement of Executive colleagues for the paper to be brought forward for discussion.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant of AQW 39683/11-15, to detail the mechanism in place for allocating Northern Ireland's share of the financial resource identified in dormant accounts.
(AQW 42275/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: Under The Dormant Bank & Building Society Accounts Act (2008), my Department may make provision restricting the purposes for which, or the kinds of person to which, the distribution of Dormant Accounts money for meeting Northern Ireland expenditure be made.

Having reviewed the proposals for the Northern Ireland Dormant Account fund, my Department intends to issue a public consultation exercise. Following this process, it is my intention to lay before the Assembly a Statutory Rule which shall detail how Dormant Accounts funding in Northern Ireland will be utilised.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of the likely impact on the community background of the public service of a 20,000 staff reduction through a voluntary exit scheme.
(AQW 42300/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: Given that any exit schemes will be voluntary, it is not yet known what the impact will be in terms of the community background of those staff choosing to exit.

It will be for individual public sector organisations to consider the equality implications of their particular voluntary exit scheme(s). This information is not held centrally.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of the likely impact on the community background of the Civil Service of a 20,000 staff reduction across the public service through a voluntary exit scheme.
(AQW 42301/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The NICS comprises only 13% of the public sector workforce in Northern Ireland. An equality impact screening assessment has been carried out on the NICS Voluntary Exit Scheme which determined that an Equality Impact Assessment was not required. However, due to the voluntary nature of the scheme and the fact that virtually all permanent NICS staff are eligible to apply, it is not possible to determine the likely impact on the community background of the NICS until applications are received and selected.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many Prison Service staff, who left under the voluntary early retirement scheme on 31 March 2012, have subsequently been told that their pension was miscalculated; and what action has been taken to rectify this problem.
(AQW 42353/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: One member of Prison Service staff who left under the scheme on 31 March 2012 has subsequently been told that their pension was miscalculated.

The individual concerned has been advised accordingly and additional checks put in place for such cases.

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the estimated cost of (i) the refurbishment of the premises currently occupied by the headquarters of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) at Dundonald House; and (ii) the temporary relocation costs of DARD headquarters, if the relocation to Ballykelly were not to proceed and Dundonald House had to be retained.
(AQW 42380/11-15)

Mr Hamilton:

i) The cost of works to refurbish Dundonald House to Workplace NI standard is estimated to be £35,850,000 (this excludes any decant costs).

ii) This cost has not been calculated.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what are the contractual terms, including the financial arrangements, pertaining to the use of the Stormont Estate for the Ice Cross Downhill World Championship.
(AQW 42391/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: Red Bull was required to agree and sign a standard contract for the use of the Stormont Estate. This contract details the provisions that must be met including the provision of sufficient liability insurance for the event and agreement that Red Bull will pay for whatever restoration work is necessary to restore the Estate grounds to their original condition at no cost to the public purse. Before Red Bull fully vacates the Estate on 2 March 2015, a full inspection will be carried out by the Estate Management Unit to identify areas requiring repair. All remedial work for damage done to the Estate will then be carried out by the Department's contractors at Red Bull's expense.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether he will place a copy of the business case for the 20,000 staff exit scheme across the public service in the Assembly library.
(AQW 42392/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: There is no single business case for the Public Sector Voluntary Exit Scheme. Each public sector organisation will prepare individual business cases to support bids to the Public Sector Restructuring Fund. The NICS business case for the Voluntary Exit Scheme covers the NICS only.

There are no plans to place copies of all business cases for such schemes in the Assembly Library.

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the objectives and expected outcomes of the Northern Ireland Civil Service Voluntary Exit Scheme for Administrative Assistants and Administrative Officers.
(AQW 42437/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: It is anticipated that in the region of 2,400 staff will be required to exit the NICS via the Voluntary Exit Scheme. Departments have indicated they expect approximately 150 will be Administrative Assistants and approximately 560 will be Administrative Officers.

As the scheme is voluntary and almost all permanent NICS staff are eligible to apply it is not possible to predict the profile of applicants by grade.

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether his Department intends to carry out an economic impact assessment of the Civil Service Voluntary Exit Scheme.
(AQW 42440/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: This question has been referred to me by the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment as it refers to the NICS Voluntary Exit Scheme. An economic impact assessment of the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) Voluntary Exit Scheme has not been made, since the scheme has been designed with the objective of facilitating significant pay bill reductions required to live within their 2015/16 Budget allocations. This is a voluntary scheme and so any impact can only be analysed once the scheme has closed and numbers and profile of applicants is known. Civil Service Voluntary Exit Scheme

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what impact assessment has been carried out on the likelihood of the Northern Ireland Civil Service having a younger age and experience profile following the proposed Voluntary Exit Scheme.
(AQW 42442/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: Due to the voluntary nature of the NICS Exit Scheme and the fact that virtually all permanent NICS employees will be eligible to apply, it is not possible to assess the likelihood of the NICS having a younger age and experience profile until applicants have been selected to leave under the terms of the scheme.

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what plans are in place for Departments to transform their business practices to ensure that, following the Voluntary Exit Scheme, permanent benefits and value for money improvements can be achieved and staffing numbers stay reduced in the long term.
(AQW 42491/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The objective of the NICS Voluntary Exit Scheme is to secure a permanent paybill reduction, therefore suppressed posts will not be replaced. Maintaining those reductions will therefore require departments to manage their staffing numbers, business and service delivery within their budget allocations.

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the information available on civil servants' skills, performance and experience; and how this will be used to make decisions on retention and departure in the proposed Voluntary Exit Scheme.
(AQW 42492/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The Voluntary Exit Scheme is part of a Paybill Reduction Strategy for the NICS. Those selected to leave will have the decision based on value for money considerations. This is not a strategic workforce planning exercise and skills, performance and experience are not, therefore, selection criteria for the scheme. A range of measures, including redeployment provisions and maximum numbers to be released within grades will contribute towards protecting business delivery within departments.

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether Executive Departments have finalised detailed workforce plans ahead of the proposed Voluntary Exit Scheme.
(AQW 42493/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: It is a matter for Ministers in their respective departments to comment in relation to their detailed workforce plans, but I can confirm that the scale of the NICS Voluntary Exit Scheme was informed by workforce planning exercises undertaken by departments in the context of living within their 2015/16 budget allocations.

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the governance arrangements associated with the Voluntary Exit Scheme; and whether decisions on departures will be peer reviewed, signed off at Permanent Secretary level and where necessary subject to internal audit.
(AQW 42494/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The NICS Voluntary Exit Scheme has been developed and managed under robust project management arrangements, with a Senior Responsible Owner, Project Board and Project Manager in place to oversee the scheme. The business case for and terms of scheme have been subject to robust examination and have secured the necessary approvals at Permanent Secretary and Ministerial level.

Selection panels, made up of staff from departments, will be used to quality assure the selection process. Permanent Secretaries' Group will have an oversight role. This Voluntary Exit Scheme, in line with any area of my Department is subject to examination by Internal Audit at any time.

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether the Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service will work with Permanent Secretaries to provide strategic oversight and active monitoring of the proposed Voluntary Exit Scheme.
(AQW 42495/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The Head of the NI Civil Service chairs the Public Sector Restructuring Steering Group comprising senior officials from each department nominated by their Ministers to provide oversight of the process for allocation of the funding for voluntary exit schemes across the public sector over a four year period.

The Voluntary Exit Scheme for the Northern Ireland Civil Service has been subject to consideration at Permanent Secretaries Group at all stages under the chairmanship of the Head of the Civil Service.

Mr Rogers asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what economic assessment has been carried out to consider the impact the Voluntary Exit Scheme will have on the number of people registered as unemployed and in receipt of unemployment benefits.
(AQW 42832/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: An economic assessment has not been made of the Northern Ireland Civil Service Voluntary Exit Scheme, since the objective of the Scheme is to secure a permanent pay bill reduction within the 2015/16 Budget allocations agreed by the Executive in January 2015. This is a voluntary scheme, which will compensate staff who choose to apply and are selected to leave.

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Mr Clarke asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in relation to his recent statement to the Assembly advising that his Department provides funding to Trade Unions, to detail (i) how much is paid annually to Trade Union Officials; (ii) how many officials this payment covers; and (iii) how much it costs to administer Trade Unions dues.
(AQW 40327/11-15)

Mr Wells (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): This response refers to the costs borne by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and its arms length bodies:

(i) the total annual amount paid during 2013/2014 was £1,840,540;

(ii) this represents the salaries of 58 (WTE) Trade Union Officials;

(iii) the administration of Trade Union dues is undertaken through payroll as part of the overall HR Connect/ Human Resources Payroll, Travel and Subsistence (HRPTS) payroll services and it is not possible to estimate the cost.

Legislation requires employers to make provision for trade union activity, however the level of such spend by the Department and across the HSC is one of the areas being reviewed as I endeavour to fund frontline services, in the current challenging financial climate.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the progress of the Adoption and Childcare Bill.
(AQW 40582/11-15)

Mr Wells: The draft Adoption and Children Bill is cross-cutting in nature and Executive approval to consult on the Bill is required. A draft Bill has been prepared and I intend to write to Executive colleagues seeking agreement to consult.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of (i) beds; (ii) doctors; and (iii) nurses in each of Northern Ireland's Type 1 Emergency Care Departments, in each of the last ten years.
(AQW 40850/11-15)

Mr Wells: The HSC Trusts have provided the below figures to show the number of beds, doctors, and nurses in each of Northern Ireland's Type 1 Emergency Departments (EDs).

It has not been possible in all cases for Trusts to provide figures from before their creation in 2008 (following the Review of Public Administration). Staffing numbers are provided as at 1 December in each year.

Most emergency care departments do not have beds as such, but will use flexible trolleys for multiple purposes in response to the individual needs of patients. Patients may move through cubicles during periods of assessment or observation, or for other care requirements.

Belfast HSC Trust

Belfast City Hospital

Year	Beds	Medical WTE	Qualified Nursing WTE
2005	19	Not available	Not available
2006	19	Not available	Not available
2007	19	Not available	Not available
2008	19	15.0	34.68
2009	19	17.0	38.72
2010	19	17.0	35.17
2011	19	0.0	35.17
2012	0	0.0	30.74
2013	0	0.0	0.00
2014	0	0.0	0.00

Note that Belfast City Hospital's emergency care department closed in November 2011.

Mater Hospital

Year	Beds	Medical WTE	Qualified Nursing WTE
2005	12	Not available	Not available
2006	12	Not available	Not available
2007	12	Not available	Not available
2008	12	12.01	30.14
2009	12	16.1	27.67
2010	12	17.1	25.47
2011	12	22.1	27.27
2012	12	22.1	32.04
2013	19	21.0	32.92
2014	19	23.0	44.35

Royal Victoria Hospital

Year	Beds	Medical WTE	Qualified Nursing WTE
2005	20	Not available	Not available
2006	20	Not available	Not available
2007	20	Not available	Not available
2008	20	14.0	38.42
2009	20	16.0	42.66
2010	20	21.0	38.55
2011	29	30.0	39.74
2012	29	34.0	44.36
2013	29	38.0	106.39

Year	Beds	Medical WTE	Qualified Nursing WTE
2014	29	35.0	103.56

Northern HSC Trust

Antrim Area Hospital

Year	Beds	Medical WTE	Qualified Nursing WTE
2005	15	3 (Consultants only)	Not available
2006	15	4 (Consultants only)	Not available
2007	15	4 (Consultants only)	40.76
2008	15	4 (Consultants only)	45.56
2009	19	21.60	45.56
2010	19	24.90	54.79
2011	19	25.90	54.79
2012	19	27.14	54.79
2013	27	27.14	75.00
2014	32	29.57	75.00

Note that the Trust was only able to provide information on medical Consultant staffing for Antrim Area Hospital for years prior to 2009.

Causeway Hospital

Year	Beds	Medical WTE	Qualified Nursing WTE
2005	15	10.0	Not available
2006	15	10.0	36.78
2007	15	11.0	36.78
2008	15	11.0	36.78
2009	15	11.0	36.78
2010	15	11.0	36.78
2011	15	12.0	40.78
2012	17	12.0	40.78
2013	17	12.0	40.78
2014	17	12.0	40.78

South Eastern HSC Trust

The South Eastern Trust has only been able to give staffing figures for Consultants working in the Ulster Hospital's Emergency Department. Consultants will be supported by other grades of doctors.

Ulster Hospital

Year	Beds	Medical WTE (Consultants only)	Qualified Nursing WTE
2005	22	Not available	Not available
2006	30	Not available	Not available
2007	30	Not available	Not available
2008	30	4.8	44.61
2009	30	5.2	52.40
2010	30	6.2	59.92
2011	32	7.6	53.19

Year	Beds	Medical WTE (Consultants only)	Qualified Nursing WTE
2012	32	7.6	63.90
2013	32	10.5	87.77
2014	32	11.5	84.31

Southern HSC Trust

Craigavon Area Hospital

Year	Beds	Medical WTE	Qualified Nursing WTE
2005	Not available	Not available	Not available
2006	Not available	Not available	Not available
2007	31	Not available	Not available
2008	31	26.33	47.84
2009	31	25.19	51.47
2010	31	23.20	52.61
2011	31	21.80	51.82
2012	31	24.78	63.20
2013	31	26.57	66.71
2014	31	29.58	83.05

Daisy Hill Hospital

Year	Beds	Medical WTE	Qualified Nursing WTE
2005	Not available	Not available	Not available
2006	Not available	Not available	Not available
2007	16	Not available	Not available
2008	16	8.00	20.41
2009	16	5.01	21.34
2010	16	5.03	19.12
2011	16	8.03	22.71
2012	16	11.56	24.58
2013	16	11.53	25.53
2014	16	13.73	32.13

The Southern Trust notes that information from prior to 2007 for beds and 2008 for staffing is unavailable. It further notes that for both of the above tables the recorded Medical WTE excludes agency locum doctors and GPs working in A&E in years prior to 2014.

Western HSC Trust

Altnagelvin Hospital

Year	Beds	Medical WTE	Qualified Nursing WTE
2005	Not available	12.80	33.05
2006	Not available	12.80	37.32
2007	Not available	17.80	33.32
2008	Not available	15.55	28.19
2009	Not available	18.55	31.62
2010	Not available	15.55	31.05

Year	Beds	Medical WTE	Qualified Nursing WTE
2011	Not available	16.85	35.19
2012	Not available	15.85	40.62
2013	Not available	19.00	43.34
2014/15	21	16.06	51.91

The Western Trust were unable to provide historical figures relating to beds at Altnagelvin Hospital's ED. The figure given above refers to January 2015.

Erne / South West Acute Hospital

Year	Beds	Medical WTE	Qualified Nursing WTE
2005	7	5.0	19.90
2006	12	7.0	20.83
2007	12	7.0	20.83
2008	12	8.0	19.62
2009	12	6.0	21.62
2010	12	5.0	21.62
2011	12	4.0	20.62
2012	18	5.0	23.62
2013	18	5.0	22.00
2014	18	5.0	25.84

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the total expenditure on MFDs and print related services by each Health and Social Care Trust over the last three years.
(AQW 41518/11-15)

Mr Wells: Expenditure by HSC Trusts on MFDs and printed related services can only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he will direct the Health and Social Care Board and Health and Social Care Trusts to publish waiting times for audiology services.
(AQW 41521/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Department currently publish information on patients waiting for an audiology (pure tone audiometry) diagnostic service by weeks waiting. This information is published quarterly by Hospital Information Branch (HIB) in the 'Northern Ireland Waiting Time Statistics: Diagnostic Waiting Times' statistical bulletin and is available on the DHSSPS website at the following link:

http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/statistics/hospital/waitingtimes/waitingtimes-diagnostic.htm

The Department is currently assessing newly developed information on waiting times for hearing aids and when considered as being of robust quality it will be published as official statistics.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 40119/11-15, to detail the Pharmaceutical Price Regulation Scheme payments received by the Health and Social Care Board; and how these payments have been used.
(AQW 41808/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Pharmaceutical Price Regulation Scheme (PPRS) 2014 started on 1 January 2014. Returns to Northern Ireland from year one of the scheme are detailed in the following table.

	Quarter 1 (Jan –Mar)	Quarter 2 (Apr-Jun)	Quarter 3 (Jul-Sep)
Amount	£3.53 m	£3.83 m	£3.92 m

I have beenadvised by HSCB that returns from the PPRS have been re-invested to assist with financial pressures and service development priorities across HSC.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why has he allowed the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust to action the full closure of the Bangor GP Ward when it was originally proposed for temporary closure.
(AQW 41816/11-15)

Mr Wells: The decision to temporarily close the Bangor GP Ward was taken by the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust as part of its financial contingency plan to break even in 2014/15 while maintaining patient safety. This came into effect on 1 December 2014. In the meantime a full option appraisal has been carried out by the Trust, identifying a preferred option for the reconfiguration of intermediate care services in the North Down and Ards area which, if implemented, would include the permanent closure of the GP Ward. In line with my Department's guidance on Personal and Public Involvement, the Trust is currently consulting on these proposals. The Trust is committed to engaging fully with stakeholders on this matter and I will await the outcome of that consultation before commenting further.

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 40951/11-15, to detail the stations that will benefit, including the number of replacement vehicles each will receive.
(AQW 41860/11-15)

Mr Wells: The table below indicates the stations allocated replacement vehicles in 2014/15 and the types of vehicles allocated. Three of the replacement vehicles are still to be confirmed to a station.

Ambulance station	Accident & Emergency Ambulance	Patient Care Service Ambulance	Rapid Response Vehicle
Antrim	1	1	1
Ballymena	2	1	0
Ballymoney	1	0	0
Carrickfergus	0	0	1
Coleraine	1	0	0
Magherafelt	1	0	0
Whiteabbey	0	2	0
Unallocated	1	2	0

Mr Byrne asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what protocols and guidelines he will issue to GP practices to improve patient appointment requests within acceptable limits.
(AQW 41866/11-15)

Mr Wells: Under the terms of their GMS Contract GPs are required to provide essential primary medical services during core hours (8am-6.30pm Monday to Friday) to their registered patients, who are ill or believe themselves to be ill, in a manner determined by the Practice in discussion with the patient, and provide immediately necessary treatment for any medical emergency.

The Health and Social Care Board (HSCB), as the commissioning organisation, is responsible for monitoring the performance of GP Practices to ensure that they are meeting their contractual obligations. It supports improved access to GP Services through Local Enhanced Services (LES) for Additional Surgeries and Demand Management.

The Additional Surgeries LES is designed to fund further clinical support to address the increased demand for appointments and home visits from November 2014 to March 2015. This enables GP Practices to run additional surgeries, either in hours or in the evenings, or to put in place initiatives to manage acute demand and home visits for their patients. The service is designed to increase capacity, by incentivising GPs, to provide additional sessions out of normal contracted hours, or part time doctors to provide additional sessions beyond their normal weekly working hours. It is anticipated that this additional funding will result in approximately 3,500 additional GP surgeries, at which it is expected that 38,000 patients will receive a consultation with either a GP or Nurse

The Demand Management LES is a quality improvement programme to manage workload, demand, capacity and responsiveness within primary care. Over the last two years this enhanced service has enabled GP practices to measure and shape demand, match capacity to demand and plan for contingencies by reviewing and making changes in the following areas:

- Use of Telephone Triage
- Development of a Practice Website
- Use of alternatives to standard GP appointments
- Use of Telephone Consultation and call-backs
- Review of existing GP and nurse surgeries
- Review of treatment room services
- Review of staffing levels for answering telephone, telephone lines and equipment
- Patient education, self-management and the use of GP services by patients

- Did Not Attend (DNAs) policy and use of appointment reminders
- Improvement to Telephone Call handling and customer care
- Review of staff roles and competencies
- Use of Check-in screens and electronic displays

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the progression of a Children's Palliative Care Strategy, following the public consultation that ended on 28 March 2014.
(AQW 41933/11-15)

Mr Wells: My Department has finalised its draft Strategy for Children's Palliative and End-of-Life Care. The draft strategy will shortly be referred to the Health and Social Care Board to prepare an Implementation Plan to be published with the final strategy subject to my approval. I expect this work to be concluded for publication by May 2015.

Mr Byrne asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the state and condition of ambulances.
(AQW 41938/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service has a rolling fleet replacement programme which aims to replace ambulance vehicles on a five-year cycle. The A&E ambulance fleet age profile is outlined in the table below.

Age of vehicle (years)	0-1	1-2	2-3	3-4	4-5	5-6
Number of vehicles	15	23	22	22	24	10

A&E ambulances currently average about 36,000 miles per year. Older vehicles will tend to do less than the average miles while newer vehicles will do higher mileage than the average in the first few years.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the business case and timeline for investment in the Clark Clinic, Belfast.
(AQW 41978/11-15)

Mr Wells: I intend to make an announcement about my final decision on the International Working Group's recommendations for the future delivery of congenital cardiac services in early March 2015. I will also announce the details of how proposals for a Specialist Children's Cardiology Centre in Belfast will be taken forward. My Department is working with officials from the Belfast Trust, Health and Social Care Board, Public Health Agency and patient representatives to establish the framework in which this can be taken forward with the appropriate senior representation from each organisation.

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) what steps have been taken by the Western Health and Social Care Trust to liaise with parents of children who were given the wrong vaccination at Omagh Academy; (ii) the background to the mistake; (iii) what steps have been taken to ensure this does not happen again; and (iv) whether the results of the investigation by the Public Health Agency be published.
(AQW 41982/11-15)

Mr Wells: I have been made aware that a letter was issued by the Western Health and Social Care Trust on 26 January 2015 to every parent/carer of a child vaccinated on 12 January 2015 in Omagh Academy providing points of contact, to facilitate parents/guardians contacting the Trust. The School Health Lead in the Trust has been in constant direct contact with both the school and parents answering any queries.

The Public Health Agency have informed me that the investigation is being dealt with as a Trust Serious Adverse Incident and the guidance for the investigation of Serious Adverse Incidents is therefore being followed. The investigation is being led by the Trust with appropriate input from the Public Health Agency. The findings will be shared with the parents of the pupils, the school and the education and library board. Any findings and learning points from the investigation will be shared by the Public Health Agency/Health and Social Care Board with all HSC Trusts to ensure that a similar incident does not occur in any other Trust.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what steps he is taking to ensure that telephone numbers provided to patients to access specialists nurses for information and advice are not diverted to answer phone for prolonged periods; and whether he will ensure that when staff are on leave that these numbers will be answered by appropriate nursing staff.
(AQW 41993/11-15)

Mr Wells: This is a matter for the Health and Social Care Trusts responsible for the individual services concerned. It is important that where the specialist nurse is unable to answer patients' calls straight away, answer phone or voicemail calls are checked frequently and returned within a reasonable timeframe. Arrangements will vary depending on the specialty concerned, but broadly speaking, messages are checked regularly by the specialist nurse or a member of the team and calls returned as soon as possible. If the specialist nurse is on leave, the message on the answer phone or voicemail will be updated to indicate an alternative way to contact the specialist team, or a suitably qualified nurse will provide cover to ensure patients have access to advice and guidance.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 40741/11-15, for his assessment of the real term benefits of collating data on GP waiting lists to ascertain the likelihood of potential increases in Emergency Department attendance.
(AQW 42016/11-15)

Mr Wells: A survey of patients attending Emergency Departments will be conducted during the next few months; this will include the question why patients attend Emergency Departments.

The outcome of the survey should prove useful as it will illustrate if patients are attending Emergency Departments because they were experiencing difficulty getting an appointment with their GP.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 40408/11-15, to detail the number of cancer patients transferred to GB for specialised treatment, broken down by cancer type, in the last three years.
(AQW 42017/11-15)

Mr Wells: Information on patients referred to Great Britain (GB) for specialised treatment is collected by the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB), as the commissioner of such services.

The number of cancer patients transferred to GB for specialised treatment is not collated centrally by the HSCB. Extra Contractual Referrals (ECRs) are considered on the clinical rationale for treatment and the applications submitted do not always include a definitive cancer diagnosis. As such, the requested information would require a case by case analysis involving a manual trawl of case notes and could only be provided at disproportionate cost. The HSCB have however estimated that approximately 5% of 1074 approved Extra Contractual Referral to GB providers in 2013/14 were for cancer related assessment and/or treatment. Please note that this is the number of ECRs approved by the HSCB, rather than the number of patients who actually travel for treatment.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the current level of reserves of each Health and Social Care Trust, including how these reserves are utilised.
(AQW 42023/11-15)

Mr Wells: The HSC Trusts' reserves for the period ending 31 March 2014 are summarised in the following table and have been extracted from the latest Statements of Financial Position contained within the 2013/14 audited annual accounts:

	Revaluation Reserve(1) £000	**SoCNE Reserve(2) £000**	**Charitable Trust Funds(3) £000**	**Total Reserves £000**
WHSCT	67,990	308,436	3,668	380,094
BHSCT	108,101	770,026	42,889	921,016
SHSCT	40,540	183,158	2,783	226,481
SEHSCT	47,845	341,458	6,385	395,688
NHSCT	56,029	251,818	5,590	313,437
	320,505	**1,854,896**	**61,315**	**2,236,716**

Notes:

(1) Revaluation Reserve: This reserve is created when the value of an asset becomes greater than the value at which it was previously carried on the Statement of Financial Position. It is used for accounting purposes to record the underlying value of the trusts' assets.

(2) SoCNE Reserve: The Statement of Comprehensive Net Expenditure Reserve is used for accounting purposes to record the accumulated balance of investment by the Department.

(3) Charitable Trust Funds: Charitable Trust Funds are managed independently of normal HSC Trust operations and are utilised for the purpose intended by the benefactor.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 40038/11-15, to outline the terms of reference for the review into the clinical negligence settlement management process.
(AQW 42086/11-15)

Mr Wells: The options being considered are still policy under development and I am not in a position to outline them at present. The Terms of Reference for the review into the clinical negligence settlement management process will be developed once all the options have been considered.

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the appropriateness of the blanket policy of the Health and Social Care Board to reimburse only those expenses incurred in relation to treatment by an

independent healthcare provider where this is part of a local waiting list initiative, given that some patients who are on waiting lists in areas where such initiatives have ceased.
(AQW 42103/11-15)

Mr Wells: Due to the financial pressures faced by my Department the Health and Social Care Board introduced a regional pause on referring patients to the Independent Sector for treatment in autumn 2014. While I regret this action it was however necessary and entirely appropriate given the scale of the financial challenges.

Individuals who chose to seek treatment privately are entitled to do so. However, it would not be an appropriate use of resources for the Health and Social Care Board to reimburse those individuals as this would be unfair to patients on HSC waiting lists.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he has considered the merits of extending to Northern Ireland the recently announced programme to screen newborn babies in England for four rare genetic disorders.
(AQW 42105/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Newborn Bloodspot Screening Programme currently in place in Northern Ireland and in the rest of the United Kingdom offers screening for phenylketonuria (PKU), congenital hypothyroidism (CH), cystic fibrosis (CF), MCADD (medium chain acyl CoA dehydrogenase deficiency), and sickle cell disorders (SCD).

In 2014 the UK National Screening Committee (NSC) recommended that every newborn baby in the UK should be screened for four additional conditions. This would involve expanding the existing Newborn Bloodspot Screening Programme to include screening for: Homocystinuria (HCU), Maple Syrup Urine Disease (MSUD), Glutaric Aciduria Type 1 (GA1) and Isovaleric Aciduria (IVA). Screening for these four other inherited metabolic diseases is being rolled out in England. Wales is also extending its bloodspot programme to include these four additional conditions. I too would hope to be in a position to do this in Northern Ireland and on new service development funding becoming available, expansion of the Newborn Bloodspot Screening Programme will be prioritised and considered. A decision has not yet been taken in Scotland.

It is recognised the early identification of these rare disorders (approximately 3 in Northern Ireland every two years) can prevent death and significantly improve the quality of life for those living with these conditions.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what differences exist in the screening of newborn babies in Northern Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom for genetic disorders.
(AQW 42106/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Newborn Bloodspot Screening Programme currently in place in Northern Ireland and in the rest of the United Kingdom offers screening for phenylketonuria (PKU), congenital hypothyroidism (CH), cystic fibrosis (CF), MCADD (medium chain acyl CoA dehydrogenase deficiency), and sickle cell disorders (SCD).

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It is recognised the early identification of these rare disorders (approximately 3 in Northern Ireland every two years) can prevent death and significantly improve the quality of life for those living with these conditions.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update to AQW 35542/11-15, in view of his indication of a decision in early 2015.
(AQW 42107/11-15)

Mr Wells: I am currently considering a detailed briefing paper from my officials on a proposed way forward and I plan to my announce my decision shortly on how best ILF users will be supported following the closure of the Fund in June 2015.

Mr Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the number of hospital beds in the Foyle constituency dedicated to mental health patients; and how this number compares to (i) two; (ii) five; and (iii) ten years ago.
(AQW 42126/11-15)

Mr Wells: Information on the number of hospital beds in the Foyle constituency dedicated to mental health patients is not available.

However, information is available on the number of available beds within the mental health programme of care (POC) in the Western Health and Social Care (HSC) Trust. The number of available beds is the number of beds on each ward open overnight that were actually available for patients, measured at midnight. Beds reserved solely for day care admissions or regular day admissions are not included as these patients do not stay overnight.

The table below details the average number of available beds within the mental health POC in the Western HSC Trust over the last ten years.

Available Beds within the Mental Health POC **Source: KH03a**

2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
221.6	219.3	182.3	175.4	170.1	154.4	150.4	125.5	98.2	98.0

The Bamford vision is that people with a mental illness should be treated in the community close to their families and friends, unless there is a clinical reason for not doing so. Transforming Your Care supports this approach. Accordingly, developments in mental health in recent years have been focused on community based services such as crisis response teams, home treatment teams and community mental health teams. Improvements in community mental health services in turn reduce dependency on inpatient care, and therefore acute mental health beds have reduced and will continue to reduce in the future.

Between 2004/05 and 2013/14, the average number of available beds within the mental health POC in the Western HSC Trust decreased by 55.8% (123.6), from 221.6 to 98.0.

Mr Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the percentage of his budget spent on hospital meals.
(AQW 42127/11-15)

Mr Wells: In 2013/14, the HSC Trusts spent £6.6m on hospital meals (for patients only), which represented 0.18% of total Trusts expenditure in that year.

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the emergency ambulance provision for the Derry city area.
(AQW 42133/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS) HSC Trust has a station based at Altnagelvin Area Hospital with a deployment point based at Northland Road Fire Station which will provide cover in the Londonderry City area. It should be noted that NIAS deploys its emergency response resources using a tactical deployment plan to ensure the nearest available resource responds to an incident, and this may come from another area such as Limavady or Strabane.

The following cover is provided at Altnagelvin Ambulance Station:

- 2 A&E ambulances 24/7 cover
- 1 A&E ambulance Monday to Sunday 07:30 to 17:30
- 2 A&E ambulances Sunday to Thursday 20:00 to 08:00
- 3 A&E ambulances Friday and Saturday 20:00 to 08:00
- 1 Rapid Response Vehicle Monday to Friday 08:00 to14:00 and 20:00 to 24:00
- 2 Rapid Response Vehicles Monday to Friday 14:00 to 20:00
- 1 Rapid Response Vehicle Saturday to Sunday 09:00 to 15:00 and 20:00 to 24:00
- 2 Rapid Response Vehicles Saturday to Sunday15:00 to 20:00

A&E resources are dispatched to the Northland Road deployment point on a daily basis.

Information about the number of occasions in each of the last three years when emergency ambulance provision in the Derry city area fell below standard levels, if this occurred, is not readily available and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of occasions in each of the last three years when emergency ambulance provision in the Derry city area fell below standard levels.
(AQW 42134/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS) HSC Trust has a station based at Altnagelvin Area Hospital with a deployment point based at Northland Road Fire Station which will provide cover in the Londonderry City area. It should be noted that NIAS deploys its emergency response resources using a tactical deployment plan to ensure the nearest available resource responds to an incident, and this may come from another area such as Limavady or Strabane.

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- 1 Rapid Response Vehicle Monday to Friday 08:00 to14:00 and 20:00 to 24:00
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A&E resources are dispatched to the Northland Road deployment point on a daily basis.

Information about the number of occasions in each of the last three years when emergency ambulance provision in the Derry city area fell below standard levels, if this occurred, is not readily available and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of quangos linked to his Department on (i) 8 May 2007; and (ii) 11 February 2015; and how many people served on the quangos on these respective dates.
(AQW 42180/11-15)

Mr Wells: Staffing figures for each Arm's Length Body (ALB) of my Department, with the exception of the Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service (NIFRS), are processed on a quarterly basis; figures on the dates requested are therefore unavailable. The tables below show headcounts and whole-time equivalents (WTE) for employees of each ALB, as at the 31st March 2007 and the latest available, at 30th September 2014 (1st March and 1st September for NIFRS).

March 2007

ALB	Headcount	WTE
Altnagelvin Group HSS Trust	2,773	2,483.5
Armagh and Dungannon HSS Trust	1,930	1,651.2
Belfast City Hospital HSS Trust	4,348	3,818.5
Blood Transfusion Service	212	182.4
Causeway HSS Trust	2,657	2,260.5
Central Services Agency	717	675.2
Craigavon & Banbridge Community HSS Trust	1,440	1,231.3
Craigavon Area Hospital Group HSS Trust	3,149	2,611.1
Down Lisburn HSS Trust	3,495	2,947.8
Eastern HSS Board [1]	279	253.7
Foyle Community HSS Trust	2,384	2,053.1
Green Park Healthcare HSS Trust	1,480	1,293.3
Guardian Ad Litem Agency	55	51.1
Health Promotion Agency	57	54.5
Homefirst Community HSS Trust	4,232	3,584.4
Mater Infirmorum Hospital HSS Trust	1,351	1,187.3
Newry & Mourne HSS Trust	2,204	1,845.6
NI Ambulance Trust	1,062	1,049.5
NI Practice & Education Council	22	19.6
North & West Belfast HSS Trust	3,169	2,688.4
Northern HSS Board [1]	223	205.4
Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service	2,116	1,118.5
Northern Ireland Medical & Dental Training Agency (including GP trainees paid through NIMDTA)	233	116.5
Northern Ireland Social Care Council	32	29.8
Regional Medical Physics Agency	113	108.5
Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority	78	72.8
Royal Group of Hospitals HSS Trust	6,568	5,622.7
South & East Belfast HSS Trust	3,107	2,636.7
Southern HSS Board [1]	404	292.0
Sperrin/Lakeland HSS Trust	3,434	3,028.6
The Beeches	106	93.4

ALB	Headcount	WTE
Ulster Community & Hospitals Group HSS Trust	4,991	4,147.5
United Hospitals Group HSS Trust	3,704	3,125.3
Westcare Business Services	404	394.9
Western HSS Board [1]	209	194.0

1 HSS Board figures will include support staff allocated to the 4 Health & Social Services Councils.

2 Administration staff in the Mental Health Commission (8 staff) were seconded from DHSSPS.

September 2014

ALB	Headcount	WTE
Belfast HSC Trust	19,597	16,895.6
Business Services Organisation	1,366	1,305.0
Health & Social Care Board	592	540.2
NI Ambulance Service	1,167	1,147.2
NI Blood Transfusion Service	196	168.8
NI Fire & Rescue Service	2,224	1,209
NI Guardian Ad Litem Agency	68	62.7
NI Medical and Dental Training Agency (including GP trainees paid through NIMDTA)	258	177.6
NI Practice & Education Council	18	17.1
NI Social Care Council	61	56.8
Northern HSC Trust	10,652	8,974.9
Patient Client Council	31	29.8
Public Health Agency	335	315.7
Regulation & Quality Improvement Authority	146	136.4
South Eastern HSC Trust	9,128	7,766.9
Southern HSC Trust	9,343	7,852.9
Western HSC Trust	9,595	8,480.6

Notes:

1 All staffing figures were sourced from the HSC's Human Resources Management System (HRMS) for 2007 and Human Resources, Payroll, Travel and Subsistence (HRPTS) for 2014, with the exceptions of the NI Medical & Dental Training Agency (2007 only), Health Promotion Agency and the Fire & Rescue Service. These figures were obtained directly from the organisations.

2 HSC staffing figures exclude bank staff, members/chairs of Boards, members of staff on career break, members of staff with a WTE of less than 0.03, and home help/domiciliary care staff. NI Medical & Dental Training Agency figures include trainee GPs who are paid via NIMDTA's payroll but are not employees of NIMDTA. Retained Firefighters are included in Headcount figures, but not WTE. Agency staff in NIFRS Support roles are excluded from March 2007, because figures were unavailable.

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what discussions he has had with Executive colleagues on the retention of the Supporting People Programme.
(AQW 42213/11-15)

Mr Wells: I have recently been in correspondence with Minister Storey on the Supporting People Programme, and we have agreed to meet to discuss the Programme when the Supporting People budget for 2015/16 is agreed.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 41316/11-15, to detail the current number of audiology consultants employed in each Health and Social Care Trust.
(AQW 42214/11-15)

Mr Wells: Trusts have advised that the consultants dealing with audiology issues are Ear, Nose & Throat (ENT) specialists and have provided figures for ENT consultants in the table below.

HSC Trust	Headcount	Whole-time Equivalent
Belfast	9	7.98
Northern	5	5.0
South Eastern	4	4.0
Southern	6	6.0
Western	6	6.0

Most patients referred for audiology services are not waiting to see a consultant, but are waiting to see audiology staff, who are healthcare scientists. Trusts have provided figures for audiology staff below.

HSC Trust	Band	Headcount	Whole-time Equivalent
Belfast	Audiology Assistant Band 2-3	8	5.06
	Audiologist Band 5-8A	20	18.71
Northern	Audiology Assistant Band 2	1	0.6
	Audiologist Band 5-8B	14	11.12
South Eastern**	Audiology Assistant Band 2	2	1.0
	Audiologist Bands 5-8a	10	8.88
Southern	Audiology Assistant Band 2-4	4	2.7
	Audiologist Band 5-7	12	11.4
Western	Audiology Assistant Band 2-3	3	1.96
	Audiologist Band 5-8a	13	11.3

** The South Eastern Trust's figures refer to funded posts and include 1 (1.0 WTE) vacancy for a Band 6 Audiologist.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 41318/11-15, for his assessment of the real term benefits of collating data concerning patients transferred for specialist treatment in GB.
(AQW 42216/11-15)

Mr Wells: The timely collection of accurate cancer patient data relating to occurrence, modality of treatment and the outcome of treatment is of benefit in real terms for the delivery of services, planning and research. This is the case for all NI cancer patient data regardless of where patients are treated.

Through the Extra Contractual Referrals process, patients may be referred to providers outside NI for assessment or treatment which cannot be provided locally due to its specialist nature, or can be provided locally but clinical reasons exist for treatment outside NI.

The Health and Social Care Board maintains a database of all Extra Contractual Referral submissions, which includes the reason for treatment, the specialty and the outcome of the submission.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of Recommendation 8 of the Donaldson Review into Health and Social Care governance arrangements, specifically on the lack of system-wide data.
(AQW 42217/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Donaldson Report recommendations are far reaching in their implications and in my Oral Statement to the Assembly on 27 January I outlined a number of urgent actions to be taken but also that there needed to be time to give fuller consideration to the Report recommendations as a whole. Given the significance of the recommendations, it is important to ensure that stakeholders across NI have the opportunity to give their views and participate in a debate about how we take forward health and care services in the future.

As such, a consultation has been launched on the recommendations, including recommendation 8, from the Donaldson Report to allow people to give their views. This consultation can be accessed on the DHSSPS website and closes later in May 2015.

Currently my Department monitors quality and safety through a range of metrics at Regional, Trust and clinical service level. Standards and indicators for key quality and safety metrics are specified in the Commissioning Plan Direction and Indicators of Performance Direction issued to the Health and Social Care Board and the Public Health Authority. These metrics draw on best practice internationally, and are aligned as far as possible with equivalent metrics used elsewhere in the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. The metrics are reviewed annually to ensure they remain up-to-date and relevant.

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether there are any plans to introduce a podiatric surgery facility in Northern Ireland.
(AQW 42230/11-15)

Mr Wells: A surgical podiatric service for foot and ankle surgery is in development; and the roll out of this initiative in 2015/16 will be considered by the Health and Social Care Board in the context of available resources and competing priorities on these resources.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what steps each Health and Social Care Trust is taking to increase the amount of recycling and reuse to increase efficiencies.
(AQW 42269/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Department of Health and Social Services does not hold information centrally relating to the operational procedures of individual Health and Social Care Trusts. The Health and Social Care Trusts were asked to submit details on their recycling arrangements and these responses are attached in Annex A.

Annex A: Trust Responses to information request

HSC Trust	Trust Response to Information Request No. AQW 42269/11-15
Belfast	Belfast Trust is pro-active in the reduction, recycling and reuse of its waste. The Trust's waste policy includes the key objectives that: ■ The creation of waste is minimised. ■ All waste streams are separated to minimise disposal costs and associated environmental impact. To achieve this the Trust provides mandatory waste training which highlights good practice to staff and emphasises the importance of waste reduction and use of correct waste segregation practices. Information on waste reduction is regularly promoted on the Trust Intranet and through internal publications. The Trust's Waste Manager monitors waste tonnage produced to ensure reduction targets are achieved and continually looks for opportunities to achieve further reductions. The following is an indication of the level of reduction, recycling and reuse across each waste stream. **General/Domestic Waste** ■ Working in partnership with our waste contractor SITA, Belfast Trust has introduced a dry mixed recycling stream for domestic waste - separating recyclable items at source such as paper, cardboard, cans, plastic bottles etc. As a result the percentage of such waste going to landfill from Jan 2014-Jan 2015 was only 3.34%. 58.32% of waste was recycled and 38.34% was recovered. **Clinical Waste** ■ From June 2014 all Clinical waste residue (flock following thermal heat treatment process) from Belfast Trust has been diverted from landfill for 100% recovery and electricity conversion, resulting in zero landfill. **Confidential Waste** ■ All confidential paper waste removed from the Trust is 100% recycled via licensed contractor.
	WEEE - Waste Electrical & Electronic Equipment ■ All electrical waste goes for recycling as per W.E.E.E. regulations via licensed contractor. **Furniture & Equipment** ■ The Trust has a furniture store for desks, chairs, ward furniture, catering equipment etc to reduce the requirement to purchase new items. Any furniture not suitable for reuse within the Trust is donated to charity.

HSC Trust	Trust Response to Information Request No. AQW 42269/11-15
Southern	Over the last 2-3 years the level of recycling has been approximately 11-13%. This excludes the Trust general/domestic waste which is taken to the contractor's site where waste is segregated so that at least 75% of waste is diverted from landfill. Recycling is promoted throughout the Trust as part of staff mandatory waste e-learning training. Staff also receive information through the Trust e-brief and from waste audits of ward(s)/department(s). Recycling is undertaken throughout the Trust and it is planned to increase levels at Acute sites from April 2015 by increasing promotion of recycling in wards/departments and implementing the introduction of same where possible. At main hospital sites cardboard waste is segregated and recycled. Where possible the Trust currently recycles waste including: ■ Batteries ■ Printer toner cartridges ■ Fluorescent tubes ■ Confidential waste paper ■ Waste Electronic and Electrical Equipment (WEEE) ■ Chemicals

Western	**Policy and Procedures** 1 The WHSCT has an Environmental Policy in place which has been approved by the Trust Board; this details a commitment to 'promote waste minimisation by segregation, reuse and recycling, and reduce environmental impact through safe disposal of the residue' 2 The Policy commitment is implemented by procedures documented in Trust 'Waste Manual' Segregation and Disposal 3 The Trust segregates waste produced in accordance with HTM07-01for separate collection, recycling and reuse and the key waste streams include: Waste Stream — Colour of Containment Clinical waste (orange) Non-Recyclable (black) Mixed Recycling (blue) Compostable (brown) Confidential waste (white) Waste Electronic and Electrical Equipment (WEEE) **Chemicals, Oils & Paints** 4 The Trust has waste disposal contracts in place for removal, recycling and/or safe disposal of hazardous (infectious and non-infectious) and non-hazardous waste; these have been arranged through BSO/PALS, the relevant Centre of Procurement Expertise (COPE)) Both PALS and the Trust's Environment Manager meet regularly with contractors to review recycling/ reuse performance. 5 Waste segregation and recycling information (including posters) are posted in all wards/ departments/facilities across Trust.
	Quality Assurance, Audit and Training 6 The WHSCT has a full-time Environment Officer who undertakes an annual programme of 'Environmental Audits' across the Trust which includes monitoring compliance with waste procedures in Waste Manual, and identifying and implementing areas for improvement. 7 The Environment Officer also undertakes an annual environmental training programme for key Trust staff involved in handling waste, e.g. Nursing, Support Services. 8 The WHSCT has an Environmental Management System (EMS) in place, which is externally accredited to ISO14001 Environmental Management Standard and covers Waste management activities as outlined above.

Northern	Over the last 3 years recycling has steadily increased, due to promotional information and staff training, as well as contractors' facilities being improved allowing the removal a higher percentage of recycled material. There is also a higher percentage of recovery of the remaining material from the recycling process to be processed into a fuel source. This has helped to further divert waste from landfill, with some Northern Trust Hospitals and community facilities achieving 100% recycling and with a total Trust recycling rate of 84% (Jan 2015 figures). The majority of Trust Hospitals have balers to compact cardboard, which reduces the amount of recycling bins and creates space in compactors, resulting in less collections and lorries on the road. Across all of the Trust Hospitals 172.88 tonnes of cardboard was baled and recycled during 2013-14 (141.5 tonnes from April 2014 to Jan 2015). A new efficient domestic waste compactor (which contains recyclable waste) was installed at Causeway Hospital during January 2014 with a higher load capacity reducing collections from once a week to once a month, further reducing lorries on the road and collection charges. Recycling has now expanded to include other items such as clothes, scrap metal, batteries and toner cartridges. The Trust has collaborated with local Social Enterprise schemes to recycle cooking oil from the catering departments into biodiesel and up-cycling and reupholstering furniture that would otherwise be disposed of. At present information is being gathered with regard to food waste quantities at both acute and community facilities with the aim of adopting either separated food waste collections for composting or to install de-watering food waste equipment which will reuse the treated food waste as a fuel. Food waste is disposed of via black bags i.e. non-recyclable waste but is processed at our contractor's recycling plant to recover recyclable material and also to process the waste into fuel. Even though this waste is recycled and recovered for fuel it is still classified as non-recycling. The Trust's average annual recovered waste to energy is 4%. With the introduction of separate food waste collections we hope to increase the recycling rate by 5-10%
South Eastern	Waste Contracts: All SEHSCT waste contracts are regional contracts let by BSO PaLS and all emphasise compliance with NI Waste Management Strategy with the aim of zero to landfill. Non-hazardous waste: All black bag and mixed dry recyclable waste is taken for sorting and recycling to one of two Material Recovery Facilities, there is no direct disposal to landfill. There is source segregation of mixed dry recyclables at a number of SET facilities and there is a programme in place to extend this to achieve financial efficiencies. At the sites where the volume of cardboard waste is sufficient to justify it, cardboard is compacted and baled for onward recycling – the current market rate is paid to the Trust by the contractor. Confidential Waste: Following security shredding by our authorised contractor, this waste is sent for onward recycling Bulky Skip Waste: The current contractor achieves approx. 40% recycling rate of bulky items – furniture etc. When this contract is due for renewal, continual improvement of recovery rates will be specified as one of the KPI's. Clinical Waste: The tender process is currently underway for the regional contract for the collection and treatment / disposal of clinical waste. A 'zero to landfill' solution has been emphasised. Training: South Eastern HSC Trust has an e-learning module on 'Environmental and Waste Awareness'. This includes an explanation of the Waste Hierarchy, emphasising waste elimination and minimisation before reduction, recycling, recovery, etc. This module forms part of the mandatory induction programme for all new staff and is also available as a refresher for existing staff. Food Waste: Relevant South Eastern HSC Trust staff are aware of the new NI Food Waste Regulations and will be working on projects to ensure the Trust will be fully compliant by the designated dates.
NIAS	The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service HSC Trust uses the regional waste contract wherever possible and segregates domestic waste into general waste and "Mixed recyclables". Packaging at our central stores is bundled and recycled. Disposable Batteries are recycled. Electrical waste is disposed of in accordance with WEEE regulations Specialist equipment is disposed of via the supplier. Garage waste, batteries, tyres, oil are disposed of via specialist contractors.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the implementation of the General Practitioners Work Force Planning Group Report recommendations.
(AQW 42276/11-15)

Mr Wells: My Department is currently considering the recommendations of the General Practitioners Work Force Planning Group Interim Report. Increasing the number of GP trainees would, of course, require increased funding, and any decision would need to take account of the overall financial position of my Department. Therefore, no final decision will be taken until this work has been completed.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 41185/11-15, to detail the developmental options being considered.
(AQW 42321/11-15)

Mr Wells: The options being considered are still policy under development and I am not in a position to outline them at present. The Terms of Reference for the review into the clinical negligence settlement management process will be developed once all the options have been considered.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 41053/11-15, for his assessment of the equality implications of such decisions that restrict services from a departmental and regional perspective.
(AQW 42322/11-15)

Mr Wells: As indicated in my response to AQW 41053, each HSC Trust is a public authority for the purpose of Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act, and accordingly is required to have its own equality scheme in place setting out its arrangements for implementing the statutory equality duties. The decision taken by the South Eastern HSC Trust to change its community meals service does not have implications outside the Trust area. I am satisfied that the South Eastern HSC Trust has complied with its duties in accordance with its own equality scheme. It completed an equality screening exercise in January 2013 on the proposed community meals service. A further equality screening exercise was undertaken in January 2015 following the award of the tender. The Trust is committed to monitoring the implementation of the proposal on an ongoing basis, and if necessary will reassess the equality screening in light of that monitoring.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the review into the Supplement for Undergraduate Medical and Dental Education.
(AQW 42323/11-15)

Mr Wells: A review into the Supplement for Undergraduate Medical and Dental Education is scheduled to be carried out by my Department in 2015-16. The review will consider a range of issues associated with the current SUMDE funding allocation model.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when the Health and Social Care Board will make a decision on residual demand funding for Health and Social Care Trusts, specifically in relation to Action on Hearing Loss Hear to Help services operating in each Health and Social Care Trust.
(AQW 42324/11-15)

Mr Wells: In view of the current financial challenges, my Department and the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) are jointly reviewing all non-recurrent funding.

I understand that depending on confirmation of funding for 2015/16 the HSCB is actively considering whether existing projects including “Hear to Help” could still be supported for a further period to provide the opportunity for evaluations to take place.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of children in the Western Trust Health and Social Care Trust with high medical needs, such as complex disabilities, life limiting diseases and terminal illnesses.
(AQW 42335/11-15)

Mr Wells: This information is not held centrally and was requested from the Western Health and Social Care Trust. They informed me that at 20th February 2015 there were 60 children on the caseload of the Community Children’s Nursing Team that would be considered to have complex healthcare needs in the Western Health and Social Care Trust area. This figure has not been validated by the Department.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on supported living provided by South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust at the former Ravara House in Kilcooley, Bangor.
(AQW 42337/11-15)

Mr Wells: The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust has advised that it hopes to be in a position to resubmit a business case to the NIHE Supporting People Programme in the coming weeks.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the future of all nursing and residential care comes which fall under the auspices of each Health and Social Care Trust.
(AQW 42358/11-15)

Mr Wells: All Health and Social Care Trusts have completed their evaluation of the future role and functions of their statutory residential care homes against the regional criteria agreed by the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) in June 2014, following an extensive consultation process. In line with the regional process, all Health and Social Care Trusts have submitted their proposals to the HSCB. The Department is now working with the HSCB to consider how these proposals should be brought forward for consultation.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 41519/11-15, for his assessment of the health benefits and potential savings of implementing National Institute for Health and Care Excellence Clinical Excellence Guidance CG32.
(AQW 42359/11-15)

Mr Wells: In my previous answer I advised that The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) Clinical Guideline 32 (CG32) regarding Nutritional Support for Adults was published in February 2006 and that, as this predates the Department's formal links with NICE, CG32 has not been endorsed by the Department.

The Department has not, therefore, reviewed CG32 for its applicability and implementation within Northern Ireland at this time.

NICE are due to review CG32 in March 2016 and the Department will consider the guidance at that stage.

My Department continues to support the improvement of nutritional care of adults in Northern Ireland through 'Promoting Good Nutrition: A Strategy for Good Nutritional Care for Adults on all Care Settings in N Ireland; 2011-2016' which makes specific reference to NICE CG32.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the projected implications his Department's 2015/16 budget will have on community and voluntary organisations and their subsequent ability to provide vital frontline services to the public.
(AQW 42360/11-15)

Mr Wells: My Department currently provides grant funding totalling £4,452,244 to voluntary and community organisations, some of which is allocated to the delivery of services. My officials are currently considering in detail what is provided, to whom and for what purpose and will provide me with an options paper on a way forward in 2015/16.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on Recommendation 2 of the North South Feasibility Study.
(AQW 42378/11-15)

Mr Wells: Substance misuse is an issue that affects jurisdictions right across the UK, British Isles, and Europe. It is therefore important that we work together to take consistent and co-ordinated action to prevent and address the harm related to substance misuse, and to tackle this societal issue. However, it should be noted that policies and strategies in the two jurisdictions differ, as do mechanisms for the commissioning and provision of services.

In order to look at areas of mutual interest, a joint North/South conference on alcohol misuse took place in January 2012. Following the event, at request of the Chief Medical Officers in NI and RoI, a North/South Alcohol Policy Advisory Group was established to assist collaboration. This Group's work, facilitated by the Institute of Public Health, is supporting information sharing, discussion and joint action. A paper on the availability of alcohol, on which the Group focussed initially, was presented to the NSMC Health and Food Safety Group for consideration. In addition, work is underway on joint protocols to address Hidden Harm and a joint project on alcohol outlet density mapping. I am also pleased that the two Health Departments jointly commissioned a research report on the potential impact of introducing a Minimum Unit Price for alcohol in both jurisdictions.

The British-Irish Council Substance Misuse Sectoral Group also provides a forum for discussing and taking forward joint work on substance misuse across all member jurisdictions. This has included identification, information sharing and agreeing a joint position on New Psychoactive Substances and supporting the development of agreed positions on EU, UN and International policy developments.

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 32034/11-15, to detail the latest figures for (i) the number and value of unfitted insulin pumps; (ii) the date these pumps were purchased; and (iii) the date these pumps will become obsolete as a result of the removal of the manufacturer's warranty due to excessive storage periods, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust.
(AQW 42385/11-15)

Mr Wells: The information is not collected centrally and was requested from the five Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts. Their responses are provided below:

(i)

HSC Trust	Number of unfitted insulin pumps	Notes
Belfast	100	80 Adult pumps 20 Paediatric pumps
Northern	74	25 Roche pumps 23 Animas pumps 26 Medtronic pumps
South Eastern	8	
Southern	69	
Western	83	35 Medtronic pumps 32 Roche pumps 16 Animas pumps (63 of these pumps are required for replacements by the end of 2017, resulting in 20 pumps remaining for new starts in this time period)

HSC Trust	Total Cost	Notes
Belfast	£250,000	Adult pumps costing £200,000 Paediatric pumps costing £50,000
Northern	£185,000	£2,500 each
South Eastern	£21,600	£2,700 each
Southern	£120,750	
Western	£129,300	Approximately £1,500 per Metronic / Roche pump Approximately £1,800 per Animas pump

(ii)

HSC Trust	Date Purchased
Belfast	March 2012
Northern	2012
South Eastern	March 2012
Southern	2012
Western *	March 2012

* The allocation of pumps in the Western HSC Trust in March 2012 was aimed to cover a 3-5 year period (2012-2015/17).

(iii)

HSC Trust	Warranty
Belfast	From 1st April 2015, all Medtronic and Roche insulin pumps will have a 4 year warranty regardless of whether they are in storage or in use by a patient. Adult Animas insulin pumps will have a warranty of 2 years regardless of whether they are in storage or in use by a patient. Paediatric Animas insulin pumps have all been replaced with the latest version launched at the end of 2014. These have been given a 2 year warranty. From 1st April 2015, paediatric Animas pumps purchased in future will have a 4 year warranty.
Northern	Roche pumps have a 5 year warranty from date of commencement. From April 2015, Medtronic pumps will start a 4 year countdown warranty. From June 2015, Animas pumps will have a 2 year warranty.
South Eastern	The warranty on the eight remaining pumps expires at the end of March 2015.
Southern	The warranty on the remaining pumps expires on 1st April 2018.
Western	Roche and Animas pumps have a 4 year warranty from the date of pump start. Medtronic pumps have a delayed 4 year warranty which will start in April 2016.

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether the guidance from the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence on the use of insulin pumps is being fully implemented in Northern Ireland.
(AQW 42386/11-15)

Mr Wells: The NICE Technology Appraisal 151 on insulin pumps was endorsed by the Department in June 2009.

Insulin pump therapy has been implemented across Northern Ireland since 2010/11.

In 2011/12 an additional 1050 new and replacement pumps were purchased to be implemented over the following 4 to 5 years.

The most recent figures available show that 327 children and 450 adults are using insulin pumps. Further expansion in numbers using insulin pump users will continue for the next 2 years when the situation will be reviewed.

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action he is taking to ensure the availability of insulin pumps in each Health and Social Care Trust meets the levels of demands and that resources will be available to protect the public investment by transferring pumps to other Trust areas where demand exists.
(AQW 42387/11-15)

Mr Wells: It is the responsibility of the Health and Social Care (HSC) Board and the HSC Trusts to ensure the availability of insulin pumps in each HSC Trust meets the level of demand. There is no impediment to HSC Trusts transferring pumps to other Trust areas where conditions allow and there is mutual agreement.

In 2011/12 an additional 1050 new and replacement pumps were purchased to be implemented over the following 4 to 5 years.

The most recent figures available show that 327 children and 450 adults are using insulin pumps. A further expansion in the number of patients using insulin pumps will continue for the next 2 years when the situation will be reviewed.

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 32034/11-15, to detail the difference between insulin pumps that have been designated for adults and those designated for paediatric use.
(AQW 42388/11-15)

Mr Wells: Insulin pumps used by adults and children share the same technology and approach. The only difference between insulin pumps used by adults and children is the size of the pump and the accompanying consumables (e.g. tubing).

Mr Rogers asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, following the public rally supporting the Downe Hospital, whether he can provide an assurance that all services will be fully restored at the hospital and existing services safeguarded.
(AQW 42407/11-15)

Mr Wells: During that debate recent debate in the Assembly, when the future of both the Downe and Daisy Hill Hospitals were discussed, I referred to the assurances I have received from the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust that the Downe Hospital will continue to play a vibrant and vital role in the acute network which will deliver essential hospital services now and in the future. I am strongly of the view that the Downe Hospital is crucial to the local community and that it will continue to be an absolutely key component of healthcare for this area.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether, in relation to acute mental healthcare, (i) there is no suitable space, accommodation or environment at the South West Acute Hospital site; and (ii) the Tyrone and Fermanagh Hospital site continues to offer the appropriate environment and physical setting for the care of patients with acute mental health issues and if his Department will commit to this site for the delivery of acute mental health services into the future based on the excellence of patient care and the effective and efficient spending of public money.
(AQW 42447/11-15)

Mr Wells: The location of second mental health unit in the southern sector of the Western Health and Social Care Trust is subject to a business case which is currently being developed by the Trust. The business case will, as required, include a full options appraisal taking into account the essential requirements for high quality safe, effective, and robust adult mental health services for the people of Fermanagh and West Tyrone. This will include an evaluation of suitable space, accommodation and environment in reaching a determination on the preferred option.

Until this business case process is concluded, I will not be in a position to commit to the suitability or otherwise of any current facility.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether there is funding available within the Western Health and Social Care Trust to provide specialist wheelchairs and other necessary equipment for patients who are bed bound as a consequence of suffering from ME and/or Fibromyalgia.
(AQW 42449/11-15)

Mr Wells: Western Health and Social Care Trust (WHSCT) advised that dthe edicated funding is available for the provision of specialist wheelchairs and appliances for all clients whose functional skills and mobility are impaired through illness or injury and whose equipment requirements cannot be met through the Trust's Community Appliance Service.

The funding for the 2014/15 financial year has already been allocated and this has meant that some clients are experiencing delays in receiving specialist non-stock appliances. Trust staff endeavour to provide alternative solutions to minimise any risk to clients. Clients and carers with urgent needs are prioritised.

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the approximate number of prescriptions issued in each of the last five calendar years.
(AQW 42463/11-15)

Mr Wells: The number of prescription forms and the number of prescription items, for which a prescription was written, dispensed by a community pharmacist, dispensing doctor or appliance supplier, and presented for payment in each of the last five calendar years, are shown in Table 1 below. Not all prescriptions issued are subsequently dispensed and presented for payment, so the number of prescriptions issued is not known centrally.

The figures shown are presented by the calendar year in which the prescription was paid to the pharmacist; it should be noted that there may be a time lag where prescriptions have been dispensed by the community pharmacist in a particular year but paid the following year. The data provided only covers drugs dispensed in primary care, as drugs prescribed and dispensed in hospital cannot be captured centrally due to the use of different hospital IT systems.

Table1: Number of prescription forms and prescription items dispensed in each of the last five calendar years

Calendar Year	Number of Prescription Forms	Number of Prescription Items
2010	20,149,112	35,366,062
2011	20,572,383	36,322,851
2012	21,424,191	37,841,141
2013	21,677,596	38,661,481
2014	22,235,510	39,687,529

Source: Family Practitioner Services, Information and Registration Unit, BSO.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the measures which have been taken to produce a targeted health promotion approach to raising awareness of the health and social care needs arising from sexual violence and abuse, since 2011.
(AQW 42486/11-15)

Mr Wells: Since 2011, my Department has brought forward a range of measures which provide support to victims of sexual violence and abuse and raise awareness of their health and social care needs. These measures include: the provision of the government 24 Hour Domestic and Sexual Violence Helpline; the development and establishment of The Rowan, Sexual Assault Referral Centre; and the provision of a regional sexual abuse counselling service through Nexus NI. My Department also established Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland and partners with the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership to protect children at risk.

My Department's Sexual Health Promotion Strategy aims to improve, protect and promote the sexual health and well-being of the population of Northern Ireland, and provide information and training on the Sexual offences (Northern Ireland) Order 2008 to those in the HSC and voluntary and community sectors working in the field of sexual health.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, given that it is proposed that the 95 per cent exceptionality criteria be removed in respect of access to specialist drugs, whether he anticipates any other percentage threshold.
(AQW 42505/11-15)

Mr Wells: My statement of the 17th February 2015 makes clear that is reasonable to expect clinicians to demonstrate some level of clinical exceptionality in order to allow wider access to this group of unapproved drugs. What we are seeking, and my Department's proposals reflect this, is that clinicians and other experts work together to agree an accepted definition of clinical exceptionality.

My Department is conducting a public consultation exercise on the proposed changes to the Individual Funding Request process. That consultation process will run until 8 May and following this we will aim to set out the details of the process going forward.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when the first patient will receive access to medicine through the new Drugs Fund he announced on 17 February 2015.
(AQW 42523/11-15)

Mr Wells: I will be exploring every possible option for ensuring that the specialist medicines fund, announced on the 17th February, is established as quickly as possible. Officials are conducting a public consultation exercise on the question of the use

of prescription charges to support a specialist medicines fund. That consultation process will end on 8 May. I can assure you that once the public has had its say on this important matter I will bring it to the Executive as a matter of urgency.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, given The Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry statement at the recent Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety meeting that income to Northern Ireland from the Pharmaceutical Price Regulation Scheme is likely to rise by an additional £30M next year, whether these additional funds could be used to fund a Specialist Drugs Fund.
(AQW 42543/11-15)

Mr Wells: It is not known how the £30 million figure referred to has been calculated. The payments made under the PPRS are based on primary care data for the spend on licensed branded medicines. It is then apportioned to each of the devolved administrations on the basis of the prescribing data for that country for the same period as the income relates. As the amount we will receive depends on the total amount we actually spend on licensed branded medicines it is not possible to calculate how much we are likely to receive next year.

I wish to establish a Specialist Medicines Fund on a sustainable basis for the longer term. Returns from the PPRS will continue to be re-invested to support pressures across HSC including those associated with the growth in branded specialist medicines.

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what care is available in each Health and Social Care Trust for people diagnosed with (i) ME; and (ii) Fibromyalgia Symposium.
(AQW 42584/11-15)

Mr Wells: Health and Social Care Trusts do not provide a specialist CFS/'ME' service, but GPs may refer to a wide range of specialists such as cardiology or neurology depending on the most prominent presenting conditions by the individual patient. Provision of services are determined on a case-by-case basis and tailored to the patient's need. Services for fibromyalgia are also provided on the same basis.

The Northern Health and Social Care Trust has completed a pilot condition management programme for CFS/ME. Emerging findings are positive and the option of replicating the service as part of a regional clinical network for CFS/ME is being considered, subject to discussion and available resources.

Mr Girvan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why the Northern Health and Social Care Trust changed their admission policy for adults with severe learning difficulties attending residential respite facilities.
(AQW 42588/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Northern Health and Social Care Trust has advised me that it has not made any changes to its admission criteria for any service users who are assessed as needing, and availing of, residential respite services.

The Trust is currently reviewing its provision of respite services in general with a view to improving respite provided to families caring for a service user with learning disabilities.

The Trust has been discussing this with service users and carers. The review has not been completed and will be subject to consultation thereafter.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether the failure to introduce the Meningitis B Vaccine Bexsero, following its recommendation by The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation, is a breach of the National Health Service Constitution.
(AQW 42693/11-15)

Mr Wells: All four UK Health Ministers accepted the JCVI recommendation to introduce a Men B vaccination programme, subject to the vaccine being procured at a cost effective price.

At present the Department of Health England, acting on behalf of the whole UK, is engaged in a procurement process with the vaccine manufacturer. This process has taken longer than expected and is still ongoing.

DH England has a legal obligation, under the 2010 NHS Constitution, to offer new vaccines and make changes to existing programmes to the public that are recommended by JCVI and which are shown to be cost effective. The NHS Constitution only applies to NHS England and therefore any breach of the NHS Constitution would be a matter for the Secretary of State for Health, Jeremy Hunt.

Northern Ireland is under no obligation to implement any JCVI recommendation, however to date we have always implemented JCVI recommendations, subject to a vaccine being procured at a cost effective price.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of patients transferred from the South West Acute Hospital to other hospitals in the last twelve months, broken down by (i) treatment type; and (ii) reason for referral.
(AQW 42778/11-15)

Mr Wells: The number of patients transferred from the South West Acute Hospital to other hospitals in 2014 (1st January to 31st December), broken down by specialty is provided in the table below.

Specialty Description	Transfers
General Surgery	119
Anaesthetics	16
General Medicine	232
Rehabilitation	2
Cardiology	183
Paediatrics	25
Geriatric Medicine	67
Obstetrics	21
Gynaecology	4
Northern Ireland	669

Source: Hospital Inpatient System Information on the reason for referral is not collected centrally.

Department of Justice

Mrs Hale asked the Minister of Justice whether he can ensure that all staff who availed of the Voluntary Exit Scheme were provided with the correct holiday entitlement.
(AQW 41999/11-15)

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): All leavers, irrespective of their reason for leaving, have been paid excess annual leave at the rate stipulated in the Northern Ireland Civil Service HR Handbook.

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of Prison Service staff morale.
(AQW 42052/11-15)

Mr Ford: Prisons can be difficult places to work and as a result staff morale can change from day to day. I understand this and greatly appreciate the work of the dedicated staff of the Northern Ireland Prison Service who deliver frontline services in that context.

There are a range of ways staff morale is kept under review including mechanisms which facilitate staff engagement with senior management. This is done at a local level (full staff briefings) and as part of the front-line forum meetings. The Director General and Director of HR visit each prison as part of the front-line forum meetings which bring together a cross section of staff – this is in addition to the regular visits to the prisons by the leadership team.

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Justice how many Prison Service staff are currently on sick leave; and how this compares to each of the last five years.
(AQW 42053/11-15)

Mr Ford: The table below details the average working days lost per member of staff in each of the last five years.

The official absence figure for 2014/2015 is not yet known, however, absence levels to date in this year would indicate that there will be an increase when compared to the previous year.

NIPS Average Working Days Lost during the period 2010/11 – 2013/14

Period	Average Working Days Lost to Sickness Absence
2010/11	14.5
2011/12	15.2
2012/13	14.5
2013/14	13.8
2014/15 (April – January)	14.4

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, given prosecuting counsel in crown court matters are self-employed and drawn from a panel, whether they are bound by a set fee, a maximum fee or whether they command their own fee, in each case undertaken; and which area within his Departmental budget meets these fees.
(AQW 42074/11-15)

Mr Ford: The setting of fees for prosecuting council is a matter for the Public Prosecution Service. You may wish to direct your question to the Director of Public Prosecutions.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, following the dissident republican prisoner actions in Roe House and the associated protest outside HMP Maghaberry on Monday 1 February 2015, how many staff are, or have been, off sick as a result.
(AQW 42160/11-15)

Mr Ford: As fewer than five members of staff are on sick absence as a result of the incident at Maghaberry Prison on Monday 2 February 2015 the actual number has been withheld. This is to protect the identity of the individuals concerned as disclosure would be contrary to the Data Protection Act 1998.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 41235/11-15, and with reference to the Compensation Payments – April – September 2013 publications on his Department's website, to detail the compensation paid to officers since October 2013 as per the format outlined to include the category, number of claims closed, compensation and costs.
(AQW 42163/11-15)

Mr Ford: The information in the format requested is contained in the tables below.

Officers

Category	No of claims closed	Compensation £	Costs £
Medical/Psychiatric	2	16,000	34,405.76
C&R Injuries (including C&R Training)	10	55,133	25,743.98
Assault by Prisoner(s)	19	175,314.86	43,737.56
Assault by Dog	1	2,500	4,296.31
Slips,Trip,Falls/Defective Facilities/Unsafe Working Practices	17	86,919.80	59,368.48
Smoke Inhalation	4	12,850	6,102.39
Employment Related	0	0	0
Hearing Loss	165	369,173	625,105
RTA	3	25,000	13,685.13
Total	**221**	**742,890**	**812,444.61**

Prisoners

Category	No of claims closed	Compensation £	Costs £
Medical/Psychiatric	2	0	0
Death in Custody	0	0	0
Assault by Officer(s)	6	0	0
Assault by Prisoner(s)	5	19,250	14,781.98
Assault by Dog	1	3,500	3,166.80
Slips,Trip,Falls/Defective Facilities/Unsafe Working Practices	27	32,765.25	22,708.72
Breach of Human Rights	10	15,000	0
Smoke Inhalation	5	400	3,088.64
Unlawful Imprisonment	18	34,875	11,483.57
RTA	3	1,500	2,734.84
Total	**77**	**107,290.25**	**57,964.55**

Civilian Staff

Category	No of claims closed	Compensation £	Costs £
Medical/Psychiatric	0	0	0
Assault by Prisoner(s)	1	12,500	0
Assault by Dog	1	0	0
Slips,Trip,Falls/Defective Facilities/Unsafe Working Practices	1	4,000	14,283.26
Smoke Inhalation	0	0	0
Employment Related	0	0	0
Hearing Loss	0	0	0
RTA	0	0	0
Total	**3**	**16,500**	**14,283.26**

Members of the Public

Category	No of claims closed	Compensation £	Costs £
Medical/Psychiatric	0	0	0
C&R Injuries	0	0	0
Assault by Officer(s)	1	15,000	0
Assault by Dog	1	95.00	0
Slips,Trip,Falls/Defective Facilities/Unsafe Working Practices	1	5,585	3,073.80
Smoke Inhalation	0	0	0
Unlawful Imprisonment	1	1,000	421.59
RTA	7	10,029.69	8,436.99
Total	**11**	**31,709.69**	**11,932.38**

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, in relation to offences being committed inside a prison facility, how the Prison Service decides what is to be adjudicated internally and what is a court matter
(AQW 42164/11-15)

Mr Ford: Where an alleged offence against prison discipline may constitute an offence in criminal law, due to the type and/or severity of the offence, it is referred to the Police Service for Northern Ireland for investigation with a view to considering criminal prosecution. In these cases the internal proceedings are adjourned, pending the outcome of the PSNI investigation.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice where court cases, that would have been held in Newtownards courthouse, will be held if the courthouse is closed.
(AQW 42171/11-15)

Mr Ford: As is made clear in the current consultation document, it is proposed that all criminal, civil and family court cases which originate within the Petty Session Districts of Ards and North Down will transfer to Belfast.

The published document also proposes that those Crown Court cases originating from the Petty Session Districts of Ards and North Down and currently heard at Downpatrick Courthouse, will transfer to Belfast. This will result in shorter journeys for many defendants, legal practitioners, jurors, victims and witnesses involved in these types of cases.

Likewise family court cases originating from within the Petty Sessions District of Downpatrick currently heard in Newtownards will, under the proposals, revert to Downpatrick courthouse. Again this should mean shorter journeys for many of those involved in these cases.

The consultation period runs until 30 April 2015 and I will listen carefully to the matters raised during this time. I intend to issue a response to the consultation, including decisions on the closures, in June 2015.

I do not expect that any closures will take place until 2016.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice to outline the timescale and consultation and decisions on the proposal to close a number of courthouses.
(AQW 42172/11-15)

Mr Ford: As is made clear in the current consultation document, it is proposed that all criminal, civil and family court cases which originate within the Petty Session Districts of Ards and North Down will transfer to Belfast.

The published document also proposes that those Crown Court cases originating from the Petty Session Districts of Ards and North Down and currently heard at Downpatrick Courthouse, will transfer to Belfast. This will result in shorter journeys for many defendants, legal practitioners, jurors, victims and witnesses involved in these types of cases.

Likewise family court cases originating from within the Petty Sessions District of Downpatrick currently heard in Newtownards will, under the proposals, revert to Downpatrick courthouse. Again this should mean shorter journeys for many of those involved in these cases.

The consultation period runs until 30 April 2015 and I will listen carefully to the matters raised during this time. I intend to issue a response to the consultation, including decisions on the closures, in June 2015.

I do not expect that any closures will take place until 2016.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice how many prisoners are currently housed in HMP Maghaberry.
(AQW 42220/11-15)

Mr Ford: As of 18 February 2015, the number of prisoners in Maghaberry is 957.

There are currently 43 prisoners within Maghaberry who have satisfied the criteria to be held within Separated Republican Accommodation.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice how many prisoners housed at HMP Maghaberry are categorised as republican.
(AQW 42221/11-15)

Mr Ford: As of 18 February 2015, the number of prisoners in Maghaberry is 957.

There are currently 43 prisoners within Maghaberry who have satisfied the criteria to be held within Separated Republican Accommodation.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice what were the total running costs of HMP Maghaberry, in each of the last three financial years.
(AQW 42222/11-15)

Mr Ford: The direct running costs of Maghaberry Prison for the last three financial years are listed in the table below:

	2011-12 £'000	**2012-13 £'000**	**2013-14 £'000**
Net Expenditure	56,785	54,941	51,065

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Justice how his Department will measure any impact on crime rates of the budget cuts to Railway Street drug addiction service.
(AQW 42233/11-15)

Mr Ford: Discussions are ongoing with the Northern Health and Social Care Trust regarding future provision of the Railway Street Addiction Service.

The Chief Constable is operationally responsible for tackling crime and resourcing each policing district to do so. The PSNI will continue to measure crime in the Ballymena area and publish these figures.

However, it should be recognised that there are many factors that influence offending and crime rates. Substance misuse is one of those factors and this leads to difficulties in isolating any one factor which impacts on crime rates. Other factors may include crime prevention initiatives already in place.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, if Magherafelt Magistrates Court cases are to transfer to Dungannon Court House for hearing, how the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service intends to cope with the additional vehicles in a car park which is not currently accommodating existing vehicle levels.
(AQW 42238/11-15)

Mr Ford: Under the court rationalisation proposals, it is expected that the transferring business from Magherafelt Magistrates' Court will generally be accommodated on those days which currently have lower volumes of court users attending court. In this context I would not anticipate that the proposals will impact substantially on the current levels of traffic which might be expected on an individual day.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 41235/11-15 and with reference to the Compensation Payments – April – September 2013 publication on the departmental website, to detail the compensation paid to paid to prisoners, civilian staff and members of the public, since October 2013 as per the format outlined and to include, Category, Number of Claims Closed, Compensation and Costs,
(AQW 42239/11-15)

Mr Ford: The information in the format requested is contained in the tables below.

Officers

Category	No of claims closed	Compensation £	Costs £
Medical/Psychiatric	2	16,000	34,405.76
C&R Injuries (including C&R Training)	10	55,133	25,743.98
Assault by Prisoner(s)	19	175,314.86	43,737.56
Assault by Dog	1	2,500	4,296.31
Slips,Trip,Falls/Defective Facilities/Unsafe Working Practices	17	86,919.80	59,368.48
Smoke Inhalation	4	12,850	6,102.39
Employment Related	0	0	0
Hearing Loss	165	369,173	625,105
RTA	3	25,000	13,685.13
Total	**221**	**742,890**	**812,444.61**

Prisoners

Category	No of claims closed	Compensation £	Costs £
Medical/Psychiatric	2	0	0
Death in Custody	0	0	0
Assault by Officer(s)	6	0	0
Assault by Prisoner(s)	5	19,250	14,781.98
Assault by Dog	1	3,500	3,166.80
Slips,Trip,Falls/Defective Facilities/Unsafe Working Practices	27	32,765.25	22,708.72
Breach of Human Rights	10	15,000	0
Smoke Inhalation	5	400	3,088.64
Unlawful Imprisonment	18	34,875	11,483.57
RTA	3	1,500	2,734.84
Total	**77**	**107,290.25**	**57,964.55**

Civilian Staff

Category	No of claims closed	Compensation £	Costs £
Medical/Psychiatric	0	0	0
Assault by Prisoner(s)	1	12,500	0
Assault by Dog	1	0	0
Slips,Trip,Falls/Defective Facilities/Unsafe Working Practices	1	4,000	14,283.26
Smoke Inhalation	0	0	0
Employment Related	0	0	0
Hearing Loss	0	0	0

Category	No of claims closed	Compensation £	Costs £
RTA	0	0	0
Total	**3**	**16,500**	**14,283.26**

Members of the Public

Category	No of claims closed	Compensation £	Costs £
Medical/Psychiatric	0	0	0
C&R Injuries	0	0	0
Assault by Officer(s)	1	15,000	0
Assault by Dog	1	95.00	0
Slips,Trip,Falls/Defective Facilities/Unsafe Working Practices	1	5,585	3,073.80
Smoke Inhalation	0	0	0
Unlawful Imprisonment	1	1,000	421.59
RTA	7	10,029.69	8,436.99
Total	**11**	**31,709.69**	**11,932.38**

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether an offence committed by a prisoner, that is adjucated within the prison facility in which the offence was committed, is added to the prisoner's criminal record.
(AQW 42240/11-15)

Mr Ford: The adjudication process within the prison system is used as a means of addressing breaches against Prison Rules. It is not run as a court of law and therefore offences against discipline are not added to a prisoner's criminal record.

On occasions where the offence committed against Prison Rules is deemed of a serious nature, the Governor has the discretion to refer the matter to the PSNI; in these instances, if the matter is progressed through the court system, it may be added to an individual's criminal record.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice how many prisoners are currently housed in HMP Magilligan.
(AQW 42279/11-15)

Mr Ford: The prisoner population in Magilligan prison on 20 February 2015 was 526.

Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) establishments do not have a maximum operational capacity. Each establishment has a Certified Normal Accommodation figure and NIPS accommodates people in custody based upon the requirements of the courts.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice what is the maximum amount of prisoners that can be housed at HMP Maghaberry.
(AQW 42280/11-15)

Mr Ford: There is no maximum operational capacity for Maghaberry Prison. As Northern Ireland's only adult male committal prison the Prison Service is required to house all prisoners committed to Maghaberry from the courts.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice what is the maximum amount of prisoners that can be housed at HMP Magilligan.
(AQW 42281/11-15)

Mr Ford: The prisoner population in Magilligan prison on 20 February 2015 was 526.

Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) establishments do not have a maximum operational capacity. Each establishment has a Certified Normal Accommodation figure and NIPS accommodates people in custody based upon the requirements of the courts.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice how many prison officers are employed at HMP Maghaberry.
(AQW 42282/11-15)

Mr Ford: There are currently 672 prison officers employed at Maghaberry Prison. Not all of these staff work full-time hours so this equates to 668.54 Full Time Equivalents.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice how many prison officers are employed at HMP Magilligan.
(AQW 42283/11-15)

Mr Ford: There are currently 298 prison officers employed at Magilligan Prison. Not all of these staff work full-time hours so this equates to 297.20 Full Time Equivalents.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 41604/11-15, whether all departmental and courts service staff are aware of the requirement not to abuse disabled parking bays, even on private departmental property.
(AQW 42286/11-15)

Mr Ford: Staff are not formally made aware of the requirement not to use disabled parking bays. However, there is an expectation that staff will respect the purpose for which these bays are provided.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 41129/11-15, whether the prisoner in question will be held liable for these costs; and if so, as opposed to an immediate warrant situation, whether they could be recouped from prison earnings.
(AQW 42287/11-15)

Mr Ford: The only cost to the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) in this case was for returning this prisoner from Belfast City Airport to Maghaberry Prison in a Prisoner Escorting and Court Custody Service (PECCS) vehicle.

PECCS is responsible for the transportation of prisoners throughout Northern Ireland including to hospital when prisoners have self- harmed or transportation to Courts when they have been charged with other offences.

These, together with returning prisoners to custody, from periods of UAL, are normal operational duties and NIPS will not seek to recoup these costs.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 41406/11-15, whether the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service and his Department consider the extra 12 vehicles were (i) obstructive and restrictive to the flow and manoeuvring of traffic; and (ii) placing the car park at over capacity.
(AQW 42289/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service does not consider that the 12 additional vehicles parked outside of designated parking bays were obstructive or restrictive to the flow and manoeuvring of traffic. G4S Secure Solutions (UK) Ltd staff were present in the sanger to monitor car parking and the review of the Closed Circuit Television shows vehicles moving freely through the car park. The car park is marked for 96 spaces and the overflow of cars was facilitated by using the limited additional capacity of kerbside parking.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 41411/11-15, to address points (i) and (ii) of the question in respect of the differences in sentencing outcomes if brought to court by charge sheet or Public Prosecution Service summons.
(AQW 42291/11-15)

Mr Ford: Summonses and charge sheets are no more than the mechanisms to bring cases before the magistrates' courts. A charge sheet will be used for a person who has been arrested and charged with an offence. Where a person is not charged, they may be reported for prosecution to the Public Prosecution Service, who may then initiate proceedings by way of summons. The decision to charge or submit a file to the Public Prosecution Service is an operational matter for the police.

Sentencing is a separate consideration based on the outcome of the prosecution, not how the case was brought to court.

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 41078/11-15, to detail the breaches of the rule of being in possession of an unauthorised article in each prison, over the last four years.
(AQW 42294/11-15)

Mr Ford: The statistics requested are set out in the table below:

	2011	2012	2013	2014
Maghaberry	239	328	626	392
Magilligan	169	183	208	251
Hydebank	297	227	343	327

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 41134/11-15, to detail (i) the finds which caused concern; and the (ii) actions taken as a result.
(AQW 42296/11-15)

Mr Ford:

(i) Examples of finds that would give concern would be illicit drugs, prescribed medication (illicitly held), weapons, mobile phones or cash.

(ii) These matters are dealt with as a breach of prison rules; the Governor will consider each case at adjudication. Awards for guilty verdicts can range from a caution to a maximum of 14 days cellular confinement as well as loss of other privileges. Serious matters, e.g. finds of significant amounts of drugs, will be referred to the PSNI.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Justice how many young offenders in each of the last three years were from a foster care background.
(AQW 42357/11-15)

Mr Ford: When Young Offenders are committed to Hydebank Wood they are inducted through a committal process. However, this does not include researching if they have a foster care background.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 41712/11-15, why this is not suitable for consideration given the role of prisons is purportedly to rehabilitate, but also from the perspective of responsibility of public safety.
(AQW 42369/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Criminal Justice (NI) Order 2008 changed the law introducing determinate, indeterminate and extended custodial sentences. Where the court has imposed an indeterminate or extended sentence for public protection, release is at the discretion of the Parole Commissioners in Northern Ireland. They must be satisfied before directing release that it is no longer necessary, for the protection of the public from serious harm, for the offender to continue to be confined to custody.

To create a statutory provision to attach release to a requirement for rehabilitative engagement may in effect turn every prison sentence into an indeterminate sentence.

The approach allows the Northern Ireland Prison Service and its partners to work with individuals to address their offending behaviour, support rehabilitation, and promote desistance from crime on release into the community.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice what past experience the Northern Ireland Prison Service change managers have in situations such as Roe House, compact arrangements for separated prisoners and prisoner stand-offs to the degree which recently occurred in HMP Maghaberry; and what is the role of the change managers in respect of these matters.
(AQW 42370/11-15)

Mr Ford: The incident on 2 February reinforced the challenges of having separated areas for some prisoners in Maghaberry Prison. These are unique challenges and their successful management is dependent upon the combined skills and experience of all senior managers in the Northern Ireland Prison Service.

The Organisational Change Manager for the Northern Ireland Prison Service is part of the senior management team that leads that response.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 41713/11-15 , given this figure is extremely low against the number of court bail breaches in which sureties are lodged, will he take action to ensure that such sureties are seized.
(AQW 42372/11-15)

Mr Ford: The estreatment of bail against either the principal parties or sureties in a case is a judicial decision.

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Justice when he will be in a position to table proposals to the Executive regarding securing the necessary capital funding to rebuild Magilligan Prison.
(AQW 42383/11-15)

Mr Ford: NIPS Officials are continuing to work closely with Finance colleagues from the DOJ, following approval of the Outline Business Case for the Redevelopment of Magilligan on 9 January 2015.

I will continue to engage with the Minister for Finance and Personnel colleagues on the options available to deliver this important project.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, in relation to the case of Dwayne Mullan and his sentencing at Dungannon Magistrates Court in November 2014, for his assessment of the Pre-Sentence Reports compiled by the Probation Board of Northern Ireland, and the various recommendations by a number of agencies contained therein.
(AQW 42434/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Probation Board for Northern Ireland is operationally independent of my Department. A Pre-Sentence Report is provided by a Probation Officer at the request of the Courts in order to assist Judges with their sentencing decisions.

It would not be appropriate for me to comment on the content of an individual Pre-Sentence Report.

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Justice to detail the amount of money spent on Limavady Court House on maintenance and repairs in each of the last five years.
(AQW 42467/11-15)

Mr Ford: Total costs for maintenance and repairs for Limavady courthouse in each of the last five years are outlined below. The spend includes planned maintenance works which consist of statutory testing in relation to Legionella prevention and Fire Alarm testing. Grounds maintenance, pest control and external cleaning also fall under the maintenance spend. Work carried out between 2009 - 2011 included security enhancements.

	Maintenance and Repairs (£)
2009-10	107,594
2010-11	94,294
2011-12	29,790
2012-13	19,166
2013-14	10,958
Total Spend	**261,802**

Limavady Courthouse is not a listed building. The Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service will work closely with Land and Property Services to ensure the courthouse is disposed of in accordance with Department of Finance and Personnel guidelines on the Disposal of Surplus Public Sector Property in Northern Ireland.

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Justice what plans will be put in place to protect Limavady Court House as a listed building.
(AQW 42468/11-15)

Mr Ford: Total costs for maintenance and repairs for Limavady courthouse in each of the last five years are outlined below. The spend includes planned maintenance works which consist of statutory testing in relation to Legionella prevention and Fire Alarm testing. Grounds maintenance, pest control and external cleaning also fall under the maintenance spend. Work carried out between 2009 - 2011 included security enhancements.

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Mr Frew asked the Minister of Justice what protocols are in place in prisons if a Prison Officer or staff member receives injuries due to (i) an incident with, or assault by, prisoners; and (ii) an accident at work; and how are these incidents or accidents are recorded.
(AQW 42479/11-15)

Mr Ford: The response protocol for all injuries, whether to staff or prisoners, will be proportionate to the injuries received. Major incident protocols include an initial response from local First Aiders, support from local Healthcare staff and calling the Emergency Response Services.

Minor incidents can be dealt with by First Aid staff with staff released to attend either their GP or A&E department if required. Sufficient First Aid staff and kits are available throughout work locations.

All accidents or incidents are recorded in accident books and monitored by the local health and safety staff at each establishment. Local line managers complete health and safety documentation on individual accidents and incidents.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, in relation to the community placement of John McDermott, (i) whether an error was made in this matter; (ii) whether a review has been conducted into its handling; and if so, (iii) what is the nature and purpose of the review.
(AQW 42480/11-15)

Mr Ford: As has been stated previously, the Probation Board for Northern Ireland does not comment on individual cases.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, given his release was subject to stringent terms, why Eamon Foley has not been returned to custody for refusing to sign the Sex Offender Register.
(AQW 42481/11-15)

Mr Ford: The alleged breach of notification requirements under the Criminal Justice Act 2003 was brought before the courts by PSNI. The decisions in relation to these proceedings are entirely a matter for the court.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 41232/11-15, whether this Risk Assessment template is standard for all prisoners seeking temporary leave.
(AQW 42483/11-15)

Mr Ford: This Risk Assessment template is specific to life sentence prisoners applying for temporary leave.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 41789/11-15, for a breakdown of the category of sex offender in each district.
(AQW 42487/11-15)

Mr Ford: The data requested is provided in the table below:

Police District	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Category 1	115	265	137	141	162	107	147	114
Category 2	3	11	7	3	5	6	2	4
Category 3	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0
Total	**119**	**277**	**144**	**144**	**167**	**113**	**150**	**118**

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 42083/11-15, whether this is being dealt with as an internal prison charge or a an external court matter.
(AQW 42625/11-15)

Mr Ford: The prisoner charged with the offence of "Disobeys a Lawful Order (Rule 32 Paragraph 22)" as a result of the incident in Roe House on 2 February 2015 will be dealt with as an internal charge against prison discipline.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 41875/11-15, whether there was no verbal communication of mistaken identity.
(AQW 42627/11-15)

Mr Ford: As outlined in my answers to all the previous questions on this matter, Probation Board for Northern Ireland does not comment or issue statements in respect of specific cases.

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Justice to clarify the legal position in relation to non payment of parking charge notices issued by private companies on private lands such as retail parks.
(AQW 42730/11-15)

Mr Ford: This is not a matter for the Department of Justice. My responsibility for parking on private land is limited to ensuring that those who carry out vehicle immobilisation are properly licensed by the Security Industry Authority. I have no remit in relation to parking issues.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the future of the site of the former Donaghadee police station.
(AQW 42759/11-15)

Mr Ford: The management of the PSNI estate is an operational matter for the Chief Constable, for which he 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.

I would refer you to the Chief Constable.

Department for Regional Development

Mr Clarke asked the Minister for Regional Development how much NI Water has spent on (i) diaries; (ii) calendars; (iii) advertising; and (iv) other merchandising items, in each of the last five years.
(AQW 40566/11-15)

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): In the last five financial years NI Water has not incurred any expenditure on diaries and calendars in connection with advertising the company. Nor has there been any expenditure on "other merchandising".

In total, NIW has spent £1,111,134 on various forms of advertising over the last five financial years. This spend has been divided between statutory public notices and spend on major public awareness campaign such as the 'Beat The Freeze' campaign, the 'Don't Wait, Insulate' campaign, the 'Water Efficiency' campaign and the 'Bag it and Bin It' campaign.

Details of spend on advertising is set out in Table 1.

Table 1

*Above The Line	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	Total
Publicity Campaigns	£78,378	£45,120	£344,140	£241,314	£214,747	£923,699
Statutory Notices	£30,225	£28,056	£19,959	£15,948	£12,093	£106,281
**Below The Line	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	Total
Publicity/Promotional	£41,754	£608	£1,497	£27,764	£9,531	£811,54
						£1,111,134

Notes:

*' Above the line' advertising can be defined as prominent and widespread publicity and information campaigns.

**' Below the line' advertising can be defined as the acquisition of promotional material and other similar advertising projects.

Mr Clarke asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) how many employees of Translink are entitled to free transport; (ii) whether free transport is also available to their families; (iii) if so, how many families can access free transport; and (iv) what was the cost in each of the last five years.
(AQW 40793/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The provision of free travel to staff and their dependants is the industry norm for transport companies and is part of agreed staff terms and conditions in Translink. It is important to say that Translink has advised that when it became an integrated organisation in 1995-96 it carried with it staff travel concessions similar to other public transport operators. The travel concession is considered to be common practice in the transport sector. The subsequent extension of the scheme for spouses and partners was introduced in June 2001 and extended to dependants with effect from September 2006. These concessions have formed an integral part of the wage offer negotiated with Union representatives.

(i) There are currently 3,972 employees of Translink who are entitled to free transport;

(ii) Free transport is available to their families.

This facility is extended to spouses and partners of staff, as well as dependent children from 5 – 16 years. This entitlement comes into effect once a member of staff has satisfactorily completed a 6-month probationary period. Travel is restricted for dependants to Monday – Friday after 18:00 hours, all day Saturday and Sunday, all day during school holiday periods.

(iii) 1,098 families have access to free transport;

(iv) In relation to the cost of travel made using these cards to the organisation, Translink does not extract this type of usage data from its information management systems for this group of individuals. The number of individual journeys made using such passes is recorded as part of its periodic passenger journey information, which is sufficient for business needs. For these reasons quantification of the cost is very difficult.

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 38745/11-15, (i) how much has been spent on the resurfacing works on the Sandown Road, east Belfast, to date; and (ii) what appraisal mechanisms are in place to ensure the standard of the work is of a sound and consistent nature.
(AQW 41490/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: To date, my Department has spent £292,139.36 on resurfacing of the Sandown Road and a further £15,000 has been spent on the construction of a new Toucan Crossing at the Comber Greenway.

My Department employs a number of procedures to ensure that resurfacing works are carried out to a high standard. The Department employs quality assured contractors who have the appropriate technical expertise and experience, and the necessary resources to undertake this type of resurfacing work. The resurfacing materials specified for the Sandown Road are in accordance with national design standards e.g. the Design Manual for Road and Bridges. This helps to ensure the performance and durability of the carriageway. Officials supervise the resurfacing works using trained and experienced staff to make sure that resurfacing materials are laid and compacted in accordance with good industry practice. During this operation officials undertake a number of on-site tests to ensure the quality of the resurfacing material used. Based on the on-site supervision of the works and post completion inspection, I can confirm that the recent resurfacing works on the Sandown Road

have been undertaken in accordance with industry good practice. Officials will inspect the completed works during the two year maintenance period to identify any possible defects and arrange for appropriate remedial action, should any be detected.

Mr Spratt asked the Minister for Regional Development whether the proposed flood alleviation scheme at Finaghy can be enforced under legislation; and whether it is subject to planning approval.
(AQW 41806/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: NI Water does have powers under the Water and Sewerage Services (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 to enforce the proposed flood alleviation scheme; however it is endeavouring to reach an amicable agreement with the Golf Club Committee to accelerate delivery of the project.

The requirement for Planning approval is dependent on the final design but following initial scoping meetings with DOE Planning Service, the majority of the works would not be subject to planning approval.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development how much money has been spent on upgrading footpaths in the Kilcooley estate in Bangor, over the last four financial years.
(AQW 41956/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department completed a footway reconstruction and upgrading scheme in Kilcooley Estate in 2011/12, at a cost of £145,000.

This work was in addition to the routine maintenance repairs carried out in the Estate over the past four years for which cost information is not readily available.

Mrs Hale asked the Minister for Regional Development whether there are any plans to extend the 30mph speed limit from Culcavy Road onto the Halftown Road, given its residential status.
(AQW 42184/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: One of the factors officials take into account when determining the appropriate local speed limit is the mean driven speed of vehicles on the road in question. Indeed, speed survey equipment is presently gathering such data for this stretch of road.

I have asked my officials to contact you with a view to arranging a meeting to discuss this matter as soon as the data has been analysed and a full speed limit review completed.

Mr Frew asked the Minister for Regional Development what can be done to provide wheelchair accessibility from Adelaide Street Railway Station to Windsor Park football ground, given that there are two footbridges to cross when travelling to and from the stadium.
(AQW 42194/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I can advise you that Translink is considering a project to redevelop Adelaide Halt and has appointed a design team to carry out a feasibility study. The aims of the project include:

- improving halt access and passenger facilities;
- making improvements to accessibility and Disability Discrimination Act compliance; and
- improving access and integration with proposed pedestrian path to Windsor Park Football Stadium.

Translink would intend to commence construction in 2017 and complete the project in 2018. However, the necessary approvals and funding must be secured before this can happen.

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 36903/11-15, for an update on funding for a new Transport Hub at the former Waterside Train station.
(AQW 42228/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The creation of a mixed use transit hub which integrates and enhances the transport and travelling infrastructure of the city and its hinterlands is predicated upon securing a suitable site, and funding from European sources.

In this regard, my Department has worked extensively with official colleagues in Scotland and the Republic of Ireland to secure the inclusion of a €40 million Sustainable Transport thematic objective in the 2014-2020 INTERREG VA Territorial Co-operation Programme, which has recently been approved by the European Commission.

I expect calls to open for the INTERREG VA programme later this year and, subject to appropriate call criteria, my department intends to present a funding application for the project at this, or a subsequent, call.

Mr Frew asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the introduction of resident parking schemes.
(AQW 42253/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: In Belfast, my officials carried out a formal consultation on the implementation of Residents' Parking Schemes in the Lower Malone and the College Park Avenue/Rugby Road areas, between 29 October 2014 and 19 November 2014.

During this time they received a significant number of objections and representations on the two proposed schemes. Officials are currently considering and dealing with these objections and representations and plan to have met with the objectors by the end of March 2015. However, they cannot complete the remaining part of the legislative process for either scheme until the issues raised have been fully considered and dealt with. The earliest a scheme could be implemented on the ground in these areas would be within the 2015/2016 financial year, although this very much depends on a positive outcome to the consultation process.

In Londonderry, my Department is currently finalising the draft legislation for a Residents' Parking Scheme in Rossville Street prior to progressing to the consultation stage. The consultation period for this scheme is due to commence in March 2015. The timeline for delivery of the scheme will be dependent upon the outcome of the consultation exercise and nature of any objections. In the absence of any significant objections, the implementation process to deliver the scheme could commence in spring 2015.

A similar situation exists in Antrim, where the public consultation period is due to commence in early 2015. Once again, the timeline for the delivery of the scheme will be dependent upon the outcome of the consultation and nature of any objections.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Regional Development, in view of the number of fatalities on the stretch of the A26 from Dunsilly to Ballymena, whether he will commission a full safety review of this road.
(AQW 42254/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I would firstly like to take this opportunity to express my sympathy to the family of the victim of the recent collision at the Woodgreen junction. I can assure you that road safety is my Department's TransportNI's highest priority.

As you will appreciate the exact circumstances of this collision are still under investigation by the PSNI, and my officials will be meeting with the relevant PSNI officers in the near future to determine if any additional traffic measures are appropriate at this location.

With regard to a safety review of the A26 from Dunsilly to Ballymena, I can confirm this dual carriageway will also be given detailed consideration, in conjunction with the PSNI, and that some initial investigatory work has already been undertaken.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the number of quangos linked to his Department on (i) 8 May 2007; and (ii) 11 February 2015; and how many people served on the quangos on these respective dates.
(AQW 42255/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department has responsibility for two arm's length bodies (ALBs): the Northern Ireland Transport Holding Company (NITHC); and Northern Ireland Water (NIW). Both of these ALBs were in existence in 2007.

NITHC is a public corporation; at 8 May 2007 its Board consisted of one Executive Director and seven Non-Executive Directors. At 11 February 2015 the NITHC Board consisted of two Executive Directors and six Non-Executive Directors.

NIW is a government-owned company; on 8 May 2007 its Board had three Executive Directors and four Non-Executive Directors; and on 11 February 2015 its Board had four Executive Directors and five Non-Executive Directors.

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development whether his Department plans to raise with Translink the lack of a direct bus service between Bangor and the Ards Peninsula.
(AQW 42317/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink, which has operational responsibility in regard to bus scheduling under its licence, has advised that there is a significant number of bus services that operate from the Ards Peninsula to Newtownards in particular and onwards to Bangor using a number of connections available. Full details of these are available on the Translink website, www.Translink.co.uk.

For Translink to provide additional services it would require evidence of demand to ensure any new service is financially viable. Translink continues to hold local stakeholder events such as the Meet the Manager Programme to monitor this.

However given the unprecedented financial pressures the budget available may result in an impact on frequency of some public transport services. Translink is currently reviewing its service provision in light of these funding constraints.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant AQW 41408/11-15, whether this taxi rank is available for the use of all taxis and not exclusively for the contracted firm.
(AQW 42371/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: As part of the fee paid by the contracted firm to Translink it has exclusive rights to access the taxi rank at Central Station.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) how much has been spent on road resurfacing work on the (a) Upper Newtownards Road; (b) Sandown Road in the last twelve months; (ii) for his assessment of the work undertaken; and (iii) whether there are any plans to repair any remaining bumps or potholes.
(AQW 42374/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The works currently being carried out on the Upper Newtownards Road are associated with the Belfast Rapid Transit scheme and involve widening the carriageway slightly, associated utility alterations and resurfacing of the footways and carriageway. To date, £476K has been paid to the contractor with overall construction costs anticipated to be £855K.

To date, my Department has spent £292,139.36 on resurfacing of the Sandown Road and a further £15,000 has been spent on the construction of a new Toucan Crossing at the Comber Greenway.

The resurfacing materials specified for the Upper Newtownards Road and Sandown Road are in accordance with national design standards; for example, the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges. This helps to ensure the performance and durability of the carriageway. Officials supervise the resurfacing works using trained and experienced staff to make sure that resurfacing materials are laid and compacted in accordance with good industry practice. During this operation officials undertake a number of on-site tests to ensure the quality of the resurfacing material used. Finally, officials will inspect the completed works during the two year maintenance period to identify any possible defects and arrange for appropriate remedial action, should any be detected.

The Sandown Road and Upper Newtownards Road are inspected on a 4-week cyclical basis and anything which is considered to be hazardous to the public is identified and programmed for repair in accordance with established maintenance standards.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Regional Development what arrangements are in place to ensure that stones and gravel are cleared from the cycle lanes; and how often the cycle lanes on the Sydenham by pass and on the A2 Belfast to Bangor road are swept.
(AQW 42376/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The local Council is responsible for clearing stones and gravel from cycle lanes as part of its street cleansing function. Should my officials note any issues is relation to debris on the cycle lanes, or are made aware of any issues by members of the public, these are immediately notified to the appropriate local Council for action.

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Regional Development what approximate percentage of Translink's annual expenditure is spent on (i) salaries, pensions and other associated costs; and (ii) fuel.
(AQW 42382/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The approximate percentage of Translink's annual expenditure for the relevant items is as follows:

	Percentage of Translink's Annual Expenditure
Salaries, wages, pensions, etc.	65%
Fuel	15%

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Regional Development what input his Department has had on the new P1 for planning application E/2013/0093/F, in relation to the number of traffic movements through local communities and villages considering the volume of water to be used and the volume of waste water produced.
(AQW 42419/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department was initially consulted on planning application E/2013/0093/F in August 2013. Since the original consultation there have been detailed discussions with the applicant's traffic consultants regarding haul routes, auto tracking, improvement to the junction of Ballinlea Road and Kilmahamogue Road, and improvements to the Kilmahamogue Road.

DOE Planning received an Environmental Statement and revised P1 form and my Department was further consulted on 19 February 2015. My officials will now be carrying out an assessment of the revised submission in terms of traffic generation and impact on the public road network.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the approval of a business case and funding allocation for Phase 3 of the replacement and extension of the Rossory Wastewater Pumping Station's existing pumped sewer.
(AQW 42421/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Phases 1, 2 and 3 of the Rossory Wastewater Pumping Station Project concentrate on sewerage system repairs and upgrading, as well as localised containment of odours.

Phase 3 involves replacement and extension of the Rossory Wastewater Pumping Station's existing pumped sewer to improve its hydraulic performance. This will also provide the benefit of diverting odorous sewage flows away from the problematic trunk sewer to a new discharge location. Site investigations and draft designs for two route options are now complete and both options are undergoing detailed consideration.

This project is funded within NI Water's PC15 Business Plan (2015 to 2021) and is part of the Utility Regulator's final determination. NI Water remains fully committed to addressing the odour problems customers are experiencing in the area as soon as practicable through the short, medium and long term measures.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what new road resurfacing schemes in Bangor are planned between now and the end of this financial year.
(AQW 42430/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I would remind the Member that information on completed and proposed roads schemes for the current financial year can be found in my Department's Spring and Autumn Reports to Councils. These reports can be accessed from my Department's internet site at the following web address:

http://www.drdni.gov.uk/index/freedom_of_information/customer_information.htm

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what new road resurfacing schemes in Donaghadee are planned between now and the end of this financial year.
(AQW 42433/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I would refer the Member to the answer provided in response to AQW 42430/11-15.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 41458/11-15, what assurances he can give that no public announcements made on trains or at Central Station advising that onward journeys are available through use of said taxi company as a transport partner, preferred operator or similar.
(AQW 42436/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink has advised that it does not currently make any such public announcements, either on trains or in the Central Station concourse.

Mr McMullan asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 41255/11-15, when the finished report into the project will be published; and whether there will be a consultation carried out.
(AQW 42466/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The final Route Optimisation Project report is currently scheduled to be available in August 2015. As the project does not involve a change to my Department's winter service policy, a consultation is not required.

Mr Frew asked the Minister for Regional Development whether the report on the cause of the flooding in the Toome Road and Queen Street area of Ballymena has been published; and what potential solutions have been found.
(AQW 42534/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My answer under AQO 7446/11-15 advised that, at the request of the Flood Investment Planning Group, NI Water was preparing an investigatory report to look at the root cause of flooding and to develop potential solutions.

This report is now complete and a series of options to reduce the risk of flooding in the Ballymena area are being considered. NI Water will present the report to the Flood Investment and Planning Group at its next meeting in March 2015 to recommend a preferred option. On confirmation of the preferred option the scheme will then be progressed to detailed design stage.

It is estimated that a construction project could be ready to commence in 12 months with a further 12 month period required for construction. This outline timeframe will be subject to obtaining any statutory approvals, land purchase and the availability of funding.

Department for Social Development

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development whether the Housing Executive are allowed to source European funding for stock insulation issues.
(AQW 41336/11-15)

Mr Storey (The Minister for Social Development): The Housing Executive has not previously sought European funding for stock insulation issues. Advice was therefore sought from the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and the Department of Finance and Personnel. I understand that the Northern Ireland European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) Programme for Investment in Growth and Jobs (2014-2020), which has recently been approved by the European Commission, provides no scope for funding stock insulation. In addition, the Northern Ireland ERDF Sustainable Competiveness Programme (2007-2013) is already fully allocated and therefore provides no scope for funding stock insulation.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 38453/11-15, to detail (i) the identity of the nine local providers that were market tested; (ii) how specifically each of these were market tested; (iii) the outcome or feedback of each of the market tests; (iv) the officials in the Northern Ireland Housing Executive that carried out market testing; (v) the most recent costs and companies involved with providing vehicles under a hire or lease agreement; (vi) the status of the arrangement with the two companies; and (vii) whether the contract has since been tendered through the traditional exercise, and if not, to outline the reasons.
(AQW 41581/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised that in relation to:-

(i) The nine providers that were market tested were:

- Fleet Financial
- Lease Options
- Northgate
- Rent a Merc
- Van Hire Belfast
- Corrigans Vehicle Hire
- DFC
- Bridge Commercials
- Comber Commercial Centre

(ii) The Housing Executive's Corporate Procurement Unit telephoned each of the providers listed above. A brief description of the requirement was discussed and the providers were asked if they had the capacity and ability to meet the requirement in the necessary timeframe. At this stage four providers stated that they would not be able to meet the need and declined the opportunity to bid. The remaining five providers expressed an interest and were subsequently sent a brief specification stating the requirements on 9th April 2013. The five providers were Lease Options, Corrigans Vehicle Hire, DFC, Bridge Commercials and Comber Commercial Centre.

(iii) Of the providers who expressed an interest only two bids (Corrigans Commercial and Comber Commercial Centre) were subsequently received and logged.

(iv) The market testing was conducted by the NIHE's Purchasing Manager for Supplies and Services Procurement within the Housing Executive's Corporate Procurement Unit.

(v) The costs of the current agreements are commercially sensitive. The companies currently providing vehicles under hire or lease agreements are Corrigans Commercial and Ogilvie Fleet. Corrigans Commercial was the successful bidder at time of the market test. The vans currently provided by Ogilvie Fleet are as a result of the Housing Executive having to take over the delivery of a contract when a Contractor went into administration. The vehicles were part of an agreement between the previous Contractor and Ogilvie Fleet. The vans were essential in delivering services to tenants in these circumstances.

(vi) The two companies continue to provide vans on contract hire agreements.

(vii) The contract has not been tendered through a traditional exercise. This is because the Housing Executive was in the process of conducting a review of the number of vans required in the future for the delivery of essential services and the potential business structures for delivery of services. The Housing Executive has now confirmed the business need and a tender is currently being developed to test the market using a traditional tendering approach. It is estimated that this will take place in March 2015.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of the support provided by the Social Fund and Community Care Grants system to working parents on a low income, who have a child with a disability.
(AQW 41862/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Social Fund scheme comprises a regulated element which provides entitlement to maternity, funeral, cold weather and winter fuel payments and a discretionary element made up of, Community Care Grants, Budgeting Loans and Crisis Loans. Subject to working parents on a low income satisfying the relevant qualifying conditions, they may be entitled to Cold Weather Payments, Community Care Grants, Budgeting Loans and Crisis Loans to meet the specific needs of a disabled child.

My Department's Annual Report on the Social Fund was published on 17 December 2014 and provides details of the £82 million paid out from the discretionary element of the Social Fund during 2013/14. The report highlights that over:

- 129,000 Budgeting Loans were awarded totalling £53.69 million
- 103,000 Crisis Loans awards totalling £14.45 million were made
- 20,000 Community Care Grants awards totalling £13.69 million were made

Information is not recorded separately on applications specifically related to disabled children, however, these figures are a clear indication that for thousands of people across Northern Ireland who are on low incomes, the Social Fund provides valuable assistance in helping them cope with unforeseen emergencies and managing unanticipated expenditure.

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Social Development to detail all planned scheme works for Mount Vernon, Belfast.
(AQW 41896/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised that two major schemes are planned for Mount Vernon, Belfast in 2015 as follows:-

- Double glazing replacement scheme for approximately 110 dwellings;
- New fire door replacement scheme in Mount Vernon and Ross House.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development why the Warm Homes Scheme contract cannot be extended beyond 31 March 2015; and why it is suggested that rules of procurement are a barrier.
(AQW 41904/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Warm Homes Scheme contract was awarded to Bryson Energy and H&A Mechanical Services in July 2009 for 3 years with an option to extend the contract for 2 further years ending in June 2014. The Warm Homes Scheme contract was further extended by single tender award to 31st March 2015 to allow the new Affordable Warmth Scheme to bed in. There is no need to consider another extension of the Warm Homes Scheme as the new Affordable Warmth Scheme will be fully operational from 1st April 2015. If the Department had decided to continue with the Warm Homes Scheme beyond 31st March 2015 in favour of the Affordable Warmth Scheme then procurement of a new contract would have been necessary.

Mr Spratt asked the Minister for Social Development how much has been spent on repairs to damp in multi-storey flats in the last five years, broken down by constituency.
(AQW 42039/11-15)

Mr Storey: The table attached, provided by the Housing Executive, details the amount they have spent on repairs to damp in multi storey flats in the last five years (1 January 2010 to 31 December 2014) broken down by constituency.

Constituency	Total Spent
Belfast East	£2,461.99
Belfast North	£11,120.06
Belfast South	£22.50
Belfast West	£240.15
East Antrim	£359.13
Lisburn	£12,873.00
Strangford	£1,823.54
Total	**£28,900.37**

The Information provided in this response is governed by the Principles and Protocols of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. This is enforced by UK Statistics Authority.

Mr Spratt asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on management surveys carried out on multi-storey flats to assess the properties for asbestos.
(AQW 42040/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised that their policy regarding asbestos is to have a survey carried out for all their properties and any other properties for which they have a maintenance responsibility. This includes tenanted, leasehold and communal shared spaces of multi storey flats. All 32 of their multi storey blocks have had a management survey completed for the communal shared spaces and surveys have also been carried out in a large number of individual flats. This will continue until all the flats have been surveyed. The Housing Executive has further advised that they maintain an asbestos register and manage asbestos and any works to be carried out in compliance with their obligations under legislation.

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of households in fuel poverty in North Down.
(AQW 42070/11-15)

Mr Storey: This estimation is provided using the Fuel Poverty figures for Councils using the 2011 NI House Condition Survey.

It is estimated that in North Down in 2011, between 38% and 42% of households were in Fuel Poverty, this equates to between approximately 12,400 and 13,700 households.

The Information provided in this response is governed by the Principles and Protocols of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. This is enforced by UK Statistics Authority.

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 39423/11-15, whether landlords in receipt of housing benefit for tenants must be registered under the Landlord Registration Scheme; and if not, whether registered payments have been stopped or if there a final date for registration from the date of the introduction of the scheme or a timescale from the purchase of tne property to let to complete the registration.
(AQW 42077/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised that receipt of Housing Benefit is not conditional on registration under the Landlord Registration Scheme.

Landlords are required to register either immediately prior to the letting of a new tenancy or by 25 February 2015 where there is an existing tenancy. Therefore by 25 February all private landlords should be registered and have provided information about the properties they let.

The Department's advertising campaign is encouraging all tenants to check that their landlord is registered and to report unregistered landlords to their local Council.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Social Development what short term support grants are available for small voluntary charitable community groups to help cover the cost of providing transport for clients to and from day centres.
(AQW 42079/11-15)

Mr Storey: There is no specific funding to bring people to and from day centres.

DSD's Volunteering Small Grants Programme provides support direct to frontline volunteering organisations. The programme provides support to volunteer providing organisations to cover volunteer out-of-pocket expenses travel or equipment costs. In excess of £1.4m of funding has been allocated over the last two years supporting over 1300 organisations. The next phase of this programme is planned to launch in April / May 2015.

The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) has confirmed that they work with the Department for Regional Development (DRD) to provide support for the Elderly and Disabled. Individuals receive concessionary travel on Rural Community Transport Partnership vehicles and DARD currently provides support to community and voluntary groups in rural areas.

In addition, the Health and Social Care Board has confirmed that they do not operate a grants scheme. However, some Health and Social Care Trusts may have service level agreements with local voluntary and community groups. These agreements may have statutory transport provided or have a transport element reflected in the contract or are designed for people who make their way independently to the Day Centre.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Social Development what provision exists for small voluntary charitable community groups to enable them to bring people with psychological, physical and learning disabilities to and from day centres.
(AQW 42080/11-15)

Mr Storey: There is no specific funding to bring people with psychological, physical and learning disabilities to and from day centres.

DSD's Volunteering Small Grants Programme delivers support direct to frontline volunteering organisations. The programme provides support to volunteer providing organisations to cover volunteer out-of-pocket expenses travel or equipment costs and over £1.4m has been allocated over the last two years supporting over 1300 organisations. The next phase of this programme is planned to launch in April / May 2015.

In addition the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) has confirmed that they work with the Department for Regional Development (DRD) to provide support for the Elderly and Disabled. Individuals receive concessionary travel on Rural Community Transport Partnership vehicles and DARD currently provides support to community and voluntary groups in rural areas.

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Social Development, following the success of the renovation of a number of derelict dwellings in Ballysally, Coleraine, what progress is being made in the renovation of the remaining derelict dwellings in the estate.
(AQW 42129/11-15)

Mr Storey: Choice Housing Ireland has advised me that the Contract Notice for

Phase 2 for the final 15 houses has been published in the European Journal (OJEU) for contractor applications. This closes next week and Choice Housing Ireland plan to issue the tender documentation to short listed contractors in the first week in March.

The Contract is expected to be awarded by the end of March 2015 with an anticipated completion date of October 2015.

Mr Clarke asked the Minister for Social Development when an adjustment is made to household income via tax credit, how the Housing Benefit Section within his Department is updated.
(AQW 42174/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised that changes to Tax Credit awards made by HM Revenue and Customs are notified to the Housing Executive's Housing Benefit department via an automated electronic system known as ATLAS.

Files of information are received by the Housing Executive on a daily basis and over the course of a year approximately two million transactions are notified via ATLAS. Approximately 85% of the notifications are processed automatically and Housing Benefit awards adjusted accordingly by the Housing Benefit system with the remaining notifications being reviewed and updated manually by Housing Benefit staff in each of our Housing Benefit Service Centres. Whether a notification can be processed automatically or requires manual intervention depends on the type of change being notified.

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of houses that have benefited from Housing Support Services through the Supporting People Programme in North Down since 2012.
(AQW 42176/11-15)

Mr Storey: Details of Supporting People schemes active in North Down, as at April 2012 and at present, are summarised below. These schemes have offered accommodation-based support and floating support (to clients in their own homes).

The information is based on schemes within the North Down and Ards Borough Councils - the two council areas which relate to the North Down parliamentary constituency.

The total capacity of these schemes has grown over the period as summarised in the table below:

	Capacity as at April 2012	Capacity at February 2015
Accommodation-based service	1,273	1,342
Floating Support	166	219
Total	**1,439**	**1,561**

I hope this information is useful.

The Information provided in this response is governed by the Principles and Protocols of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. This is enforced by UK Statistics Authority.

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development how many Housing Executive properties are vacant in (i) North Down Borough Council; (ii) Donaghadee and Millisle; and (iii) Northern Ireland.
(AQW 42177/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised that at 31 January 2015 in relation to:-

(i) There were 39 properties vacant in the North Down Borough Council area;

(ii) There were five properties vacant in Donaghadee and Millisle; and

(iii) There were 1,195 properties vacant across Northern Ireland.

The number of vacant properties listed includes those awaiting imminent relet, difficult to let, undergoing major repairs/ decanting, pending sale, pending demolition etc.

Mr Devenney asked the Minister for Social Development what his Department is doing to ensure that advice services such as the Citizens Advice Bureau are sustained with the possibility of an increase in demand following Welfare Reform.
(AQW 42197/11-15)

Mr Storey: My Department provides funding of £2.9 m each year for advice services to organisations such as Citizens Advice Bureau and other independent advice providers. This includes provision of frontline advice services in over 45 locations across Northern Ireland which are free to the user.

Social Security Agency officials have met with representatives from the Northern Ireland Advice Services Consortium (NIASC) to discuss implementation of the Welfare Reform Bill. Officials and NIASC will continue to work together to explore the way forward.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on a strategy for the delivery of generalist advice services.
(AQW 42199/11-15)

Mr Storey: Work on developing the new strategy 'Advising, Supporting, Empowering – A strategy for the delivery of generalist advice services in Northern Ireland 2015 – 2020' is at an advanced stage. Consultation with members of the public and other stakeholders has now been completed and it is anticipated that the new strategy will be launched in early summer 2015.

Mr McCallister asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of the claim that Supporting People saves the public purse in excess of £125m per annum; and what discussions he has had at Executive level on the retention of the Programme.
(AQW 42229/11-15)

Mr Storey: The study "The Financial Benefits of the Supporting People Programme in Northern Ireland" commissioned by the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA) used a methodology which offers estimates based on a range of assumptions. While the approach does not offer the necessary rigour required to provide a firm basis for making public spending decisions, it does helpfully point to the importance of the Supporting People Programme and the role it plays in transforming people's lives for the better.

At present the Department is carrying out a Review of the Supporting People policy which will be completed by the summer. This review will help to

determine the future shape of the Supporting People Programme. To date I have not discussed the Programme at the Executive.

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Social Development what is the total cost to Northern Ireland of not levying the bedroom tax as happens in England and Wales.
(AQW 42256/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Welfare Reform Bill has now completed both Consideration Stage and further Consideration Stage and the Assembly has approved the provisions which provide the power to restrict the maximum amount of housing benefit payable in specific circumstances. The Executive has also agreed a scheme that should be developed which will protect both existing and new tenants from the impact of this specific provision. They have also agreed to create a separate fund for this purpose and my officials are currently finalising the detail of how such a scheme could operate.

This will be subject to a public consultation and regulations brought forward to put the scheme into operation. Whilst the initial estimated costs put the costs of this type of scheme in the region of £17 million for existing tenants, my officials will not be able to finalise the costs until the impact of new tenants and increased rents have been included in the estimates.

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Social Development whether there are any changes planned to the protected tenancies scheme before May 2016.
(AQW 42261/11-15)

Mr Storey: There are currently 1,065 protected tenancies on the rent register. These are tenancies which are controlled by the Rent Officer for Northern Ireland. The majority of tenants in protected tenancies are elderly people who have been resident in these properties for decades.

As a result of the measures introduced under the 2006 Private Tenancies Order protected and statutory tenancies are gradually being phased out. Rather than immediately abolishing protected tenancies the gradual phasing out has the advantage of eventually removing these tenancies, that some landlords may feel are restrictive, whilst still allowing the tenant their day in the property. This approach protects existing vulnerable tenants whilst at the same time reforms a process that is viewed, by some, as antiquated and outdated.

On a separate note, Rent Control is one of a number of issues that are under consideration in the review of the role and regulation of the private rented sector which I announced in November 2014. Any proposals as a result of this review will be issued for public consultation in autumn 2015.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Social Development how many sanctions, which have resulted in financial penalties, have been applied to people claiming benefits, in each of the last five years.
(AQW 42271/11-15)

Mr Storey: The information is not available in the format requested.

Information on the number of sanctions applied where claimants fail to comply with the prescribed conditions for receiving a particular benefit is only available from May 2011. The details are set out in Table 1 below.

Details of the number of Administrative Penalty and Loss of Benefit sanctions that have been applied in respect of benefit fraud offences are set out in Tables 2 and 3 below. Information on loss of benefit sanctions was only captured from September 2012.

Table 1: Benefit Conditionality Sanctions applied

Period	May 11 – Mar 12	Apr 12 – Mar 13	Apr 13 – Mar 14	Apr 14 – Jan 15
Totals	6,831	11,546	8,216	4,749

Table 2: Administrative Penalty Sanctions applied

Period	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014- 13/02/15
Totals	582	506	491	679	368

Table 3: Loss of Benefit Sanctions applied

Period	Sept 12 – Mar 13	Apr 13 – Mar 14	Apr 14 –Jan 15
Totals	26	167	139

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 40785/11-15, whether the eligibility criteria for receiving measures to increase energy efficiency under the Warm Homes Scheme has changed since 2012/13.
(AQW 42332/11-15)

Mr Storey: The eligibility criteria for the Warm Homes Scheme have not changed since 2012/2013.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 41066/11-15, what recent engagement he has had with members of the Joint Government/Voluntary and Community Sector Forum; and to detail the number of times the Joint Forum has met in the last twelve months.
(AQW 42334/11-15)

Mr Storey: In October 2014 I met with Anne O'Reilly and Marie Cavanagh, who are the Voluntary and Community Sector Co-Chairs on the Joint Forum.

I also attended the most recent Joint Forum on 18 February 2015 and on both these occasions emphasised the importance of closer working relationships and partnership working between Government and the Voluntary and Community Sector.

The Joint Forum has met on three occasions in the last twelve months.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the housing association new build for the Kilclief Gardens area of Kilcooley, Bangor.
(AQW 42336/11-15)

Mr Storey: Ark housing continues to progress plans to deliver 16 general needs social homes on Housing Executive owned land at Kilclief Gardens, Bangor. Ark's application for Project Approval to the Housing Executive's Development Programme Group which was submitted on 13th February 2015 is currently being assessed.

Ark's Planning application (submitted June 2014) has been "streamlined" and we therefore expect Planning Approval to be achieved before the end of March 2015.

The Housing Executive is also working closely with Ark to finalise the land transfer and we anticipate that this scheme will start on site before the end of March 2015. Completion is currently estimated for June 2016.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how many houses have yet to be allocated in Clanmil Housing Association's new development in Bloomfield Estate, Bangor.
(AQW 42338/11-15)

Mr Storey: Clanmil Housing Association has confirmed that all of their properties in their development in Bloomfield estate, Bangor have been allocated.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the progress of the pensioners' bungalows at Ballyree Drive in Bloomfield Estate, Bangor.
(AQW 42339/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive transferred the ownership of 72 bungalows at Ballyree Drive in the Bloomfield Estate in Bangor to OakleeTrinity in June 2014. Although ownership has transferred, the Housing Executive is committed to holding regular meetings with OakleeTrinity to monitor the progress of the improvement scheme.

OakleeTrinity have provided the following update on the progress of the scheme:

- Contract Start date: Monday 30th June 2014
- Duration: 83 Weeks
- Expected Completion Date Monday 01 February 2016

The Programme is approximately 12 weeks behind schedule due to some delays in Phase 1 and difficulties with utility connections. The project is approximately 20% complete with work progressing at 24 (33%) of the properties.

Phase 1 of the works (12 properties) is nearing completion and these are expected to be handed over in early March 2015. Phase 2 (12 properties) is progressing well with an expected handover date in early April 2015.

Tenants have been decanted to vacant units in Bloomfield and Rathgill for the duration of the works to their homes. Ten properties in Phase 1 will be void on completion and it is proposed to offer the decanted tenants in Phase 3 a permanent move.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development whether any housing associations have plans for new build housing in the Rathgill area of Bangor.
(AQW 42340/11-15)

Mr Storey: Fold Housing is currently progressing plans to deliver 102 new general needs social homes on Housing Executive owned land in the Rathgill area of Bangor.

Fold's application for Project Approval to the Housing Executive's Development Programme Group which was submitted on 13 February 2015, is currently being assessed.

Fold's Planning Application (submitted October 2014) was endorsed at Council on 10 February 2015 and we expect Planning Approval to be achieved before the end of March 2015.

The transfer of the land from the Housing Executive to Fold is expected to complete in time to allow the scheme to start on site before the end of March 2015. Completion is currently estimated for July 2017.

Phase two of the development, currently programmed for 2016/17, is for 50 units and this will also be delivered by Fold on Housing Executive owned land.

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) what procurement process the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland is required to follow in respect of the appointment of an interim manager; and (ii) under what circumstances the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland is required to seek Ministerial approval.
(AQW 42364/11-15)

Mr Storey:

(i) The Charity Commission for Northern Ireland complies with Central Procurement Directorate (CPD) policies and procedures.

(ii) The Charity Commission for Northern Ireland is not required to seek Ministerial approval regarding the appointment of an Interim Manager.

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) what procurement process was followed in respect of the appointment of an interim manager for the Disabled Police Officers Association of Northern Ireland; (ii) the engagement of the same firm to carry out a forensic audit of the Association and the engagement of an IT security firm to extract information from the Association's computer and mobile telephones; (iii) why tendering was not considered appropriate; and (iv) what consideration was given to whether a conflict of interest might have been created.
(AQW 42365/11-15)

Mr Storey: The question concerns a matter, which is the subject of an ongoing investigation by the Charity Commission in respect of an organisation of which Mr Hussey is a member, therefore it would be inappropriate to make any comment at this time.

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Social Development who in the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland is responsible for any failure to follow correct procurement procedures.
(AQW 42366/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Chief Executive of the Charity Commission, as Accounting Officer, is responsible for the administration and control of the Charity Commission.

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 40865/11-15, whether he will review his response more specifically by (i) referring to the interim manager rather than the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland; (ii) by referring to any power to share information with persons other than public bodies; and (iii) whether any such order was actually made by the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland.
(AQW 42398/11-15)

Mr Storey: I refer the Member to my answers to AQW 40865/11-15 and AQW 41570/11-15.

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Social Development whether the proposed hardship top up fund will fully compensate any individuals who may lose all their benefits as a result of Welfare Reform.
(AQW 42424/11-15)

Mr Storey: My Department is continuing to develop the eligibility criteria and level of payments that can be made from the allocated funds. This includes working through a number of different payment scenarios to identify the maximum level of support that can be provided to all affected claimants.

At this time it is not possible to confirm if claimants will receive a payment equivalent to the total loss in benefits that may be experienced as a result of Welfare Reform.

I can provide an assurance that, following agreement with Executive colleagues, the detailed proposals for providing additional financial support to those claimants adversely impacted by the Welfare Reforms, will be issued for public consultation.

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Social Development, following recent media coverage regarding the possible adverse consequences of retro fit cavity wall insulation, for his assessment of the impact this will have on homes in Northern Ireland.
(AQW 42462/11-15)

Mr Storey: Savills have been commissioned to undertake an extensive stock condition survey comprising of approximately one in four homes managed and maintained by the Housing Executive. This survey exercise will record the current condition of the Housing Executive's portfolio as well as considering issues such as thermal performance; it will not however involve intrusive investigations into cavity walls.

Through the asset commission, the Housing Executive has asked Savills for some general views in relation to the issues and challenges associated with cavity wall insulation. Savills has advised the Housing Executive that throughout the UK, social landlords almost without exception manage issues arising from cavity wall insulation on a responsive basis and this is the approach currently adopted by the Housing Executive.

Mr Frew asked the Minister for Social Development to detail all works planned by the Housing Executive in Ballykeel, Ballymena in the next three years.
(AQW 42476/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised that there are two External Cyclical Maintenance schemes planned for Ballykeel, Ballymena in the next three years.

These are:-

- A scheme involving 326 properties and 83 garages (Ballykeel and rural) is currently programmed to commence in May 2016; and
- A scheme involving 299 properties in Ballykeel is currently programmed to commence in November 2016.

Any properties that meet the criteria for a heating or kitchen upgrade will be identified by the Housing Executive's local office for inclusion in future schemes.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the rationale used to reduce the funding provided to the Areas at Risk programme for Beechfield Estate, Donaghadee.
(AQW 42490/11-15)

Mr Storey: Beechfield Estate, Donaghadee was allocated funding of £67,766.00 from the Areas at Risk programme for the 2 year period 1 April 2011 - 31 March 2013 (subsequently extended to 31 March 2014 at the request of the local community group). The allocation was increased to £85,207.84 following the decision to extend the Areas at Risk programme to 31 March 2015.

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the criteria for the distribution of funds from the hardship top up fund.
(AQW 42504/11-15)

Mr Storey: My Department is continuing to develop the eligibility criteria and level of payments that can be made from the allocated funds. As the criteria are not yet confirmed it is not possible to provide any further details at this time.

I can provide an assurance that, following agreement with Executive colleagues, the details of any scheme will be issued for public consultation. My department will also be communicating with claimants and the general public in Northern Ireland on the details of the changes to the benefit system brought about by the Welfare Reform Bill.

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Social Development who will be responsible for the distribution of the hardship top up fund.
(AQW 42542/11-15)

Mr Storey: The arrangements necessary for the effective administration of the additional support identified as part of the Stormont House Agreement, will be dependent on the Executive agreement to the proposals which my department is currently developing. The current working assumption is that the Department for Social Development will have responsibility for the future administration of the additional support.

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 41744/11-15, what assessment he has made of the impact on charities of the different approaches to the regulation of charities adopted in England and Wales and in Northern Ireland; and whether this approach to investigation adopted by the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland represents value for money.
(AQW 42545/11-15)

Mr Storey: I have made no assessment of the impact on charities of the different approaches to the regulation of charities adopted in England and Wales and in Northern Ireland.

The Charity Commission for Northern Ireland has a statutory function to identify and investigate apparent misconduct or mismanagement in the administration of charities and take remedial or protective action.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development whether funding for Small Pockets of Deprivation for Rathgill Community Association, Bangor will continue in 2015/16.
(AQW 42608/11-15)

Mr Storey: All government departments including DSD have had to take difficult decisions on how to allocate reduced resources. It is too early for me to say which projects will be supported during 2015/16 however my Department will allocate resources in line with its priorities and in doing so will seek to take account of the priorities of the new Councils.

Mr Ross asked the Minister for Social Development what sanctions are available for breaches of (i) liquor; and (ii) restaurant licences.
(AQW 42646/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Licensing (Northern Ireland) Order 1996 (the Order) is the legislation regulating the retail sale of alcohol in Northern Ireland.

There are 11 categories of premises which may be authorised by licence to sell alcohol. A restaurant is one of these categories.

Sanctions include fines, penalty points, imprisonment, and suspension of liquor licence.

Schedule 10A of the Order contains a table of offences which attract penalty points and also provides the general nature of the offences and level of fine. A copy of Schedule 10A is attached.

Annex A

Schedule 1: N.I. Schedule to be Inserted in Licensing Order as Schedule 10A

This schedulenoteType = Explanatory Notes has no associated

"SCHEDULE 10A N.I.TABLE OF OFFENCES WITH PENALTY POINTS

PART 1 N.I.OFFENCES PUNISHABLE WITH LEVEL 3 FINE ON THE STANDARD SCALE (UP TO £1000)

Article of Order	General nature of offence	Penalty points
30(8)	Selling of intoxicating liquor etc. otherwise than in accordance with an occasional licence	3-4
30(9)	Failure to admit constable where there is an occasional licence	3-4
47(7)	Selling of intoxicating liquor etc. otherwise than during hours or in premises specified in an extension licence	3-4
50(2)	Selling etc. of intoxicating liquor for consumption off the premises on Christmas Day or Easter Day	3-4
51(5)	Failure to comply with conditions as to sale etc. in guest houses and restaurants	3-4
52(2)	Failure to comply with conditions as to sale etc. in places of public entertainment	3-4
52A(2)	Failure to comply with conditions as to sale etc. in indoor arenas	3-4
54(2)	Failure to comply with conditions as to sale etc. in seamen's canteens	3-4
56(2)	Permitting consumption of intoxicating liquor in unlicensed part of premises	3-4
57(1) or (2)	Breaching terms of off-licence	3-4
60B(4)	Failure to display notice relating to age	3-4
65(1)	Allowing prostitutes to assemble on licensed premises	3-4
69A(4)	Keeping premises open after closure made under Article 69A	3-4
80(5)	Failure to comply with licence for non-seagoing vessels	3-4

PART 2 N.I.OFFENCES PUNISHABLE WITH LEVEL 4 FINE ON THE STANDARD SCALE (UP TO £2500)

Article of Order	General nature of offence	Penalty points
5(6)	Failure to comply with licence in respect of certain premises	4-5
58(10)	Allowing person under 18 to be in licensed premises in contravention of Article 58(2) or (8)	4-5
61(1)	Permitting drunkenness, or selling intoxicating liquor to a drunken person	4-5
71(2)	Failure to admit constable etc.	4-5

PART 3 N.I.OFFENCES PUNISHABLE WITH LEVEL 5 FINE ON THE STANDARD SCALE (UP TO £5000)

Article of Order	General nature of offence	Penalty points
3(2)	Selling etc. intoxicating liquor in premises not authorised by a licence	5-6
8(4)	Failure to comply on grant of licence with court order to make alterations etc.	5-6
31(6)	Failure to comply with court order to restore premises as far as possible to original condition	5-6
41(2)	Selling intoxicating liquor etc., otherwise than during permitted hours	5-6
55(2)	Selling liquor etc. other than of certain kind	5-6

Article of Order	General nature of offence	Penalty points
57A(5)	Contravention of regulations as to irresponsible drinks promotions	5-6
57B(2)	Contravention of regulations as to pricing of intoxicating liquor	5-6
60(6)	Selling of intoxicating liquor etc. to person under 18 in contravention of Article 60(1)	5-6
67(3)	Supplying etc. intoxicating liquor at any entertainment	5-6
68(3)	Supplying etc. intoxicating liquor in premises used by a club	5-6
69B(6)	Permitting premises to be open in contravention of closure order under Article 69B	5-6
69F(5)	Permitting premises to be open etc. in contravention of court's decision about closure order	5-6"

Mr Rogers asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the number of landlords registered under the Landlord Registration Scheme, broken down by council.
(AQW 42647/11-15)

Mr Storey: The table below details the number of landlords registered since the launch of the Landlord Registration Scheme in February 2014, broken down by council area of the permanent address provided.

Council	Number of Landlords (at 25 February 2015)
Antrim Borough Council	930
Ards Borough Council	1,611
Armagh City Council	863
Ballymena Borough Council	1,180
Ballymoney Borough Council	524
Banbridge District Council	880
Belfast City Council	3,797
Carrickfergus Borough Council	666
Castlereagh Borough Council	1,228
Coleraine Borough Council	1,013
Cookstown District Council	634
Craigavon District Council	1,360
Derry City Council	1,130
Down District Council	1,367
Dungannon & South Tyrone Borough Council	886
Fermanagh District Council	755
Larne Borough Council	655
Limavady Borough Council	437
Lisburn City Council	2,221
Magherafelt District Council	734
Moyle District Council	330
Newry & Mourne District Council	1,305
Newtownabbey Borough Council	1,336
North Down Borough Council	1,729
Omagh District Council	800
Strabane District Council	500

Council	Number of Landlords (at 25 February 2015)
Great Britain	986
International	458
Total	**30,315**

The information provided in this response is governed by the Principles and Protocols of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. This is enforced by the UK Statistics Authority.

Mr Frew asked the Minister for Social Development how he plans to ensure that the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and housing associations meet their obligations to address complaints of anti-social behaviour.
(AQO 7640/11-15)

Mr Storey: I am concerned about the serious problems that can be caused by anti-social behaviour. Community safety is a quality of life issue which impacts on all of society, individually and collectively and, whilst there are no easy solutions, I want to ensure that the Housing Executive and Housing Associations use all the powers available to them deal with this issue.

I would point out that Housing legislation in Northern Ireland provides all social housing landlords, including registered Housing Associations, with a common set of statutory tools for tackling Anti-Social Behaviour affecting or caused by their tenants or others residing with or visiting their tenants.

However, it should be recognised that Anti-Social Behaviour is not an issue which can be dealt with by one statutory agency working in isolation. It requires the intervention of all the relevant government bodies working closely with the community to deliver real results.

With regard to the Housing Executive, a Community Safety Strategy has been in place since 2008 and a public consultation in 2014 led to the development of “Safer Together”, the Housing Executive’s Community Safety Strategy 2015-17. This will be subject to bi-annual review at the Housing Executive’s Board level.

Non- statutory interventions include warning letters and mediation and the Housing Executive estimates that 70% of reported Anti-Social Behaviour cases cease following initial interview and the issue of a warning letter. Use is also made of an Acceptable Behaviour Contract – this is a voluntary written agreement between the Housing Executive and a person who has been involved in Anti-Social Behaviour.

The Housing Executive also tackles community safety issues through formal partnership working with Community Based Restorative Justice groups and involvement with Policing and Community Safety Partnerships.

Statutory Interventions include eviction, though this is viewed as a last resort. A range of interventions will be used in an attempt to keep the individual within their home, whilst at the same time addressing the offending behaviour. However, if these interventions do not work there are legal powers available to ensure victims of Anti-Social Behaviour are protected and the unacceptable behaviour is stopped. These range from injunctions to stop the nuisance or repossession of the property.

Turning to Housing Associations, my Department’s Housing Association Guide sets out the standards expected of all registered Housing Associations. The Guide places a requirement on all registered Housing Associations to have published policy and procedures for dealing with anti-social behaviour and provides a model statement of policy and procedures by way of guidance.

Within the Department’s inspection process, the Inspection Team reviews the anti-social behaviour policies and practices in place within registered Housing Associations to ensure that they comply with the Department’s guidance and that they are being applied effectively and consistently.

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister for Social Development why the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland considers it necessary to institute statutory inquiries at an early stage of its investigations.
(AQW 42747/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Charity Commission for Northern Ireland will institute a statutory inquiry under section 22 of the Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008 where there appear to be issues of substantial or serious risk to the assets or beneficiaries of a charity. Before the opening of a statutory inquiry is approved, at least three Charity Commissioners will consider the investigation to date, the nature of the areas of concern and the risk to the charity and the charity’s property. Where the charity trustees refuse to cooperate with the Commission in its investigations, the risk level increases and this is a factor in any decision to open a statutory inquiry.

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on social housing development in Ballymena.
(AQO 7633/11-15)

Mr Storey: I thank the Member for his question.

I am aware that there is significant social housing need in the Ballymena area. The current projected housing need for 2014 to 2019 for the Ballymena District Council area is 566 units.

Work is ongoing to address this and I can advise you that to date, as part of the 2012/2013 to 2014/15 Social Housing Development Programme, 95 social housing units have been completed.

The Housing Executive is working with Housing Associations to ensure that the remaining 83 units programmed for delivery in 2014/15, will start on site before the end of this financial year. A further 377 units are planned between now and 2018, subject to budget.

Unfortunately, as is regularly the case, some schemes have slipped from the programme but it is expected that these will start on site as part of the 2015/16 programme.

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister for Social Development whether he will make up the current shortfall in the Neighbourhood Renewal budget for 2015/16.
(AQO 7634/11-15)

Mr Storey: Neighbourhood Renewal provides services to people living in our most deprived communities. In this difficult financial climate I am seeking to protect those projects which demonstrate most effectively that they are meeting the objectives of the programme. The process of assessing applications on the basis of evidence of need and impact of each project is currently ongoing.

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Social Development how any budgetary settlement will affect Town Centre Regeneration projects.
(AQO 7636/11-15)

Mr Storey: All government departments including DSD have had to take difficult decisions on how to allocate reduced resources. It is too early for me to say which projects will be supporting during 2015/16 however my Department will allocate resources in line with its priorities and will seek to take account of Council priorities.

Allocations for budgets to be transferred on 1 April 2016 have yet to be determined. These will be revisited during 2015 and the final decision on the budget allocations will be taken in the context of the Executive's budgetary processes at that time.

Mr Rogers asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of people on the current waiting lists of services in each Women's Aid refuge shelter.
(AQO 7641/11-15)

Mr Storey: Women's Aid refuges do not operate waiting lists given the crisis nature of their service. In the event that someone presents to a Women's Aid refuge where no accommodation is available each refuge will make efforts to find alternative accommodation solutions for the individual including making a referral to the local Housing Executive office to discuss temporary accommodation options.

Mr Ramsey asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the proposed pay increase for Northern Ireland Housing Executive staff.
(AQO 7643/11-15)

Mr Storey: I can confirm that the proposed pay settlement for Housing Executive staff has now been approved by the Finance Minister.

Housing Executive officials have been advised accordingly and work is ongoing to ensure that NIHE staff receive their payments as soon as possible.

Mr Clarke asked the Minister for Social Development how many properties in South Antrim are not fit for allocation as a result of repairs not being carried out.
(AQO 7644/11-15)

Mr Storey: I assume the Member is referring to social housing in South Antrim. The Housing Executive has advised that they have a total of 41 void properties in South Antrim:-

- 29 properties are void due to extensive repairs; and
- 12 properties are void due to operational schemes and projects.

Housing Associations have reported no void properties in South Antrim.

Ms McCorley asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the timeframe for the roll out of his Department's Tower Block Strategy.
(AQO 7645/11-15)

Mr Storey: The new Tower Block Strategy is currently being developed and will set out how the Housing Executive intends to invest in all of the blocks in the years ahead and will be an integral part of a new Asset Management Strategy that will emerge primarily from the work that is currently being undertaken by Savills (UK) Limited as part of the Department for Social Development/Housing Executive's Asset Management Commission.

Savills is currently carrying out a stock condition survey of the Housing Executive's properties and this includes an inspection of the structure, mechanical and electrical installations, internal elements of all the tower blocks and an assessment of their short, medium and long term investment requirements. Technical survey reports for the Housing Executive's tower blocks are due by March 2015 and a draft multi-storey (tower blocks) asset management strategy is then due around May 2015.

However, whilst this work is ongoing, I tasked the Housing Executive to prepare an interim investment priorities plan based on their current understanding of the stock. This Priorities Plan is built around a number of themes, including bringing forward work to be carried out to a number of tower blocks. The purpose of the interim approach is to effectively bridge the gap that exists between now and the development and delivery of the comprehensive strategy for maintaining all of the Housing Executive's housing assets leading, in turn, to a clear long term funding strategy.

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister for Social Development what steps have been taken by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive to identify land available for new social housing in Upper Bann.
(AQO 7646/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive who manage the Social Housing Development Programme, carry out annual housing needs assessment of all districts councils in order to examine the supply and demand of new social housing. This assessment is then used to determine the Housing Executive's unmet housing needs prospectus, which identifies locations where there is general unmet housing need beyond the schemes included in the Social Housing Development Programme and where it has not been possible to secure new build sites.

Based on statistics covering the March 2010 - 2014 period, the projected housing need for the Upper Bann Constituency up to 2019 was 228 new social housing units. However, following recent social housing development and proposed development the new forecasted housing need for the area has been reduced to 116 units.

North Lurgan has the highest unmet housing need for 120 units. In order to address the housing need, the Housing Executive instigated a Site Identification Study to assist Housing Associations source suitable development sites for social housing. A North Lurgan study boundary was agreed and resulted in the identification of a possible 28 sites in private ownership, which may be suitable for social housing development.

Over the last year Housing Associations have submitted a number of scheme proposals for sites within the North Lurgan area some of which have been programmed which will further reduce the unmet housing need figure for the area to 48 units.

In addition the Housing Executive also maintains a Landbank Register of Undeveloped Land and Existing Open Spaces. Through this register a site at Gilpinstown Road in North Lurgan has been identified. A feasibility study is currently being carried out to establish the development potential at a site. If acceptable, the site has the potential to provide up to 30 units.

The Housing Executive has also been working with the Planning Service in developing the Banbridge/Newry and Mourne Area Plan 2015 which has also resulted in a number of sites throughout both districts having a Key Site Requirement for social housing placed on them. For instance, in Banbridge town, zonings were placed on sites at Dromore Road, Castlewellan Road and Edenvale totalling 41 social housing units. Clanmil Housing Association is currently investigating the Dromore Street site.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of the current Volunteer Strategy for Northern Ireland; and whether it is on schedule to meet all of its objectives by 2016.
(AQW 42768/11-15)

Mr Storey: Launched in March 2012 the 5 year volunteering strategy aims to provide the conditions which enables volunteering to flourish and ensure its impact on life in Northern Ireland is maximised.

In order to determine if the strategy is on schedule to deliver on its objectives my department has commissioned independent consultants to carry out an interim evaluation. This will provide an assessment of the strategy and whether it is on schedule to meet all of its objectives by 2016. This evaluation is planned to be completed by April 2015.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister for Social Development, if the Charity Commission is found to have placed information into the public domain contained within a final report into a charity, whether the Charity Commissioner or the Commission's Chief Executive would be held responsible.
(AQW 42786/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Charity Commission for Northern Ireland, a body corporate established under section 6 of the Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008, is responsible for the content of an inquiry report published by it under section 22(6) of that Act.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister for Social Development why the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland, in the interests of ensuring accuracy, do not submit a draft final report to a charity which it has investigated prior to releasing the final report into the public domain.
(AQW 42787/11-15)

Mr Storey: It is the policy of the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland that a charity which has been subject to a statutory inquiry will always be afforded the opportunity to see and comment on the facts contained in a statutory report before publication.

Northern Ireland Assembly Commission

Mr Allister asked the Assembly Commission what involvement it had, and with what return, in respect of the grant of the use of Stormont grounds and facilities for the Ice Cross Downhill World Championship.
(AQW 42426/11-15)

Mr Ramsey (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): In response to the question, please find the following;

On the 17 September 2014, a request from Red Bull Ireland was received by the Minister of Finance and Personnel seeking permission to use the Stormont Estate to host the “Red Bull Crashed Ice” event in February 2015. The Minister approved the use of Stormont Estate in order to host this major event.

Subsequently, the Assembly Commission received a request for the use of Parliament Buildings upper plateau, front steps and lawns. The Assembly Commission granted permission for use as requested. No costs have been incurred by the Assembly Commission in staging the event.

Mr Nesbitt asked the Assembly Commission what was the cost to the Assembly of staging the Red Bull Crashed Ice event.
(AQW 42594/11-15)

Mr Ramsey (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): In response to the question, please find the following;

On the 17 September 2014, a request from Red Bull Ireland was received by the Minister of Finance and Personnel seeking permission to use Stormont Estate to host the “Red Bull Crashed Ice” event in February 2015.

Subsequently, the Minister approved the use of Stormont Estate. The Assembly Commission also granted the use of Parliament Buildings upper plateau, front steps and lawns in order to host this major event.

To date, the Assembly Commission has not incurred any cost in staging the Red Bull Crashed Ice event.

Mr Allister asked the Assembly Commission where the silver maces from the Northern Ireland Commons and Senate are now located.
(AQW 42813/11-15)

Mr Ramsey (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): The maces have been on the walls of the Speaker’s office since 2008. The current Speaker has expressed his preference that the maces continue to be displayed in his office.

Friday 6 March 2015

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the level of cuts proposed to the budget of the North South Ministerial Council by their Department's budgetary proposals.
(AQW 39917/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness (The First Minister and deputy First Minister): The North South Ministerial Council (NSMC) does not have a dedicated budget. However, the work of the NSMC is supported by a Joint Secretariat which is funded on a 50/50 basis by the Irish Government and the Stormont Executive.

The Executive's contribution to the Joint Secretariat is channeled through OFMDFM and will be considered as part of OFMDFM's overall budget for 2015-16.

The draft OFMDFM budget for 2015/16 is under consideration within the department and the exact make-up of the budget is not yet agreed, however the proposed level of cut for the NSMC Joint Secretariat is in line with reductions in other parts of the department.

Mrs Overend asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQW 38186/11-15, to detail which Department is co-ordinating a cross departmental action plan on Female Genital Mutilation to which they are contributing.
(AQW 40811/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Given the nature of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), there is no one department co-ordinating a cross departmental action plan on this matter.

Following a public consultation exercise last year, the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) published multi-agency guidelines on FGM. These guidelines state that it is unlikely that any single agency will be able to meet the multiple needs of someone affected by FGM. The guidelines set out a multi-agency response and strategies to encourage agencies to co-operate and work together.

A copy of the Guidelines has been placed in the Assembly library.

Mr McCallister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail delivery against targets in the Play and Leisure Implementation Plan to date.
(AQW 42037/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Play and Leisure Implementation Plan (PLIP) was launched in September 2011 and is scheduled to run until 2016, in line with the Ten Year Strategy for Children and Young People. The PLIP contains 41 actions, to be delivered by a range of departments, to support the commitments made in the Executive's Play and Leisure Policy Statement of January 2009 and obligations under Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

To date, 17 actions have been achieved and 17 remain ongoing. Actions that have been achieved include the delivery of awareness sessions on play for policy makers and professionals; publication of guidance on the community use of schools; and research into children and young people's experiences in public spaces.

There are 7 actions which have a financial outlay. These actions include the potential audit of workforce needs; the development and dissemination of information on the benefits of challenge and risk in play; and the establishment of a professional bodies working group. Progress on these actions is subject to funding availability.

Mr Eastwood asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the process to secure City Deal status from Westminster in Northern Ireland.
(AQW 42188/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Executive already has responsibility for powers comparable to those included as part of the series of City Deals in England and Scotland.

In addition, the transfer of Corporation Tax rate setting powers will provide the Executive with much greater potential to support private sector growth and employment than what is being considered for other regions.

However, if there are any individual aspects of City Deals which through their success would be expected to bring significant benefit to the local economy, then the Executive will consider whether these should be sought.

Mr McGlone asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the current position in relation to the continued financial support for the Delivering Social Change Improving Literacy and Numeracy Signature Project.
(AQW 42290/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Delivering Social Change Improving Literacy and Numeracy Signature Programme is a two year programme scheduled to finish at the end of June 2015. We are currently considering the future of the programme.

Mr McCallister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister when a Programme for Government 2015/16 will be published.
(AQW 42399/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Work is currently underway to extend the current Programme for Government, to include the 2015/16 year. We intend to bring forward an Executive Paper on this subject in the coming weeks, and following Executive approval and Committee notification, the revised Programme for Government will be published.

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what support has been given from the Social Investment Fund to projects in North Antrim.
(AQW 42507/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Fuel Poverty project was awarded funding of £1.8million in 2014 and Employment through Education recently received Letter of Offer for £3.5million. Both projects will bring benefits throughout the Northern Zone including the North Antrim constituency.

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what action her Department is undertaking to ensure local community groups will be supported to locate to the former MOD base at Ballykelly.
(AQW 42318/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): The Shackleton site at Ballykelly was transferred to the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister in 2011. The development of the wider site is an objective of that Department, and it plans to dispose of the remaining parts in due course. I have been advised that meetings between OFMDFM officials and the local community association in Ballykelly have been positive, and discussions have taken place regarding the community benefits which could be derived from the future development of the Shackleton site.

OFMDFM advise that any plans for the future development of the site will be expected to demonstrate how community needs have been identified and will be met. There are various ways in which this could be achieved, including the location of community facilities on the site, but other options may be acceptable.

I visited the Ballykelly site recently to view the preparatory work being undertaken for my new headquarters and had an opportunity to meet local community and business representatives. I will continue to ensure that there is engagement with local representatives throughout the development of my new headquarters.

Mr Rogers asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development following the recent Common Agricultural Policy reform, what action she is taking to address the concerns of potato farmers, who are unable to acquire sufficient conacre land to continue their business.
(AQW 42389/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: From 2014, both I and my officials have sought to address the concerns of potato farmers regarding the impacts of CAP Reform through stakeholder meetings, direct correspondence with farmers, articles in the farming press, farmers' meetings and by the publication of information on the DARD website. Most recently, I published details of possible solutions which are available on the DARD website at http://www.dardni.gov.uk/area-based-schemes-2015.htm and these are outlined below.

The farmer who owns the land and the conacre farmer seeking land could agree a land exchange for 2015. In this context, the potato grower would, for example, rent in a 5ha field from a livestock farmer to grow potatoes and establish entitlements. The livestock farmer would rent in a 5ha field from the potato grower for grazing and cutting and establish entitlements. The net effect of the transaction is that both farmers are able to establish five entitlements in 2015. As entitlements are not attached to land, in 2016 the livestock farmer is able to use the five entitlements established on the potato grower's land to claim on his own land and vice versa. It is essential that this arrangement be reflected on the ground and not simply be a paper exercise. I can see the scenario working best where the farmers are geographically close.

A second option could be for the potato grower to establish entitlements on conacre land in 2015 and transfer these back to the farm business owning the land in 2016. It may be possible for two businesses to come to an agreement on this prior to the renting of the land. The farming landowner will want to compare the conacre rent offered in 2015 to the income forgone by not establishing entitlements in 2015 (and the impact across the CAP Reform period). In addition to this, entitlements will be tradable again in 2016 and the two parties could agree that the entitlement could be transferred back to the landowner in 2016. It is recommended that both parties seek legal advice before entering any such agreement.

A third option could involve the potato growing business altering its traditional rotation for one year and growing a greater area of potatoes on owned land. It would then establish entitlements on that land in 2015. It is anticipated that land availability will not be as big an issue in 2016 as, once entitlements are established in 2015, other farmers would be free to lease land with entitlements.

Whatever the solution adopted, farmers need to be mindful of the need to adhere to greening requirements and compliance with the Nitrate Regulations.

I encourage all farmers to use the online calculator available on DARD Online Services and seek advice from local crops and countryside management advisors where necessary.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the number of applications from each constituency received by the Rural Borewells Scheme in (i) 2013; and (ii) 2014; and the number which were successful. **(AQW 42390/11-15)**

Mrs O'Neill: In 2013, thirty eight applications were submitted into the Rural Borewells Scheme. A further fifty five applications were submitted in 2014. Twenty one applications passed the initial eligibility criteria set for the 2013 Scheme, with nineteen of these achieving a wholesome water supply. Twenty six applications passed the initial eligibility criteria for 2014 and site works have now commenced. A detailed breakdown of applications from each constituency is provided in the table below.

Constituency	Number of applications received in 2013	Number of eligible applications received in 2013	Number of applications received in 2014	Number of eligible applications received in 2014
East Antrim	3	2	5	1
East Derry	2	2	5	3
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	1	1	4	1
Lagan Valley	2	1	1	1
Mid Ulster	3	1	6	4
Newry & Armagh	1	1	7	3
North Antrim	4	2	10	5
South Antrim	9	7	5	3
South Down	2	2	2	1
West Tyrone	10	3	10	4
Wales	1	0	-	-
Total	**38**	**22**	**55**	**26**

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the number of quangos linked to her Department on (i) 8 May 2007; and (ii) 19 February 2015; and how many people served on the quangos on these respective dates. **(AQW 42577/11-15)**

Mrs O'Neill:

(i) At 8 May 2007 DARD sponsored 7 public bodies, namely: - the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute, the Agriculture Wages Board, the Drainage Council, the Livestock and Meat Commission, the NI Fishery Harbour Authority, the Pig Production Development Committee and the Research and Education Advisory Panel. A total of 62 people were serving on these bodies on that date.

(ii) At 19 February 2015 DARD sponsored 5 public bodies, namely: - the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute, the Agriculture Wages Board, the Drainage Council, the Livestock and Meat Commission and the NI Fishery Harbour Authority. A total of 42 people were serving on these bodies on that date.

In addition DARD has two Ad Hoc Advisory Groups. The Agri-Food Strategy Board, which is jointly sponsored with DETI, has 9 people serving on the Board. The TB Strategic Partnership Group has 5 people serving on its Board.

Mr Girvan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what steps her Department is taking to maximise the potential of the equine industry, and open it up to new markets such as China.
(AQW 42587/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: In 2012, I secured a meeting with a senior representative of the Chinese equine industry in Beijing to begin the process of relationship building, as required in Chinese business culture, and apprised him of the opportunities for educational collaboration between China and the north of Ireland.

My Department provides education and training for the future leaders of the equine industry at the Enniskillen Campus of the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE). This provision covers both the Sport Horse and Thoroughbred sectors of the industry. Enniskillen Campus offers courses from Level 2 Diploma to Honours Degree level and produces graduates who are highly qualified and skilled to lead the equine industry and help it achieve its potential. CAFRE's Enniskillen Campus enjoys excellent support from the equine industry across Ireland through bursaries (including those from world renowned organisations such as Coolmore and Darley), workplace training, visits and mentoring.

Enniskillen Campus has secured lucrative opportunities for some of its students to complete their workplace training on Paca Paca Stud Farm in Japan and at Coolmore's Australian operation. It has also developed links with the Chinese equine industry and in 2014, I was delighted to host a cohort of 13 Chinese equine interns from Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum's (Darley) Dubai International Thoroughbred Internships (DITI) programme during their visit to CAFRE. I look forward to welcoming another cohort in April 2015.

In terms of new markets, I represent all sectors of the agriculture industry in my ongoing relationship building with the Chinese including at my meeting last week with Ms Wang, the Chinese Consul-General.

I am pleased to confirm that an Export Health Certificate for live equine exports from the north to China was approved in May 2014 following a meeting between Minister Zhi, General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine (AQSIQ) and my Deputy Chief Veterinary Officer.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on the status and progress of the Trap, Vaccinate and Release programme.
(AQW 42628/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I wish to advise that we do not have a Trap, Vaccinate and Release programme. However, we do have the Test and Vaccinate or Remove (TVR) Wildlife Intervention Research Project.

The TVR Year 1 fieldwork ended on 24 October 2014 and data obtained through TVR field activities is currently being analysed. TVR is a five year research project and during this period considerable data will be accumulated. Care will be taken in relation to the release of interim results as this could lead to premature, and potentially inaccurate, speculation about TVR and its effects. Some information may become available as the TVR research project progresses but this is likely to be quite limited so we do not compromise the validity of the research study. However, my officials are currently preparing a Year 1 Report for the TVR wildlife intervention research project and, when completed, it will be placed on my Department's website.

A final report on TVR will not be completed until the TVR field activities are fully completed (late 2018) and only after the accumulated data has been analysed, interpreted and understood. It is anticipated that the final report on the TVR research project could be available by late 2019.

You may be interested to know that in Year 1 of TVR, some 94% of farmers and landowners who have responded in the TVR area gave access permission to allow Department staff to implement the TVR research project on their land. During the TVR badger capture period last year 280 unique badgers were captured, although a further 350 recapture events also took place, with some badgers caught on more than one occasion. The 280 badgers were all sampled, identified by microchip, vaccinated and released. The recaptured badgers were released following an identity check.

TVR is expected to recommence in June 2015, during which all TB test positive badgers will be removed. The TB test negative badgers will be vaccinated, even if they were captured and vaccinated in Year 1, and then released.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, in relation to her departmental headquarters relocation to Ballykelly, which procurement contracts have been awarded to suppliers (i) based in East Londonderry; and (ii) in the third sector.
(AQW 42725/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: All contracts for the redevelopment of the site for my new departmental headquarters at Ballykelly will be awarded through DFP's Central Procurement Directorate (CPD) in line with Executive policy.

I can confirm that the contract for the 'site enabling works' has been awarded by CPD to a supplier with a base in Coleraine. This contract covers site clearance and demolition works.

I can also confirm that no contracts to date have been awarded to the third sector.

Ms Ruane asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail her Department's financial investment in South Down in each year since 2007, including the (i) organisations that have received funding; and (b) investment they received.
(AQW 42726/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The table below provides details of the funding invested in South Down since 2007:-

Year	Amount
2007/08	£ 26,973,650
2008/09	£ 26,319,214
2009/10	£ 28,839,273
2010/11	£ 27,794,899
2011/12	£ 27,793,272
2012/13	£ 28,767,547
2013/14	£ 30,005,238
2014/15	£ 30,932,266
Total	**£ 227,425,359**

Further detailed information, including organisations that have received funding, has been provided in the attached table, a copy of which has been placed in the Assembly Library.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how much funding her Department has awarded to the Rural Women's Network in each of the last three years.
(AQW 42756/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department has not provided any direct funding to the NI Rural Women's Network (NIRWN) in any of the last three financial years (April 2012 to March 2015).

My Department has, however, helped to support the needs of rural women by providing funding alongside the Department for Social Development (DSD) to the Consortium for the Regional Support for Women in Disadvantaged and Rural Areas. DARD has provided £75K funding to the Consortium in each of the last three years. NIRWN are part of this Consortium, which is overseen by DSD, to ensure that the needs of women in both rural and urban areas are addressed.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many meetings of the Rural Women's Network have been held in (i) North Down; and (ii) Ards Borough Council areas in each of the last three years.
(AQW 42757/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: As the NI Rural Women's Network (NIRWN) is an independent organisation with no regulatory links to DARD my Department does not hold the information that you request.

I would therefore advise you to contact NIRWN directly for this information.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the number and location of Rural Women's Network meetings, in each of the last three years.
(AQW 42758/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: As the NI Rural Women's Network (NIRWN) is an independent organisation with no regulatory links to DARD my Department does not hold the information that you request.

I would therefore advise you to contact NIRWN directly for this information.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what is her Department's target time for the removal of bovine tuberculosis reactors from a farm once they have been diagnosed; and what is the average time taken.
(AQW 42784/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department's target time for removal of bovine TB reactors is within 15 working days of TB test completion.

Rather than an average value, a median value for working days estimated from calendar days is routinely used to monitor reactor removal times, and is published monthly on the DARD internet as part of the Tuberculosis Disease Statistics in the north of Ireland. http://www.dardni.gov.uk/tbstats-december-2014pdf.pdf

According to the most recently published statistics, the median TB reactor removal time from farm during 2014 was 8.9 working days.

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline any plans for the future of AFBI Plant Testing Station, Crossnacreevy.
(AQW 43023/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: In common with the rest of the public sector, both my Department and AFBI face significant budgetary pressures in 2015/16 and beyond.

DARD officials have, therefore, undertaken significant work with AFBI colleagues to develop a way forward for the organisation and to ensure that it remains viable and sustainable in the future.

At this stage, there are no definitive plans to close AFBI's Crossnacreevy site and its future is being considered within the above context.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for a breakdown by slaughter house of animals slaughtered under halal conditions, in each of the last two years.
(AQW 43043/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: In 2013, 181323 sheep were processed for the halal market and in 2014, 193470 were processed. All animals were pre-stunned before slaughter.

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

Mr Humphrey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what funding her Department has provided to Foras Na Gaelige in each of the last three years.
(AQW 42551/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): Foras na Gaeilge receives 25% of its funding from the Department of Culture Arts and Leisure (DCAL).

Since 2009 the Colmcille initiative (a tri partite arrangement between the Executive, the Southern government and the Scottish government) has been administered by Foras na Gaeilge and Bòrd na Gàidhlig. Foras na Gaeilge receives equal amounts of funding for this from the Executive and the Southern government.

In 2014 DCAL also provided funding to Foras na Gaeilge for the development and maintenance of the Líofa website and e-learning packages.

The funding provided by the DCAL to Foras na Gaeilge for the last three years is shown in the table below.

Year	Amount 25% of Annual Budget	Colmcille Funding	Líofa website	Total
2012	£3,605,080	£114,679	-	£3,719,759
2013	£3,502,961	£137,631	-	£3,640,592
2014*	£3,095,150	£61,424	£55,495	£3,212,069

The financial year used by both agencies of the North South Language Body equates to a calendar year.

*The accounts for 2014 have not yet been audited.

Mr Humphrey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much funding Foras Na Gaelige received from the (i) Executive; and (ii) Irish Republic's government, in each of the last three years.
(AQW 42552/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Foras na Gaeilge receives 75% of its funding from the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (DAHG) and 25% of funding is received from the Department of Culture Arts and Leisure (DCAL). The two sponsor departments have been the only sources of funding for Foras na Gaeilge in the last three years.

Foras na Gaeilge also receives funding from DAHG for the Clár na Leabhar Gaeilge programme which is delivered solely in the south.

Since 2009 the Colmcille initiative (a tri partite arrangement between the Executive, the Irish government and Scottish government) has been administered by Foras na Gaeilge and Bòrd na Gàidhlig. Foras na Gaeilge receives equal amounts of funding for this from the Executive and the Irish government.

In 2014 DCAL also provided funding of £55,495 to Foras na Gaeilge for the development and maintenance of the Líofa website and e-learning packages.

All funding received in the last three years is shown on the table below.

Year	DAHG 75% Annual Budget	DCAL 25% Annual Budget	Colmcille Total	Clár na Leabhar Gaeilge	Líofa Website	Total
2012	£10,671,549	£3,605,080	£231,717	£1,021,039	-	£15,529,385
2013	£10,519,432	£3,502,961	£250,878	£994,527	-	£15,267,798
2014*	£9,285,449	£3,095,150	£121,651	£900,732	£55,495	£13,458,477

The financial year used by both agencies of the North South Language Body equates to a calendar year.

*The final accounts for 2014 have not yet been audited.

Mr Humphrey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what funding her Department has provided to the Ulster-Scots Agency in each of the last three years.
(AQW 42553/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Ulster-Scots Agency receives 75% of its annual funding from the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL). The funding provided by DCAL to the Ulster-Scots Agency in each of the last three years is shown in the table below.

Year	Amount
2012	£2,022,487
2013	£1,914,095
2014*	£1,188,732

The financial year used by both agencies of the North South Language Body equates to a calendar year.

*The final accounts for 2014 have not yet been audited.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on a Government E-strategy for Northern Ireland.
(AQW 42561/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: E-safety is an issue of relevance to a number of Northern Ireland departments requiring a cross-government response. It has been agreed that the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland (SBNI) should be formally commissioned to develop a Northern Ireland e-safety strategy and produce an e-safety action plan on behalf of the Northern Ireland Executive. My Department has committed to a financial contribution to facilitate the development of the e-strategy and action plan.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether her Department plans to reintroduce funding for reimaging projects.
(AQW 42569/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The current Re-imaging scheme which ends in June is managed by the Arts Council NI and is funded through IFI, SEUPB Peace III and the National Lottery. Currently Arts Council is not planning to drawn down any PEACE IV funding.

The Department has no plans at present to provide funding for re-imaging projects.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what will be the cost of the consultation on the Irish Language Bill.
(AQW 42570/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The estimated cost of the consultation on proposals for an Irish language Bill is between £10k and £15k.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to place a copy of the business case for the new Liofa book clubs initiative in the Assembly library.
(AQW 42605/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I do not intend to place the Business Case in the Assembly Library; however, the Business Case can be accessed through the Department's website

http://www.dcalni.gov.uk/index/quick-links/general_publications/other_publications.htm

Department of Education

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 40818/11-15, whether he will ensure that each withdrawn patrol is reassessed in relation to the risks posed to pupils cycling or walking to and from each school.
(AQW 41747/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): The provision of school crossing patrols is a discretionary function. Patrols are, therefore, provided in support of the parental duty to ensure the safety of their child(ren) when walking to school. Patrols are provided where a location has been assessed as exceeding the threshold(s) set out in assessment guidelines. The guidelines are based on those of Road Safety GB, previously Local Authority Road Safety Officers Association (LARSOA). These guidelines incorporate elements from the existing widely adopted criteria for the assessment of potential zebra and pelican crossing sites, and consider factors such as traffic flow and the number of pupils crossing. Therefore, patrols are usually established at locations where there are high numbers of pupils and a heavy volume of traffic. Additionally, school crossing patrols are only permitted to marshal pedestrians and not cyclists.

Reassessments of patrols are routinely conducted when a patrol person leaves their post. School crossing patrols may be removed where a location no longer exceeds the threshold(s) set out in the guidelines.

With regard to the impact upon pupils following the removal of a patrol, Boards ensure that the reassessed crossing point is within tolerances experienced by pupils on any other route without a crossing patrol.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Education whether he will provide, or place in the Assembly library, a copy of the figures for the 2014/15 census of primary and post-primary pupils with Special Educational Needs, broken down by Education and Library Board.
(AQW 42292/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The 2014/15 school census final figures were released on 26th February 2015. A breakdown of special educational needs in primary and post-primary schools by ELB can be found overleaf.

Number of primary and post-primary pupils with special educational needs, by ELB, 2014/15

Primary

	Belfast	Western	North Eastern	South Eastern	Southern	Total
Statemented pupils	863	774	882	1,232	1,353	5,104
SEN stages 1-4	5,984	5,729	6,717	6,640	6,042	31,112
SEN stages 1-5	6,847	6,503	7,599	7,872	7,395	36,216

Post-primary

	Belfast	Western	North Eastern	South Eastern	Southern	Total
Statemented pupils	1,004	1,210	1,031	1,099	1,622	5,966
SEN stages 1-4	6,618	4,988	4,084	4,491	3,589	23,770
SEN stages 1-5	7,622	6,198	5,115	5,590	5,211	29,736

Source: NI school census

Notes:

1 Figures for primary includes nursery, reception and year 1 - 7 classes.

2 Figures include pupils at stages 1 – 5 on the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice.

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education to detail the capital budget for new builds and the schools enhancement programme for 2015/16.
(AQW 42457/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Initial indicative allocations of £55m and £40m have been made for Major Works and School Enhancement Programme projects respectively for the 2015/16 financial year, however, these figures will be subject to revision following review of the overall capital budget position.

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education how many places (i) are reserved; and (ii) have been appointed for Catholic Church representatives on the Board of Governors of Integrated Schools in Northern Ireland.
(AQW 42525/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Under Article 89 of the Education Reform (NI) Order 1989, the Trustees of Catholic Maintained schools are entitled to nominate, to the relevant Education and Library Board for appointment, one seventh (1/7th) of the Governors of a Controlled Integrated school.

There are 21 controlled integrated schools and 42 governor posts to which the Trustees of Catholic Maintained schools can make nominations. Of these, 6 governor posts have been filled by nomination from the Trustees of Catholic Maintained schools.

Where the right to nominate is not exercised, the relevant Education and Library Board may, in accordance with Article 89 (2) (a) of the Education Reform (NI) Order 1989, fill the posts to which nominations have not been made. There are 36 posts filled by this means.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 42159/11-15, whether there is a policy within his Department or the Education and Library Boards whereby only Stage 5 SEN pupils are permitted to be considered for classroom assistance.
(AQW 42559/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: There is no policy within either the Department of Education or the Education and Library Boards (ELBs) which states that only pupils at Stage Five of the Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs can be considered for classroom assistance. Current legislation does not prevent a school or Board from considering classroom assistance for a pupil at any stage of the Code of Practice.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Education what programmes exist within secondary level education to raise awareness of cyber bullying and social media exploitation.
(AQW 42562/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department takes these issues very seriously and issued an e-Safety Guidance Circular to all schools in December 2013. It stated that 'eSafety must be built into the delivery of the curriculum' and recommended that schools use external expertise, where appropriate, to help address these complex issues. It is, however, a matter for each school to determine which programmes and resources best suit their particular needs.

All secondary schools promote the personal development of pupils as part of the topic 'Learning for Life and Work' (LLW). Bullying/cyber-bullying and e-safety are widely covered during LLW. LLW resources for schools have been developed by CCEA, which include 'safety and managing risk' in the real world and online. Other materials on specific e-safety issues have been prepared and made available to all teachers through the Classroom 2000 (C2K) network.

Awareness raising programmes, training and resources are provided by a range of organisations such as the PSNI and the NI Anti-Bullying Forum. Voluntary organisations also support schools by providing talks to pupils and parents on these issues.

As part of "Safer Internet Day 2015", a toolkit was provided to schools which included information, advice and lesson plans on issues including sexting, using webcams, using Social Networks, inappropriate content and chatting with strangers online.

Specialist training and support are also available to schools via the Education and Library Boards' child protection, education welfare and behaviour support services; and from the Child Protection Support Service to Schools (CPSSS).

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Education to detail the spending per pupil, broken down by constituency, in each of the last five years.
(AQW 42619/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Every school receives a fully delegated budget, distributed under the Common Funding Scheme and the Local Management Schools funding arrangements.

The Department does not hold information on spending per pupil. Alongside delegated budgets, schools may receive other centre funding support including resources for Statemented pupils, programme funds etc. and other costs (such as transport and administrative costs) that are not readily identifiable at phase or Constituency level.

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education when the provision of an additional classroom for Kilbride Primary School will be realised, as detailed in the Planned School Enhancement Programme.
(AQW 42672/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: As a controlled primary school in Ballyclare, the North Eastern Education and Library Board (NEELB) has responsibility for capital works at Kilbride Primary School.

The NEELB has confirmed that the school's enrolment is 137 pupils and as such Kilbride PS is a 5-class base school. Currently the school is operating as a 7-class base school however this is a decision for the school and does not impact on the school's infrastructure entitlement. There are no plans to provide additional classrooms in excess of entitlement.

Mr Rogers asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 40862/11-15, for an update on the timeline for the establishment of the amalgamated primary school in Lower Mourne.
(AQW 42742/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I would refer the Member to my response to AQW 40862/11-15 on 27 January 2015 where I advised that I approved a development proposal for the amalgamation of the Lower Mourne schools on 23 September 2014; effective from September 2015. Should the Mourne Primary Schools project be successful in any future major capital investment announcement a timetable for the establishment of an amalgamated primary school will be commissioned at that stage. In the meantime I understand that the Trustee, Principals and Chairs of Governors of the schools involved are continuing to meet to discuss the amalgamation.

Ms Ruane asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators in each post-primary school; and whether they are teaching or acting as Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators in a full time capacity.
(AQW 42777/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs states that all mainstream schools should have a Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO).

The Belfast Education and Library Board has advised that there were less than five non-teaching SENCOs identified in its last audit in March 2014.

The remaining Education and Library Boards (ELBs) have advised that this detail is not held at ELB level.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education how much European funding his Department has received in each of the last two financial years; and from which funding streams.
(AQW 42818/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department's ability to access EU funding is directly linked to the applicability of EU funding streams to the core business of the Department.

My Department's main focus during the period in question has been on maximising the support available from the EU's Comenius and Youth in Action Programmes which ended on 31 December 2013 and the EU's Erasmus+ programme which was launched on 1 January 2014.

The British Council was the National Agency for the Comenius and Youth in Action programmes and the British Council in partnership with Ecorys, is the National Agency responsible for delivering the EU's Erasmus+ programme. The education service here has been able to benefit from £1.6m drawn down by the National Agency in the 2012/13 financial year an estimated £2.2m* in the 2013/14 financial year.

*Drawdown for the Erasmus+ programme is provisional as details of drawdown provided by the British Council signifies their intention to award funding. Drawdown is not final until organisations applying for EU funding have signed a contract and final figures are awaited.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 42078/11-15, how many mainstream post-primary schools in Fermanagh and South Tyrone have (i) failed; and/or (ii) had concerns noted, following Special Educational Needs inspections, in their last seven year inspections cycles.
(AQW 42821/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) evaluates and reports on the quality of education and states explicitly the areas for improvement that need to be addressed in the interest of the pupils.

Special educational needs (SEN) is inspected as an integral part of all mainstream post-primary inspections and reported on within the body of the published inspection report. Since 2007, based on their last inspection or follow-up inspection, SEN was evaluated as good with areas for improvement that the school demonstrated the capacity to address in 14 mainstream post-primary schools. In a further three schools, SEN was evaluated as satisfactory with areas for improvement.

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Education what changes he envisages to the Pre-School Education Advisory Groups with the advent of the Education Authority on 1 April 2015.
(AQW 42823/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Learning to Learn, a Framework for Early Years Education and Learning, which I launched in late 2013, includes an action to review current arrangements for the delivery of all funded pre-school services to achieve maximum benefit from a single authority, including reviewing the role of the Pre-School Education Advisory Group (PEAG).

This action will be the responsibility of the Education Authority in due course.

In the interim, the PEAGs will continue to be responsible for managing the funded pre-school places required to meet the Programme for Government commitment to ensure that at least one year of pre-school is available to every family that wants it

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Education what scheme will be used to appoint Principals of controlled schools when the Education Authority comes into existence on 1 April 2015.
(AQW 42824/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Work on developing a Teaching Appointments Scheme (TAS) for the Education Authority (EA) is underway. A draft Transitional Teaching Appointments Scheme, along with a guide to the selection process and a Scheme of Management for controlled schools is being developed in the first instance to make provision for those appointments that must be made in the first months following the establishment of the EA. This will allow time for a longer-term TAS to be agreed once the EA has been established.

Miss M McIlveen asked Minister of Education whether all current Education and Library Board staff will be protected under the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006 when transferring to the Education Authority on their existing permanent grade.

(AQW 42825/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: You have clarified that this question also relates to staff who are on temporary promotion (TP) and whether they will transfer to the Education Authority (EA) in their TP grade or revert to their substantive grade.

My Department is currently working on an "Education Authority – Staff Transfer Scheme", which will detail and set in place the arrangements for the transfer of staff currently employed in the ELBs and the SCELB.

If staff are acting up on 31 March 2015, irrespective of the duration, and have not been advised by their current employer that this arrangement will cease on or before 31 March 2015, they will transfer to EA in their acting up position. They will continue to act up in accordance with the arrangements that relate to their acting up post where there is a continuing need for the work to be done.

EA will review acting up arrangements in due course on the basis of available funding, new organisational structures and future business needs.

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 42455/11-15, to detail the eight schools which have had their business cases approved and can, subject to finance, progress to building stage in 2015/16.
(AQW 42856/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The eight schools that are currently anticipated to move to site in 2015/16 (subject to availability of finance) are:-

- Edenderry Nursery School, Belfast
- Omagh Integrated PS
- St Joseph's and St James' Primary School, Poyntzpass
- St Patrick's Academy, Dungannon
- Parkhall Integrated College, Antrim
- Devenish College (enabling works)
- St Bronaghs PS, Rostrevor
- St Mary's PS/ Glenravel PS
- Two of the above projects still have business cases to be approved.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education what frameworks will be used by the Education and Training Inspectorate to evaluate shared education programmes, including raising the educational standards of pupils.
(AQW 42862/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Over the four years of the Signature Project relating to Shared Education, ETI will use a framework to evaluate Shared Education which it has developed, in consultation with key educational stakeholders.

In practice, ETI will evaluate the quality of:

- the strategic aims and objectives of the partnership through the school development plan, action plans and discussion with senior management;
- the outworking of the partnership ethos through the learning environment and pastoral provision, policies and practice:
- the leadership and management of shared education provision at all levels within the school and of the Shared Education partnerships between that school and other schools;
- learning and teaching through direct classroom observation – achievement and standards, knowledge, understanding, skills, thinking, attitudes and dispositions:
- pupils' work: oral; written, multimedia and displays.

Discussions will also be held with pupils, parents, teachers, senior management, governors and community representatives.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education whether integrated schools of the same management type, and those of different management type, will qualify for shared education programmes.
(AQW 42863/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Funding opportunities through the DSC Signature Project and Peace IV funding programme will be open to all schools who meet the eligibility criteria.

The DSC Shared Education Signature Project is aimed at schools that have already engaged in shared education provided they meet other criteria as outlined in the call for applications (see www.sepni.gov.uk for details). Each application will be assessed on a case by case basis.

The Peace IV programme will target those schools that are not already engaged in sharing. Subject to EU agreement, this is expected to launch later this year.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education for an update on the Strategic Review of Integrated Education.
(AQW 42864/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I am currently considering the need for and scope of a future review of integrated education.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education, pursuant AQW 41469/11-15, what 'Gateway' checks did Priory College not meet.
(AQW 42865/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Priory College did not meet the 'sustainability' gateway check. The school enrolment at the point of assessment was 430 pupils in years 8 to 12, and 70 pupils in year 13 (sixth form). The school also had an intake of only 83 pupils in year 8. The 'Schools for the Future, Policy for Sustainable Schools' recommends that the minimum enrolment for Years 8 to 12 should be 500, sixth forms should have a minimum of 100 and the minimum average annual intake should be 100 pupils. The policy may be viewed a the following hyperlink; http://www.deni.gov.uk/a_policy_for_sustainable_schools-2.pdf.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education where the schools in North Down due for a rebuild are on the waiting list for capital funding.
(AQW 42888/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: With the constrained capital budget position I currently have no plans for a further capital announcement. The timing of any future announcement will be dependent on the capital budget available to Education in the next budget cycle (April 2016 onwards).

In relation to Major Works projects that are currently underway, funding for the capital works will be allocated on completion and approval of all design stages, in line with the available capital budget at that time.

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Education for a progress update on additional nursery places at Primate Dixon School, Coalisland.
(AQW 42907/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Development Proposal (DP) no. 323, was published by the Southern Education and Library Board on 22 January 2015 at the request of the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools. The proposal is to establish an additional fulltime nursery unit at Primate Dixon Primary School, to increase pre-school admissions numbers from 1 September 2015, or as soon as possible thereafter.

Following the publication of a DP, a statutory twomonth objection period begins, which affords all interested and affected parties an opportunity to submit their comments on the proposal to the Department of Education. The statutory objection period on DP 323 ends on 23 March and I hope to be able make a decision as soon as possible thereafter.

A record of all current development proposals and recent decisions are listed on my Department's website. These records are updated following my decision on a proposal.

Mr Rogers asked the Minister of Education when phase 1 applicants will be notified if they have been accepted for the shared education Delivering Social Change Signature project.
(AQW 42911/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Applications to Phase 1 of the DSC Share Education Signature Project are subject to an assessment process being undertaken by ELBs. Recommendations from ELBs will be in considered for endorsement by the Project Board which is scheduled to meet on 10 March 2015. Applicants will be notified when this process has been complete.

Mr Rogers asked the Minister of Education when phase 2 of the shared education Delivering Social Change Signature Project will open; and whether schools that have taken part in previous shared education programmes will be eligible.
(AQW 42912/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: It is expected that the applications to phase 2 of the Delivering Social Change Shared Education Signature Project will be invited before the end of the current financial year. Work is currently in progress to refine the application process following lessons learned from the phase 1. The Project is aimed at schools that have previously engaged in shared education, including those that previously participated in such programmes (subject to meeting other criteria as outlined in the call for applications - see www.sepni.gov.uk for details).

Mr Rogers asked the Minister of Education which recommendations from the Committee for Education's Report on Education and Training Inspectorate will be taken forward.
(AQW 42913/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department's response to the Committee for Education's Report on the Education and Training Inspectorate and School Improvement can be found on the Assembly website at the following link.

http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/assembly-business/committees/education/calls-for-evidence/inquiry-into-the-education-and-training-inspectorate-eti/

It provides details of whether each recommendation has been accepted, in full or in part, and, where relevant, details of current actions being taken.

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Education for an update on when he will make a final decision on approving Principals release for Nursery schools.
(AQW 42963/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I am considering the proposals submitted by the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) in support of their request to fund Nursery Principal Release Time.

Given the current challenging budgetary constraints, I must assess the cost to my Department and, subject to affordability, I will make my final decision.

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Education when the Controlled Schools Support Council will be fully operational.
(AQW 42965/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department has provided funding to support the Working Group which will establish the Controlled Schools' Support Council. This group has submitted an application for funding of costs associated with the establishment and running of the Controlled Schools' Support Council. My officials have requested further information to support this claim and will progress the necessary appraisal and approvals on receipt of this information.

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of the General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland paper, Striking the Right Balance - Towards a Framework for School Accountability in the 21st century.
(AQW 42966/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The document 'Striking the Right Balance' was part of the evidence provided by GTCNI during the Inquiry into the work of the Education and Training Inspectorate and School Improvement conducted by the Education Committee, and as such was considered in deliberations.

I welcome all constructive contributions from key stakeholders who are working on behalf of all of our learners.

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Education for an update on progress in relation to his dashboard of measures for measuring school performance.
(AQW 42967/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: To date the work on the dashboard has primarily encompassed desk research, literature reviews and internal discussion on the range of indicators that might be included.

The Department has written to key stakeholders inviting them to be part of a panel which will work with departmental officials to consider what should be included in the Dashboard of Measures, how it can be presented and the timescales for implementation.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education to detail who sits on the regional project management board for the Delivering Social Change Shared Education Signature Project.
(AQW 42997/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Project Board for the Delivering Social Change Shared Education Signature Project comprised representatives of the funders and the Education and Library Boards who are responsible for delivery. Membership is as follows:

- Faustina Graham (Chair), Department of Education
- Padraic Quirk, Atlantic Philanthropies
- Linsey Farrell, OFMdFM
- Andrew Bell, Department of Education
- Ray Gilbert, NEELB
- Paddy Mackey, WELB
- Arlene Kee, SEELB
- John Unsworth, SELB
- Paul Lawther, BELB

It should be noted that ELB members of the Project Board may be subject to change post March 2015 to reflect the new structure of the Education Authority.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education whether he can provide an assurance that should the Community Relations, Equality and Diversity fund be phased out, that those schools who are in receipt of the Community Relations, Equality and Diversity monies and do not meet the criteria of the Shared Education Signature Project, will still be able to avail of resources to carry out diversity work.
(AQW 42998/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Addressing diversity issues is part of the curriculum which all schools are required to deliver. Earmarked funding was provided to support the initial implementation of the Community Relations Equality and Diversity (CRED) policy, in particular capacity building and the sharing of good practice. Any decision to end CRED earmarked funding would be with a view to all schools continuing to carry out diversity work within their Local Management of Schools (LMS) budget allocation.

Shared Education funding will support schools in collaborating on a cross community basis with the aim of improving educational standards and reconciliation outcomes. While the two policies are complementary, they are not the same.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education why the development proposals for nursery units by St Malachy's Primary School in Kilcoo and Randalstown Central Primary School were treated differently, in that the former was marked 'urgent' within the Department and the latter 'routine'.
(AQW 43018/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The timescale indicated on submissions sent to me by Department of Education officials takes account of the individual circumstances of each Development Proposal. They are marked 'routine' unless they need to be considered quickly, in which case an 'urgent' marking will be used.

The submission for the Development Proposal for St Malachy's PS, Kilcoo was sent to me on 11 July 2014 and the proposed implementation was September 2014. In this case, it was marked "Urgent" as it was considered necessary to clarify the position for interested parents as soon as possible.

The submission for the Development Proposal for Randalstown Central PS was dealing with a proposed variation from the normal format for statutory nursery provision. This required additional consideration which took it past the proposed implementation date of September 2014. It was sent to me on 22 January 2015 and in this case, it was not considered that there was an immediate urgency associated with the submission as the proposed implementation date had passed and the children were placed for the 2014/15 academic year.

I consider submissions sent to me without undue delay, and in both of these cases I was able to make my decision within 7 working days.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education how many school Development Proposals since May 2011 have been marked in his Department as (i) urgent; and (ii) routine, broken down by school sector.
(AQW 43020/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I wish to emphasise that the marking on any submission made to me by my officials is an administrative tool to assist the smooth operation of my Private Office. These markings do not relate to the importance attached to the subject matter of the submission.

There have been 164 Development Proposals (DPs) published since May 2011 on which I have made a decision. The details of submissions made to me on these DPs which have been marked 'Urgent' or 'Routine' are contained in Tables 1 and 2. Some proposals have alternative markings such as "immediate" depending on the circumstances pertaining at the time of consideration. See Table 3 below.

Decisions on DPs have a significant impact on pupils and local communities and I endeavour to make my decisions without undue delay regardless of officials' markings. My focus is always on the best interest of children and young people.

Table 1 Development Proposals marked Urgent

Sectors	**DPs**
Controlled	31
Grant Maintained Integrated	2
Irish Medium	5
Maintained	22
Voluntary	2
Total	**62**

Table 2 Development Proposals marked Routine

Sectors	**DPs**
Controlled	19

Sectors	DPs
Controlled/Voluntary	6
Grant Maintained Integrated	8
Irish Medium	4
Maintained	35
Maintained/Voluntary	1
Other Maintained	1
Other Maintained/Controlled	3
Voluntary	1
Total	**78**

Table 3 Development Proposals with alternative markings

Sectors	DPs
Controlled	18
Maintained	6
Total	**24**

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education, in circumstances where it is proposed to convert an existing pre-school reception class into a nursery unit of the same size, while using the same premises and staff, whether this is considered a sufficiently significant change as to require the submission of a proposal to his Department under Article 14 of the Education and Libraries (NI) Order 1986.
(AQW 43021/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department considers that the establishment of a nursery unit represents a significant change to a primary school and therefore requires the publication of a development proposal. Guidance on the Publication of Development Proposals was published by my Department on 26 September 2014. Section 4 of the Guidance relates to the Need for a Development Proposal and Paragraph 4.8 is specific to nursery schools and units in Primary Schools.

A link to the Guidance is as follows:
http://www.deni.gov.uk/de1_14_202314__development_proposal_guidance_-__english_version__issued_26_09_14.pdf

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education whether it is only the impact on other grant-aided schools, as opposed to play groups, which must and can be taken into account in considering a proposal under Article 14 of the Education and Libraries (NI) Order 1986.
(AQW 43022/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Article 14 of The Education and Libraries (NI) Order 1986 is the main legislation governing the statutory Development Proposal process, by which schools are established or closed, or have significant changes made to them.

The Department's assessment of a Development Proposal takes account of all relevant Departmental policies and I make my decision on proposals taking account of all pertinent information.

To put this in context with regard to nursery proposals, the Pre-school Education Programme (PSEP) is a partnership between statutory and voluntary/private pre-school providers and both sectors are equally valued for their contribution to the education of pre-school children.

If a Development Proposal involves a significant change to an existing nursery school or unit, or the establishment of a new nursery school or unit, careful consideration is given to its impact on existing providers, including voluntary/ private pre-school playgroups, which offer funded places under the PSEP.

Mr Byrne asked the Minister of Education when schools will receive their budget allocation for the 2015/16 academic year.
(AQO 7697/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Schools were notified of their overall delegated budget shares and total budget allocations for 2015/16 on Wednesday 25 February 2015. The information for all schools has been placed on the Department's website.

Schools will, in due course, be provided with formal budget statements of their delegated funding shares by their respective Funding Authorities, along with allocations from other programme budgets available for distribution at that time.

Mr Ramsey asked the Minister of Education what discussions has he held with the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety regarding the forthcoming Special Educational Needs and Disability Bill.
(AQO 7693/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have engaged in discussions with the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety on a range of matters relating to provision for children with special educational needs, during the development of the current policy proposals for the way forward on special educational needs and inclusion.

My core SEN proposals were considered and agreed by the Executive in July 2012 and I have proceeded with the drafting a Bill to reflect this agreement. In February 2015, I brought a Special Educational Needs and Disability Bill to the Executive for consideration. The Bill contains clauses covering both the core proposals, as agreed in 2012, and a number of associated policy areas which I had advised I would consider; all are aimed at enhancing the current SEN policy framework. In advance of each of these Executive meetings, I circulated the draft proposals to all Executive colleagues.

There has also been ongoing engagement at official level as proposals of the Review of SEN and Inclusion were being developed. A number of meetings have taken place and presentations given on the key elements proposed for inclusion in a draft Bill.

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister of Education whether he will publish a list of the approximately 100 schools that require new builds.
(AQO 7694/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I do not hold a list of schools that are deemed to require a new build.

Schools in the estate have differing and ever changing needs for investment. Changes to enrolment numbers, the condition and suitability of the premises to deliver the curriculum, the use of temporary accommodation and the social needs of the pupils all need to be assessed within the context of area plans at the point when announcements of projects to proceed in planning are made.

I have announced lists of projects to proceed in planning for new builds in 2012, 2013 and 2014. Projects are selected from a long list of potential projects submitted by Boards and school planning authorities on the basis of a protocol that is applied at the time the announcement is made. A list of potential projects is not retained for future announcements, rather the protocol will be applied again at the point when I deem there is sufficient budget available to warrant initiation of planning and design work on a further tranche of projects.

Unfortunately, given the constrained capital budget I currently have no plans to make a further capital announcement. The timing of any future announcement will be dependent on the capital budget available to Education in the next budget cycle commencing April 2016.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education how he will ensure that no integrated school is disadvantaged if Community Relations, Equality and Diversity funding is discontinued.
(AQW 43069/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: As per my answer to AQW 42998/11-15, any decision to end Community Relations, Equality and Diversity (CRED) earmarked funding would be with a view to all schools continuing to carry out diversity work within their Local Management of Schools (LMS) budget allocation. If this decision is taken, schools of all management types will be treated equally.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education to outline the process by which two schools can move to joint management; and whether two schools can move to joint management without the two churches' agreement.
(AQW 43070/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Guidance for jointly managed schools is still under development and will be published in due course. Once published, the guidance will outline the process by which schools can move to joint management as well as stressing the pre-requisite for community support.

Mr G Kelly asked the Minister of Education to outline the procedure used by schools when deciding to close for a snow day.
(AQO 7700/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department recognises that decisions on whether or not to close a school can only be made at local level by the Principal who has the knowledge and experience to assess the situation affecting their school. The specific procedure for deciding whether or not to close will therefore vary across schools.

To support Principals in making their decision, the Department has provided schools with a checklist which includes a list of the issues they need to consider when deciding whether or not to close their school. The main consideration is the possibility of risks to the health and safety of pupils and staff.

Each year the Department issues a letter to all schools to remind them of the need to have an action plan in place detailing how schools will deal with any exceptional closures that may arise and this reminder signposts them to the checklist which is available on the Department's website.

Ms McCorley asked the Minister of Education how his Department will utilise Peace IV funding opportunities.
(AQO 7701/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department has worked closely with Special European Union Programmes Body (SEUPB) to shape proposals for Peace IV funding that includes a Shared Education thematic area. It is proposed that this funding is aimed at those 24% of schools, as identified in Schools Omnibus Survey in 2013, who stated that they have not engaged in delivery of Shared Education. Additionally the proposal includes extending eligibility for shared education funding to the early years and youth service sectors as well as capacity building across the educational workforce.

This funding stream will complement the existing Delivering Social Change Shared Education signature project which is aimed at those schools that have had significant experience of sharing opportunities.

Together the outcomes of these funding streams will inform policy for the way forward for Shared Education.

Mr Newton asked the Minister of Education how his Department promotes science, technology, engineering and mathematics subjects in primary and post-primary schools.
(AQO 7702/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: At primary level, the curriculum provides for science, technology and engineering within "The World Around Us".

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) conducted a review of 'World Around Us' recently and found that most of the science and technology lessons observed by inspectors (86%) were evaluated as good or better. Over half of the lessons were evaluated as very good or outstanding. The report makes a number of recommendations and I have asked my officials to consider how these can be taken forward.

My Department supports the development of the cross-curricular skills of Communication, Using Maths and Using ICT. These core skills are central to our curriculum and they are acquired and used throughout a child's education and beyond.

My Department also has a number of STEM intervention programmes to complement the curriculum. It provides annual core funding of £400 thousand pounds to Sentinus, the Department's front line STEM delivery partner which delivers 57,000 interventions to primary and post-primary pupils every year.

Sentinus has also developed an important initiative called 'IT's Your Choice', to excite and enthuse young people of all ages about computer programming.

Together, I believe my policies and programmes are having a positive impact in terms of pupils pursuing STEM subjects as evidenced by the 3 percentage points increase in the number of STEM A-level entries between 2007 and 2012.

Mr Irwin asked the Minister of Education whether he will prioritise a new build at Markethill High School, Co. Armagh.
(AQO 7703/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Market Hill High School will be assessed for a new build along side any other applications for a new build ahead of my proposed announcement.

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Education how many pupils in post-primary schools have studied Design and Technology at GCSE level since 2011.
(AQO 7704/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: In the academic years 2010/11 to 2012/13, 14,481 year 12 pupils made examination entries in GCSE design and technology.

Department for Employment and Learning

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what representations have been made on behalf of former employees of City Link, Nutts Corner to the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills to accelerate their claims for National Insurance Fund redundancy payments.
(AQW 41975/11-15)

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): I understand that there may have been some representations at a political level on behalf of former employees of City Link, Nutts Corner to the Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS); but I can confirm that my Department has received no request from BIS to accelerate their claims for redundancy payments. BIS has no remit or responsibility for the provision or administration of the Northern Ireland Redundancy Payments Service (RPS). That remit and responsibility falls to my Department. I can confirm that in response to this regrettable announcement over the Christmas/New Year period, staff in my RPS implemented an action plan to ensure that redundancy applications from eligible employees in this jurisdiction were expedited as quickly as possible, with the intent of minimising any financial hardship.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Employment and Learning which (i) full-time; and (ii) part-time undergraduate courses have been withdrawn from the Ulster University prospectus since the 2012/2013 academic year, broken down by campus.
(AQW 42344/11-15)

Dr Farry: Ulster University regularly reviews its course provision with the latest review having been carried out in December 2014 and noted by the university committee in February 2015. The university makes decisions by looking at a number of factors including the number of applications, employability statistics and national student satisfaction scores.

Ulster University has provided the following information regarding courses which have been withdrawn from its prospectus since the 2012/13 academic year. The University has stated that course closures do not necessarily equate to subject closures, as different courses in the same subject area will still be available to prospective students.

Full Time

Programme Title	Campus	Committee Notation
BSc Hons Banking and Finance	CE	Feb 2013
BSc Hons Clinical Physiology Respiratory	JN	
BSc Hons Clinical Physiology Cardiology	JN	
BSc Hons Creative Enterprise	JN	April 2013
BSc Hons Communication	JN	
BSc Hons Communication with Advertising	JN	
BSc Hons Communication with Counselling	JN	
BSc Hons Communication with Public Relations	JN	
BSc Hons Language and Linguistics with Advertising	JN	
BSc Hons Language and Linguistics with Communication	JN	
BSc Hons Language and Linguistics with Counselling	JN	
BSc Hons Language and Linguistics with Public Relations	JN	
BSc Hons Public Relations	JN	
BA Hons Irish Studies	CE	June 2013
BA Hons Irish Language and Literature	CE	
UG Hons Subject: Irish (Major, Main, Minor)	CE	
UG Hons Subject: Irish (Main)	ME	
BSc Hons International Hotel and Tourism Management	BT	
BSc Hons Environmental Health (non DIS/DPP)	JN	Sep 2013
BSc Hons Economics with Politics	JN	
BSc Hons Economics with Accountancy Studies	JN	
BSc Hons Economics with Marketing	JN	
BSc Hons Specialist Nursing Practice	CE	Feb 2014
BSc Hons Transportation with Specialisms	JN	April 2014
BSc (Hons) Transport and Supply Chain Management	JN	
LLB Law with Drama	ME	June 2014
BA Hons Dance with Music	ME	Oct 2014
BA Hons Drama with Computing	ME	
BA Hons English with Geography	CE	
BA Hons Film Studies and French	CE	
BA Hons Film Studies and German	CE	
BA Hons Film Studies and Spanish	CE	
BA Hons Film Studies with French	CE	

Programme Title	Campus	Committee Notation
BA Hons Film Studies with German	CE	
BA Hons Film Studies with Spanish	CE	
BA Hons French with English	CE	
BA Hons French with Geography	CE	
BA Hons French with Photo Imaging	CE	
BA Hons German with Business	CE	
BA Hons German with Geography	CE	
BA Hons German with Marketing	CE	
BA Hons German with Photo Imaging	CE	
BA Hons History with Photo Imaging	CE	
BA Hons Media Studies with French	CE	
BA Hons Media Studies with Geography	CE	
BA Hons Media Studies with German	CE	
BA Hons Media Studies with Spanish	CE	
BA Hons Spanish with English	CE	
BA Hons Spanish with Geography	CE	
BA Hons Spanish with Photo Imaging	CE	
BA Hons English with Photo Imaging	CE	
BA Hons Film Studies with International Development	CE	
BA Hons German with English	CE	
BA Hons Media Studies with International Development	CE	
BSc Hons Business	CE	
BSc Hons Advertising with Accounting	ME	Nov 2014
BSc Hons Advertising with Irish	ME	
BSc Hons Sports Technology	JN	
BA Hons English and Film Studies	CE	Feb 2015
BA Hons Film Studies and Geography	CE	
BA Hons Film Studies and History	CE	
BA Hons Film Studies and Journalism	CE	
BA Hons Film and Media Studies	CE	
BA Hons Media Studies with Film Studies	CE	
BA Hons History with Film Studies	CE	
BA Hons English with Film Studies	CE	
BA Hons French with Film Studies	CE	
BA Hons German with Film Studies	CE	
BA Hons Spanish with Film Studies	CE	
BA Hons Journalism with Film Studies	CE	
BA Hons Film Studies with Photo Imaging	CE	
BA Hons Film Studies with English	CE	
BA Hons Film Studies with History	CE	

Programme Title	Campus	Committee Notation
BA Hons Film Studies with Media Studies	CE	
BA Hons Film Studies with English as a Second Language	CE	
BA Hons Journalism with Photo Imaging	CE	
BA Hons Media Studies with Photo Imaging	CE	
BA Hons Media Arts with Photo Imaging	CE	
BA Hons Irish History and Society	CE	
BA Hons Irish History with Education	CE	
BA Hons Irish History with English	CE	
BA Hons Irish History with Geography	CE	
BA Hons Journalism with Irish History	CE	
BA Hons Irish History and Politics	ME	
BA Hons Music with Dance	ME	
BA Hons Dance with Drama	ME	
BA Hons Dance	ME	
BA Hons Drama with Dance	ME	
BSc Hons Transportation	JN	
BSc Hons Housing Management	JN	
BSc Hons Building Engineering and Materials	JN	
MSci Transport Planning	JN	
BSc Hons Computing with Geography	CE	
BSc Hons Computing with Psychology	CE	
BSc Hons Computing with Accounting	CE	
BSc Hons Computational Finance	JN	
BSc Hons Computer Gaming, Modelling and Animation	ME	
BSc Hons Geography with Photo Imaging	CE	
BSc Hons Environmental Science with Photo Imaging	CE	
BSc Hons Business Studies with Irish History	ME	

Part Time

Programme Title	Campus	Committee Notation
BSc Computing and Information Systems	JN	Nov 2012
BSc Hons Communication	JN	April 2013
BSc Hons Communication with Advertising	JN	
BSc Hons Communication with Counselling	JN	
BSc Hons Communication with Linguistics	JN	
BSc Hons Communication with Public Relations	JN	
BSc Hons Language and Linguistics with Advertising	JN	
BSc Hons Language and Linguistics with Communication	JN	
BSc Hons Language and Linguistics with Counselling	JN	
BSc Hons Language and Linguistics with Public Relations	JN	

Programme Title	Campus	Committee Notation
BSc Hons Public Relations	JN	
BA Hons Irish Studies	CE	June 2013
UG Hons Subject: Irish (Major, Main, Minor)	CE	
UG Hons Subject: Irish (Main)	ME	
BSc Hons International Hotel and Tourism Management	BT	
BSc Hons Applied Bioscience (Healthcare Sciences)	DL	Sep 2013
UG Hons Subject: Procurement (Minor)	JN	
BA Hons English Literature	BT	Nov 2013
BSc Hons Politics with Social Policy	JN	
BSc Hons Politics with Sociology	JN	
BSc Hons Politics with Procurement	JN	
BSc Hons Specialist Nursing Practice	CE	Feb 2014
LLB Law with Drama	ME	June 2014
BSc Hons Accounting	JN	Oct 2014
BA Hons German with Business	CE	
BA Hons Media Studies with Film Studies	CE	Feb 2015
BA Hons English and Film Studies	CE	
BA Hons Spanish with Film Studies	CE	
BA Hons Media Studies with Photo Imaging	CE	
BA Hons Irish History and Politics	ME	
BA Hons Irish History with Psychology	ME	
BA Hons American Studies with Irish History	ME	
BA Hons Irish History and Society	ME	
BA Hons Irish History and Society	CE	
BA Hons Dance	ME	

JN = Jordanstown campus
CE = Coleraine campus
ME = Magee campus
BT = Belfast campus
DL = Donegal – Letterkenny Institute

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline the opportunities identified by each of the higher education institutions in teaching and learning in accordance with Graduating to Success.
(AQW 42350/11-15)

Dr Farry: The table below sets out the collaborative teaching and learning opportunities identified, and taken forward, by the higher education institutions as part of the Graduating to Success cross border project.

NI Institution	ROI Partner	Programme
Queen's University	University College Dublin	MA in Reconceiving the Renaissance: Literatures, Places, Cultures.
Queen's University	University College Dublin, Trinity College Dublin	Postgraduate Certificate in Innovation and Entrepreneurship
Ulster University	Letterkenny Institute of Technology	MSc Innovation Management in the Public Service

NI Institution	ROI Partner	Programme
Ulster University	Letterkenny Institute of Technology	BA Hons Irish Language and Literature
Ulster University	University College Dublin	the PgCert/Dip/MSc Food Regulatory Affairs
Ulster University	Cavan Innovation and Technology Centre	AdvCert and AdvDip and BSc Hons in Management Practice
Ulster University	Marino Institute, Dublin	MSc Management and Corporate Governance
Ulster University	Monaghan Education Centre	PgDip/MEd
Stranmillis University College	Cavan and Monaghan Education and Training Board	BA (Hons) Early Childhood Studies

Mr Beggs asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the (i) higher and further education courses associated with transport management that have been cut from the syllabi; (ii) employment rates of former students on these courses; and (iii) process by which education institutions decided to cut these courses.
(AQW 42384/11-15)

Dr Farry: In researching the higher and further education courses associated with transport management, officials have identified two level 3 courses entitled OCR Level 3 Certificate of Professional Competence for Transport Managers (Passenger Transport & Road Haulage) available at Northern Regional College. The statistics show that in the academic years 2011/12 and 2012/13 there were no enrolments for these courses, however, there were six enrolments in the academic year 2013/14 all of which relate to the Certificate of Professional Competence for Transport Managers (Road Haulage). I can also confirm that my department does not hold information on employment rates of former further education students on these courses.

While the Department sets the strategic direction for the Further Education Sector, each College is responsible for its own curriculum offer colleges are not required to consult when they propose to discontinue a course.

In regard to higher education courses, Ulster University has withdrawn a single honours programme in Transportation.

Approximately 15 students per year have graduated from this course in the last number of years. Using the national graduate destination statistics (which are collected 6 months after graduation) the average employment rates over the last 3 years have been:

- in employment (not necessarily in the transport sector) – 80%
- in further study – 4%
- doing voluntary unpaid work – 4%
- unemployed 12%

In reviewing this course the University stated that it took into account a range of performance measures, including: the number of applicants selecting a course as their firm (first) choice through UCAS; UCAS tariff points achieved by entrants to the course (eg ‘A level grades); first year retention (drop out rates); performance in the National Student Survey and employability.

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail (i) the number of litigant requests for written transcripts of Industrial Tribunal hearings since practice directions were issued on 7 May 2012; and (ii) the number of written transcripts subsequently issued to litigants.
(AQW 42498/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Office of Industrial Tribunals and the Fair Employment Tribunal (OITFET) does not maintain a record of all litigant requests for written transcripts of industrial tribunal hearings.

OITFET has issued seven transcripts of industrial tribunal hearings to litigants since practice directions were issued on 7 May 2012.

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning why appropriate guidelines were not issued for the appeals process for applications to the European Social Fund.
(AQW 42516/11-15)

Dr Farry:

(i) All applicants who had their applications rejected through Phase I of the European Social Fund (ESF) assessment process received a letter which outlined the appeals process. This was also outlined in the Guidance Notes for Applicants issued at the time of the ‘Call for Applications’ to the Programme.

(ii) Each application which was rejected was afforded an opportunity to appeal the decision to reject the application within 5 working days. Applicants rejected for reasons other than financial capability assessment were notified earlier as the process of financial capability assessment took longer than anticipated to complete.

(iii) The Department intends publishing the list of successful applicants to the ESF Programme once the full assessment process has been completed. It is not common practice to issue a list of unsuccessful applicants, and would involve breaching commercial confidentiality.

(iv) In the current ESF Programme 2007 – 2013 the Department supported the Apprenticeship Programme and therefore as detailed in the NI ESF Operational Programme 2014-2020, which was approved by the European Commission, my Department will continue to fund the Apprenticeship and Youth Training Programmes with 40% of the ESF allocation. The remaining 60% of funding will be awarded through the open call for applications. This is where the voluntary and community sector will play a key role in delivering the additionality that is required from this type of activity to support the unemployed; economically inactive; young people not in education, employment or training; people with disabilities; and provision for community family support.

(v) My officials are working under challenging circumstances to ensure that the new ESF is operational from 1 April 2015 and there are no contingency plans for gap funding.

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning why separate appeal dates were issued for European Social Fund applications (i) rejected on technicalities; and (ii) rejected as being financially unviable.
(AQW 42517/11-15)

Dr Farry:

(i) All applicants who had their applications rejected through Phase I of the European Social Fund (ESF) assessment process received a letter which outlined the appeals process. This was also outlined in the Guidance Notes for Applicants issued at the time of the 'Call for Applications' to the Programme.

(ii) Each application which was rejected was afforded an opportunity to appeal the decision to reject the application within 5 working days. Applicants rejected for reasons other than financial capability assessment were notified earlier as the process of financial capability assessment took longer than anticipated to complete.

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(v) My officials are working under challenging circumstances to ensure that the new ESF is operational from 1 April 2015 and there are no contingency plans for gap funding.

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to list the organisations that applied to deliver the European Social Fund in North Down and Ards.
(AQW 42518/11-15)

Dr Farry:

(i) All applicants who had their applications rejected through Phase I of the European Social Fund (ESF) assessment process received a letter which outlined the appeals process. This was also outlined in the Guidance Notes for Applicants issued at the time of the 'Call for Applications' to the Programme.

(ii) Each application which was rejected was afforded an opportunity to appeal the decision to reject the application within 5 working days. Applicants rejected for reasons other than financial capability assessment were notified earlier as the process of financial capability assessment took longer than anticipated to complete.

(iii) The Department intends publishing the list of successful applicants to the ESF Programme once the full assessment process has been completed. It is not common practice to issue a list of unsuccessful applicants, and would involve breaching commercial confidentiality.

(iv) In the current ESF Programme 2007 – 2013 the Department supported the Apprenticeship Programme and therefore as detailed in the NI ESF Operational Programme 2014-2020, which was approved by the European Commission, my Department will continue to fund the Apprenticeship and Youth Training Programmes with 40% of the ESF allocation. The remaining 60% of funding will be awarded through the open call for applications. This is where the voluntary and community sector will play a key role in delivering the additionality that is required from this type of activity to support the unemployed; economically inactive; young people not in education, employment or training; people with disabilities; and provision for community family support.

(v) My officials are working under challenging circumstances to ensure that the new ESF is operational from 1 April 2015 and there are no contingency plans for gap funding.

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline the rationale for using European Social Funds for core departmental responsibilities; and whether his Department considers the European Social Fund to represent additionality.
(AQW 42519/11-15)

Dr Farry:

(i) All applicants who had their applications rejected through Phase I of the European Social Fund (ESF) assessment process received a letter which outlined the appeals process. This was also outlined in the Guidance Notes for Applicants issued at the time of the 'Call for Applications' to the Programme.

(ii) Each application which was rejected was afforded an opportunity to appeal the decision to reject the application within 5 working days. Applicants rejected for reasons other than financial capability assessment were notified earlier as the process of financial capability assessment took longer than anticipated to complete.

(iii) The Department intends publishing the list of successful applicants to the ESF Programme once the full assessment process has been completed. It is not common practice to issue a list of unsuccessful applicants, and would involve breaching commercial confidentiality.

(iv) In the current ESF Programme 2007 – 2013 the Department supported the Apprenticeship Programme and therefore as detailed in the NI ESF Operational Programme 2014-2020, which was approved by the European Commission, my Department will continue to fund the Apprenticeship and Youth Training Programmes with 40% of the ESF allocation. The remaining 60% of funding will be awarded through the open call for applications. This is where the voluntary and community sector will play a key role in delivering the additionality that is required from this type of activity to support the unemployed; economically inactive; young people not in education, employment or training; people with disabilities; and provision for community family support.

(v) My officials are working under challenging circumstances to ensure that the new ESF is operational from 1 April 2015 and there are no contingency plans for gap funding.

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail any contingency plans for gap funding should the outcome of applications European Social Fund not be known by 1 April 2015.
(AQW 42520/11-15)

Dr Farry:

(i) All applicants who had their applications rejected through Phase I of the European Social Fund (ESF) assessment process received a letter which outlined the appeals process. This was also outlined in the Guidance Notes for Applicants issued at the time of the 'Call for Applications' to the Programme.

(ii) Each application which was rejected was afforded an opportunity to appeal the decision to reject the application within 5 working days. Applicants rejected for reasons other than financial capability assessment were notified earlier as the process of financial capability assessment took longer than anticipated to complete.

(iii) The Department intends publishing the list of successful applicants to the ESF Programme once the full assessment process has been completed. It is not common practice to issue a list of unsuccessful applicants, and would involve breaching commercial confidentiality.

(iv) In the current ESF Programme 2007 – 2013 the Department supported the Apprenticeship Programme and therefore as detailed in the NI ESF Operational Programme 2014-2020, which was approved by the European Commission, my Department will continue to fund the Apprenticeship and Youth Training Programmes with 40% of the ESF allocation. The remaining 60% of funding will be awarded through the open call for applications. This is where the voluntary and community sector will play a key role in delivering the additionality that is required from this type of activity to support the unemployed; economically inactive; young people not in education, employment or training; people with disabilities; and provision for community family support.

(v) My officials are working under challenging circumstances to ensure that the new ESF is operational from 1 April 2015 and there are no contingency plans for gap funding.

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what is the time scale for a decision by the Department of Finance and Personnel on the business case for the expansion of Ulster University's Magee campus.
(AQW 42522/11-15)

Dr Farry: I refer to my answer in response to Oral Question No. AQO 7714/11-15 on 3rd March 2015.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of the Employment Service Support Programme; and whether it will be extended beyond March 2015.
(AQW 42560/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Employment Service Support (ESS) was introduced on 2 June 2014, to support the continued delivery of Executive funded initiatives and facilitate the continuity of provision leading to the introduction of a new adult return to work programme, Steps 2 Success (S2S).

ESS initially comprised the following six strands of provision:

- ESS Into Work Skills;
- ESS Short Accredited Training Courses;
- ESS YES Work Experience Strand;
- ESS YES Skills Development Strand;
- ESS First Start; and
- ESS Step Ahead 50+.

The programme was expanded in October 2014 to accommodate the introduction of an additional strand - ESS Self Employment Test Trading.

S2S was successfully launched as my Department's new adult return to work programme on 20 October 2014.

While validated statistical information is not yet available on ESS, management information collected on the various strands indicates that, at 20 February 2015, over 4,600 clients have accessed this provision in order to assist them to return to work. These initial statistics are very encouraging, however, it will not be possible for an accurate assessment of the performance of ESS until statistics become available on the numbers finding employment following completion of their ESS provision.

Whilst it is not possible for ESS to continue in its existing format beyond March 2015, the Employment Service is committed to offering a quality all age service to help jobseekers overcome barriers to work and to move towards, and into, work at the earliest opportunity.

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how much funding is committed to the current European Social Fund programme.
(AQW 42579/11-15)

Dr Farry:

(i) The current ESF Programme 2007-2013 has a financial allocation of €189,777,300 which is fully committed.

(ii) There is no projected underspend at this time for the current ESF Programme 2007-2013.

(iii) There are no plans to extend the current ESF Programme. All expenditure under the Programme must have been incurred and the process of claiming it from the Commission, including all verification and audit work, must be completed by the end of 2015.

(iv) My Department has applied the Freedom of Information Act 2000 Section 43 (commercial interests) to the applicants that have applied to the ESF Programme and, therefore, I am unable to provide detailed information on further education colleges applications.

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what is the anticipated underspend in the current European Social Fund programme.
(AQW 42580/11-15)

Dr Farry:

(i) The current ESF Programme 2007-2013 has a financial allocation of €189,777,300 which is fully committed.

(ii) There is no projected underspend at this time for the current ESF Programme 2007-2013.

(iii) There are no plans to extend the current ESF Programme. All expenditure under the Programme must have been incurred and the process of claiming it from the Commission, including all verification and audit work, must be completed by the end of 2015.

(iv) My Department has applied the Freedom of Information Act 2000 Section 43 (commercial interests) to the applicants that have applied to the ESF Programme and, therefore, I am unable to provide detailed information on further education colleges applications.

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what opportunities exist to extend the current European Social Fund programme.
(AQW 42581/11-15)

Dr Farry:

(i) The current ESF Programme 2007-2013 has a financial allocation of €189,777,300 which is fully committed.

(ii) There is no projected underspend at this time for the current ESF Programme 2007-2013.

(iii) There are no plans to extend the current ESF Programme. All expenditure under the Programme must have been incurred and the process of claiming it from the Commission, including all verification and audit work, must be completed by the end of 2015.

(iv) My Department has applied the Freedom of Information Act 2000 Section 43 (commercial interests) to the applicants that have applied to the ESF Programme and, therefore, I am unable to provide detailed information on further education colleges applications.

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the number of project applications submitted to the European Social Fund by each further education college.
(AQW 42582/11-15)

Dr Farry:

(i) The current ESF Programme 2007-2013 has a financial allocation of €189,777,300 which is fully committed.

(ii) There is no projected underspend at this time for the current ESF Programme 2007-2013.

(iii) There are no plans to extend the current ESF Programme. All expenditure under the Programme must have been incurred and the process of claiming it from the Commission, including all verification and audit work, must be completed by the end of 2015.

(iv) My Department has applied the Freedom of Information Act 2000 Section 43 (commercial interests) to the applicants that have applied to the ESF Programme and, therefore, I am unable to provide detailed information on further education colleges applications.

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether there are minimum class sizes for Essential Skills courses.
(AQW 42603/11-15)

Dr Farry: My department's current operational guidelines for the delivery of Essential Skills recommend that in terms of good practice, class sizes should have a minimum of eight learners.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of the role played by Charter NI in the success of the recent Jobs Fair in Kilcooley.
(AQW 42667/11-15)

Dr Farry: You will be aware that Charter NI was one of the stakeholders working in partnership with my Department to organise and facilitate the delivery of the successful Work Placement event in Kilcooley Community Centre on Thursday 13 November 2014.

The event was well attended, and I am advised that Charter NI played a key role by providing transport to and from the event for a considerable number of their clients. Indeed, this service generated approximately 50% of the attendees on the day.

In addition, it was clear that Charter NI have established good working relationships and a rapport with their clients, which enabled their mentors to provide onsite support to assist with the completion of application forms and preparation for employer interviews.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on Project Ten of Graduating to Success and the establishment of a university base at one of the further education colleges.
(AQW 42673/11-15)

Dr Farry: The aim of Project 10 of Graduating to Success is to pilot a number of initiatives and approaches aimed at increasing access to, and participation in, HE provision locally, with a particular emphasis on up-skilling those in employment. The pilot is being run in two further education colleges, the South West College (SWC) and the Southern Regional College (SRC). These colleges were selected for pilot purposes because, geographically, they are furthest from university campuses in Northern Ireland.

Both colleges are engaged in information technology infrastructure developments, including the production of online learning materials and delivery platforms, which will facilitate flexible delivery of higher education provision using a blend of distance learning and more traditional face to face learning.

SWC is working in partnership with both the University of Ulster (UU) and Queen's University Belfast (QUB). Subject to final higher education validations, the college plans to have a recruitment to a BSc (Honours) Sustainable Construction course with UU, and a recruitment to a BSc (Honours) Sustainability course with QUB, both commencing in September 2015.

SRC and UU are partnering in the development of a blended learning framework that will define future blended learning arrangements across all higher level provision within the college, and the development and implementation of e-tutoring arrangements are being piloted currently within the higher level apprenticeship in Applied Industrial Science. The Foundation Degree in Applied Industrial Science is the underpinning knowledge for this higher level apprenticeship. Similarly, the Foundation Degree in Accounting and Finance has also been developed with UU.

Both colleges are engaged in on-going discussions with the universities to identify further opportunities to use technology in innovative ways to facilitate the local delivery of higher education provision.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for details on the compliance of the (i) universities and university colleges; and (ii) higher education providers have adopted the Higher Education Achievement Report HEAR as stated in Graduating to Success by 2014 and 2015.
(AQW 42675/11-15)

Dr Farry: Work in relation to Project 6 of Graduating to Success aims to – 'Enhance the employability prospects of graduates'. The project contains a number of outcomes, is progressing well and I am pleased to report that Ulster University, Queen's University, and Stranmillis and St Mary's University Colleges have all adopted the Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR). My officials are currently working with the other higher education providers, namely our further education colleges and the Open University, with a view to adopting the HEAR in 2015.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on the commitment within Graduating to Success to carry out a Research Excellence Framework assessment in 2014; and to detail the results of the assessment.
(AQW 42678/11-15)

Dr Farry: As part of 'Graduating to Success: Higher Education Strategy for Northern Ireland', my Department, along with the other UK funding bodies, committed to introducing the Research Excellence Framework (REF) as a system for assessing the quality of research in UK universities. The results of REF 2014 were published in December 2014 and demonstrated the high quality and enhanced international standing of research conducted by our universities. REF 2014 shows that the quality of submitted research outputs has improved significantly since the last assessment exercise in 2008.

Queen's University Belfast and the Ulster University had a very positive outcome from the REF. They performed to an exceptionally high standard in a number of areas, with some top 5 and top 10 positions in a UK context in relation to their 4* and combined 3* and 4* assessments.

Stranmillis University College can also be proud of its achievements and the significant increase in particular in its overall 4* rating. St Mary's submission to the REF was its first participation in this type of assessment and it has achieved an assessment that indicates that 87% of its submitted research is at a standard that is recognised internationally or nationally.

A more detailed assessment of our universities' performance in REF 2014 will be provided to the Committee for Employment and Learning in due course.

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning why the European Social Fund roadshows made no mention of management accounts.
(AQW 42695/11-15)

Dr Farry: The ESF Roadshows were organised to provide information to potential applicants on the application, assessment and implementation processes for the new ESF Programme 2014-2020. It was clearly stated at the roadshows that the Programme might be subject to changes as its development was still underway. Attendees at the roadshows were advised that detailed guidance notes for applicants would be issued along with the application form. No specific reference to management accounts was made at the roadshows as this level of detail is outlined in the guidance notes.

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline the rationale for his Department's interpretation of EU guidelines on 10 per cent assests in its European Social Fund guidlines.
(AQW 42700/11-15)

Dr Farry: In the new ESF Programme the European Commission has limited the upfront advance payment to the Department to 1% as opposed to the previous programme advance of 30%.

Given that actual ESF expenditure has to be paid out in full by an ESF project before submitting a claim to the Department, a project must therefore have access to the relevant cash resources. It is therefore imperative that a project has net cash assets to fulfil this requirement. If a project has no net cash assets then they would not be able to comply fully with the ESF financial claims process.

Therefore, for the new ESF Programme, the Department requires that sufficient net cash assets must be demonstrated as part of the financial capability assessment before a project commences activity.

To assist with the financial capability assessment, a potential project applicant must have net cash assets of at least 10% of the value of the application. This amount would equate to £10,000 net cash assets for a possible ESF applicant seeking £100,000 funding per year.

This would allow projects to have sufficient cash resources to implement their project and reduce any potential risk of getting into financial difficulties during the implementation of the programme.

Should a project not have sufficient cash assets they would not be able to pay staff salaries and therefore not provide sufficient audit documentation to claim funding. All funding is paid retrospectively so it is important that net cash assets are available.

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for the managing authority's definition of finacial capacity and viability in relation to the European Social Fund application assessment process.
(AQW 42701/11-15)

Dr Farry: The financial capability assessment is required because of very stringent financial requirements both at EU and Northern Ireland level and also due to the fact that, unlike in the current ESF Programme, a change in EU rules means that projects will not be able to access a prepayment advance of 30% of project costs.

For the purpose of the financial capability assessment to be undertaken as part of the European Social Fund application process, the most recent management accounts should consist of a balance sheet and a year to date income and expenditure statement. In addition annual accounts are examined.

The ESF guidance notes stipulated that the Net Cash Assets needed to be 10% of the annual cost of the project. The accounts were reviewed to see if an applicant met the criteria.

A review of the annual accounts including the notes to the accounts, the directors' report and the auditors' report was undertaken to see if there was anything identified in these that would need to be considered in the financial capability assessment. For example, a "Going Concern" note.

The current ratio (Current Assets/Current Liabilities) was calculated for both years in the annual accounts and the management accounts to assess the ability of the organisation to pay their current liabilities with their current assets.

For each project a cash flow was prepared to ascertain whether the applicant organisation would be likely to run into any cash flow difficulties.

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what acknowledgement his Department makes of the not for profit circumstances of voluntary and community groups when considering their financial capability in European Social Fund applications.
(AQW 42702/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Department assesses each applicant to the European Social Fund based on the criteria that were fully outlined in the Guidance Notes for Applicants and in an open and transparent process. Applications were encouraged from applicants that fully met the criteria, and a large number of voluntary and community sector organisations submitted applications. All applicants must have sound financial capability to enable financially viable projects to be selected. It is entirely possible for not for profit organisations to meet these financial capability requirements.

Mr Newton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how he is addressing the essential skill needs of adults within the Belfast constituencies; and how he plans to address this need.
(AQW 42753/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Essential Skills for Living strategy continues to provide Essential Skills programmes for adults throughout Northern Ireland, including Belfast.

Essential Skills remains a priority for my department and provision is integrated within all our funded programmes in further education, training and employment. Belfast Metropolitan College (BMC) is the main provider of Essential Skills tuition in its five principal sites across the Belfast area, offering free literacy, numeracy and information technology (ICT) courses from entry level through to level 2. In each of the last three years BMC has enrolled in excess of 5,000 Essential Skills learners.

The college also provides an extensive Essential Skills Community Education Programme through its partnerships with a wide range of community, voluntary and statutory agencies and is also one of the largest providers of Essential Skills through the Learner Access and Engagement Programme which is aimed at those learners facing significant barriers.

Through the Union Learning Fund, my department also encourages trade union members to take advantage of Essential Skills courses. Under the auspices of the Fund, trade unions, employers and BMC collaborate to deliver Essential Skills in the workplace.

Finally, my department's Employment Service provides a comprehensive range of work focused support as part of the client offer. For those individuals whose lack of achievement in Essential Skills is identified as an impediment to gaining and retaining employment Advisers will signpost to an Essential Skills provider.

I am confident that the Essential Skills provision available in Belfast, and throughout Northern Ireland, is helping to address an important aspect of underachievement in our economy.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how much European funding his Department has received in each of the last two financial years; and from which funding streams.
(AQW 42895/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department receives direct European funding in respect of the European Social Fund, which is one of the Structural and Investment Funds. My Department received £15,824,016 in the financial year 2012/13 and £26,578,620 in 2013/14 from the European Commission for the Northern Ireland ESF programme.

My Department also facilitates the drawdown of competitive European funding by its Arms Length Bodies (ALBs) and third party organisations through various European funding programmes.

In 2012/13, my Department facilitated ALBs and third party organisations in drawing down approximately £4.5 million for research under Framework Programme 7 (FP7) and £3.5 million for mobility under the Lifelong Learning Programme.

In 2013/14, my Department facilitated ALBs and third party organisations in drawing down approximately £6.3 million under FP7 and £3 million under the Lifelong Learning Programme.

My Department continues to support these organisations in accessing EU funding through targeted promotion and investment in infrastructure, particularly in respect of the new Horizon 2020 and Erasmus+ programmes.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Employment and Learning when staff in the Northern Regional College will receive their 2014/2015 incremental pay award.[R]
(AQW 42922/11-15)

Dr Farry:

(i) The current ESF Programme 2007-2013 has a financial allocation of €189,777,300 which is fully committed.

(ii) There is no projected underspend at this time for the current ESF Programme 2007-2013.

(iii) There are no plans to extend the current ESF Programme. All expenditure under the Programme must have been incurred and the process of claiming it from the Commission, including all verification and audit work, must be completed by the end of 2015.

(iv) My Department has applied the Freedom of Information Act 2000 Section 43 (commercial interests) to the applicants that have applied to the ESF Programme and, therefore, I am unable to provide detailed information on further education colleges applications.

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Employment and Learning when he expects the Department of Finance and Personnel to make a decision on whether the business case for the expansion of Ulster University's Magee campus represents value for money.
(AQO 7714/11-15)

Dr Farry: The business case for the expansion of Ulster University's Magee campus is currently being scrutinised within my Department. Once it is approved by my Department it will then be passed to the Department of Finance and Personnel for its review. As I do not know what issues or queries it will raise on the business case, I am not in a position to say when it will make its decision.

Ms McGahan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline the level of co-operation and interaction between the STEM Centre in the Dungannon Campus of the South West College and local schools to meet the criteria of the Entitlement Framework.
(AQO 7710/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Centre at South West College is a teaching facility focused exclusively on delivering educational and interactive activities, in the areas of Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths.

Activities are offered to school pupils at Key Stage 2 and 3 and since the centre opened, I am pleased to report, teachers, educationalists and parents, as well as over 12,000 young people have attended, including over 3,000 pupils from over 30 post-primary schools.

Approximately 650 pupils were surveyed in the last year based on their attendance, 76% stated their visit has encouraged them to study a STEM subject, and 79% stated it made them more aware of STEM careers.

The centre is providing co-operation and interaction with local schools in a number of ways, these include: delivery of activities for promotion of STEM subjects and teacher training days in conjunction with the Southern Education and Library Board.

In addition, the centre supports the College contribution to the Department of Education's Entitlement Framework Programme.

Pupils who attend from local schools aim to achieve a GCSE in a vocational area and the centre is used as a tool to enhance the curricula pupils are learning in the college.

The stylish and relaxed environment is designed to capture and attract the imagination of young people and promote interest in the vast range of career paths and options available to scientists, technologists, engineers and mathematicians.

The skills developed are wholly relevant to the school curriculum and complement the syllabus currently studied by students in schools and college.

Finally, the college has achieved the Association of Colleges award for College and School Partnerships for their work inspiring pupils towards further study and careers in science, technology, engineering and maths.

Mr McMullan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how his Department engages with the Agri-Food Strategy Board.
(AQO 7711/11-15)

Dr Farry: My officials and I have engaged with the Agri-Food Strategy Board since its inception.

My Department is represented on the Inter Departmental Steering Group which has played a vital role in assessing the recommendations contained in this Plan.

Since the Executive endorsement of Going for Growth, the Group's focus has naturally shifted somewhat and it

now assists in monitoring government's progress against implementation of the Plan. My Department reports progress against the relevant objectives on the Plan on a quarterly basis.

Tony O'Neill and I jointly Chair the Food and Drink Manufacturing Skills Group. This Group was established by my Department in 2011 as our route of engagement with this economically important sector. The Group brings together government, local employers and education providers to identify the key skills issues facing the sector and to develop solutions to help address these skills challenges.

Tony O'Neill is also the Chairman of the Agri-Food Strategy Board and his involvement in the Skills Group provides a mechanism for progress on skills issues to be communicated to the Board, thereby facilitating effective coordination between the two bodies.

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what steps he is taking to discuss skills needs with local businesses.
(AQO 7712/11-15)

Dr Farry: In support of the Skills Strategy, my Department actively engages with local businesses in a range of ways to help them to identify and overcome skills issues and contribute to upskilling the workforce. We focus, in particular, on the skills needs of sectors which are a priority for economic growth, and small and medium sized enterprises.

My Department manages the Employer Support Programme – InnovateUs, the programme's key objective, is to deliver a unique, tailored training solution to meet the identified innovation skills needs of owners, managers and employees in SMEs with 50 or less employees.

The Assured Skills programme is another vehicle through which we address the skills needs of local business. The academy model is a short-term intervention which we have already used successfully to meet urgent and identified skills needs in areas such as software testing, cloud computing and data analytics.

I also chair Working Groups related to economically important sectors, such as ICT, Food and Drink Manufacturing, and Advanced Manufacturing and Engineering Services. Each Group involves employers and short term Action Plans have been produced to address the skills needs of the relevant sectors.

Furthermore, the Northern Ireland Strategy on Apprenticeships articulates a blueprint for the future of apprenticeships here. It will have a transformative impact on the supply of skills, particularly at higher levels for employers. It is being driven by strategic partnerships; putting employers at its very heart through a Strategic Advisory Forum and sectoral partnerships. This will ensure that apprenticeships help businesses address skills gaps providing vital skills benefiting employers of all sizes.

Similarly, as outlined in the recent review of youth training consultation, the future youth training system will also include employers in its design and delivery, to better match supply and skills.

Mrs Cameron asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on the provision of training for young people with special educational needs, once they reach the age of 19.
(AQO 7713/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department is committed to ensuring that all young people with special education needs who can benefit from training, can avail of the opportunities on offer.

Training is offered through a range of education, skills and employment provision.

My Department offers these young people a number of options through a range of programmes and services. This includes Training for Success, Apprenticeships, Further and Higher Education, the European Social Fund programme, Careers guidance and employment support services.

I am well aware that young people with special education needs can face a range of barriers that prevent them from availing of the opportunities on offer.

That is why my Department and its providers place great importance on offering support facilities right across our services.

Our aim is straightforward. We want to provide tailored support and assistance that helps these young people achieve their desired training, skills or employment outcomes.

Our support provides financial help and targets assistance at individuals. The individual assistance can include adaptations to training or learning environments, the provision of a support worker, extended eligibility criteria or more flexible participation arrangements.

In addition to our current provision, in recent times I have initiated a number of strategic approaches which cumulatively will enhance our provision.

This includes the outworking of the review of careers support, the review of Youth Training, an Employment and Skills Strategy for People with Disabilities, the delivery of wide ranging support services under the new European Social Fund programme and also the new Economic Inactivity Strategy.

The initiatives will put in place new and improved provision which young people with special education needs can access in order to achieve their skills and employment goals.

Mr Beggs asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what protection he can provide to professional and vocational courses available at local colleges and universities.
(AQO 7715/11-15)

Dr Farry: In light of the particularly difficult budgetary settlement, my Department is in discussions with further education colleges regarding budget allocations and the proposed curriculum.

The Department sets high level targets in respect of the curriculum to be delivered and agrees targets with individual colleges through the college development planning process.

This process aims to achieve a balance between provision that strengthens economic and workforce development and provision that enhances social cohesion. Although my Department sets the strategic direction for the sector, colleges are responsible for their own curriculum, including high level skills provision, and for curriculum change. It is the responsibility of colleges to meet the needs of learners and employers.

Around 97% of funding for colleges' provision at level 3 and below is in respect of courses leading to professional, technical and academic qualifications on regulated qualification frameworks. In considering the 2015/16 curriculum offer, colleges have to ensure that at least 90% of funded provision must be vocational in nature.

The higher education sector is facing similar budgetary constraints to that of the further education sector.

While my Department sets the strategic direction for the higher education sector, each University is responsible for its own course provision and curriculum. Before making decisions regarding course provision, universities take a number of factors into account including my Department's priorities, the needs of the economy and student demand. While there is no specific protection for professional and vocational courses at the universities, I have requested that the universities protect narrow STEM related courses.

I am committed to protection of current and future apprenticeships and youth training programmes. Funding will continue to be allocated in line with demand. In recognising the importance of this provision, I have also secured additional funding of £7.5 million, through the Change Fund, to deliver pilot schemes in high level apprenticeships and youth training later this year.

Mr Douglas asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of the recent difficulties surrounding applications to the European Social Fund.
(AQO 7716/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department recently invited applications for funding to the Northern Ireland European Social Fund Programme, 2014-2020.

With each signed application an organisation had to submit a number of key documents including its most recent management accounts by the closing date for applications of noon on 9 January 2015.

This was clearly outlined in the ESF Guidance Notes for Applicants.

In the same guidance it was also clearly stated that failure to provide any of the requested documents would result in an application being rejected.

Management accounts were requested in order for the Department to conduct a financial capability assessment on each organisation applying and hence to enable financially viable projects to be selected.

This assessment is required because of very stringent financial requirements both at EU and Northern Ireland level.

The ESF Guidance Notes for Applicants stated clearly that failure to provide any of the requested documents would result in an application being rejected at the first phase of the process.

However, 43 of the organisations applying, for whatever reason, did not submit their most recent management accounts. Those affected by the decision to reject their application on this basis believe that failure to produce the requested information was due to a lack of clarity in the guidance notes concerning what constitutes management accounts. Taking account of representations on this issue, I allowed those organisations which did not submit their most recent management accounts with their applications a further opportunity to do so.

Applicants affected were contacted by my Department and afforded an opportunity to submit those documents.

Those applications are now being further examined by my Department in Phase I of the assessment process. Any applicants passing Phase I will then be examined by an assessment panel at Phase II.

Although challenging for officials in my Department it is anticipated that the overall assessment and appeals process will be completed by the end of March 2015.

This will allow funding to be awarded and successful applicants to be supported by 1 April 2015.

Mrs McKevitt asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on applications to the European Social Fund.
(AQO 7717/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department recently invited applications for funding to the Northern Ireland European Social Fund Programme, 2014-2020.

With each signed application an organisation had to submit a number of key documents including its most recent management accounts by the closing date for applications of noon on 9 January 2015.

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Mr Allister asked the Minister for Employment and Learning why there is a high failure rate of applications to the European Social Fund.
(AQO 7718/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department recently invited applications for funding to the Northern Ireland European Social Fund Programme, 2014-2020.

With each signed application an organisation had to submit a number of key documents including its most recent management accounts by the closing date for applications of noon on 9 January 2015.

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Mr B McCrea asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline the steps he is taking to tackle the increasing numbers of economically inactive adults.
(AQO 7719/11-15)

Dr Farry: As part of the Programme for Government 2011 – 2015, my Department and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, in conjunction with a number of other departments, have been developing a strategy to reduce economic inactivity in Northern Ireland. This is in direct response to the historically high levels of economic inactivity experienced in Northern Ireland.

Extensive research, development and consultation with stakeholders has been undertaken and a final draft strategy and implementation plan will be presented to the Executive for consideration shortly.

The final strategy will seek to help a number of specific economically inactive groups to make the transition towards, and into, the labour market. The final strategy will also seek to contribute to an increase in the employment rate in Northern Ireland through a reduction in the proportion of working age adults classified as economically inactive.

This will be the only dedicated government strategy in the United Kingdom targeted specifically at addressing the major socio-economic issue of economic inactivity.

This is a reflection of the significance placed by my Executive colleagues and me in seeking to tackle the issue on a sustainable basis across Northern Ireland.

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether a cost benefit analysis has been carried out on the various options for reducing Air Passenger Duty.
(AQW 42342/11-15)

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): My Department, in conjunction with DFP, commissioned the Northern Ireland Centre for Economic Policy (NICEP) to conduct a detailed economic impact assessment on the impact of air passenger pricing, including short haul Air Passenger Duty. The report is available to download from the DETI website at http://www.detini.gov.uk/economic_impact_assessment_of_air_passenger_duty.pdf

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the number of quangos linked to her Department on (i) 8 May 2007; and (ii) 19 February 2015; and how many people served on the quangos on these respective dates.
(AQW 42576/11-15)

Mrs Foster:

(i) Four Quangos were sponsored by DETI at 8 May 2007, namely: - Invest Northern Ireland, Northern Ireland Tourist Board, General Consumer Council for Northern Ireland and Health & Safety Executive for Northern Ireland. A total of 46 people were serving on the boards of these bodies at that date.

(ii) Five Quangos were sponsored by DETI at 19 February 2015, namely: - Invest Northern Ireland, Tourism Northern Ireland (previously the Northern Ireland Tourist Board), General Consumer Council for Northern Ireland, Health & Safety Executive for Northern Ireland and the Agri-Food Strategy Board. This fifth body is jointly sponsored with DARD. A total of 49 people were serving on the boards of these bodies at that date.

Mrs McKevitt asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline the routes of the two races organised for the Giro Gran Fondo on 21 June 2015.
(AQW 42590/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The routes are fully available to view on www.granfondogiroditaliani.com

The Mourne route is a 177km ride that will challenge the fittest riders by providing tough climbs and inspire each rider by bringing them through some breath taking scenery.

The Mourne route can be viewed here: http://www.discovernorthernireland.com/attachment.aspx?attachmentID=1912

The Strangford route is a 58km loop touching the shores of Strangford Lough and is achievable for beginner and novice cyclists.

The Strangford route can be viewed here: http://www.discovernorthernireland.com/attachment.aspx?attachmentID=1911

More detailed maps of both routes will be released in the coming weeks, along with exact locations of food and hydration stops.

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how much funding was allocated to companies in each constituency by InvestNI for staff development and training, in each of the last five years.
(AQW 42604/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The following table is a breakdown of Invest NI offers for staff development and training in the last 5 years (figures for 2014/15 are to January 2015).

Invest NI Skills Assistance Offered by Constituency (2010-11 to 2014-15)

Constituency	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	Total
Belfast East		1,444,030	428,107	845,030	3,569,425	6,286,592
Belfast North		98,134	244,301	315,197	894,613	1,552,245
Belfast South	714,864	1,521,789	2,017,082	1,717,520	5,267,519	11,238,774
Belfast West		115,872	346,489	186,607	754,810	1,403,778
East Antrim	157,442		155,200	280,929	462,425	1,055,996
East Londonderry			3,409	104,177	214,353	321,939
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	122,823	167,755	531,216	1,170,532	1,108,852	3,101,178
Foyle		87,036	251,177	716,868	125,598	1,180,679
Lagan Valley		17,660	390,819	925,071	47,054	1,380,604
Mid Ulster	115,728	29,405	648,282	527,483	366,456	1,687,354
Newry & Armagh			729,759	17,352	271,981	1,019,092
North Antrim	102,910	654,359	1,603,918	305,568	400,434	3,067,189
North Down		44,363	84,845	32,124	6,440	167,772
South Antrim	1,447,162	238,381	370,851	1,035,340	35,440	3,127,174
South Down		258,603	2,250	7,802	187,158	455,813
Strangford	58,394			109,467	48,635	216,496
Upper Bann	162,734	134,167	2,215,602	61,232	245,560	2,819,295
West Tyrone	49,531	68,946	304,197		252,617	675,291

Notes

1 Figures For 2014-15 Are Up To Jan 2015 Only And Are Provisional And May Be Subject To Amendment.

2 Assistance Relates Only To The Following Schemes - Bitp, Skills Growth Programme, Skills Advancement Grant, Skills Accelerator Grant.

3 Invest Ni Revises Performance Data On A Regular Basis To Ensure That It Reflects Implemented Projects; Therefore, The Data Above May Differ To Previously Published Information.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the eligibility criteria for the Broadband UK Connection Voucher Scheme.
(AQW 42624/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Super-connected Cities Programme is managed by Broadband Delivery UK (BDUK), a unit within the Department for Culture, Media and Sport.

Business premises, within the Belfast and Londonderry council areas, who meet the eligibility criteria at https://www.connectionvouchers.co.uk/superconnected-cities/can apply for grants up to £3,000, to cover the cost of high speed broadband installation.

The Super-connected Cities Programme is being extended to include other council areas. This presents an opportunity for our new Super-Councils to apply for a voucher scheme, similar to those that exist in Belfast and Londonderry council areas.

My Department facilitated an information event on 23 February 2015 to advise council representatives of further details.

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether Invest NI funding offers contain any stipulations regarding trade union membership.
(AQW 42629/11-15)

Mrs Foster: No. Invest NI funding offers do not contain any stipulations regarding trade union membership.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what additional support her Department can offer to businesses in the hospitality industry in rural areas to provide greater access to broadband services.
(AQW 42770/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department is currently implementing the Northern Ireland Broadband Improvement Project (NIBIP). The project is progressing according to schedule and by 31 December 2014 just over 17,500 homes and business premises across Northern Ireland had benefited from the improvements.

By project completion in December 2015, it is anticipated that improvements will have been delivered for at least 45,000 homes and businesses across Northern Ireland, resulting in the provision of basic wire-line broadband services of at least 2 Megabits per second in areas that previously had no service and improvements in the availability of superfast fixed-line broadband services (24 Megabits per second or higher) in areas where choice is poor or broadband speeds are low.

In addition, my Department has just signed a contract with BT for the Superfast Roll-out Programme Phase 2 (SRP2) project, which seeks to further increase the coverage of superfast broadband services across Northern Ireland by 2017.

Business premises, within the Belfast and Londonderry Council area, who meet the eligibility criteria at https://www.connectionvouchers.co.uk/superconnected-cities/can apply for vouchers up to the value £3,000, to cover the cost of high speed broadband installation from the Super-connected Cities Programme, managed by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport.

This Programme is being extended to include other council areas. This presents an opportunity for our new Super-Councils to apply for a voucher scheme, similar to that which exists in the Belfast and Londonderry Council areas.

My Department facilitated an information event on 23 February 2015 to provide council representatives with further details.

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment which Department will pay the costs of the £1.2million cost of the investigation into the NI Events Company.
(AQW 42841/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department has paid the £1.2million cost of the investigation into the Northern Ireland Events Company.

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the value of City Deals being used as an economic lever.
(AQO 7723/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The City Deals initiative is aimed at giving a number of cities in England and Scotland greater control in relation to decisions that affect their area. It includes measures in relation to greater local flexibility on the use of resources for economic development, infrastructure investment and support for skills.

The Executive already has responsibility for powers comparable to those included as part of the series of City Deals in England and Scotland. In addition, the transfer of Corporation Tax rate setting powers will provide the Executive with much greater potential to support private sector growth and employment than what is being considered for other regions. The transfer of functions to the eleven new councils as part of the Review of Public Administration will also see more responsibility devolved to local areas.

Given the arrangements in Northern Ireland it is not apparent that there would be any benefit in the City Deals initiative being extended to Northern Ireland. However, if there were specific aspects of City Deals which could potentially bring significant benefit to the local economy, then these could be explored.

Mr G Kelly asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the current number of hotel beds in Belfast, in relation to anticipated future demand.
(AQO 7726/11-15)

Mrs Foster: There are currently twenty nine hotels in the Belfast City Council area, providing six thousand six hundred and seventy eight bed spaces.

The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency figures show that the annual average room occupancy of Belfast hotels was seventy six per cent in 2013. This can be significantly higher during the summer months and peak periods.

Occupancy levels for beds are lower and this also reflects the significant level of business visitors to Belfast booking single occupancy rooms.

These figures suggest that the current number of hotel rooms, and subsequently beds, in Belfast may be insufficient to meet any significant increase in future demand. However, further development will depend on commercial decisions by potential investors or developers.

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the latest labour market statistics.
(AQO 7727/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I am pleased that the latest labour market statistics show that our economic recovery is continuing.

The number of people claiming unemployment benefits has fallen for a twenty fifth consecutive month, with January's decrease of one thousand seven hundred the single largest monthly fall in over fifteen years.

We have also seen consistent job growth with almost thirty thousand net new jobs added to the local economy since the end of 2011.

However, I am not complacent despite these positive figures and recognise that we still have a number of labour market challenges to address.

Mr Humphrey asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how the extension to the Waterfront Hall in Belfast will benefit the tourism industry.
(AQO 7728/11-15)

Mrs Foster: One of the main aims of the project is to place Belfast as a key National and International conference destination and develop the local business and leisure tourism sector.

It aims to generate Gross Value Added of almost ten million pounds in wider economic benefits.

This project has been awarded total financial assistance of eighteen and a half million pounds.

This is broken down into thirteen million, eight hundred and seven thousand pounds of European Regional Development Fund element and four million, seven hundred and fifty seven thousand pounds of Tourism NI core element.

Construction job targets include the creation of approximately two hundred construction jobs over the length of the project as well as the provision of new jobs upon completion.

The contractor has thirty five people currently employed on site and this is due to rise to over one hundred in the next month.

Other targets include attracting fifty thousand annual conference delegates, doubling the existing baseline, by 2020, comprising thirty five thousand out of state delegates, from the existing baseline of five thousand, seven hundred and fifty.

This project is progressing well. The main contractor commenced work in late September 2014, with construction completion due in March 2016.

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of Tourism Ireland's performance in attracting visitors from both the rest of the UK and overseas to Northern Ireland.
(AQO 7729/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Figures published recently by NISRA show that the number of visitors to Northern Ireland from Great Britain and overseas increased by plus three per cent for the January to September period last year. More importantly, there was a marked increase in holidaymakers from Great Britain and overseas, compared with the same nine-month period in 2013.

We saw growth of plus twelve per cent in holidaymakers from Great Britain, and growth of plus twenty one per cent in holidaymakers from North America.

Holidaymakers now make up one third of all visitors to Northern Ireland, compared to fourteen per cent in 2002.

During 2015 Tourism Ireland will continue to highlight Titanic Belfast, the Giant's Causeway and our unique National Trust properties as well as maximising the tourism potential of events such as the return of the Tall Ships to Belfast , the Irish Open and the Gran Fondo. Game of Thrones, the Causeway Coastal Route and driving holidays to Northern Ireland will also be promoted widely as well as City breaks to Belfast and Londonderry.

Mr Sheehan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on the availability of Grade A office accommodation in Belfast.
(AQO 7730/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The availability of suitable office accommodation is an important part of Northern Ireland's investment proposition.

At the end of 2014 there was a reported nine hundred and sixty eight thousand square foot of office space available in Belfast.

Of this amount, three hundred and twenty thousand square foot was classified as being of typical Grade A standard of which two hundred and fifty thousand square foot was located within Belfast City Centre.

In recent months the Belfast property market has seen a number of positive announcements after a long period of inactivity.

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on improvements to rural broadband provision in East Antrim.
(AQO 7731/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Building on previous interventions, my Department is currently implementing the Northern Ireland Broadband Improvement Project which seeks to provide wire-line broadband services of at least 2 Megabits per second in areas that previously had no service and improve the availability of fixed line broadband services of 24 Megabits per second or higher in areas where choice is poor or broadband speeds are low. The project is progressing according to schedule and by 31 December 2014 almost seventeen thousand five hundred premises across Northern Ireland had benefited from the improvements being

delivered, including just over one thousand in the East Antrim Constituency. By project completion in December 2015, it is anticipated that improvements will have been delivered for at least forty five thousand premises across Northern Ireland.

Ms McGahan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on the Irish Rugby Football Union's bid to host the 2023 Rugby World Cup.
(AQO 7732/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Since the announcement on 5th December 2014 that the Irish Government and the Northern Ireland Executive are supportive of the Irish Rugby Football Union bid to host the Rugby World Cup 2023, the bid group has commenced work on compiling the bid, with the support of the two administrations and their agencies. To oversee progress on the bid and guide the bid preparation, an Overview Group will be appointed and I hope to be in a position to announce the details of the group in the near future.

Department of the Environment

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the amount spent on retrieving litter from Lough Erne from (i) January to June 2012; and (ii) January to June 2013.
(AQW 42154/11-15)

Mr Durkan (The Minister of the Environment): Responsibility for retrieving litter from Lough Erne lies with the local district councils. The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) has spent no money on retrieving litter from Lough Erne for either period; January to June 2012 or January to June 2013.

Mr Wilson asked the Minister of the Environment whether he, his Special Advisor or his immediate predecessor, is, or has been, a member of Friends of the Earth or any other environmental organisation; and if so, to detail the environmental organisation and when any membership ceased.
(AQW 42362/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Neither I nor my Special Advisor have ever been members of Friends of the Earth or any other environmental organisation. The Department does not hold this information in respect of the former Environment Minister, Alex Attwood MLA.

Mr Wilson asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the dates he has met with Friends of the Earth, including the purpose of the meetings.
(AQW 42363/11-15)

Mr Durkan: I have hosted four meetings where a representative of Friends of the Earth was in attendance. Details are set out below.

Date	Purpose of meeting
17 October 2013	Planning Bill Environmental Stakeholders Group
17 December 2013	Meeting with objector about Dalradian Goldmine planning application
27 January 2014	Climate Change Environmental and NGO Stakeholder
23 July 2014	Meeting to discuss implementation of two European Directives

Mr Rogers asked the Minister of the Environment whether he has any plans to review the tractor speed limit and the maximum weight limit for tractors and trailers in the light of the recent statement by the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Transport.
(AQW 42394/11-15)

Mr Durkan: I am aware of the recent announcement by the Department for Transport that, from 9 March 2015, in Britain, the maximum combination weight of an agricultural tractor towing an agricultural trailer will be 31 tonnes, increasing from 24.39 tonnes; and also tractors currently restricted to 20 miles per hour will be able to travel at 40 kilometres per hour (approximately 25mph).

My Department plans to review the maximum weight limit for tractors and trailers in Northern Ireland. Speed limits fall under the remit of the Department for Regional Development (DRD) and my officials are liaising with their DRD colleagues to consider whether it would be appropriate to conduct a joint public consultation to decide whether similar increased agricultural combination weights and tractor speeds should be introduced in Northern Ireland.

I would expect to make further announcements on this matter in the coming weeks.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of the Environment, if specified on a planning application, to detail the differences between conventional and unconventional drilling.
(AQW 42403/11-15)

Mr Durkan: In the oil and gas industry the terms conventional and unconventional are usually applied to the types of reservoir in which oil or gas may be trapped. In conventional reservoirs (e.g. sandstones, naturally fractured limestones) the oil or gas is trapped in well-connected spaces (pores) between the grains of the rock and flows readily from the rock into and up the well.

In contrast, in unconventional reservoirs the hydrocarbons may be adsorbed (attached) onto the grains or trapped in poorly connected micropores and fractures. In this case High Volume Hydraulic Fracturing (HVHF) is used to enhance the fracture network so that the hydrocarbons will flow from the reservoir into the well at the required rate.

The drilling specifications for an exploration well will depend on the design of the well including the inclination, total depth and the lithologies (rock types, including aquifers) through which the drill will pass.

If the well is intended to test an unconventional shale gas reservoir, for example, the application for consent to drill would include an HVHF programme followed by flow testing of any hydrocarbons present.

When a conventional reservoir is tested the oil or gas may flow to surface naturally or reduced permeabilities may inhibit this flow. Drill stem tests and mini fall-off tests may be used to evaluate the reservoir properties and procedures such as an acid wash and squeeze and conventional hydraulic fracture stimulation may be used to initiate or increase the flow of hydrocarbons from the reservoir. Before drilling it is impossible to predict which of these procedures will be required but they would be included as options in the application for consent to drill.

My Department is currently assessing one application for a borehole development that may include a conventional hydraulic fracture. There are currently no applications in the North for an unconventional hydraulic fracture.

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (i) how many staff are employed in the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) in Northern Ireland; and (ii) what interaction takes place between DVSA NI and DVSA UK.
(AQW 42482/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) operates in Britain and is responsible for HGV vehicle testing and driver testing arrangements. It does not operate in Northern Ireland and does not employ any staff here.

The functions of the DVSA reflect some of the responsibilities of the Driver Vehicle Agency (DVA) in Northern Ireland.

Details of the various interactions between the Driver Vehicle Agency (DVA) in Northern Ireland and its counterpart Driving Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) in the UK are outlined below:-

- Driver Certificate of Professional Competence – DVA and DVSA are joint-signatories of a UK-wide Drivers Certificate of Professional Competency service agreement and work closely together on the accreditation and quality assurance of training centres and their courses. Details of Northern Ireland vocational drivers are shared with DVSA to facilitate the production of Driver Qualification Cards.
- Driver Testing & Instruction – DVA and DVSA work closely together on a range of driver testing matters including: Approved Driving Instructor related issues including the mutual recognition of certificates; driver testing policies and standards; examiner training; EU legislation; and driving test related publications.
- Theory Test - DVA and DVSA are joint-signatories of the UK-wide theory test contract and work closely together on a range of contract and service management matters, and on wider theory test development initiatives.
- Vehicle Testing - DVA interacts with DVSA on vehicle testing matters of mutual interest, including vehicle testing standards and policies, testing procedures and guidance, legislation and future vehicle technology.
- Driver Licensing – For drivers wishing to acquire a Northern Ireland driving licence, who passed a test in Great Britain, DVA liaise with DVSA to establish their test results and licence entitlements.
- Product Group Meetings - DVA attends DVSA Product Group meetings on a quarterly basis to keep up to date with developments in GB to ensure that, where possible, DVA deliver a consistent compliance and enforcement approach across the UK Member State.
- Tripartite meetings – DVA meet regularly with DVSA and the Irish Road Safety Authority to review enforcement interactions between the agencies involved and to identify synergies from a co-ordinated enforcement approach in the following areas:
    - Optimising resources and effective scheduling of operations, at times and in locations where efforts can be concentrated on high risk operators and drivers;
    - Targeting/profiling of high risk operators;
    - Joint training opportunities;
    - Joint exchanges with specific themes;
    - Sharing of information on enforcement equipment;
    - Conduct of checks – best practice;
    - Raising profiles of checks.
- Information Sharing Agreement – there is a Memorandum of Understanding in place with DVSA to share information including Goods and Passenger Operator Licensing, Annual Test Outcomes and roadside enforcement encounters.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of whether any decision made in relation to E/2013/0093/F will set precedence for other similar applications.
(AQW 42508/11-15)

Mr Durkan: No decision has been made in connection to planning application E/2013/0093/F. My officials are in the process of reviewing the Environmental Statement and consulting with the necessary bodies.

In terms of precedence, I can advise that each application is assessed on its own merits and is subject to the full scrutiny of the planning process.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of the Environment whether he plans to develop a Strategic Environmental Impact Assessment that would encapsulate any future applications similar to E/2013/0093/F.
(AQW 42509/11-15)

Mr Durkan: A Strategic Environmental Impact Assessment is a process which is applied to plans and programmes. It is not a process which is applied to individual projects.

Application E/2013/0093/F is subject to an Environmental Impact Assessment under Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012. My officials are currently in the process of reviewing the Environmental Statement and consulting with the relevant bodies.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of the Environment what due diligence is undertaken on companies prior to the granting of planning permission as detailed in E/2013/0093/F, specifically in relation to their environmental performance track record.
(AQW 42510/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Each planning application is processed taking into account the information that accompanies the submission. The Department is charged with securing the orderly and consistent development of land and the planning of that development.

As planning permission is attached to the land and not the applicant, a company's environmental performance is not deemed to be a material planning consideration.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of the Environment what cognisance is taken of the 'flaring effect' as detailed in the P1 of E/2013/0093/F.
(AQW 42513/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The issue of flaring is being assessed as part of the processing of planning application E/2013/0093/F. The Department in currently consulting with the relevant bodies in relation to the information supplied in the Environmental Statement.

At this time, no decision has been made in relation to the application.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 40835/11-15, to confirm his Department's position that, for the purpose of Environmental Impact Assessment screening, an urban development project, as defined within Schedule 2.10(b) of the Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012, only applies to proposals located within defined settlement limits.
(AQW 42529/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Departmental position is that an urban development project, as identified within Schedule 2.10(b) of The Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012, does not only apply to proposals within defined settlement limits.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 40835/11-15, whether the construction of a development of 19 dwellings comprising an area greater than 0.5ha and located within a defined settlement requires an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) determination, whereas that same development outside of any settlement, located within an Area of High Scenic Value, adjacent to a Special Area of Conservation, does not require screening for EIA.
(AQW 42530/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Any residential proposal that meets the relevant thresholds/criteria set out in Schedule 2.10(b) of The Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012, will require EIA screening. However, a residential proposal that is not within a sensitive area and does not meet the relevant thresholds/criteria set out in Schedule 2.10(b) of the Regulations may not necessarily require EIA screening. The Department considers all applications and the necessity for EIA screening on a case by case basis.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment to outline all current applications for Judicial Review of decisions made by (i) his Department's Planning Office; and (ii) the Northern Ireland Environment Agency.
(AQW 42532/11-15)

Mr Durkan:

(i) Table 1 outlines the details of all current applications for judicial reviews of decisions made by DOE Planning.

(ii) Table 2 outlines the details of all current applications for judicial reviews of decisions made by the DOE's Northern Ireland Environment Agency.

Table 1 – DOE Planning - Current JRs

Applicant	Detail	Position
Carol Beattie	Change of use from redundant agricultural buildings to storage and distribution buildings at 2a Old Ballygowan Road, Comber.	Leave granted and hearing date set for 9/10 March.
DETI	BMAP Adoption and Ministerial Code.	Leave granted and hearing set for 27/28 May.
Newry Chamber of Commerce & Trade	Permission for a mixed use development, Carnbane, Newry.	Leave granted and hearing set for 12 May.
Tamboran Resources Ltd	Determination that Permitted Development notification constitutes EIA development and permitted development rights do not apply.	Set aside for mention 23 February.
Sean McKevitt	Time period for appeal against an Enforcement notice. 210 Dublin Road, Newry	Leave granted, hearing set for April

Table 2 – DOE NIEA – Current JRs

Applicant	Detail	Position
Mr Frank Mc Gurk	Challenge to NIEA's decision to grant a Water Order Discharge Consent to Northern Ireland Water (NIW) for Magilligan WWTW.	Leave granted and hearing set for 23 March 2015.
Envirogreen Polymers Ltd	Refusal to grant two waste exemptions, under Paragraphs 12 and 17, of The Waste Management Licensing Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003 at Low Road, Ayallogue, Newry.	Hearing held on 4 December 2014. Judgement is awaited.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment whether the new councils are prepared to take on local planning issues. **(AQW 42571/11-15)**

Mr Durkan: The councils are ready and prepared to take on their new planning responsibilities, with almost all of the necessary arrangements in place and the final tasks to be completed during March.

My preparations for transfer have involved a major programme of work to ensure that the systems, structures and resources are in place for a successful handover.

The local planning offices have been restructured in line with the new 11 council model and staff allocated to the relevant councils. The transfer of planning staff to council premises commenced in September last year, and 4 of the 6 councils that are relocating planning staff have completed the moves. The 2 remaining transfers, Belfast and North Down and Ards, will take place in March. My staff are continuing to work closely with the local government sector to ensure that all outstanding transitional arrangements and practical issues are addressed.

My Department has completed an extensive capacity building programme for local government. The programme will help to ensure that councillors have the confidence as well as the competence, to make prompt, sound planning decisions from day one. Planners transferring are also receiving additional training to ensure that every council has staff equipped with the necessary professional skills to fulfil the full range of planning functions.

Advice and guidance has been prepared for the councils on a wide variety of planning matters. This includes, for example, guidance on the operation of planning committees and on the application of the councillors' code of conduct in relation to planning, as well as practice notes on the operation of the new 2-tier planning system.

Finally, in January this year my Department informed each of the new councils of the financial allocation for their new planning and other transferring responsibilities. Councils now have certainty on the finance being transferred and can tailor their budgets accordingly.

I am confident that the preparations I have made will ensure that a fast, fair and fit for purpose planning system transfers on 1 April 2015 and that councils are equipped and resourced to fulfil their new planning functions from day one.

AQW 42573/11-15

The planning powers that will transfer to the councils are as follows:

- Local development planning;
- Development management - determining the vast majority of planning applications except for regionally significant and called-in applications;
- processing applications for non-urgent development on Crown land (non-regionally significant applications or applications which do not raise national security issues);
- entering into planning agreements on council determined applications;
- enforcement – enforcing against all breaches of planning control, issuing injunctions;
- approving non-material changes to planning permission;
- temporary listing of buildings of special architectural or historic interest;
- control of demolition or works to listed buildings (following consultation with the Department);
- conservation area designation;
- control of demolition in conservation areas;
- urgent works to preserve listed buildings and buildings in conservation areas;
- determining hazardous substances consent applications;
- applying tree preservation orders;
- determining tree preservation order consent applications;
- preservation of trees in conservation areas;
- control of advertisements;
- review of old minerals permissions (once powers commence);
- issuing completion notices (subject to confirmation by the Department);
- preparing simplified planning zone schemes;
- revoking, modifying or discontinuing planning permissions and consents (may require confirmation by the Department);
- compensation liabilities arising from council functions (mainly enforcement, listed buildings control, revocation, modification and discontinuance);
- responding to purchase and blight notices;
- issuing certificates of alternative development value; and
- maintaining a register of applications, consents, notices, certificates etc.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the planning powers that will transfer to local councils. **(AQW 42573/11-15)**

Mr Durkan: The councils are ready and prepared to take on their new planning responsibilities, with almost all of the necessary arrangements in place and the final tasks to be completed during March.

My preparations for transfer have involved a major programme of work to ensure that the systems, structures and resources are in place for a successful handover.

The local planning offices have been restructured in line with the new 11 council model and staff allocated to the relevant councils. The transfer of planning staff to council premises commenced in September last year, and 4 of the 6 councils that are relocating planning staff have completed the moves. The 2 remaining transfers, Belfast and North Down and Ards, will take place in March. My staff are continuing to work closely with the local government sector to ensure that all outstanding transitional arrangements and practical issues are addressed.

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- responding to purchase and blight notices;
- issuing certificates of alternative development value; and
- maintaining a register of applications, consents, notices, certificates etc.

Mr Girvan asked the Minister of the Environment what steps his Department has taken to ensure the safety of horse riders using the roads; and whether he would consider introducing legislation to make it compulsory for all riders to wear a riding hat and high visibility clothing.
(AQW 42586/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Horse riders, along with pedestrians, cyclists and motorcyclists, are a vulnerable group due to their lack of protection. The Highway Code contains general rules for using the road as well as rules and advice which apply specifically to horse riders. The Rules about Animals section includes specific rules for horse riders (Rules 49 to 55). It outlines legal requirements and provides advice on many issues including safety equipment and other clothing as well as road positioning and procedures to be followed at roundabouts.

One of the Action Measures contained in the NI Road Safety Strategy to 2020 is to extend road safety website material to include new approaches and further advisory information, for example including information on horse riders and their safety. As such, in the last few months, an information and advice page has been developed for the NI Direct website and can be accessed at the link below.

www.nidirect.gov.uk/index/information-and-services/motoring/road-safety/horse-safety-on-the-road.htm

My Department has also developed a new leaflet entitled ‘Horse Sense for Riders and Motorists’. This leaflet was produced with the contribution and approval of The British Horse Society and Road Safety Scotland. The leaflet can be downloaded at:

www.nidirect.gov.uk/index/information-and-services/motoring/road-safety/road-safety-leaflets.htm

All of our campaigns are available to view on YouTube. Road safety weekly blogs in the form of e-mail messages, and Facebook and Twitter accounts, offer regular topical reminders for all road users, including horse riders.

My Department’s road safety campaign ‘Share the Road To Zero’ was launched in April 2013. The core message of this campaign is that if we all share the road, shouldn’t we all share the responsibility? The opening scene shows several road user groups and the main crash scene takes place on a rural road and involves a driver moving out to pass a horse and rider. This campaign encourages all road users to act appropriately on the roads and explicitly references the potential dangers when encountering horse riders on the road.

I believe that this material and communication provides positive advice for all road users, including horse riders and those encountering them on the roads. Given the activity already in place, and the low numbers of horse riders involved in road traffic collisions, I am not at this stage persuaded that making the wearing of helmets and high visibility clothing compulsory is appropriate or necessary.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of the Environment whether he plans to introduce legislation to ban the hunting of wild animals with dogs.
(AQW 42612/11-15)

Mr Durkan: As this does not fall within the responsibilities of my Department, I have no plans to bring forward legislation on the matter.

Ms Lo asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 41705/11-15, to confirm, that unlike the Champion v North Norfolk District Council case, planning approval K/2013/0072/F was subject to Appropriate Assessment; and for his assessment of the Court of Appeal ruling that there is no material distinction between the test for Environmental Impact Assessment and the test for Appropriate Assessment as regard the threshold of likelihood of significant effects.
(AQW 42630/11-15)

Mr Durkan: My officials have sought legal advice in relation to this question. I will provide a response at the earliest opportunity.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of whether fine and ultra-fine particles between PM2.5 - 0.1u microns are particularly damaging to human health by inhalation; and what assurance can provide to residents in East Belfast that the incinerator proposed by Bombardier will not release such particulates into the atmosphere.
(AQW 42652/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Full Circle Generation Ltd facility at Bombardier is regulated by a permit which implements the requirements of the Directive 2010/75/EU on Industrial Emissions (IED). Within the IED there are technical provisions laid down relating to the emission limit values for any such plant operating within the EU. The IED includes a total dust emission limit value from such facilities of 10 mg/m3 and does not distinguish between the differing fractions of dust. This limit has been included within the facilities permit and will be continuously monitored to ensure compliance.

My officials consulted with the Public Health Agency during the process of determining the permit application, as required under the legislation and no concerns were raised regarding the human health effects of this facility

The European Directive on Industrial Emissions does not, at present, specifically deal with nanoparticles produced from energy from waste plants. It is recommended that the question of fine and ultra-fine particles being particularly damaging to human health by inhalation should therefore be directed to the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, who are likely to be in a better position to advise on this aspect.

There is a wide range of research activity surrounding the risks of such particles to human health at an E.U. and U.K. level. Our links to the E.U. and Defra ensure that, in Northern Ireland, we maintain policy measures and control to be consistent with current understanding.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment what is the safe level for emissions of fine and ultra-fine particles between PM2.5 - 0.1u microns from the proposed Bombardier incinerator.
(AQW 42653/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Full Circle Generation Ltd facility at Bombardier is regulated by a permit which implements the requirements of the Directive 2010/75/EU on Industrial Emissions (IED). Within the IED there are technical provisions laid down relating to the emission limit values for any such plant operating within the EU. The IED includes a total dust emission limit value from such facilities of 10 mg/m3 and does not distinguish between the differing fractions of dust. This limit has been included within the facilities permit and will be continuously monitored to ensure compliance.

My officials consulted with the Public Health Agency during the process of determining the permit application, as required under the legislation and no concerns were raised regarding the human health effects of this facility

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Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (i) the amount of ash that will be produced annually from the Bombardier incinerator; (ii) the types of ash; (iii) the chemical composition of the types of ash; and (iv) the toxicity of the types of ash.
(AQW 42654/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Bombardier incinerator will be operated by Full Circle Generation Ltd. There are two main ash streams produced by this type of plant – bottom ash and fly ash. The plant is currently permitted to process 120,000 tonnes per annum of refuse derived fuel and is expected to produce 22,850 tonnes per annum of bottom ash and 7,150 tonnes per annum of fly ash respectively.

Until the plant is operational the chemical composition and toxicity of the ash cannot be determined. However, typically bottom ash would be regarded as non-hazardous waste and may be suitable for recovery routes such as aggregates. Fly ash is considered hazardous waste and would be sent to a suitable landfill. NIEA will ensure the recovery or disposal of both ash streams are fully compliant.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of the Environment to detail all costs associated with processing, printing and posting vehicle test reminder letters in each of the last three years.
(AQW 42671/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Driver & Vehicle Agency (DVA) issues vehicle test reminder letters to its customers, as a courtesy service, in advance of the vehicle's test due date. The costs associated with the reminder service in each of the last three (calendar) years are set out in the table below.

Year	Number of Reminders	Processing / Printing	Postage	Total
2012	745,983	£58,186.67	£198,995.77	£257,182.44
2013	758,204	£59,139.91	£219,437.05	£278,576.96
2014	779,954	£60,836.41	£236,658.09	£297,494.50

Mr Anderson asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the level of training his Department has provided local councillors in relation to planning given its imminent transfer to local councils.
(AQW 42704/11-15)

Mr Durkan: A series of training events were rolled out across Councils from early September 2014 to late January 2015. The sessions covered an overview of Planning for councillors; development plans and working with the community; practical Planning and propriety and outcomes for the Code of Conduct.

The training was facilitated and delivered by senior planning staff; staff from other Departments and outside bodies, including NI Housing Executive, and representatives from other jurisdictions with knowledge and experience of similar planning systems. The training programme was developed to help prepare those attending to understand the new planning system, the processes involved in making planning decisions and the need to comply with ethical standards.

At a local level, the Department continues to work closely with the new councils to provide training and guidance through, for example, working with the shadow Planning Committees or facilitating mock planning committee meetings which planning staff and councillors have attended.

The area planning managers are also taking responsibility for preparing, training and educating their staff for the change. Ongoing training for planners on the new two-tier planning system will continue to be delivered over the coming months to ensure that all involved in the new system have the necessary skills and competence to ensure the system is effectively delivered from day one.

Locally each new council has developed a training plan and has been allocated £100k to meet needs identified in that plan. This will provide training to cover new councillor induction and governance arrangements, as well as organisational design.

As well as the training given by councils and Planning HQ, regional training continues, covering areas such as community planning, via a contract with Community Places, and the new councillor code of conduct. Funding has also supported community planning workshops for all stakeholders involved in the process. Added to this, funding has been made available for developing a communications strategy in preparation for the transfer.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (i) whether his Department is aware of a Habitats Regulation Assessment carried out for Lough Neagh Special Protection Area by the extraction industry; (ii) for his assessment of whether the extraction industry fulfils the definition of a competent authority capable of carrying out an Habitats Regulation Assessment; and (iii) whether his assessment influenced his Department's decision not to enforce against unauthorised extraction.
(AQW 42709/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Department is aware of a document titled Lough Neagh Sand Extraction Operations, Impacts of Sediment Rich Discharges, Preliminary Article 6 Assessment, Test of Likely Significance (April 2009).

This document was produced by a consultant acting on behalf of the Lough Neagh Sand Operators. It does not constitute a Habitats Regulations Assessment which must be completed by a 'competent authority' as defined by Article 5 of The Conservation (Nature Habitats, etc.) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1995 (as amended):

Competent authorities generally

5. For the purposes of these Regulations the expression "competent authority" includes government departments, district councils and statutory undertakers, and any trustees, commissioners, board or other persons who, as a public body and not for their own profit, act under any statutory provision for the improvement of any place or the production or supply of any commodity or service.

It is clear that the sand extraction operators do not constitute a competent authority as defined in the regulation above.

The document was not used as a HRA to grant any permission, consent or other authorisation for the industry. The information it contained was used, along with information from other sources, to determine the potential impacts on Lough Neagh from the discharges of the sand traders land based operations.

As detailed in previous responses, enforcement investigations on Lough Neagh are on-going.

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of the Environment whether he will launch a public education campaign to inform consumers on the operation of the taxi industry in Belfast, given the non-implementation of the regulations aimed at giving effect to single tier licensing.
(AQW 42892/11-15)

Mr Durkan: During the annulment debate on 3 February 2015, a number of speakers noted the need to reach agreement and compromise on the regulations, to bring certainty for the taxi industry and its customers. I committed to play my part in this.

My Department will shortly be writing to all taxi drivers to update them on the legislative position. We will provide clear communication to the public on taxi licensing arrangements once agreement has been reached on the arrangements and prior to their implementation.

Department of Finance and Personnel

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the locations of the automatic teller machines that benefit from the rural area rates exemptions.
(AQW 40757/11-15)

Mr Hamilton (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): Automatic telling machines that benefit from the rural rates exemption are valued separately for rates (i.e. they are not located at a bank or building society premises) and are situated in a ward designated as rural under the Rates (Automatic Telling Machines) (Designation of Rural Areas) Order (Northern Ireland) 2006. That designation was made in line with the Report of the Inter-Departmental Urban-Rural Definition Group.

The location of the machines that benefit from the exemption are:-

District Council 2014/15	Street	Town
Antrim	Mill Road	Crumlin
Antrim	Main Street	Crumlin
Antrim	Antrim Road	Templepatrick
Antrim	Tully Road	Crumlin
Antrim	Belfast Road	Antrim
Ards	The Square	Portaferry
Ards	Comber Road	Killinchy
Armagh	Main Street	Richhill
Armagh	Portadown Road	Richhill
Armagh	Victoria Street	Keady
Ballymena	Main Street	Broughshane
Ballymena	Galgorm Road	Ballymena
Ballymena	Main Street	Cullybackey
Banbridge	Dunbarton Street	Gilford
Banbridge	John Street	Rathfriland
Banbridge	Newry Street	Rathfriland
Coleraine	Main Street	Garvagh
Coleraine	Mussenden Road	Articlave
Coleraine	Garvagh Road	Kilrea
Cookstown	Dungannon Road	Cookstown

District Council 2014/15	Street	Town
Cookstown	Magherafelt Road	Moneymore
Cookstown	Hillhead	Dungannon
Cookstown	Mullanahoe Road	Dungannon
Craigavon	Dungannon Road	Portadown
Craigavon	Main Street	Waringstown
Craigavon	Banbridge Road	Waringstown
Craigavon	Belfast Road	Lurgan
Derry	Main Street	Eglinton
Derry	Longfield Road	Eglinton
Derry	Church Street	Claudy
Down	Ballynahinch Road	Saintfield
Down	Downpatrick Road	Ardglass
Down	Downpatrick Road	Killyleagh
Down	Main Street	Downpatrick
Down	Crossgar Road	Saintfield
Down	South Pier	Downpatrick
Down	Drumaness Road	Drumaness
Down	Saintfield Road	Kilmore
Dungannon & S.Tyrone	Main Street	Augher
Dungannon & S.Tyrone	Caledon Road	Aughnacloy
Dungannon & S.Tyrone	Moore Street	Aughnacloy
Dungannon & S.Tyrone	Dungannon Street	Moy
Dungannon & S.Tyrone	Main Street	Ballygawley
Dungannon & S.Tyrone	Ballynakilly Road	Coalisland
Dungannon & S.Tyrone	Charlemont Street	Moy
Fermanagh	Clones Road	Newtownbutler
Fermanagh	Main Street	Enniskillen
Fermanagh	Brownhill Link Road	Irvinestown
Fermanagh	Main Street	Derrylin
Limavady	Main Street	Feeny
Limavady	Clooney Road	Greysteel
Limavady	Feeny Road	Dungiven
Limavady	Main Street	Ballykelly
Limavady	Glenroe Park	Dungiven
Lisburn	Main Street	Moira
Lisburn	Main Street	Moira
Lisburn	Main Street	Glenavy
Lisburn	Glenavy Road	Moira
Lisburn	Main Street	Moira
Lisburn	Rathfriland Road	Dromora
Lisburn	Main Street	Crumlin

District Council 2014/15	Street	Town
Lisburn	Culcavy Road	Hillsborough
Lisburn	Glenavy Road	Ballinderry
Magherafelt	Glenshane Road	Maghera
Magherafelt	Main Street	Bellaghy
Magherafelt	Coleraine Road	Maghera
Magherafelt	Magherafelt Road	Tobermore
Moyle	Main Street	Bushmills
Newry & Mourne	Milltown Street	Warrenpoint
Newry & Mourne	Kilkeel Road	Annalong
Newry & Mourne	Main Street	Camlough
Omagh	Main Street	Carrickmore
Strabane	Victoria Road	Strabane

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what is his Department's definition of a rural area for the purpose of qualification for the rates exemption of automatic teller machines.
(AQW 40758/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: Automatic telling machines that benefit from the rural rates exemption are valued separately for rates (i.e. they are not located at a bank or building society premises) and are situated in a ward designated as rural under the Rates (Automatic Telling Machines) (Designation of Rural Areas) Order (Northern Ireland) 2006. That designation was made in line with the Report of the Inter-Departmental Urban-Rural Definition Group.

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Ards	Comber Road	Killinchy
Armagh	Main Street	Richhill
Armagh	Portadown Road	Richhill
Armagh	Victoria Street	Keady
Ballymena	Main Street	Broughshane
Ballymena	Galgorm Road	Ballymena
Ballymena	Main Street	Cullybackey
Banbridge	Dunbarton Street	Gilford
Banbridge	John Street	Rathfriland
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Down	Downpatrick Road	Ardglass
Down	Downpatrick Road	Killyleagh
Down	Main Street	Downpatrick
Down	Crossgar Road	Saintfield
Down	South Pier	Downpatrick
Down	Drumaness Road	Drumaness
Down	Saintfield Road	Kilmore
Dungannon & S.Tyrone	Main Street	Augher
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Fermanagh	Brownhill Link Road	Irvinestown
Fermanagh	Main Street	Derrylin
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Limavady	Clooney Road	Greysteel
Limavady	Feeny Road	Dungiven
Limavady	Main Street	Ballykelly
Limavady	Glenroe Park	Dungiven
Lisburn	Main Street	Moira
Lisburn	Main Street	Moira
Lisburn	Main Street	Glenavy
Lisburn	Glenavy Road	Moira
Lisburn	Main Street	Moira
Lisburn	Rathfriland Road	Dromora
Lisburn	Main Street	Crumlin
Lisburn	Culcavy Road	Hillsborough

District Council 2014/15	Street	Town
Lisburn	Glenavy Road	Ballinderry
Magherafelt	Glenshane Road	Maghera
Magherafelt	Main Street	Bellaghy
Magherafelt	Coleraine Road	Maghera
Magherafelt	Magherafelt Road	Tobermore
Moyle	Main Street	Bushmills
Newry & Mourne	Milltown Street	Warrenpoint
Newry & Mourne	Kilkeel Road	Annalong
Newry & Mourne	Main Street	Camlough
Omagh	Main Street	Carrickmore
Strabane	Victoria Road	Strabane

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, within the context of the normal process of natural wastage and the experience of recent years, how long it would have taken to reduce the public service by 20,000 without an exit scheme, relying rather on a recruitment freeze.
(AQW 41238/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: Natural wastage in the NICS has in recent years been in the region of 3.7% which equates to an annual reduction of around 1,000 employees. Information about natural wastage in the wider public sector is not held centrally. It is neither possible to predict what future natural wastage will be in the NICS nor to meaningfully extrapolate current NICS natural wastage figures to the wider public sector.

The Executive faces a range of financial pressures which require early action to reduce costs, particularly salary costs. The Executive has agreed to deploy a range of measures to reduce paybill costs including voluntary exit schemes, pay restraint and moratoria on recruitment.

This approach is similar to that which has been adopted in Scotland and in England and Wales where a combination of a moratorium on recruitment and voluntary exit schemes has achieved significant reductions in costs. In these jurisdictions, VE schemes have been used successfully to accelerate the staff reduction process. The Executive will be deploying VE schemes in a similar way to incentivise people to leave quickly and to minimise disruption through timely and planned use of redeployment.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number of quangos linked to his Department on (i) 8 May 2007; and (ii) 11 February 2015; and how many people served on the quangos on these respective dates.
(AQW 42179/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: At 8 May 2007 my Department was responsible for 8 arm's length bodies.

At 11 February 2015 my Department was responsible for 6 arm's length bodies.

At 8 May 2007 there were 208 staff serving on the arm's length bodies. There were 84 at 11 February 2015.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (i) the business case/pay remit currently with his Department for approval for staff of the Housing Executive; (ii) when this issue was presented to his Department for consideration; and (iii) when he expects to make a decision on this matter.
(AQW 42405/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The Public Sector Pay approval process requires that pay remits are approved by both the sponsor Department, in this case DSD, and the Finance Minister. I can confirm that I approved the NIHE pay remit on 13 February 2015. This was within the best practice 15 day target set for such approvals.

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (i) the number of people (a) available for work; and (b) in work; and (ii) the number of job vacancies in each of the last three years.
(AQW 42526/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The estimated number of persons aged 16 or over who describe themselves as (a) available for work and (b) in employment is provided in Table 1 below.

Table 1 – Number of people aged 16 or over (i) Available for work and (ii) In Employment 2012-14

Quarter	Available for work* (000s)	In Employment (000s)
Jan-Mar 2012	871	803
Apr-Jun 2012	874	795
Jul-Sep 2012	888	806
Oct-Dec 2012	876	797
Jan-Mar 2013	876	794
Apr-Jun 2013	872	794
Jul-Sep 2013	884	809
Oct-Dec 2013	877	805
Jan-Mar 2014	886	811
Apr-Jun 2014	889	821
Jul-Sep 2014	889	824
Oct-Dec 2014	874	812

Source: Labour Force Survey

*including those in employment

The number of vacant positions notified by employers to the Department for Employment and Learning in 2011/12 and 2012/13 is presented in Table 2 below.

The statistics do not relate to the total unsatisfied demand for staff by employers, but to only those vacant positions that have been notified by employers to DEL.

Table 2 – Number of notified vacancies 2011-12 to 2012-13

Financial Year	Notified Vacancies
2011/12	48,658
2012/13	58,890

In December 2013 improvements were made to the methodology for recording and validating data on vacancies. These changes led to a break in the time series for vacancy statistics. A new series of vacancy statistics commenced in 2015. This data should not be directly compared with previous figures. The number of vacant positions notified to the Department for Employment and Learning in the first three quarters of 2014/15 is presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3 – Number of notified vacancies April-June 2014 to October-December 2014

Quarter	Notified Vacancies
Apr-Jun 2014	13,914
Jul-Sep 2014	14,733
Oct-Dec 2014	12,039

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what steps he has taken to promote gender equality in most senior positions across the Northern Ireland Civil Service.
(AQW 42674/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The Northern Ireland Civil Service is committed to gender equality at all levels including at the most senior positions in the organisation where women are known to be under-represented. A variety of actions have been taken to improve the gender balance at senior levels such as in-depth reviews into the gender profile of all grades in the Northern Ireland Civil Service to identify areas of concern; the use of statements in job advertisements for senior posts welcoming applications from women; the establishment of a senior women's network and the decision in 2013 to fill vacancies at grade 3 and grade 5 by open recruitment rather than promotion.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to AQW 42202/11-15, to detail the percentage of government procurement spend which has been with Small and Medium Enterprises, in each year, since 2011.
(AQW 42717/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: CPD publishes an annual Procurement Activity Report, which details the value of contracts awarded by the Centres of Procurement Expertise to Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs).

SMEs won 56% of the value of contracts awarded in the 2011/2012 year and 62% in the 2012/2013 year. This equates to 80% of the number of contracts awarded in each year.

The Procurement Activity Report for the 2013/14 year is currently being compiled.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to AQW 42202/11-15, to detail any specific training which is provided by the Central Procurement Directorate, for community and voluntary organisations, which offers financial advice and guidance on developing business plans and contract tendering.
(AQW 42719/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: CPD does not directly provide any training to suppliers. It does however, publish procurement guidance notes on its website that aim, amongst other things, to help third sector organisations develop their capability to compete successfully for public sector contracts.

CPD works closely with InterTradeIreland, and other partner organisations such as Invest NI, to ensure that resources and training are available that would potentially help community and voluntary sector suppliers compete for public sector contracts. More information on this is available on the websites of the respective organisations. CPD regularly provides speakers for tendering workshops provided by local councils and business network organisations such as the Federation of Small Businesses.

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what steps will he take to ensure there is a wide geographical adoption of the recently announced £208m funding from the Special EU Programmes Body.
(AQW 42722/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The 2014-20 INTERREG VA programme covers Northern Ireland, the Border Region of Ireland and Western Scotland.

To ensure full access to the programme, the Managing Authority (Special EU Programmes Body) for the INTERREG VA programme has scheduled twelve pre-application development workshops spread across the eligible area. The full schedule is as follows:

Date	Venue	Town
Thursday 26 February	Tara Centre	Omagh
Tuesday 3 March	Crest Centre	Enniskillen
Thursday 5 March	NW Science Park	Derry/Londonderry
Tuesday 10 March	Castlesaunderson Scout Centre	Belturbet
Wednesday 11 March	Armagh City Hotel	Armagh
Thursday 12 March	Four Seasons Hotel	Carlingford
Thursday 19 March	Skainos Centre	Belfast
Tuesday 24 March	Corrymeela	Ballycastle
Thursday 26 March*	Jury's Inn	Glasgow
Tuesday 31 March	Ramada Plaza Hotel	Shaw's Bridge, Belfast
Thursday 2 April	Tullyglass House Hotel	Ballymena
Tuesday 14 April	Signal Business Centre	Bangor

* This event will be streamed live online

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what plans he has to ensure staff are supported in their decision making as to whether to avail of the Voluntary Exit Scheme.
(AQW 42793/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: Staff have been encouraged to read the Scheme information booklet, published on 2nd March, which launched the Scheme, sets out the terms and how to apply. Further guidance has been provided to typical queries, in the format of answers to Frequently Asked Questions and these will be regularly updated.

For staff working full time, an on-line calculator is available for them to work out what they may get under the terms of the Scheme. Staff who work part-time recently received a letter from Civil Service Pensions providing them with their likely compensation under the Scheme.

Other existing support mechanisms, including employment-related information, are also available to staff choosing to leave via the Voluntary Exit Scheme and while these will be signposted for staff, it is a decision for the individual as to whether to avail of the Voluntary Exit Scheme.

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what is being done to prepare staff who might leave through the Voluntary Exit Scheme for the outside job market.
(AQW 42794/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The overarching objective of the NICS Voluntary Exit Scheme is a permanent NICS pay bill reduction in the 2015/16 financial year. It is a voluntary scheme, which will compensate staff who choose to apply and are selected to leave.

The normal support mechanisms to anyone wishing to seek alternative employment are available to staff choosing to leave via the Scheme, for example through the Department of Employment and Learning Careers Service and Employment Service. While sources of information already available, including employment-related information, will be signposted to staff, it is entirely a decision for the individual as to which future career path, if any, they wish to pursue on leaving the NICS.

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what is being done to harness the skills of staff who will avail of the Voluntary Exit Scheme to ensure they are not lost but are marketed properly externally.
(AQW 42795/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The normal support mechanisms to anyone wishing to seek alternative employment are available to staff choosing to leave via the NICS Voluntary Exit Scheme. While these will be signposted to staff, it is entirely a decision for the individual as to which future career path, if any, they wish to pursue on leaving the NICS voluntarily.

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether any Department would have the capacity to deliver support services for staff leaving through the Voluntary Exit Scheme, given the recent budgetary constraints.
(AQW 42797/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The overarching objective of the NICS Voluntary Exit Scheme is a permanent NICS pay bill reduction in the 2015/16 financial year. It is a voluntary scheme, which will compensate staff who choose to apply and are selected to leave.

A wide range of support services which are already provided within existing departmental capacity, are available to staff choosing to leave via the Scheme. One example is the Department of Employment and Learning's Career and Employment Service and such sources of information will be signposted to staff.

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what plans are being put in place to prepare managers, who will not be leaving through the Voluntary Exit Scheme, to manage change.
(AQW 42891/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: Responsibility for managing change as a result of the NICS Voluntary Exit Scheme rests with individual departments. I am confident that managers within the NICS have the resilience and ability to deal with the challenges that will arise as a consequence of the pay bill reduction required in the current financial year. Furthermore, the Department will agree a comprehensive training programme with the Centre for Applied Learning, the NICS generic provider for Learning and Development, to support mangers at all levels across the organisation to manage change.

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the total spent on each of the (i) capital; and (ii) other projects which have not proceeded since May 2007, including the loss resulting from each project.
(AQW 39838/11-15)

Mr Wells (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): The information requested is presented below for projects exceeding £500,000, where a business case has been produced and approved, and where a decision has been taken to either not proceed or stop the project.

There are 2 projects which have not proceeded since May 2007.

Business case approval granted authority to spend capital of £2,620,655 on the construction of a replacement fire station in Ballycastle. This approval expired in February 2013, and as yet the project has not progressed. A small spend-to -date of £2,497.25, relates to legal fees and Land and Property Service fees. £14,280.24 was also spent on exemplar design works and a feasibility study for the fire station, under the Emergency Services Investment Programme (ESIP).

In October 2007, a decision was taken to stop the tender process for the Person Centred Community Information System Project (PCIS) project without award of contract. By that time the total recorded capital spend on the project was £9.3m of which £7.7m was spent by Trusts, and the remaining £1.6m was incurred by the Department. Of that spend Trusts recorded an impairment of £0.88m in their 2007/08 accounts in respect of this project and DHSSPS recorded an impairment of £0.34m. The remainder of the spend was considered to be of benefit to the project having provided access to computers for an additional 4000 staff together with improved systems and working practices in a number of community services.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 41050/11-15, whether he has any plans to proceed with those bids submitted to the Change Fund that were not accepted
(AQW 42087/11-15)

Mr Wells: The final budget settlement for my Department in 2015/16 presents significant financial challenges and does not currently facilitate funding of service developments, including the bids submitted to the Change Fund that were not accepted.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the financial resource rebate received by his Department through the Pharmaceutical Price Regulation Scheme; and for a breakdown of where this resource will be, or has been, allocated.
(AQW 42361/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Pharmaceutical Price Regulation Scheme (PPRS) 2014 started on 1 January 2014. Returns to Northern Ireland from year one of the scheme to date are detailed in the following table.

	Quarter 1 (Jan –Mar)	**Quarter 2 (Apr-Jun)**	**Quarter 3 (Jul-Sep)**
Amount	£3.53 m	£3.83 m	£3.92 m

Returns from the PPRS will continue to be re-invested to support pressures across HSC including branded medicines.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what progress has been made with regard to the 5-7 hospital networks recommended in Transforming Your Care.
(AQW 42377/11-15)

Mr Wells: I would refer the Member to my statement in the Assembly on 27 January 2015 concerning Sir Liam Donaldson's report on his review of the Quality of Care in Northern Ireland, when I said:

"This is a time for those who are committed to the delivery of high-quality health and social care services to engage in open, honest, intelligent debate about how we move forward. The report should force us collectively to raise the standard of our debate on health and care and to focus on the prize, which is a world-class health and care service. We need to recognise the realities that we face and to arrive at the right decisions, beginning by ensuring that we are asking the right questions. Too often, discussion about the health service can be overly simplistic and focused on a simple choice between closing or keeping open a particular facility. In this context, the reaction of the local community is understandable and instinctive: a save-our-service mentality. In reality, though, it is not about saving a service, but saving a structure. The real choice that we face is an uncomfortable one for us all, including political representatives. It is this: do we want a world-class service or a service on our doorstep, which, while convenient, may be sub-optimal and compromise quality and safety? The discussion about the right structure for our services and hospitals has been going on for many years under different administrations and under the leadership of Ministers from different political parties. The message from Sir Liam is clear — I need to emphasise this point — we now need a mature debate and we need to strive for political consensus to empower us collectively to make the right choice. Borne out of a desire for that mature debate, I have chosen to place this report in the public domain and to address the Assembly at an early stage in the interests of openness and transparency. I want to allow a wide range of stakeholders the earliest possible opportunity to reflect on the report and to begin to formulate solutions to meet the challenges in it. These solutions can only be informed by openness and honesty about where we are now and what has to be done to deliver the changes needed. Whilst we are moving ahead with some of the recommendations that I have outlined today, I am also asking for written comments on the recommendations to be submitted to the Department by the end of April 2015. That gives an opportunity for stakeholders to reflect and engage with one another, political representatives and the Department".

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of patients receiving dialysis in each Health and Social Care Trust in each of the last three years; and for his assessment of the capacity of each Trust to meet demand within their respective catchment area.
(AQW 42402/11-15)

Mr Wells: The number of patients receiving haemodialysis in each Health and Social Care Trust in each of the last three calendar years is set out in the table below. The Belfast Trust is included in a separate table as the information has been collected by financial year.

	2012	**2013**	**2014**
SEHSCT	107	110	102
NHSCT	125-130	125-130	125-130
WHSCT	139	117	124
SHSCT	213	174	163

	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
BHSCT	210	208	180

The Northern Trust is currently operating at full capacity. As a result, approximately 50 patients receive their Haemodialysis treatments in neighbouring Trust units.

Each of the other Trusts is currently operating within capacity.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 41251/11-15, for further details on the advice provided in AQW 38677/11-15 on 'the efforts that are being made to address' the difficulties recruiting staff for a pain management clinic.
(AQW 42404/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Western Health and Social Care Trust's Pain Management Service currently supports a comprehensive range of chronic pain management through Consultant Anaesthetists based at both the Tyrone County Hospital and Altnagelvin Hospital sites. These include outpatient clinics at Altnagelvin and Tyrone County Hospital, interventional techniques at Altnagelvin and Tyrone County Hospital and a pain management programme based at Tyrone County Hospital.

The Trust has been developing a "hub-and-spoke" model for chronic pain management within the Trust. This would centre pain activity and resources in Tyrone County Hospital with satellite activity in the South West Acute Hospital and Altnagelvin.

While there are presently no pain clinics at the South West Acute Hospital, the principal limiting factor to the expansion of clinics is the availability of medical staff with expertise in pain management. Recruitment remains challenging and suitably trained specialists are expected to remain in short supply.

I appreciate that a small number of patients have to travel to avail of this service; however, the current service is meeting the clinical care needs of patients and will continue to do so.

Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many elective surgeries have been cancelled in each Health and Social Care Trust in each of the last twelve months.
(AQW 42415/11-15)

Mr Wells: The number of elective operations cancelled by the hospital on the day of, or up to two days prior to, the planned operation, in each month between 1st February 2014 and 31st January 2015 is provided in the table below. The data have been differentiated by cancellations made for clinical or non-clinical reasons.

Number of cancelled elective operations on the day of, or up to two days prior to, the planned operation each month broken down by HSC Trust: February 2014- January 2015

	Belfast		Northern		South Eastern		Southern		Western	
	Clinical	Non-Clinical	Clinical	Non-Clinical	Clinical	Non-Clinical	Clinical	Non-Clinical	Clinical	Non-Clinical
Feb-14	91*	24*	73	59	58	21	52	22	49	38
Mar-14	33*	46*	68	42	67	33	47	29	45	6
Apr-14	85	218	73	41	56	31	45	30	51	10
May-14	79	194	68	38	64	26	50	35	56	8
Jun-14	80	171	42	52	59	41	52	38	64	17
Jul-14	71	135	50	26	71	45	38	37	73	15
Aug-14	76	153	46	61	58	43	37	28	56	7
Sep-14	98	169	84	50	70	37	61	43	68	14
Oct-14	108	248	76	59	86	35	49	47	82	24
Nov-14	130	244	54	26	67	42	54	39	90	4
Dec-14	90	164	80	52	70	23	55	43	84	19
Jan-15	208	339	57	132	76	58	68	67	77	207

Source: P9 Cancelled Operations Return

Notes:

* Due to a system error, figures for the Royal Victoria Hospital are unavailable for February and March 2014.

Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many patients, who have had elective surgery postponed in the last year, are still waiting; and how long each patient had to wait for their surgery to be rescheduled, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust.
(AQW 42416/11-15)

Mr Wells: Information on the number of patients, who have had elective surgery postponed in the last year, that are still waiting; and how long each patient had to wait for their surgery to be rescheduled, is not available.

Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the (i) type; and (ii) number of elective surgery cancelled within the twelve months, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust.
(AQW 42417/11-15)

Mr Wells: The number of elective operations cancelled by the hospital on the day of, or up to two days prior to, the planned operation, between 1st February 2014 and 31st January 2015 is provided in the table below. The data have been differentiated by cancellations made for clinical or non-clinical reasons.

Number of cancelled elective operations on the day of, or up to two days prior to, the planned operation broken down by HSC Trust: February 2014- January 2015

Cancellation Type	HSC Trust				
	Belfast	Northern	South Eastern	Southern	Western
Clinical	1149*	771	802	608	795
Non- Clinical	2105*	638	435	458	369

Source: P9 Cancelled Operations Return

The information collected on cancelled operations does not include a breakdown by specialty type.

Note: *Due to a system error, figures for the Royal Victoria Hospital are unavailable for February and March 2014.

Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what measures he is taking to reduce pressure on the Emergency Department at the Royal Victoria Hospital; and what plans he has in place to increase bed capacity in the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust to ease pressure in Emergency Departments.
(AQW 42418/11-15)

Mr Wells: My Department, through the work of the unscheduled care task group has been working closely with the HSC to ensure that our emergency care services are better prepared this winter. In addition, I have allocated £5 million of additional funding to the HSC this winter and a further £750,000 has been made available from the Health and Social Care Board. Within the Belfast Trust, funding has been used to provide additional Emergency Department and Acute Medical Unit consultants, AHP and pharmacy staff, and a Hospital Ambulance Liaison Officer.

The Belfast Health and Social Care Trust has been developing a programme of change and improvement to its unscheduled care services. The Trust is working to improve discharge processes to ensure the sickest patients have the quickest access to beds; and it has the ability to open additional beds if required at times of increased pressure in emergency departments. The Trust operates BCH Direct, a direct access assessment unit in the Belfast City Hospital for GPs who refer frail elderly patients via ambulance and by-passing the emergency department; the Trust has created extra capacity for imaging at weekends; and has Rapid Access Neuro Clinics in the Royal Victoria Hospital for people presenting to the emergency department with seizures.

The Trust has also recently physically moved 12 wards and six clinics in the Royal Victoria Hospital (308 beds) by co-locating specialisms in order to reduce outliers and further improve the efficiency of bed management.

Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many additional staff have been employed to increase the capacity of the Emergency Department at the Royal Victoria Hospital.
(AQW 42420/11-15)

Mr Wells: Belfast HSC Trust has provided whole-time equivalent (WTE) figures for medical and qualified nursing staff at the Royal Victoria Hospital's Emergency Department since 2011. The figures in the table below are as at 1 December in each year.

Year	Medical WTE	Qualified Nursing WTE
2011	30	39.74
2012	34	44.36
2013	38	106.39
2014	35	103.56

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the number of patients who suffer from ME and Fibromyalgia; and (ii) the availability of specialist consultants and support services for local patients who suffer from these illnesses.
(AQW 42448/11-15)

Mr Wells: Data is not collected in a suitable format to determine the number of patients who suffer from Myalgic Encephalopathy (ME) and Fibromyalgia.

Health and Social Care Trusts do not provide a specialist Chronic Fatigue Syndrome/ME service, but GPs may refer to a wide range of specialists such as cardiology or neurology depending on the most prominent presenting conditions by the individual patient.

The provision of services are determined on a case-by-case basis and tailored to the patient's need. These include, for example, physiotherapy and pain management.
The services for fibromyalgia are also provided on the same basis.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of whether his Department could achieve greater efficiencies in the future by opening up to public tender the awarding of pharmacy tenancies within local hospitals.
(AQW 42471/11-15)

Mr Wells: My Department is committed to the efficient and effective use of resources to sustain frontline health and social care services. However, this type of arrangement has not been explored to date and I have no immediate plans to do so.

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much has been spent on Genitourinary Medicine Clinics in each of the last three financial years, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust.
(AQW 42473/11-15)

Mr Wells:

Total Expenditure on Genito-urinary Medicine: 2011/12 - 2013/14

Trust	2011/12 £	2012/13 £	2013/14 £
Belfast	6,938,720	6,923,746	8,242,870
Southern	472,603	415,858	324,484
South Eastern	161,172	223,982	232,252
Northern	214,260	272,736	323,258
Western	967,909	846,339	960,230
Total	**£8,754,664**	**£8,682,661**	**£10,083,094**

Source: Trust Financial Returns (TFR H), 2011/12 to 2013/14

*includes both inpatient and outpatient expenditure

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in relation to the current £27 million spend on cancer drugs, for a breakdown of expenditure by (i) name of drug; (ii) type of cancer it is applicable to; and (iii) the number of recipients of each drug.
(AQW 42537/11-15)

Mr Wells: The total cancer drug expenditure in 2013/14 was £27m. This expenditure relates to a number of specialist cancer drugs which can be used across a large number of different indications. The information requested on the breakdown of spend by name of drug, type of cancer and number of patients is not available as the current clinical oncology information system (COIS) does not provide this level of detail. However, work is well underway in relation to the launch of a new regional information system for oncology and haematology (RISOH) and this system will provide detailed prescribing information by tumour site and indication. It is expected that this system will be fully operational across all Health and Social Care Trusts by summer 2016.

The projected total cancer drug expenditure for 2014/15 is approximately £30m

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of whether the proposed specialised medicines fund will result in patients in Northern Ireland having restricted access to specialised cancer drugs when compared with those in England and Scotland.
(AQW 42538/11-15)

Mr Wells: The proposed specialist medicines fund for Northern Ireland has not yet been established and it is therefore not possible at this stage to provide the detail requested. The proposed fund for Northern Ireland will have a different remit and objectives than drug funds in other jurisdictions e.g. there is no single specialist drugs fund in England to compare with.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, with regard to the proposed specialised medicines fund, to detail (i) the projected annual spend on specialised drugs under the fund; and (ii) the estimated projected income that would be received from prescription charges.
(AQW 42539/11-15)

Mr Wells: It is planned to use the proposed Specialist Medicines Fund to finance increased access to unapproved treatments through the revised Individual Funding Request (IFR) process and also to contribute to pressures on growth in specialist medicines approved by NICE.

The estimated annual cost of the revised IFR system is expected to be between £4.8m and £9.5m. In 2015/16, the projected growth in new NICE approved specialist medicines is £3-5 million.

My Department is conducting a public consultation exercise on the question of the use of prescription charges to support a specialist medicines fund. That consultation process runs until 8 May.

My Department is currently finalising work on the detail and projected income of possible charging models and I am aiming to make this information available in the coming weeks.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the drugs and treatments that will be provided to patients under the proposed specialised medicines fund.
(AQW 42541/11-15)

Mr Wells: Given the large number of new innovative drugs and treatments coming to the market each year it is not possible at this stage to provide the detail requested.

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what are the latest food hygiene ratings for the public eating areas in each of the acute hospital.
(AQW 42548/11-15)

Mr Wells: The latest food hygiene ratings that relate to public eating areas in each of the acute hospitals are as follows:

Hospital	Eating Establishment	Food Hygiene Rating
The Royal Hospitals 274 Grosvenor Road Belfast BT12 6BA	Coffee Doc	5 Very Good
	Royal Jubilee Maternity Service	5 Very Good
	Spoons Restaurant	5 Very Good
	The Busy Bee Shop	5 Very Good
	Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children	4 Good
	Sugar Box	4 Good
	Corridor Shop/Café	3 Generally Satisfactory
Belfast City Hospital 51 Lisburn Road Belfast BT9 7AB	Belfast City Hospital	5 Very Good
	Chat Coffee House (Tower Block)	5 Very Good
	Chat Coffee House (Cancer Centre)	5 Very Good
Mater Hospital 45-51 Crumlin Road Belfast BT14 6AB	Mater Hospital	5 Very Good
Craigavon Area Hospital Lurgan Road Lisnisky Portadown Armagh BT63 5QQ	Craigavon Area Hospital	5 Very Good
	Sweet Inspirations	5 Very Good
Daisy Hill Hospital 5 Hospital Road Newry BT35 8DR	Daisy Hill Hospital	5 Very Good
	Spar Convenience Shop	5 Very Good

Hospital	Eating Establishment	Food Hygiene Rating
Antrim Area Hospital Antrim Area Hospital 45 Bush Road Co Antrim BT41 2RL	Antrim Area Hospital Shop	5 Very Good
Causeway Hospital 4 Newbridge Road Coleraine BT52 1HS	Causeway Hospital	5 Very Good
South West Acute Hospital 124 Irvinestown Road Enniskillen Fermanagh BT74 6DN	SWA Hospital – Staff Restaurant/coffee Bar	5 Very Good
Altnagelvin Area Hospital Glenshane Road Altnagelvin Derry BT47 6SB	Snack Bar, Ground Floor, Altnagelvin H	5 Very Good
	Tower Block Restaurant, Altnagelvin H	5 Very Good
	Outpatients Ground Floor Coffee Bar	4 Good
	Outpatients Ground Floor Coffee bar (South Wing)	4 Good
Ulster Hospital Upper Newtownards Rd Dundonald BT16 1RH	Ulster Hospitals Snack Bars	5 Very Good

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is the predicted time-scale for the placement of a Consultant Neurologist Multiple Sclerosis Specialist in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust.
(AQW 42564/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Northern Health and Social Care Trust (NHSCT) provides a generalist neurology service for patients with a range of neurological conditions including MS, Epilepsy and Parkinson's diseases.

A second NHSCT neurology generalist consultant has been funded by the commissioner and the Trust is actively seeking appointment to this post. The timeframe for appointment is dependent on the availability of a suitable neurologist.

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 39822/11-15, whether he can confirm the location of the mental health unit for the southern sector of the Western Health and Social Care Trust.
(AQW 42566/11-15)

Mr Wells: As previously advised, the Western Health and Social Care Trust is currently developing a business case to assist in determining the need for and location of the second mental health unit for the Western Trust area. No decision on location will be taken until the business case has been completed.

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many specialists in ME and Fibromyalgia Symposium are currently employed in Northern Ireland.
(AQW 42583/11-15)

Mr Wells: There is currently one (1.0 whole-time equivalent) specialist Occupational Therapist employed in the Chronic Fatigue Syndrome/ME service within the Belfast HSC Trust.

There are no staff specifically employed to provide services only to patients with fibromyalgia. However, GPs may refer individuals to consultant rheumatologists, neurologists, etc. Where clinically required, patients with this condition can also access the services of relevant Allied Health Professions.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the follow-up appointment arrangements following a Duchenne Muscular Dystrohphy patient receiving treatment with Translarna; and how this impacts on the availability of physiotherapy treatment for other children.
(AQW 42589/11-15)

Mr Wells: Translarna has not been made available for the treatment of people with Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy other than as part of a clinical trial(which is being undertaken by the drug company). It is therefore not possible to provide details regarding the follow up appointment arrangements for Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy patients receiving this treatment or how it may impact on the availability of physiotherapy treatment for other children.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what was the average waiting time for a hip replacement operation in each of the last three years; and what efforts are being made to reduce waiting times.
(AQW 42596/11-15)

Mr Wells: Waiting time information is collected on the basis of how long patients are currently waiting for inpatient admission and not the completed length of time they waited before admission. Information relates to patients still waiting for inpatient admission at the end of each quarter.

The average number of weeks waiting for hip replacement surgery, at 31st December 2014, the most recent quarter for which official statistics are available, and the position at the end of the same quarter in each of the two years previous, is detailed in the table below.

	Average number of weeks waiting for a hip replacement operation		
	At 31st December 2012	**At 31st December 2013**	**At 31st December 2014**
Northern Ireland	16.5	17.8	20.0

The Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) continues to work with Health and Social Care Trusts to address the increasing demand for orthopaedic procedures. For example, the HSCB has recently agreed an additional investment of £4m in the trauma and orthopaedic service for the Southern Trust which will increase capacity and help reduce waiting times.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many firefighter work related deaths have occurred in each of the last five years; and how this compares with other regions of the UK.
(AQW 42597/11-15)

Mr Wells: There have been no firefighter work related deaths in Northern Ireland in the five year period 1 April 2009 to 31 March 2014. Statistics for firefighter fatalities in other regions of the UK over the same period are not readily available.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what support the Fire and Rescue Service is being given to invest to save.
(AQW 42598/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS) are responsible for the delivery of an efficient and effective Fire and Rescue Service in Northern Ireland and as such have responsibility for identifying areas requiring investment to ensure efficiency.

My Department provides both oversight and support through the development and progression of all business cases seeking investment.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what non-statutory services would be cut in the the event of a 5 per cent reduction in the Fire and Rescue Service budget.
(AQW 42599/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS) have been asked to finalise efficiency plans before submission to my Department.

NIFRS savings proposals must be prioritised on the basis of those that minimise the impact on service delivery, and ensure the continued safety of both the public and the firefighters who deliver the service.

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action he will take to improve the availability of out-of-hours doctors to alleviate the pressure on the Emergency Department at Craigavon Area Hospital.
(AQW 42600/11-15)

Mr Wells: Consistent with the position across most Emergency Departments, Craigavon Hospital's Emergency Department has experienced an increase in attendances over the winter period. The Southern Health and Social Care Trust has responded to these pressures and maintained their Emergency Department performance against key targets. Alongside the pressures at Emergency Departments there has been an 18% increase in demand for out-of-hours doctors over the past five years.

Both the Health and Social Care Board (the Board) and the Southern Trust have recognised this challenge and have been working to meet it.

The Board has also invested an additional £1.5m in out-of-hours services across Northern Ireland. It is working with all of the out-of-hours providers in order to boost the number of out-of-hours shifts that are filled.

More broadly, the Board allocated £550k of additional funding to the Southern Trust to support measures to respond to increased demand for winter pressures, including additional shifts and enhanced payments to GPs for difficult to fill shifts particularly at weekends and bank holidays. It has also provided funding to the Trust for recruitment of additional acute physicians to implement a new model for acute medicine in Craigavon Area Hospital.

I understand the Southern Trust has an on-going recruitment process for both sessional and contracted GPs and is exploring the potential to recruit suitably qualified GPs from overseas. It has also undertaken a nurse recruitment process with 30 triage nurses and 5 advance nurse practitioners appointed to date. The advance nurse practitioners are already in post and are in process of training the 30 nurses who are gradually commencing work. These nurses will provide triage and resolution of calls by telephone and face to face consultations at out-of-hours bases.

During March the Trust will be piloting a scheme which will offer a contribution to sessional GPs to help with indemnity insurance in return for a minimum commitment of 20 clinical hours per month.

The Trust is also currently seeking IT solutions to facilitate GPs in triaging calls at home and is exploring the use of remote telehealth for home consultations by a paramedic/nurse.

In addition the Trust has commenced a 6 month pilot project in which pharmacists will work in the out-of-hours service, to support and streamline service delivery such as responding to calls related to medication issues. This pilot project commenced on 1st March, with the recruitment of 9 pharmacists to provide a service between (11-4pm) Saturday, Sunday and Bank Holidays.

As a second phase of on-going continuous improvement the Trust put in place a Service Improvement Lead until 31st March 2015. The Trust has also appointed a Service Improvement Lead whose role is to undertake a rapid modernisation and improvement project for the Trust's out-of-hours service.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what assessment has been made of the number of Fire Service appliances that are unavailable for a proportion of the day due to the lack of staff resources.
(AQW 42609/11-15)

Mr Wells: The availability of Retained fire appliances during day time hours, Monday to Friday, is an issue which impacts on Fire and Rescue Services across the UK. The Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service's (NIFRS) approach to monitoring Retained availability and assessing any impact on service delivery reflects national best practice.

NIFRS has conducted a review of operational contingency arrangements to support day-time availability of Retained fire appliances and a dedicated Working Group has been tasked with developing policies and procedures which will enhance the use of existing resources going forward.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what changes recipients of the Independent Living Fund will see after 30 June 2015; and whether he can provide an assurance that current users will not have their support reduced.
(AQW 42631/11-15)

Mr Wells: I am currently considering a detailed briefing paper from my officials on a proposed way forward and I plan to my announce my decision shortly on how best ILF users will be supported following the closure of the Fund in June 2015.

My Department will do all it can to ensure that those disabled people in Northern Ireland who are most in need of our care and support are not disadvantaged by the Department of Work and Pension's decision.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 38678/11-15, to provide further details on the acute coronary care unit in the South West Acute Hospital, including (i) the services provided by this unit; (ii) the treatments provided by this unit; (iii) how many patients received treatment in the unit in each of the last four quarters; (iv) how many surgeons are on call and based within the unit; and (v) how this compares with the situation in Altnagelvin Hospital.
(AQW 42677/11-15)

Mr Wells:

(i) The acute Coronary Care Unit in the South West Acute Hospital, accepts acute coronary admissions.

(ii) The Unit provides invasive treatment, including CT, MRI, echo, transoesophageal echo, ambulatory BP, ECG monitoring and DC cardioversion.

(iii) The number of patients treated in each of the last four quarters is set out in the table below.

	South West Acute Hospital Coronary Care Unit	
Year 2014	**Admissions**	**Day Cases**
Quarter 1	136	16
Quarter 2	150	11
Quarter 3	138	20
Quarter 4	196	15

(iv) There are no cardiac surgeons in the South West Acute Hospital or any other hospital in Northern Ireland except Belfast.

(v) The number of patients treated in Altnagelvin Hospital Coronary Care Unit in each of the last four quarters is set out in the table below.

	Altnagelvin Hospital Coronary Care Unit	
Year 2014	**Admissions**	**Day Cases**
Quarter 1	224	13
Quarter 2	179	12
Quarter 3	176	10
Quarter 4	187	9

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of budget reductions at the (i) Health and Social Care Board; and (ii) Public Health Agency, in terms of (i) staffing levels; and (ii) service quality.
(AQW 42679/11-15)

Mr Wells: The HSCB and PHA are currently developing specific proposals for the Department's consideration to address their savings targets of 15% of their administration budgets in 2015/16. Where possible, these will be focused on non-public facing areas and will seek to minimise the impact on front line service delivery. It is also anticipated that savings can be identified through the Permanent Secretary-led Review of Administration.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 42274/11-15, to detail the action plans for each Integrated Care Partnership.
(AQW 42681/11-15)

Mr Wells: As set out in AQW 42273/11-15, ICPs in the Belfast, Northern, South Eastern, Southern and Western areas have produced action plans for their areas. Whilst there is some variation in the format and content of these action plans, the following key elements are reflected across the majority of action plans:

- Details of proposed actions to facilitate care pathway implementation and enhanced service provision;
- Allocation of lead responsibilities for implementation of individual actions;
- Planned investment proposals for specific ICP initiatives;
- Arrangements for reporting/monitoring; and
- Planned outcomes and outputs.

These action plans are supported by details of current and proposed care pathways and locally-focussed review of opportunities to address gaps in existing service provision.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 42274/11-15, to provide a financial breakdown of the current expenditure on Integrated Care Partnerships, including (i) the projected spend; and (ii) the actual spend, within the current financial year.
(AQW 42682/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Southern Education and Library Board (SELB) who has responsibility for capital minor works at Donacloney Primary School, has advised that the cost of placing any additional mobile classrooms since the building of the school is as follows:-

*2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	Overall Total
£25,129	£10,354	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0	£35,483

*costs have only been provided for a period of six financial years in addition to the current financial year in line with the record retention policy of the SELB.

Details of projected and estimated actual spend for Integrated Care Partnerships for the current financial year are:

2014/15	Projected Spend as per 2014/15 Commissioning Plan	Full Year Forecast at 18th Feb 2015	Actual Expenditure at 31st Jan 15
Integrated Care Partnerships	£3.5m	£2.8m	Not available until mid March 15*

The estimated underspend reflects lower than anticipated costs from ICP committee members and Business and Clinical Support Teams as well as the fact that some service initiatives have not started as quickly as anticipated.

* The actual expenditure figures to the 31st January 2015 are currently awaiting the submission of Trust returns, not all of which have been received at the time of this response.

Source: Health and Social Care Board

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment for the need to conduct up-to-date research on current and future dependency levels on the needs of recipients of domiciliary care provision and of residents in nursing and residential care homes.
(AQW 42685/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Department and HSC bodies draw on a range of currently available data sources to ensure that the future needs of the population are planned for.

Previous patterns of demand are valuable for indicating possible demand trends and can be used to inform future service planning. It is clear that with an ageing population the demand for domiciliary care and nursing home care will continue to grow while residential care will continue to provide an important role.

The Health and Social Care Board, the Public Health Agency, Local Commissioning Groups, and HSC Trusts work together to ensure that the current and future needs of the population are planned for.

However, as demands upon services increase, such new demands must be accommodated within a fixed budget allocation. As a consequence, decisions about service eligibility and the prioritisation of client need are increasingly important issues in the planning of future service delivery.

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the location of the pancreatic cancer centre.
(AQW 42712/11-15)

Mr Wells: Northern Ireland patients with suspected pancreatic cancer are referred to the regional hepato-pancreato-biliary multi-disciplinary team. Surgery for cancer of the pancreas is carried out in the Mater Hospital, Belfast.

Systemic anti-cancer treatments are provided by oncologists at Altnagelvin Hospital, the Ulster Hospital, Dundonald, Craigavon Area Hospital and Belfast Cancer Centre.

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what funding is available for the Regional Hepato-Pancreato-Biliary Surgical Service.
(AQW 42713/11-15)

Mr Wells: I refer the member to my reply to his previous question concerning this service, AQW 39652/11-15.

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether pancreatic cancer will be highlight in the new cancer awareness campaign.
(AQW 42714/11-15)

Mr Wells: Pancreatic cancer is not one of the cancers to be highlighted in the Public Health Agency's Be Cancer Aware public information campaign. This campaign was launched on 24 February 2015 and the first phase is focussing on the top three most prevalent cancers in Northern Ireland (lung, breast and bowel). Together these three cancers accounted for 55% of new cancers diagnosed in Northern Ireland in 2012 (excluding non-melanoma skin cancer).

It is envisaged that a later phase of the campaign will include other new tumour sites but the selection of these has yet to be determined.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the outcomes of the pilot scheme providing rural community pharmacies with extra funding.
(AQW 42716/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Health and Social Care Board funded a pilot scheme to support access to pharmacy services in predominantly rural areas. The purpose of the pilot was to support patient access to pharmacy services and as such the pharmacies were required to provide services for a minimum of 40 hours per week over six days. A total of 74 pharmacies received funding.

The Board has completed an evaluation to assess the impact of the financial support. The evaluation has demonstrated that 9.4% of the pharmacies did not meet the requirement to provide services for a minimum of 40 hours per week over six days and that there was no increase in opening hours in 82% of the pilot pharmacies. However, the funding enabled 56% of pilot pharmacies to increase their staffing – primarily through an increase in pharmacy support staff hours.

The volume of dispensing increased by an average of 22% in pilot pharmacies, compared with an average increase of 18% across all other pharmacies. Twelve (16%) of the pharmacies reported that the funding had enabled them to remain open/ financially viable.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 42023/11-15, to detail (i) which elements of these reserves are cash reserves; and (ii) how cash reserves are being used, for example, whether there are financial investments involved.
(AQW 42743/11-15)

Mr Wells: The cash balances reported by the HSC trusts as at 31 March 2014 were as follows:

	£m
WHSCT	3.3
BHSCT	21.4
SHSCT	2.2
SEHSCT	2.1
NHSCT	5.0
	34.0

HSC Trusts do not retain financial investments and draw down their estimated cash requirements from the Department on a weekly basis in order to meet ongoing operational business needs (such as the payment of wages, salaries and other bills). Cash balances therefore vary from day to day depending on timing and value of payment cycles.

Financial investments made by Charitable Trust Funds as at 31 March 2014 are summarised in the table below. Charitable Trust Funds are managed independently of normal HSC Trust operations and are utilised for the purpose intended by the benefactor. They are therefore not available for utilisation by the Trusts as part of its routine operational requirements.

	Investments[1] **£000**	**Short Term Investments** [2] **and Deposits £000**	**Cash £000**
WHSCT	2,112	1,595	28
BHSCT	41,253	972	659
SHSCT	2,678	100	98
SEHSCT	6,703		365
NHSCT	1,676	3,500	470
	54,422	6,167	1,620

Notes:

(1) Investments are primarily held by the Common Investment Fund operated by the BHSCT on behalf of the HSC.

(2) Funds retained in short term investment or interest bearing bank accounts.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 42360/11-15, to detail all organisations which have benefited from this funding in the last financial year.
(AQW 42779/11-15)

Mr Wells: I refer to my response to AQW 39553/11-15, which lists all the voluntary organisations funded by my Department, both from the core funding budget and from other programme funds.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the impact of the proposed fifteen per cent reduction in the Public Health Agency budget and the subsequent impact this will have on (i) staff levels; and (ii) public health initiatives.
(AQW 42781/11-15)

Mr Wells: The PHA is currently developing specific proposals for the Department's consideration to address its savings target. Where possible, these will be focused on non-public facing areas and will seek to minimise the impact on front line service delivery. It is also anticipated that savings can be identified through the Permanent Secretary-led Review of Administration.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the total value of private donations made to each Health and Social Care Trust in each of the last three years.
(AQW 42782/11-15)

Mr Wells: The total value of 'Charitable Donations and Other Contributions to Expenditure' for each HSC trust for the last three years is as follows:

	2011/12 £000	2012/13 £000	2013/14 £000
Belfast	5,099	3,303	3,777
Southern	1,733	1,598	1,474
South Eastern	-	-	4
Northern	-	-	-
Western	-	-	326
	6,832	4,901	5,580

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail all sources of income generation utilised by each Health and Social Care Trust in each of the last three years; and to provide the total financial amount derived from each source.
(AQW 42783/11-15)

Mr Wells: The total external income generated by each HSC trust in the last three years is detailed in the following tables:

2011/12	Belfast £k	Southern £k	South Eastern £k	Northern £k	Western £k	NIAS £k	Total £k
Client contributions to social care	30,356	20,331	21,985	32,007	15,891	0	120,570
Other income from non-patient services	37,432	8,387	6,933	11,111	9,957	132	73,953
Other - mostly cost recovery re road traffic accidents	4,549	3,181	2,482	1,877	0	417	12,507
Other income	8,669	1,318	3,664	526	0	0	14,177
Private patients	3,963	997	281	191	1,949	0	7,380
Charitable and other contributions to expenditure	5,099	1,733	0	0	0	0	6,832
HSC trusts	874	380	872	0	599	1,159	3,884
GB/RoI income	815	176	0	0	1,309	0	2,299
Profit on sale of land	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	**91,757**	**36,503**	**36,218**	**45,712**	**29,705**	**1,708**	**241,076**

2012/13	Belfast £k	Southern £k	South Eastern £k	Northern £k	Western £k	NIAS £k	Total £k
Client contributions to social care	31,870	22,484	22,707	32,533	16,183	0	125,777
Other income from non-patient services	38,518	8,916	8,113	14,162	10,204	343	80,255
Other - mostly cost recovery re road traffic accidents	3,645	3,184	4,242	1,650	1,562	400	14,682
Other Income	7,829	1,534	4,115	0	0	0	13,479
Private patients	3,944	723	317	169	366	0	5,519
Charitable and other contributions to expenditure	3,303	1,598	0	0	0	0	4,901
HSC trusts	995	215	1,298	0	512	1,115	4,134
GB/RoI Income	563	185	0	0	1,594	0	2,342
Profit on sale of land	16	0	0	0	0	0	16

2012/13	Belfast £k	Southern £k	South Eastern £k	Northern £k	Western £k	NIAS £k	Total £k
Total	**90,683**	**38,840**	**40,792**	**48,513**	**30,421**	**1,857**	**251,106**

2013/14	Belfast £k	Southern £k	South Eastern £k	Northern £k	Western £k	NIAS £k	Total £k
Client contributions to social care	32,613	23,730	25,011	36,010	16,350	0	133,713
Other income from non-patient services	37,809	8,270	7,542	11,365	9,889	277	75,152
Other - mostly cost recovery re road traffic accidents	4,847	1,991	2,121	1,294	1,441	396	12,090
Other Income	8,113	2,191	4,774	0	0	0	15,078
Private patients	3,158	601	329	216	579	0	4,884
Charitable and other contributions to expenditure	3,777	1,474	4	0	326	0	5,580
HSC trusts	1,087	235	619	0	635	23	2,598
GB/RoI Income	416	160	0	0	1,634	0	2,210
Profit on sale of land	190	0	0	0	0	0	190
Total	**92,009**	**38,652**	**40,399**	**48,885**	**30,854**	**696**	**251,496**

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) what his Department is doing to address audiology capacity issues in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust and the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust, which are severely impacting upon waiting times in these areas; and (ii) whether the Action on Hearing Loss Hear to Help aftercare service could be utilised as a means to alleviate pressures on these audiology services.
(AQW 42791/11-15)

Mr Wells:

(i) Across Northern Ireland the demand for audiology services exceeds the capacity that Health and Social Care Trusts (HSCTs) have to deliver through 5 audiology posts. This is predominately in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust and the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust. The Health and Social Care Board has plans in place with both HSC Trusts that will address these gaps and this will ensure that the audiology service across Northern Ireland is fully resourced to meet the demand for services. It should be noted however that currently there is a recruitment and retention difficulty with audiologists across Northern Ireland and as a result Trusts have a number of vacant posts, resulting in longer waiting times for patients.

(ii) In view of the current financial challenges, my Department and the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) are jointly reviewing all non-recurrent funding including pilot funding provided by the HSCB to Action On Hearing Loss' Hear to Help Service.

Once funding for the 2015/16 financial year is confirmed, I understand that the HSCB will actively consider continuation funding for existing projects including "Hear to Help" to enable appropriate evaluation to take place of the particular service that they provide.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the Agenda for Change banding of the 1,058 nurses categorised as district nurses in the departmental workforce census of March 2014.
(AQW 42800/11-15)

Mr Wells: The information requested is shown in the table below.

Pay Band	Headcount	Whole-Time Equivalent
Pay band 5	698	531.9
Pay band 6	260	228.8
Pay band 7	95	88.7

Pay Band	Headcount	Whole-Time Equivalent
Pay band 8A	5	4.0
Total	**1,058**	**853.3**

Source: NI HSC Human Resources, Payroll, Travel and Subsistence

This Census figure represents those staff graded as District Nurses, as at 31st March 2014. It excludes bank staff, members of staff on career breaks, and members of staff with a WTE of less than 0.03.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is the protocol for action to be taken by a GP if a patient makes a direct threat to attempt suicide.
(AQW 42822/11-15)

Mr Wells: A GP will assess the mental state of patient, taking appropriate clinical action dependent upon the severity of assessed symptoms and risk present in each individual case. If a GP determines the patient has a serious mental illness or is at high risk of suicide, immediate referral to secondary specialist psychiatric services should be made for further assessment and management. If an individual, because of the nature and degree of their mental disorder, places themselves and/ or others at risk and they are deemed unwilling or unable to accept care and treatment, the law places a responsibility on the GP (and other health and social care professionals) to intervene. The action taken is framed by the legislation, 'The Mental Health (Northern Ireland) Order 1986'. If the GP determines there is no immediate risk to either the patient or the public they may arrange to review the patient themselves. The time frame will depend on the clinical situation.

GPs are guided in evidence based clinical practice by published guidance such as NICE guideline CG16 "Self-harm: The short-term physical and psychological management and secondary prevention of self-harm in primary and secondary care", (published 2004) and the 2014 the Royal College of General Practitioners / Royal College of Psychiatrists guidance "Suicide Mitigation in Primary Care Factsheet". Guidelines and Audit Implementation Network (GAIN) has issued Northern Ireland guidance "Guidelines for Northern Ireland for the Care of Seriously Mentally Ill Patients under the Mental Health Order 2006".

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the current health provision to treat and support people who are recovering from eating disorders; and what funding has been allocated to programmes and facilities that provide this care, in each of the last three years.
(AQW 42847/11-15)

Mr Wells: Eating Disorder Services are provided through a stepped care approach which ranges from early detection and intervention, to community-based treatment, to specialist inpatient provision.

Community-based Specialist Eating Disorder Services are available across all five HSC Trusts (with Belfast Trust providing services for the South Eastern Trust) for both adults and children and young people.

Inpatient treatment for adults with an eating disorder is facilitated in existing hospitals with in-reach support provided by specialist community-based eating disorder teams. This ensures a continuum of care when patients are discharged.

Inpatient care for children and adolescents with eating disorders is usually provided at Beechcroft, the Regional Child and Adolescent Mental Health Inpatient Unit. If the patient's condition is primarily physical, clinicians may decide that the best place for treatment is an acute hospital setting.

If a patient requires more intense specialist treatment for anorexia, Trusts can access beds in England, Scotland and Ireland through the Extra Contractual Referral (ECR) process.

A total of £2 million per annum is allocated to specialist Eating Disorder Services, and this has been the case since 2008/09. This figure does not include inpatient care or the cost of treatment for eating disorders provided outside Northern Ireland.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the Support For Parents Delivering Social Change Signature Programme, including the number of families who have benefited from this programme since 2012.
(AQW 42919/11-15)

Mr Wells: Significant progress continues to be made on four parenting support programmes being delivered through the Public Health Agency (PHA) as part of the Delivering Social Change programme. These provide additional high quality support to new and existing parents living in areas of deprivation through positive parenting programmes.

Two of the four programmes are delivered direct to families. By the end of December 2014 26 Parenting Your Teen programmes have been delivered to 313 parents and 632 children, with 89% of families completing the programme. A further 117 families had completed the Strengthening Families programme.

The remaining two programmes aim to improve the quality of services delivered to families. Funding is being used to increase the number of organisations who deliver the Incredible Years programme in NI to the highest quality and adherence to programme fidelity standards. In addition, by the end of December 2014, a total of 342 early years and HSC professionals had undertaken Infant Mental Health training through one of 3 new training programmes being funded. The investment in Infant

Mental Health Training has also enabled the establishment of a regional Infant Mental Health Plan that will determine the level of investment required beyond the current scale of training resourced under Delivering Social Change.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 42323/11-15, for a financial breakdown of Supplement for Undergraduate Medical and Dental Education funding over the last three years, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust.
(AQW 42947/11-15)

Mr Wells: The funding provided to HSC trusts over the past three financial years under the Support for Undergraduate Medical and Dental Education is set out in the attached table.

Year	hsc trust	allocation
2014/2015	Belfast HSC Trust	£22,485,127
	South Eastern HSC Trust	£1,931,988
	Northern HSC Trust	£1,804,770
	Southern HSC Trust	£1,930,374
	Western HSC Trust	£2,189,638
2013/2014	Belfast HSC Trust	£22,880,437
	South Eastern HSC Trust	£1,801,862
	Northern HSC Trust	£1,621,735
	Southern HSC Trust	£1,782,898
	Western HSC Trust	£2,125,037
2012/2013	Belfast HSC Trust	£23,293,184
	South Eastern HSC Trust	£1,799,613
	Northern HSC Trust	£1,582,629
	Southern HSC Trust	£1,645,931
	Western HSC Trust	£1,982,769

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 42323/11-15, for his assessment of benefits of reforming Supplement for Undergraduate Medical and Dental Education allocation as a means to attract a greater number of students into the GP specialism.
(AQW 42948/11-15)

Mr Wells: One of the objectives of the impending review of the Supplement for Undergraduate Medical and Dental Education (SUMDE) will be to enhance the accountability and transparency of the very considerable investment made by my Department in supporting undergraduate medical and dental education. The Department will seek to explore ways in which the funding allocations can be made more flexible and responsive to any future developments in the undergraduate medical curriculum.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for a breakdown of waiting times for Occupational Therapists across each Health and Social Care Trust area, over the last year.
(AQW 42949/11-15)

Mr Wells: The tables below contains the total number of people waiting for Occupational Therapists at the end of each month for the past 12 months by Health and Social Care Trust area and length of time waiting.

Table 1: Belfast Health and Social Care Trust area – The number of people waiting for an Occupational Therapist at Month's End (January – December 2014)

	Belfast Health and Social Care Trust					
Date	0 – 3 weeks	>3 weeks – 6 weeks	> 6 weeks to 9 weeks	> 9 weeks to 13 weeks	> 13 weeks	Total
31 Jan 2014	660	280	495	365	49	1,849
28 Feb 2014	602	567	401	177	50	1,797
31 Mar 2014	715	523	387	224	69	1,918

Date	Belfast Health and Social Care Trust					
	0 – 3 weeks	>3 weeks – 6 weeks	> 6 weeks to 9 weeks	> 9 weeks to 13 weeks	> 13 weeks	Total
30 Apr 2014	527	536	446	393	175	2,077
31 May 2014	593	400	529	351	268	2,141
30 Jun 2014	691	536	483	482	195	2,387
31 Jul 2014	664	580	473	515	179	2,411
31 Aug 2014	736	571	432	658	321	2,718
30 Sept 2014	768	439	479	524	380	2,590
31 Oct 2014	639	519	459	488	388	2,493
30 Nov 2014	527	428	455	542	305	2,257
31 Dec 2014	346	392	379	492	372	1,981

Source: Health and Social Care Board

Please note these figures have not been validated by the Department

Table 2: Northern Health and Social Care Trust area – The number of people waiting for an Occupational Therapist at Month's End (January – December 2014)

Date	Northern Health and Social Care Trust					
	0 – 3 weeks	>3 weeks – 6 weeks	> 6 weeks to 9 weeks	> 9 weeks to 13 weeks	> 13 weeks	Total
31 Jan 2014	732	332	418	442	829	2,753
28 Feb 2014	680	607	396	247	754	2,684
31 Mar 2014	717	564	492	249	737	2,759
30 Apr 2014	787	623	388	363	678	2,839
31 May 2014	728	465	522	439	810	2,964
30 Jun 2014	732	513	418	356	826	2,845
31 Jul 2014	668	604	429	467	865	3,033
31 Aug 2014	591	511	457	514	976	3,049
30 Sept 2014	721	440	440	488	1,032	3,121
31 Oct 2014	667	499	435	470	1,145	3,216
30 Nov 2014	605	451	448	497	1,161	3,162
31 Dec 2014	379	447	411	508	1,270	3,015

Source: Health and Social Care Board

Please note these figures have not been validated by the Department

Table 3: South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust area – The number of people waiting for an Occupational Therapist at Month's End (January – December 2014)

Date	South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust					
	0 – 3 weeks	>3 weeks – 6 weeks	> 6 weeks to 9 weeks	> 9 weeks to 13 weeks	> 13 weeks	Total
31 Jan 2014	480	178	241	55	0	954
28 Feb 2014	502	391	51	0	0	944
31 Mar 2014	524	371	130	1	0	1,026
30 Apr 2014	387	425	287	76	0	1,175
31 May 2014	470	281	324	181	0	1,256

Date	South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust					
	0 – 3 weeks	>3 weeks – 6 weeks	> 6 weeks to 9 weeks	> 9 weeks to 13 weeks	> 13 weeks	Total
30 Jun 2014	630	312	215	84	1	1,242
31 Jul 2014	512	347	253	71	0	1,183
31 Aug 2014	526	331	218	95	7	1,177
30 Sept 2014	623	340	143	76	0	1,182
31 Oct 2014	450	318	178	51	23	1,020
30 Nov 2014	523	274	140	73	10	1,020
31 Dec 2014	334	344	200	103	26	1,007

Source: Health and Social Care Board

Please note these figures have not been validated by the Department

Table 4: Southern Health and Social Care Trust area – The number of people waiting for an Occupational Therapist at Month's End (January – December 2014)

Date	Southern Health and Social Care Trust					
	0 – 3 weeks	>3 weeks – 6 weeks	> 6 weeks to 9 weeks	> 9 weeks to 13 weeks	> 13 weeks	Total
31 Jan 2014	391	172	136	53	126	878
28 Feb 2014	429	260	113	41	118	961
31 Mar 2014	387	270	102	27	63	849
30 Apr 2014	434	283	160	73	63	1,013
31 May 2014	433	194	228	97	89	1,041
30 Jun 2014	476	276	162	122	216	1,252
31 Jul 2014	446	287	186	122	225	1,266
31 Aug 2014	356	331	177	148	229	1,241
30 Sept 2014	419	269	182	141	224	1,235
31 Oct 2014	443	263	165	104	220	1,195
30 Nov 2014	395	270	157	131	209	1,162
31 Dec 2014	292	286	223	164	194	1,159

Source: Health and Social Care Board

Please note these figures have not been validated by the Department

Table 5: Western Health and Social Care Trust area – The number of people waiting for an Occupational Therapist at Month's End (January – December 2014)

Date	Western Health and Social Care Trust					
	0 – 3 weeks	>3 weeks – 6 weeks	> 6 weeks to 9 weeks	> 9 weeks to 13 weeks	> 13 weeks	Total
31 Jan 2014	390	180	335	401	404	1,710
28 Feb 2014	357	374	340	191	175	1,437
31 Mar 2014	298	319	319	223	157	1,316
30 Apr 2014	258	311	324	368	209	1,470
31 May 2014	336	284	363	373	359	1,715
30 Jun 2014	368	348	308	393	520	1,937
31 Jul 2014	288	343	376	397	795	2,199

Date	Western Health and Social Care Trust					
	0 – 3 weeks	>3 weeks – 6 weeks	> 6 weeks to 9 weeks	> 9 weeks to 13 weeks	> 13 weeks	Total
31 Aug 2014	251	304	313	451	1,016	2,335
30 Sept 2014	389	297	319	364	1,132	2,501
31 Oct 2014	394	388	297	323	1,137	2,539
30 Nov 2014	318	314	315	364	1,130	2,441
31 Dec 2014	183	296	271	378	1,316	2,444

Source: Health and Social Care Board

Please note these figures have not been validated by the Department

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant of AQW 42323/11-15, to outline the cause of the delay in this review.
(AQW 42950/11-15)

Mr Wells: Pursuant to AQW 42323/11-15, the timing of the review of the Supplement for Undergraduate Medical and Dental Education is subject to the necessary resources being identified to take it forward in light of other competing Departmental priorities.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what assessment his Department has made of Applied Behavioural Analysis as an appropriate and effective intervention for children with autism.
(AQW 43046/11-15)

Mr Wells: My Department recognises that there are a number of interventions for autism, including Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA), but does not advocate any particular approach. This is a decision for clinicians to make, based on individually assessed needs and good practice evidence.

The range of individually tailored programmes which HSC Trusts provide, are drawn from a wide body of research and evidence. Many of these interventions use approaches from the theoretical frameworks which contribute to ABA (e.g. positive behaviour management strategies and understanding of communicating through behaviour). Following assessment Trusts work collaboratively with children and their families to provide a systemic-based therapeutic intervention, which includes working with children, young people and their families in their communities.

It should be noted that, while most ABA programmes focus solely on the child, the approach adopted by HSC Trusts means they can work with the child but also the parent (focussing on developing supports, effective and consistent parenting strategies, etc) or the school, to support the young person with autism.

Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 42416/11-15, why the information is not available and whether each Health and Social Care Trust indicated that it is not available.
(AQW 43128/11-15)

Mr Wells: Information on the number of patients, who have had elective surgery postponed in the last year, that are still waiting: and how long each patient had to wait for their surgery to be rescheduled, is not available as it is not collected centrally on a single computer system either within the Department or any of the Health and Social Care Trusts.

To obtain such information a manual linking exercise would need to be undertaken to link patient records across a number of computer systems. Given the manual nature of this exercise it would involve extensive resources, and therefore could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

This has been confirmed by each Health and Social Care Trust.

Department of Justice

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 41792/11-15, whether he will order a review into why legal aid was granted to the level of senior counsel for each defendant in this case.
(AQW 42368/11-15)

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): The decision to grant criminal legal aid, and accordingly the granting of two counsel, is a matter for the Court. While it is inappropriate for me to comment on individual judicial decisions, this case involved charges which could have resulted in life imprisonment for the defendants, and therefore is the type of case category where it could be expected that this level of representation would be appropriate.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 40980/11-15, to provide the final costs, or an estimate of same, of translators for this case.
(AQW 42435/11-15)

Mr Ford: The estimated cost of interpreters for this case is provided in the table below.

Cost Type	Estimated Cost
a) Legal Aid	£128.50
b) Prosecution	£369.90
c) Court Costs	£9,454.12
Total	**£9,952.52**

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 41355/11-15, to detail any similar school visits made in each of the previous two years.
(AQW 42438/11-15)

Mr Ford: As stated in AQW/41355/11-15, the Northern Ireland Prison Service did not visit schools during 2012 and 2013. However, the Northern Ireland Schools and Colleges Association as part of the 'Experience of Work' programme delivered, on behalf of NIPS, a presentation in approximately 20 schools showing the work of NIPS to promote careers in the service. The presentation was delivered prior to the launch of the 2013 Prisoner Custody Officer and Custody Prison Officer recruitment campaigns. In addition, NIPS was represented at a number of Further Education Careers Fairs to promote NIPS as an employer of choice.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice (i) whether lawyers are self-regulated in claiming funds from legal aid; and if not (ii) to outline the accountability of the Legal Services Agency NI or his Department to scrutinise legal aid claimed in both criminal and civil cases to ensure they fully meet the criteria and all actions, advices and expenses claimed for were fully carried out, particularly in cases of high cost.
(AQW 42439/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission is responsible for scrutinising claims submitted for payment from the Legal Aid Fund. Claims must be submitted in a prescribed format, often against Rules and Regulations which set out the basis upon which the Commission can authorise payments. In addition, certain claims are subject to scrutiny and approval by the Taxing Master, as an independent judicial officer.

The Commission performs a range of detailed checks to satisfy itself as to the propriety and regularity of all claims.

The Legal Services Agency Northern Ireland, which will be established on 1 April 2015, will have the same responsibilities for scrutinising claims before payment. The Department will shortly legislate to establish a Statutory Registration Scheme for all providers of publicly funded legal services. This will serve to strength the governance and accountability around legal aid. Practitioners wishing to continue to provide publicly funded legal services will be required to formally register with the Agency, adhere to a Code of Practice and facilitate examinations by the Agency to ensure compliance with the Code, including claiming remuneration.

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Justice what assurances he can give that the Transmission X-Ray Full Body Scanners proposed to be used in prisons detect non-metallic items and smaller packaged items like drugs.
(AQW 42478/11-15)

Mr Ford: Under the legislation for the use of ionising radiation the Northern Ireland Prison Service must complete a full justification process and obtain a licence.

That licence must be obtained prior to any evaluation of the effectiveness of transmission x-ray search technology in the prison environment.

The justification process is necessarily complex and comprehensive, and work is ongoing. Our application is predicated on the prospect of future advances in technology that would render scanners as a viable alternative to security.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice for a breakdown of the £17-19m annual cost of Legacy Inquest Cases anticipated in the Stormont Castle Agreement.
(AQW 42497/11-15)

Mr Ford: The estimated annual legal cost of Legacy Inquest Cases, set out in the Stormont Castle Agreement, was based on the historic cost of a typical legacy inquest (£1.5m) scaled up to provide an equivalent figure for all legacy inquests awaiting inquest (£80m) and divided by five to provide an annual figure (£16m) over a five year delivery period. To this was added the estimated annual costs of expanding court support to cover the increased throughput and the higher cost of High Court Judges hearing the more complex cases (£1-3m).

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice how much of the £17-19m annual cost of Legacy Inquest Cases anticipated in the Stormont Castle Agreement is funding for legal aid.
(AQW 42500/11-15)

Mr Ford: The estimated annual funding for legal aid for legacy inquest cases is approximately £1.9m.

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Justice, following the trial of a number of people in connection with the death of Kevin McDaid in Coleraine in 2009, to detail the total cost of the preparation and trial from May 2009 to completion.
(AQW 42549/11-15)

Mr Ford: The estimated cost of the preparation and trial for this case is provided in the table below.

Cost Type	Estimated Cost
a) Legal Aid	£1,648,320
b) Prosecution1	£124,837
c) Court (Judiciary and staff costs)	£26,118
d) Facilities (e.g. courtroom accommodation)	£6,051
e) Police2	-
Total	**£1,805,326**

1 In the absence of detailed records of time spent on individual cases it is not possible to produce precise or even average costs for a particular case. Some costs are identifiable however, for example the fees paid to prosecuting counsel and expenses paid to witnesses and expert witnesses.

2 It is not possible to quantify the associated PSNI costs in respect of investigation, prosecution and trial as a breakdown of expenditure is not recorded in a readily accessible manner.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many courthouses which have had drop-down bollards installed (i) have reported operational issues with the bollards; and (ii) do not have all bollards fully functioning.
(AQW 42555/11-15)

Mr Ford: It is not the policy of my Department to comment in detail on security matters. However, I can confirm that the supplier of the drop down bollards was not involved in their installation. On-going maintenance and repair is the responsibility of Properties Division within the Department of Finance and Personnel. The cost to install drop down bollards throughout the Estate was £219,800 at a maintenance cost to date of £26,107.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether the supplier of the drop-down bollards at courthouses also carried out the installations; and who is responsible for ongoing maintenance and repair.
(AQW 42556/11-15)

Mr Ford: It is not the policy of my Department to comment in detail on security matters. However, I can confirm that the supplier of the drop down bollards was not involved in their installation. On-going maintenance and repair is the responsibility of Properties Division within the Department of Finance and Personnel. The cost to install drop down bollards throughout the Estate was £219,800 at a maintenance cost to date of £26,107.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to list the courthouses which have had drop-down bollards installed; and to detail cost of (i) installation; and (ii) maintenance at each courthouse.
(AQW 42557/11-15)

Mr Ford: It is not the policy of my Department to comment in detail on security matters. However, I can confirm that the supplier of the drop down bollards was not involved in their installation. On-going maintenance and repair is the responsibility of Properties Division within the Department of Finance and Personnel. The cost to install drop down bollards throughout the Estate was £219,800 at a maintenance cost to date of £26,107.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice what further consideration has been given to the introduction of Sarah's Law; and what challenges or difficulties would be faced in introducing and enforcing such a law.
(AQW 42558/11-15)

Mr Ford: Ongoing review has shown that the current administrative disclosure arrangements are working well.

Disclosure of information to protect children already takes place and will continue under normal police operating practices. Parents and others who have immediate concerns about any individual whom they fear is posing a risk to the safety of a child should go to the police or social services at any time about their concerns. The PSNI have in place local public protection teams to deal with these issues. Children's services in Health and Social Care Trusts also have a role to protect children and work

closely with police where a risk to a child is identified, under the Protocol for Joint Investigation by Social Workers and Police Officers of Alleged and Suspected Cases of Child Abuse – Northern Ireland. Social Services are also represented on the local public protection teams.

The relevant criminal justice agencies have not raised any recent public protection concerns that need to be addressed by making changes to the arrangements. I have, therefore, no current plans to alter the administrative system of disclosure at this time as there are no pressing reasons for legislative provision. I will, however, continue to keep the arrangements under review.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Justice how his Department is working with arm's-length bodies to address cyber bullying and harassment.
(AQW 42563/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Department of Justice, through the local Policing and Community Safety Partnership (PCSP) network, has done much to develop internet safety and tackle the growing prevalence of cyberbullying and some of its very harmful consequences.

This work is directed at safeguarding young people in the digital world and educating them so they feel safe when accessing e-technologies. PCSPs, in partnership with Health Trusts and PSNI, have developed a range of e-safety resources for children, parents and practitioners on internet and on-line safety, sexting, cyberbullying and reporting abuse.

The Youth Justice Agency is represented, at committee level, on the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland which has been commissioned to develop a Northern Ireland e-safety strategy on behalf of the Northern Ireland Executive. I look forward to the publication of this strategy and will consider how my Department can best contribute to its success.

Harassment and bullying are already criminal offences in Northern Ireland, whether perpetrated directly or in the form of cyber bullying. The maximum penalty for harassment is two years imprisonment, which may be increased to seven years where there is the threat of violence, or 10 years where a person threatens to kill another.

In addition, recent changes to the law introduced by the Criminal Justice and Courts Act 2015 have increased the penalties for certain offences under the Malicious Communications Act 1988 to a maximum of two years imprisonment.

Whilst I have no further plans to change our laws at this time, along with my officials, I will be keeping developments in other jurisdictions under review.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many cases are currently within the court system in which human trafficking is a charge or charges, broken down by court division.
(AQW 42637/11-15)

Mr Ford: The number of cases, currently before the court, in which human trafficking forms an element of the charge are set out in the table below.

County Court Division	Number of Active Cases
Antrim	1
Craigavon	2
Total	**3**

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Justice (i) how many (a) prosecutions; and (b) convictions have been secured for a breaches of a (i) liquor license; and (ii) restaurant license, in each of the past ten years; (ii) for what reason did the breach occur; and how many restauranteurs have been (a) prosecuted; and (b) convicted for charging customers corkage fees, in each of the past ten years.
(AQW 42649/11-15)

Mr Ford: Offences in relation to breaches of liquor licences may be prosecuted under the Licensing (Northern Ireland) Order 1996 and the Registration of Clubs (Northern Ireland) Order 1996.

Databases held by the Department do not contain detail on the business type of the defendant and so it is not possible to distinguish whether a breach relates to a restaurant, or to some other type of establishment. In the tables provided, offences related to breach of liquor licences have been aggregated into groups relating to the general category of specific offence description.

There is no specific offence related to charging customers corkage fees. It has therefore not been possible to provide this information from data held.

Number of prosecutions for breach of liquor licensing laws, 2003 – 2013

Year	Offences related to:						
	Licensing Hours	Minors	Inspection/ entry	Unlicensed selling / consumption	Drunkenness/ disorderly behaviour	Other	Total
2003	51	16	0	8	0	0	75
2004	80	21	1	2	3	0	107
2005	43	33	4	4	0	0	84
2006	66	22	1	5	0	0	94
2007	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2008	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2009	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2010	64	26	2	6	0	0	98
2011	59	25	7	16	0	2	109
2012	69	17	3	7	0	18	114
2013	61	12	4	7	0	1	85

n.a. = data not available.

Number of convictions for breach of liquor licensing laws, 2003 – 2013

Year	Offences related to:						
	Licensing Hours	Minors	Inspection/ entry	Unlicensed selling / consumption	Drunkenness/ disorderly behaviour	Other	Total
2003	41	10	0	5	0	0	56
2004	59	13	1	2	3	0	78
2005	35	21	0	3	0	0	59
2006	58	16	1	2	0	0	77
2007	57	24	1	3	2	0	87
2008	21	22	0	4	0	0	47
2009	34	17	0	3	2	0	56
2010	45	16	2	6	0	0	69
2011	47	18	4	12	0	2	83
2012	62	11	2	4	0	15	94
2013	46	11	3	5	0	1	66

Note:

1 Data are collated on the principal offence rule; only the most serious offence for which an offender is convicted is included.

2 The figures provided relate to convictions for all classifications of the offences specified.

3 Figures relate to prosecutions and convictions under Licensing (NI) Order 1996 and the Registration of Clubs (Northern Ireland) Order 1996.

4 Prosecutions data are not available for the years 2007 – 2009.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, in relation to courthouse closure proposals, (i) whether he plans to list specific divisional sittings into the host courthouses whilst keeping them under jurisdictional judges; (ii) if so, whether this will lead to additional sitting days; (iii) whether cases will be merged into existing lists under the resident judges; (iv) if so, what impact this will have on on staff working hours; and (v) whether court sittings will have to be extended to accommodate larger lists. **(AQW 42684/11-15)**

Mr Ford: In respect of parts (i), (ii) and (iii), the consultation paper sets out an illustrative calendar for those courthouses receiving business being transferred from a closing courthouse. The proposals do not envisage any change or reduction in the current schedule of sitting days and judicial allocation. The listing of court business and allocation of judiciary to court sittings is a matter for the Lord Chief Justice. The Lord Chief Justice and the presiding judiciary periodically review court calendars to ensure effective and efficient listing practices, which may result in an increase or reduction in the number of court sitting days for certain business types.

In respect of parts (iv) and (v) the proposals will have no impact on the contracted working hours of any court staff and it is intended that the size of court lists will reflect the ordinary hours of sittings of each court as set out in rules of court or by direction of the Lord Chief Justice.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many cases passed through Magistrates court in the 2013/14 financial year, broken down by court division; and how this compares to the 2010/11 financial year.
(AQW 42690/11-15)

Mr Ford: Details of business disposed in the Magistrates' Court during the financial years 2010/11 and 2013/14, presented by Court Division and business type, are outlined in the table below.

Magistrates' Court business disposed, by Court Division and business type: 2010/11 and 2013/14P

Year of disposal	**Court Division**	**Adult defendants disposed**	**Youth defendants disposed**	Civil & Family applications disposed	**Total**
2010/11	Belfast	16,262	1,154	1,588	19,004
	Londonderry	5,391	344	573	6,308
	Antrim	6,607	499	965	8,071
	Fermanagh & Tyrone	8,137	420	597	9,154
	Armagh & South Down	6,092	206	661	6,959
	Ards	6,244	485	772	7,501
	Craigavon	5,756	289	395	6,440
	Total	54,489	3,397	5,551	63,437
2013/14	Belfast	13,649	678	1,649	15,976
	Londonderry	5,827	349	571	6,747
	Antrim	5,579	263	817	6,659
	Fermanagh & Tyrone	5,984	326	435	6,745
	Armagh & South Down	4,373	141	565	5,079
	Ards	5,003	349	748	6,100
	Craigavon	4,785	186	424	5,395
	Total	45,200	2,292	5,209	52,701

Source: Integrated Court Operations System (ICOS)

P Data are currently provisional and may be subject to change.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many applications were granted at magistrates courts for legal aid to be extended or certified to cover senior counsel in 2014, broken down by court division.
(AQW 42691/11-15)

Mr Ford: There were two applications granted at the Magistrates' Court during 2014 for legal aid to be extended or certified to cover senior counsel, both in the Craigavon Court Division.

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) the number of awards of damages made by High Court Judges over the last four years; (ii) the amount of each of these awards; and (iii) the reason for the award.
(AQW 42706/11-15)

Mr Ford: Details of Queen's Bench Writs for damages, which have been disposed of by High Court Judges, by the amount awarded and cause of claim are outlined in Tables 1–4 below.

Unliquidated claims include cases where the amount awarded is not known or recorded, for example where terms were endorsed or agreed between the parties. To provide a reason for each individual award would require a manual review of court records and incur a disproportionate cost. For presentational purposes the amount awarded has been grouped rather than providing details of each individual case.

Table 1 - Queen's Bench writs and originating summons disposed of by amount - 2011

	Unliquidated	£1,000-2,999	£3,000-14,999	Over £15,000	Total
Negligence	1175	6	84	175	1440
Breach	9	0	4	2	15
Road injuries	24	1	46	164	235
Personal injuries	84	1	13	32	130
Monies due	18	0	2	10	30
Other	44	1	1	27	73
Total	**1354**	**9**	**150**	**410**	**1923**

Excludes commercial actions, office disposals, default judgments and Master's disposals.

Table 2 - Queen's Bench writs and originating summons disposed of by amount - 2012

	Unliquidated	£1,000-2,999	£3,000-14,999	Over £15,000	Total
Negligence	1171	8	149	245	1573
Breach	12	0	3	1	16
Road injuries	35	0	45	166	246
Personal injuries	129	1	10	26	166
Monies due	10	0	2	5	17
Other	36	0	1	20	57
Total	**1393**	**9**	**210**	**463**	**2075**

Excludes commercial actions, office disposals, default judgments and Master's disposals.

Table 3 - Queen's Bench writs and originating summons disposed of by amount - 2013

	Unliquidated	£1,000-2,999	£3,000-14,999	Over £15,000	Total
Negligence	841	11	125	228	1205
Breach	13	0	5	3	21
Road injuries	40	2	49	170	261
Personal injuries	133	0	11	31	175
Monies due	13	0	0	8	21
Other	38	1	3	13	55
Total	**1078**	**14**	**193**	**453**	**1738**

Excludes commercial actions, office disposals, default judgments and Master's disposals.

Table 4 - Queen's Bench writs and originating summons disposed of by amount – 2014 [P]

	Unliquidated	£1,000-2,999	£3,000-14,999	Over £15,000	Total
Negligence	358	7	103	172	640
Breach	14	0	1	0	15
Road injuries	22	2	37	138	199
Personal injuries	123	3	12	22	160
Monies due	10	1	2	5	18

	Unliquidated	£1,000-2,999	£3,000-14,999	Over £15,000	Total
Other	40	0	4	8	52
Total	**567**	**13**	**159**	**345**	**1084**

Excludes commercial actions, office disposals, default judgments and Master's disposals. Figures for 2014 are provisional.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether the proposal to close a number of courthouses will lead to a reduction in the number of district judges; and if so, whether this is a cost-saving exercise.
(AQW 42761/11-15)

Mr Ford: The proposals to rationalise the court estate will not lead to a reduction in the number of district judges.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice in how many Magistartes' court cases in the 2014 calender year was legal aid granted for certification for (i) junior counsel; and (ii) senior counsel for the purposes of a Preliminary Investigation or mixed committal, broken down by court division.
(AQW 42762/11-15)

Mr Ford: The information requested is detailed in the table below.

Mixed Committals and Preliminary Investigations at the Magistrates' Court during 2014P

Court Division	No. of Mixed Committals and Preliminary Investigations	No. of defendants involved	No. of defendants funded by Legal Aid	No. of defendants funded by Legal Aid with counsel instructed	
				Senior [1]	Junior
Belfast	24	43	42	14	21
Londonderry	0	0	0	0	0
Antrim	2	9	8	0	6
Fermanagh and Tyrone	7	9	8	0	4
Armagh and South Down	3	3	3	0	1
Ards	4	4	4	0	2
Craigavon	9	11	11	0	6
Total	**49**	**79**	**76**	**14**	**40**

Source: Integrated Court Operations System (ICOS)

[1] 3 Defendants received both Senior and Junior Counsel.

P Data are currently provisional and may be subject to change.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice (i) whether Prison Service staffing levels have led to any facilities operating below acceptable staffing levels during the last two years; if so, (ii) what impact his had on health and safety of staff and prisoners; and (iii) how often risk assessments are conducted to ensure adherence to health and safety requirements.
(AQW 42763/11-15)

Mr Ford: Work Area Risk Assessments and Regime Delivery Quotas (RDQs) are in place and kept under review for all residential areas in prisons in Northern Ireland. If there is not the full complement of staff on duty RDQs give guidance on the regime that can be delivered to prisoners in line with the numbers of staff on duty.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to outline the process for applications for funding from the Offender Levy; and who is eligible and ineligible to apply.
(AQW 42806/11-15)

Mr Ford: Revenue from the Offender Levy is allocated through the Victims of Crime Fund to support the delivery of the Department's five-year victim and witness strategy and may include local initiatives taken forward by groups working with victims and witnesses in the community. Funding of strategic initiatives is allocated through the Victim and Witness Steering Group. Funding of local initiatives, when initiated by the Department, is channelled through Policing and Community Safety Partnerships and is directed specifically towards the start-up funding of new projects or one-off funding to new time-limited projects. The Victims of Crime Fund is not an open competition grant scheme.

Department for Regional Development

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the (i) number; and (ii) percentage of public transport passengers, across the three Translink service providers, who will be affected by higher fare increases due to differential pricing changes to different routes than the headline averages of 5.3 per cent for Metro, 4 per cent for Ulsterbus and 4.5 per cent for NI Railways.
(AQW 40464/11-15)

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): The Translink fare increase implemented on 16th February 2015 was the first increase since May 2013.

Translink holds statistics on passenger journeys rather than passengers so the percentages referred to below relate to journeys as opposed to passengers.

The potential number and percentage of public transport passenger journeys which could be affected by a higher than average increase for each of the three operating companies is shown in the table below. It is important to say that the percentages shown relate to all journeys undertaken but excluding concessionary journeys. It is also important to say that the percentages are based on existing customer behaviour and could change.

Company	No. of Passenger Journeys Potentially Affected by a Higher than Average Fare Increase	% of Passenger Journeys Potentially Affected by a Higher than Average Fare Increase
Ulsterbus	7,913,946	52
Metro	12,010,439	61
NI Railways	4,667,046	44

Translink makes a considerable effort to advise customers of the best fares for their particular travel options and encourage passengers to move to better value ticket. This is achieved through a variety of means including customer engagement programmes that promote best value ticket options, leaflet information available at stations, online lookup facilities on the Translink website. Advice and information can be obtained through the ‘What Ticket’ and ‘Special Offers’ sections of Translink’s website.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 28743/11-15, for an update on the independent review of the project consultant’s work in respect of the completion of the Appropriate Assessment process and the adequacy of the screening work previously carried out by Mouchel on the A5 Western Transport Corridor project.
(AQW 42425/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department commissioned an independent consultant to review the environmental work associated with the A5 scheme carried out by the project consultant, Mouchel.

The review was carried out in two phases. To minimise the delay to the scheme, the first phase looked forward at the proposed methodology to comply with the EU Habitats directive.

Four draft reports to inform the Appropriate Assessment under the Habitats Directive in relation the impact of the A5WTC on designated environmental sites were reviewed and approved by the independent consultant in advance of their publication. Public consultation on three of the reports concluded on 13 June 2014 and consultation on the fourth report concluded on 28 November 2014.

An Environmental Scoping Report, informing the new Environmental Statement, was also reviewed and accepted by the independent consultant. The first phase was completed in autumn 2014.

The second phase of the review was to report on the Habitats Directive screening work carried out by Mouchel prior to the court judgement in April 2013. An initial draft report has been received by my officials and it is expected this work will be finalised in the next month or so.

Mr Ó hOisín asked the Minister for Regional Development how much (i) salt; and (ii) grit is currently in stock for the winter treatment of roads.
(AQW 42428/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department currently has approximately 70,000 tonnes of Rock Salt in stock. Rock salt is the primary material used in the delivery of the winter service programme and is the material used to provide precautionary treatments of the main road network. Rock salt is a specialist material which is only available from specialist suppliers.

Grit is used for many applications by my Department and is freely available from local quarries and suppliers. It is not frequently used as part of the precautionary winter treatments of the main road network and is not stocked in large volumes as it can be sourced as and when required. Currently there are approximately 2000 tonnes of Grit in stock.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the progress of the proposed new through road from Beechfield Estate, Donaghadee to the Newtownards Road.
(AQW 42429/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department does not have any current proposals to provide a new through road from Beechfield Estate, Donaghadee to the Newtownards Road.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what new road resurfacing schemes in Holywood are planned between now and the end of this financial year.
(AQW 42431/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I would refer the Member to the answer provided in response to AQW 42430/11-15.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what new road resurfacing schemes in Millisle are planned between now and the end of this financial year.
(AQW 42432/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I would refer the Member to the answer provided in response to AQW 42430/11-15.

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development what criteria is used by his Department to define a bridge.
(AQW 42445/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: While there are many published definitions for a bridge, the definition used by my Department is contained in BD 63/07 – Inspection of Highway Structures, a constituent part of the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges.

In the document, the term "bridge" is one of a number of similar types of structure which have a common definition. Other types of structure covered by this definition would include buried structures, subway underpasses and culverts.

The common definition applied to these structures is:

> *"A structure supporting the highway as it crosses an obstacle (e.g. river, valley or flood plain) or a service (e.g. local road, railway or canal) OR a structure supporting the passage of a service (e.g. local road, railway, canal) over the highway."*

A similar definition for a bridge, from British Standard BS ISO 6707-1:2014, is:

> *"civil engineering works that affords passage to pedestrians, animals, vehicles and service(s) above obstacles or between two points at a height above ground."*

Mr Ó hOisín asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQO 7060/11-15, what is the alternative route for the A6 referred to in his answer.
(AQW 42450/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Preferred Route, presented by my officials at the Public Inquiry, bypasses Dungiven to the south of the town. The alternative route, which was presented by a third party on the final day of the Public Inquiry, deviates from the preferred line over a length of 2.8 km, also to the south of Dungiven in the vicinity of the Rivers Roe and Owenrigh.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister for Regional Development whether his Department will investigate, in association with other relevant agencies and Departments, the availability of land in public ownership on the Brookmount Road Omagh, in close proximity to St Conor's Primary School, for the purposes of providing additional parking capacity in that area.
(AQW 42472/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My officials are aware of the significant demand for parking at St Conor's Primary School at pupil drop-off and pick-up times, a situation which is common to the vast majority of schools across Northern Ireland. Whilst I am content for my officials to provide advice in relation to the layout and operation of any off-road parking facility, I consider it would be more appropriate for the Department of Education rather than my Department to take the lead on this issue as the parking requirement is clearly linked to the school.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what new footpath resurfacing schemes in Donaghadee are planned between now and the end of this financial year.
(AQW 42511/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I would refer the Member to my answer to AQW 42430/11-15.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what new footpath resurfacing schemes in Millisle are planned between now and the end of this financial year.
(AQW 42512/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I would refer the Member to my answer to AQW 42430/11-15.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what new footpath resurfacing schemes in Holywood are planned between now and the end of this financial year.
(AQW 42514/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I would refer the Member to my answer to AQW 42430/11-15.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what new footpath resurfacing schemes in Bangor are planned between now and the end of this financial year.
(AQW 42515/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I would refer the Member to my answer to AQW 42430/11-15.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Regional Development when he was first presented with the findings of the public local inquiry into the proposed duelling of the A6 Derry to Dungiven strategic roads proposal; and for an update on the status of this proposal.
(AQW 42568/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Inspector presented the report to me on 13 March 2013. One of the Inspector's recommendations was to examine a suggested alternative route for the Dungiven Bypass, put forward by a third party on the final day of the Public Inquiry, and we are currently quality assuring that route.

The work is nearing completion and, when I am satisfied that all of the issues have been appropriately reviewed, I will issue a Departmental Statement.

Progression of the project would then, subject to final approval of the business case, be reliant upon funding being made available by the Executive.

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Regional Development when the residents' parking scheme in the Bogside area of Derry will be implemented.
(AQW 42595/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department is currently finalising the draft legislation for the Rossville Street Residents Parking Scheme in Londonderry prior to progressing to the consultation stage. It is anticipated the consultation period for this scheme will commence in March 2015.

The timeline for delivery of the scheme will be dependent upon the outcome of the consultation exercise and nature of any objections. In the absence of any significant objections, the implementation process to deliver the scheme could commence in spring 2015.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what major new road projects are planned for the 2015/16 period.
(AQW 42616/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I would advise the Member that the contract for the construction of the A26 Dualling scheme, awarded to the BAM/McCann Joint Venture (JV), had a formal contract start date of 19 January 2015. Site set-up and mobilisation commenced in February and the main works are due to start in April 2015.

The contract for the A31 Magherafelt Bypass was awarded to the BAM/McCann JV on 18 February 2014. Construction is expected to commence in March 2015.

Work is also well advanced to appoint a contractor in 2015 to develop the design of the A6 Randalstown to Castledawson scheme, thereby allowing construction to commence at relatively short notice when funding becomes available in the future.

In addition, the A8 Belfast to Larne Dualling scheme is at an advanced stage and due to open to traffic by the end of May 2015 and the A2 Shore Road, Greenisland scheme is on programme for completion in late summer 2015.

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Regional Development when the passing loop on the Londonderry to Coleraine railway line will be complete.
(AQW 42658/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The passing loop is part of the overall construction work (including signalling) to be undertaken. As set out last year in my communication on this issue a timetable for completion at the end of 2016 is in place. This remains the case.

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Regional Development what further input his Department has had on the site entrance and changes to road condition of the new P1 for planning application E/2013/0093/F.
(AQW 42659/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department was initially consulted in August 2013 on a planning application from Rathlin Energy Ltd for the drilling of an exploratory borehole at Ballinlea Road, Ballycastle. Since this initial consultation, my officials have attended a number of meetings with the applicant's consultants and have commented on a number of revised submissions.

The applicant has now submitted an Environmental Statement along with a revised P1 form. The Environmental Statement contains a substantial amount of traffic and road related information and is currently being assessed by my Department.

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Regional Development, in relation to planning application E/2013/0093/F, where the applicant will source the water for their processes; and where they will dispose of their waste water as detailed in the new P1.
(AQW 42660/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The site is in close proximity to the existing water distribution source. It is anticipated that there will be demand for a water connection for domestic purposes to the site huts and offices and some limited demand on the distribution system for operational usage perhaps from on-site storage. This is in keeping with previous applications for similar exercises in the past.

NI Water has no public sewers in the area, and waste disposal will therefore require on-site disposal, e.g. chemical toilets, septic tank, cess pit etc. However this is not within the remit of NI Water.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline any potential new road calming measures planned for the Holywood area.
(AQW 42670/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I would refer the Member to the answer provided in response to AQW 42669/11-15.

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development when the 20mph signage will be erected at Leyland Meadows, Ballycastle.
(AQW 42737/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Whilst my Department is not currently in the process of erecting 20mph signage at Leyland Meadows, I can confirm that the scheme to introduce a 20mph speed limit at Whitehall in Ballycastle is substantially complete, with all 20mph signs erected. Some red surfacing work has still to be completed and this will be carried out when weather conditions permit. This speed limit is now in place and is enforceable.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Regional Development how long Translink is tied into the price it is currently paying for fuel.
(AQW 42816/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink has advised that its 'fuel forward purchasing' arrangement is in place up to March 2017.

This arrangement caters for about 90% of the volumes required up to end September 2016 and approximately 50% of the volumes required from October 2016 to March 2017.

The current fall in the cost of fuel will be reflected in fuel costs incurred by Translink beyond those timeframes.

Translink engages in fuel forward purchasing in order to provide certainty around its fuel costs, as part of its corporate planning process, and to prevent both it and its customers from being exposed to sudden significant increases in fuel prices.

Mr Ó hOisín asked the Minister for Regional Development when community transport providers, that receive grant support through the Rural Transport Fund and the Transport Programme for People with Disabilities, will receive confirmation of funding levels for the 2015-16 financial year.
(AQW 42834/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The budget for the Rural Transport Fund (RTF) and Transport Programme for People with Disabilities for 2015-16 is part of the overall Departmental budget which I have only recently agreed. In view of the financial position there will have to be reductions in funding to community and rural transport. It would be expected that through improvements in service delivery there should be a limited impact on the level of service provided.

Mr Dickson asked the Minister for Regional Development what investigations have been undertaken on the potential use of the Larne Railway Line for the purposes of freight, connecting Larne port with the wider railway network.
(AQW 42838/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I can advise you that no specific investigations have been undertaken by NI Railways in respect of freight operations on the Larne line. However there are no capacity restrictions on the current rail network that would prevent NI Railways in carrying rail freight, should a demand arise.

The Northern Ireland rail network is, and always has been, open to existing and new rail operators to seek to offer services including freight, and no application has ever been received from other operators interested in providing freight or passenger services.

The Railway Investment Prioritisation Strategy which sets out the strategic direction for future railways investment over the next 20 does not envisage a demand for the development of rail freight facilities to any of Northern Ireland ports within its timeframe.

Department for Social Development

Mr McAleer asked the Minister for Social Development to outline his plans for investment in rural areas.
(AQW 41996/11-15)

Mr Storey (The Minister for Social Development): The position in respect of 2015/16 budget has now been finalised by the Executive and Departmental finance staff are currently working through internal allocations. I am currently considering my plans for investment in rural areas.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development to explain the various options and elements deployed in Table A of Annex A of the Stormont Castle Agreement.
(AQW 42506/11-15)

Mr Storey: At further Consideration Stage debate on the Welfare Reform Bill, I outlined for the Assembly the main elements contained in Table A of Annex A of the Stormont Castle Agreement.

I am unable to provide any further detail on the different elements as they remain to be agreed by the Executive. Following that agreement the Social Development Committee will be briefed and the detail issued for public consultation.

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 42075/11-15, (i) to detail the debt involved; (ii) to publish the asset register; (iii) what publicly funded items were recovered; (iv) what reviews and inspections were completed by his Department over the three years prior to this organisation failing; (v) what steps have been taken in relation to the office holders who oversaw this collapse; and (vi) what lessons have been learned by his Department.
(AQW 42565/11-15)

Mr Storey:

i There was an outstanding debt of £95,982 owing to HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC). As noted in my previous answer, it has not been possible to determine how much, if any, of the outstanding HMRC liability was in respect of the funding provided by my Department.

ii. The Department does not hold any other records relating to the organisation's asset register. The Community Centre at Tullyally was the only asset leased to the Tullyally and District Development Group Ltd. The Community Centre has since been taken back into the control of the City Council.

iii. My Department's support for the organisation covered salaries and running costs only. No physical assets were grant-funded by my Department. Therefore, there were no publicly funded items which could be recovered by my Department.

iv. Reviews and inspections by my Department included monitoring and evaluation in accordance with the Contract for Funding. During the period of funding, my Department monitored quarterly progress reports, carried out a number of monitoring visits on the organisation, and vouched relevant original invoices and salary records (P11s) to allow for the processing of payments.

v As noted in my previous answer, there was insufficient evidence to determine whether criminal activity had taken place in respect of funding from my Department. The Tullyally and District Development Group Ltd ceased trading in January 2012.

vi. As a result of this case and the risks around HMRC payments which have been highlighted by it, my Department has introduced a new system of controls to ensure that funded groups are meeting their obligations. Funded organisations are now asked to provide proof to the Department that HMRC payments are up to date by submitting their most recent HMRC real time PAYE record showing payments and outstanding balances for their employees.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 41798/11-15, and if the report on Rinmore was presented to the Board of the Housing Executive at its meeting on 15 December 2010, why is there no reference to the report in the minutes of that meeting.
(AQW 42574/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised that a paper regarding Rinmore was submitted at the Housing Executive Board meeting on 15th December 2010. They have further advised that the paper and minutes were confidential at the time due to the status of proposals for stock transfer in Rinmore and were, therefore, not in the public domain.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development why the Social Return on Investment report for Rathgill in Bangor has not been published.
(AQW 42607/11-15)

Mr Storey: My officials commissioned Northern Ireland Housing Executive to carry out an evaluation of the Small Pockets of Deprivation programme, which included Social Return on Investment reports for all 17 SPOD areas. I understand that the final reports will be submitted to my Department shortly, and once these have been received and the overall programme evaluated I would be happy to make available to you the SROI report on Rathgill Estate, Bangor.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of the Boiler Replacement Scheme; and what consideration has been given to extending the scheme in 2015.
(AQW 42610/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Boiler Replacement Scheme has been a hugely successful scheme and up to 31 January 18,481 households had installed a new more energy efficient boiler. The scheme has also provided work for over two thousand local installers. In my budget for the 2015/16 year I have allocated £2 million to allow the Boiler Replacement Scheme to be extended into the 2015/16 year.

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Social Development whether there are plans to re-evaluate the 25 per cent margin of change required in gross income before a reassessment is carried out to determine the amount payable in Child Maintenance Service payments.
(AQW 42614/11-15)

Mr Storey: As part of our Child Maintenance Reforms, a process of Annual Review has been introduced for all applications on our new Statutory Scheme. The purpose of this Annual Review is to take account of any income or household changes in the past 12 months that may affect the Child Maintenance assessment.

Any income changes outside of this process will only affect the assessment if they are significant, exceeding 25%. That is a fundamental aspect of the new scheme and there are no plans to review it. Parents who make their own Family Based Arrangements, are of course free to take account of any income changes as and when they occur.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development what funding has been provided to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender groups by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive since 2011.
(AQW 42635/11-15)

Mr Storey: I would refer the Member to the answer provided in AQW 39719/11-15

Mr Rogers asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the additional protections afforded to private tenants, that are not already covered by existing legislation, by the introduction of the Landlord Registration Scheme.
(AQW 42648/11-15)

Mr Storey: Prior to the introduction of the Landlord Registration Scheme there was no central database of private landlords. Therefore when a landlord was not complying with the law and a tenant reported this to the local council environmental health department it was often difficult for enforcement action to be taken, specifically because they could not access up to date contact details for the landlord.

With the introduction of Landlord Registration existing and prospective tenants are encouraged to check if the landlord is registered and ensure the property is included in a registered landlord's portfolio. In addition, council environmental health officers can access the full information on the Register to enable them to proactively enforce private tenancy law.

On registration landlords receive a toolkit which details their obligations and duties under private rented sector law. Landlords are kept up-to-date with any proposed changes and can be involved in policy development.

As of 25 February 2015, over 33,000 landlords have registered providing details of over 70,000 tenancies.

Mr Frew asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the rights of family members, or others, who (i) reside; and (ii) do not reside in a property as successor tenants to (a) Housing Executive; and (b) Housing Association properties following the death of the tenant or if the tenant moves permanently into a residential home.
(AQW 42720/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised that there are two aspects to this issue which are: -

Succession - this takes place following the death of a tenant;

Assignment - this takes place when a Landlord agrees to a tenant assigning his/her tenancy to another person.

The Succession and Assignment Rights detailed below apply to both the Housing Executive and Housing Associations.

The Housing Selection Rules which govern Successions are: -

Succession to a Tenancy - Rule 73.

Succession to a tenancy only occurs where the existing tenant has died.

The Landlord will fully comply with the statutory provisions with regard to succession as set out in the Housing (N.I.) Order, 1983. Paragraphs 74 and 75 apply only if there is no statutory entitlement to succeed.

Succession to a Tenancy – Rule 74.

Where there is no statutory entitlement to succeed, the following people will be potentially eligible to succeed: -

1 A partner of the deceased if they have been living together for a year.

2 A carer, only if he/she was living with the deceased for a time in order to care for him/her and for that reason had sold a dwelling or given up a tenancy or licence in relation to a dwelling. (For the purposes of this paragraph, a tenancy or licence shall be ignored if the carer had been granted the said tenancy or licence by a relative).

3 The potential successor has accepted responsibility for the deceased tenant's dependants.

Succession to a Tenancy – Rule 75.

Those persons who are potentially eligible to succeed as set out at paragraphs 74 (1–3) above shall not be eligible to succeed if the deceased tenant was himself/herself a successor unless the deceased tenant was the spouse/civil partner, parent, brother or sister of the potential successor. (For the purposes of this paragraph, in deciding whether or not the deceased tenant was himself/herself a successor, any change from a sole tenancy to a joint tenancy, or vice versa, shall be ignored).

In relation to Assignments.

An assignment of tenancy occurs when the existing secure/introductory tenant in effect transfers his/her tenancy rights to someone else.

The Housing Selection Scheme Rules which govern assignments are detailed below: -

Assignment of Tenancy – Rule 76.

The Landlord will fully comply with its statutory obligations with regard to assignment. The rules set out in the next paragraph apply subject to, or in the absence of, any such statutory obligations.

Assignment of Tenancy – Rule 77.

As a general rule, the Landlord will not consent to any assignment. The very exceptional circumstances where the Landlord may exercise discretion to consent to assignment are as follows: -

1 Where it is not practicable for the existing tenant to continue to act as such, (for example extreme illness).

2 If the existing tenant leaves and someone else undertakes responsibility for any dependent children left in the household.

3 If the existing tenant goes into a residential home on a long term basis and other member(s) of the household remain in the property and wish to become tenant(s). In such circumstances all of the following conditions must exist:-

   a) The tenant has had to go into a residential home, and

   b) The tenant is unlikely to be able to return to the relevant dwelling within the next twelve months, and

   c) The potential assignee was living with the tenant in the dwelling when the tenant had to go into residential home, and

   d) The potential assignee would have had statutory entitlement, or an entitlement under the policy rules, to succeed to the tenancy if the tenant had died instead of entering the residential home.

4 If the tenant has to be rehoused in sheltered/special needs accommodation and other member(s) of the household remain in the property and wish to become tenant(s) and the following conditions exist:-

   a) the tenant needs to go into sheltered/special needs accommodation, and

   b) the tenant's tenancy of the new accommodation is indefinite and the tenant is unlikely to be able to return to the original dwelling within the next twelve months and such accommodation would not be able to house all of the tenant's current household, and

   c) the potential assignee was living with the tenant in the dwelling when the tenant had to go into sheltered/special needs accommodation, and

   d) the potential assignee would have had statutory entitlement, or an entitlement under the policy rules, to succeed to the tenancy if the tenant had died instead of entering the sheltered/special needs accommodation.

In relation to Succession and Assignment, if there are no statutory grounds or entitlement under the rules of the Housing Selection Scheme, consideration/ approval may be given if there are exceptional circumstances, by the Director of Landlord Services in the Housing Executive or equivalent officer for Housing Associations.

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Social Development how many landlords have been prosecuted as a result of not registering as existing landlords since February 2014.
(AQW 42721/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Landlord Registration Regulations (2014) allowed private landlords who had no changes to existing tenancies and no new tenancies until 25th February 2015 to register.

Since February 2014, any landlord with a new tenancy or changes to an existing tenancy was required to register immediately. Within the first year of the Scheme, councils have issued two Fixed Penalty Notices to landlords who were in breach of these regulations.

The Registrar continues to work closely with councils to ensure that they are proactive with enforcement action.

Mr Beggs asked the Minister for Social Development what lessons have been learnt from the Scottish Mortgage Shared Equity Scheme and the Mortgage Relief Scheme in England; and whether he plans to introduce a scheme which would advise and assist home owners who are in financial difficulty.
(AQW 42727/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Repossessions Taskforce's conference in November 2014 brought together experts from Scotland, England and the Republic of Ireland to share their experience of developing and delivering mortgage rescue schemes in their respective jurisdictions. These sessions were accompanied with discussions from policy and academic professionals on a range of other innovative approaches, such as Assisted Voluntary Sales, which provide a structured transition out of homeownership.

The Taskforce has combined these valuable insights with a number of evaluations, which are publically available, of mortgage rescue schemes in other jurisdictions. Notable examples within this body of literature include the National Audit Office's report on the Department for Communities and Local Government's Mortgage Rescue Scheme and the Scottish Government's 'Interim Review of the Home Owners Support Fund'.

A common theme of successful rescue schemes is that they are targeted on the most vulnerable homeowners and utilised as a last resort. While the number of households 'rescued' through a scheme may be limited, the availability of a scheme can be a catalyst for disengaged borrowers contacting their lender or an advice provider. While the funding and delivery structures of mortgage rescue schemes vary across jurisdictions there is detailed analysis in each case on the policy's evidence base, achieving value for money and securing buy-in from the key sectors. The evaluations also illustrate that although a mortgage-to-shared-equity scheme is a seemingly a viable solution for distressed households, downward stair casing is not a popular option.

My Department has commissioned the Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations to analyse the full range of lessons learned from other jurisdictions and to complete a feasibility study on a potential mortgage rescue scheme in Northern Ireland. The findings from this exercise will be reported in spring 2015.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development to detail how much has been provided under Neighbourhood Renewal, broken down by Neighbourhood Renewal Area.
(AQW 42746/11-15)

Mr Storey: In December 2014 in response to an earlier question, AQW 39456/11-15, I provided the amount of funding, broken down by project for each Neighbourhood Renewal Area for the period 2010/11 to 2014/15. The table below details the amount of Neighbourhood Renewal funding provided by Neighbourhood Renewal Area for the period 2003/04 to 2009/10.

Neighbourhood Renewal Area	Total Spend 2003/04-2009/10 (£)
Andersonstown	1,722,244.34
Armagh	2,610,445.41
Ballyclare	682,293.54
Ballymena	4,287,088.78
Bangor	1,749,762.04
Brownlow	4,535,152.73
Cityside	8,041,063.00
Coalisland	1,006,592.03
Coleraine (Churchlands/East)	4,403,663.88
Colin	5,393,309.30
Crumlin/Ardoyne	4,969,033.89
Downpatrick	3,393,568.38
Dungannon	814,763.85
Enniskillen	574,934.29
Greater Falls	10,717,840.17
Greater Shankill	5,670,191.52

Neighbourhood Renewal Area	Total Spend 2003/04-2009/10 (£)
Inner East Belfast	6,683,313.48
Inner North	5,693,834.71
Inner South Belfast	2,463,535.31
Lenadoon	1,496,176.76
Ligoniel	390,634.89
Limavady	817,708.00
Lurgan	3,607,697.28
Newry	4,467,466.19
NW Portadown	1,572,863.14
Omagh	938,227.65
Outer North	6,372,688.00
Outer West	3,400,317.00
Rathcoole	285,932.79
South West Belfast	3,801,963.80
Strabane	2,538,765.00
Tullycarnet	1,656,848.27
Upper Ardoyne/Ballysillan	1,617,022.54
Upper Springfield / Whiterock	4,875,817.97
Waterside	4,342,949.00

Note: Caution should always be exercised in making comparisons across Neighbourhood Renewal areas as a range of factors may influence expenditure. The main factors being the revenue investment in an area from lead Departments or from other initiatives/sources; history of capital investment and or proposed capital investment in an area from other initiatives or mainstream sources'; size (population) of an area; geographical location and proximity to existing services; and priority needs identified in Action Plans.

Mr Frew asked the Minister for Social Development what is the policy when a tenant in a Housing Executive property dies or moves permanently into full time nursing care; and what assessment is completed on the property and works are completed.
(AQW 42765/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised that when it is made aware that a tenant is deceased the local Housing Executive office will check the property records to establish if anyone was living with the tenant. If so, the local Housing Executive office will investigate the potential for succession and request completion of succession application form if appropriate. If a succession is granted the person inherits the tenancy including the deceased tenant's tenancy conditions.

If the Housing Executive records indicate that the tenant lived alone, staff from the local office will call to the property to establish contact with the next of kin to arrange vacant possession.

If the tenant goes into residential care on a long term basis and other member(s) of the household remain in the property and wish to become tenant(s), the Housing Executive will assign the tenancy to the household member(s) in accordance with the rules of the Housing Selection Scheme.

From a maintenance perspective the Housing Executive has an obligation to carry out an inspection to determine if there are any outstanding repairs necessary that are the responsibility of the Housing Executive and also to ensure there are no Health and Safety issues. Any outstanding repairs or Health and Safety issues, particularly with regard to heating appliances and electrical installation, would be carried out.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the funding allocated to each volunteer centre in Northern Ireland by the Volunteer Bureau Initiative, since 2012, broken down by centre.
(AQW 42766/11-15)

Mr Storey: Following an evaluation of Volunteer Bureaux Initiative new arrangements were developed to support volunteering infrastructure across Northern Ireland and the Volunteer Bureaux Initiative ceased to exist on 30 September 2013.

The requested information is only available by financial year and includes funding for Small Grants.

Funding Programme Title	Organisation Name	Grant Award Amount
Volunteer Bureaux Initiative 2012 - 2013	Causeway Volunteer Centre	£75,778.40
Volunteer Bureaux Initiative 2012 - 2013	Cookstown & Magherafelt Volunteer Centre	£71,244.00
Volunteer Bureaux Initiative 2012 - 2013	Craigavon and Banbridge Volunteer Centre	£74,335.00
Volunteer Bureaux Initiative 2012 - 2013	Limavady Volunteer Centre	£62,744.00
Volunteer Bureaux Initiative 2012 - 2013	North West Volunteer Centre	£131,295.00
Volunteer Bureaux Initiative 2012 - 2013	Omagh Volunteer Centre	£60,808.20
Volunteer Bureaux Initiative 2012 - 2013	Volunteer Now	£992,420.87
		£1,468,625.47

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of applicants registered on the social housing waiting list at the end of the last quarter, broken down by council.
(AQW 42767/11-15)

Mr Storey: The table attached, provided by the Housing Executive, details the total number of applicants registered on the housing waiting list for social housing at the 31 December 2014, broken down by council.

Council Area	Total Applicants on Waiting List at 31.12.14	Applicants in Housing Stress at 31.12.14
Belfast City Council	10,029	5,930
Antrim Borough Council	898	483
Ballymena Borough Council	1,410	871
Ballymoney Borough Council	458	218
Carrickfergus Borough Council	858	491
Coleraine Borough Council	1,240	657
Derry City Council	3,334	2,341
Larne Borough Council	479	176
Limavady Borough Council	474	206
Magherafelt District Council	469	201
Moyle District Council	342	189
Newtownabbey Borough Council	1,677	1,003
Strabane District Council	678	322
Armagh City & District Council	723	302
Banbridge District Council	534	246
Castlereagh Borough Council	1,193	540
Cookstown District Council	360	164
Craigavon Borough Council	1,716	602
Down District Council	1,486	822
Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council	1,052	620
Fermanagh District Council	774	307
Lisburn City Council	2,436	1,485
Newry and Mourne District Council	2,050	1,254
Ards Borough Council	1,687	927
North Down Borough Council	1,796	1,060
Omagh District Council	626	181

Council Area	Total Applicants on Waiting List at 31.12.14	Applicants in Housing Stress at 31.12.14
Total	**38,779**	**21,598**

The Information provided in this response is governed by the Principles and Protocols of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. This is enforced by UK Statistics Authority.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the specific role of the Northern Ireland Volunteer Bureau Initiative.
(AQW 42769/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Volunteer Development Agency was originally funded to administer revenue core funding to 15 Volunteer Centres across Northern Ireland under the Volunteer Bureaux Initiative (VBI).

Following an evaluation of Volunteer Bureaux Initiative new arrangements were developed to support volunteering infrastructure across Northern Ireland and the Volunteer Bureaux Initiative ceased to exist on 30 September 2013.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister for Social Development to whom the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland are accountable if they publish information following conducting an investigation of a charity into the public domain which later turns out to be inaccurate.
(AQW 42785/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Charity Commission is accountable to the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Complaints (Northern Ireland Ombudsman) about the service provided by the Commission, and to the Information Commissioner's Office about how personal information has been handled by the Commission.

Mr Dickson asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the policy in regards to the preferred energy source for heating in Housing Executive owned homes.
(AQW 42829/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised that their heating policy states:-

- Gas remains the preferred option offered in heat replacement schemes in gas areas;
- Oil heating is the preferred option outside a gas area;
- Tenant choice outside the gas area is increased to include wood pellet boilers as a potentially viable alternative to oil; and
- Economy7 electric systems may be retained by tenant choice.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the role of the programme board overseeing the strategic implementation of Portrush Regeneration Strategy initiatives, including; (i) how many times they have met since 2013; (ii) which Departments and agencies were represented at meetings; and (iii) the outcomes of these meetings.
(AQW 42844/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Portrush Regeneration Programme Board was established in October 2013. The purpose of the Board is to oversee the implementation of the family of projects to be delivered in Portrush. This will involve ensuring that projects are started at the appropriate time, that proper management arrangements have been put in place and that they are meeting their key milestones and targets. The Programme Board will also identify and analyse the interdependencies between the projects – for example, where delays on one project might affect another – and ensure that arrangements are put in place to effectively manage and co-ordinate these so that the overall objectives of the Programme are met.

The Programme Board has met on 4 occasions:

(i) 30 October 2013; 31 January 2014; 10 April 2014; and 10 November 2014.

(ii) The meetings of the Programme Board were attended by senior staff from the Department for Social Development, Coleraine Borough Council, the Department of the Environment's Planning Service and Marine Divisions, the Department of regional Development's Roads Service, the Northern Ireland Tourist Board and the Strategic Investment Board

(iii) Outcomes of the meetings were as follows:

- The meeting of 30 October 2013 agreed the purpose, scope and membership of the Programme and the structure of the relationship between the Programme Board and Projects Boards which will be established to manage the individual projects to be delivered.
- The meeting held on 31 January agreed a draft vision and set of regeneration objectives for consideration by Ministers.
- The meeting held on 10 April 2014 defined the projects to be included within the Programme, agreed the first draft of the risk register for the programme and discussed the draft terms of reference for a hotel feasibility study.

- The meeting held on 10 November 2014 considered an initial draft of the terms of reference for a study to examine the options around a proposal for the redevelopment of Portrush Harbour and the content of a paper on the way forward for the regeneration of Portrush which I propose to issue to the Executive in the near future.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of the Joint Ministerial Initiative, the Portrush Regeneration Strategy Western Peninsula; and to detail how they are providing indoor leisure facilities in Portrush.
(AQW 42848/11-15)

Mr Storey: My Department has taken the lead in a number of regeneration initiatives in Portrush over the past few years and has provided investment to allow Coleraine Borough Council to complete several public realm improvement schemes.

The announcement that Royal Portrush Golf club will host the Open Championship as early as 2019 brings with it huge opportunities not only for Portrush but also for the wider Northern Ireland economy. To make the most of these opportunities however it is recognised that a number of major infrastructure projects would need to be delivered. This includes projects like the development of the harbour, the re-location of the train station and potentially the development of a 4* hotel.

To help progress this programme of works a Ministerial sub-group has been formed to include those Departments who would have input into the decision making process in the above projects. The Ministerial sub-group has representation from DSD, DETI, DRD and DOE. My assessment is that the arrangements have delivered a number of key improvements in Portrush over the past five years and offer an effective mechanism to take forward other prioposals to regenerate the resort.

Neither the Ministerial Sub-Group collectively nor my Department individually have a role in the provision of indoor leisure facilities in Portrush. This is a responsibility which falls to the local Council.

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister for Social Development (i) whether there are any accredited courses for private landlords in Northern Ireland; if so (ii) how many landlords have been accredited; and (iii) whether there are plans to use to the landlord registration fee to subsidise accreditation costs.
(AQW 42909/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) offer an accredited course for private landlords in Northern Ireland.

104 private landlords have been awarded either a “Level 2 Award for Landlords” or a “Level 2 Award in Letting and Managing Residential Property”.

There are no current plans to use to the landlord registration fee to subsidise accreditation costs as the fee is being used to recoup the setting up and running costs of the Landlord Registration Scheme.

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister for Social Development how much has been spent on extending the Warm Homes Scheme from June 2014 to March 2015.
(AQW 42925/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has paid the Warm Homes Scheme Managers a total of £6,752,563 between July 2014 and January 2015. It is anticipated that further payments will be made of £3,540,751 for February and March 2015. This will bring the total cost of the Warm Homes Scheme contract extension to £10,293,314.

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister for Social Development what steps his Department is taking to ensure that local councils have the appropriate measures in place by 1 April 2015 to deliver Affordable Warmth.
(AQW 42926/11-15)

Mr Storey: Following two successful pilots in 2012 and 2013 my Department introduced the new Affordable Warmth Scheme on 15 September 2014. Both of these pilots provided sufficient information to determine the resources required by councils to deliver the new Affordable Warmth Scheme.

While the Affordable Warmth Scheme is at an early stage, it is already being effectively delivered across all council areas. Each of the 11 councils has signed a Service Level Agreement with the Department demonstrating their commitment to delivering the new scheme. All councils have appointed a Co-ordinator and support staff for the scheme. Officials from my Department meet regularly with lead council officers to monitor progress, receive feedback and provide additional support where necessary. My officials will continue to work closely with each of the 11 councils to ensure they have appropriate resources in place to deliver their part of the Affordable Warmth Scheme.

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister for Social Development whether his Department prepared a business case for the move from the Warm Homes Scheme to Affordable Warmth; and whether he will publish this business case.
(AQW 42927/11-15)

Mr Storey: My Department did prepare a Business Case for the new Affordable Warmth Scheme. This Business Case was approved by my Department’s Economist and the Department of Finance and Personnel. Whilst it is not Departmental policy to routinely publish a Business Case, the Affordable Warmth Business Case is available by request should anyone wish to obtain a copy.

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the review of the Allocation of Social Housing. **(AQW 43031/11-15)**

Mr Storey: The public response to many of the proposals in the independent research, published by my Department, was positive. My officials are now considering the way forward.

Any proposals arising from the review will be subject to a full public consultation.

Northern Ireland Assembly Commission

Mr Flanagan asked the Assembly Commission whether it has been approached by Tourism Ireland with regards to the prospect of Parliament Buildings joining the Global Greening Initiative; and (ii) whether it has considered participating in the Initiative. **(AQW 42423/11-15)**

Mr Ramsey (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): In response to the questions, please find the following;

(i) To date, the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission has not been approached by Tourism Ireland or other organisations requesting Parliament Buildings to join the "Global Greening line up for St Patrick's Day 2015".

(ii) At its meeting on 11 November 2014, The Assembly Commission agreed to proceed with the work required to install an external lighting system enabling Parliament Buildings to be "colour washed" and approved the "Northern Ireland Assembly use of external lighting policy at Parliament Buildings (2014)" in order to manage this system; due to be fully installed later in 2015. A copy of the policy is available overleaf for your perusal.

To date, the Assembly Commission has neither scheduled a day (policy paragraph 5a) nor received a request (policy's paragraph 5c) for the Global Greening Initiative in line with the policy.

The Commission is actively discussing its approach to the specific days on which the lighting system will be used.

Northern Ireland Assembly use of External Lighting Policy at Parliament Buildings (2014)

Introduction

1 In addition to the financial and environmental benefits to be gained by the LED external lighting system, it also has the ability to "colour wash" the facade of Parliament Buildings. This, by controlling the brightness and colour of the external lamps, consequently a wide variety of effects can be obtained ranging from subtle light, shade and colour effects highlighting the building's architectural features to a full "colour wash" of the building for special events and other functions.

2 These features, if properly and tastefully used, clearly have the potential to enhance the appearance of our iconic building and its public perception. However, there is an obvious concern that over-use could adversely affect the image and reputation of Parliament Buildings.

Purpose statement

3 Parliament Buildings being theParliament Buildings is home to the Northern Ireland Assembly, the legislative body for Northern Ireland established under the Belfast Agreement 1998 (Good Friday Agreement). home of the Northern Ireland Assembly, the legislative body for Northern Ireland established under the Belfast Agreement 1998 (Good Friday Agreement), it is therefore essential that this policy utilises the full capacity of the enhanced lighting system to best effect, but will do so in a way which is in keeping with the purpose, history and use of the building.

Scope

4 This policy will affect all set "enhanced" external lighting features ("colour-wash") including black –outk –out[6] requests scheduled and ad-hoc request by Members when sponsoring a 3rd party organisations event. No request from individual members of the public will be considered under this policy.

Policy Statement & Responsibilities

5 In order to maximise the use of the system it is therefore proposed that:

a) The Commission will schedule up to 4 days (consecutive or not) during a calendar year for event(s) of its choice in line with the policy.

b) The Northern Ireland Charity of the year will have access to the system for up to 5 days (consecutive or not) during its 12 months term.

c) The Assembly Commission will grant up to another 8 days for events during a calendar year when requests are made (paragraphs g) in line with the policy (1 day per event).

6 Earth Hour / Lights-out Initiative (outbreak of WWI)

Altogether there will be up to 17 days scheduled per year in line with the policy with potential extraordinary ad-hoc requests as specified at paragraphs h) & i).

d) There are also a considerable number of internationally recognised days including some 140+ UN specific days including Holocaust day, Suicide Prevention Day, World Aids Day, Autism, Diabetes etc.

http://www.un.org/en/events/observances/days.shtml

In many cases these carry political connotations or are not associated with a specific colour. These days will therefore not be yearly marked except where specifically requested in line with the policy or have been chosen by the Commission as part of its annual 4 days (paragraph a).

e) No more than 4 days of featured external lighting for separate events will be permitted per calendar month.

f) Only Events organised at Parliament Buildings or within the Stormont Estate (DFP approved) will have access to the lighting system for 1 or several consecutive days.

g) Due to the perceived appetite from 3rd party organisations to utilise the system only charitable, community and non-profit organisations based in or having a significant connection to Northern Ireland, celebrating a significant anniversary (1st, 5th, 10th, 25th, 50th etc..) or occasion may be permitted to have Parliament Buildings illuminated in a special colour in line with paragraph c).

Extraordinary events not organised by the Northern Ireland Assembly but which may legitimately be regarded as of significant benefit to the Assembly/province from a tourism/engagement perspective may also be granted permission. (example:

h) Giro d'Italia 2014).

i) Approval for external lighting in line with the policy should be sought from the Assembly Commission no less than 2 calendar months before the event is taking place. This will be agreed by consensus in line with "Historic Anniversaries" (Minutes of Commission meeting held on 08/05/12).

This, unless in exceptional circumstances when it will be granted by the Speaker: i.e. in the event that a recognised sporting team or organisation with a significant connection to the Assembly/province and which has achieved a significant accolade (winning an international competition etc.) may also be granted permission if a request is made.

j) A monthly monitoring of request to lit up Parliament Buildings will be submitted to the Commission in order to support all of the Policy requirements including that no more than 2 events are supported within any given month.

k) Organisation wishing to use the external lighting feature will apply for the use of this facility directly to the Events Office in line with both this policy and the Events policy.

Organisers will then be advised to seek triple signature sponsorship from Members showing cross-designation support.

The events Office will submit this application to the Commission for approval in line with paragraph c).Within its submission the Events Office will indicate whether a requested date / set of dates falls on a designated day for flying the Union Fag on Parliament Buildings. This will enable the Commission to assess whether a request might cause detriment to the Assembly or raise public concern therefore risk to the Assembly and/or a Member.

Definitions & Abbreviations

6 **"Colour-wash"**: full coverage of the main facades of Parliament Buildings in one single colour. No combination of colours or projection of images available

7 LED: Light Emitting Diode

8 UN: United Nations

9 External Lighting feature Day: from dusk to dawn on a set date with partial diming from 2am or as specified by onsite technical team.

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.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Revised Written Answers

Department for Social Development

In this Bound Volume, page WA 375 please replace AQW 42080/11-15 with:

Day Centres: Transport

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Social Development what provision exists for small voluntary charitable community groups to enable them to bring people with psychological, physical and learning disabilities to and from day centres.
(AQW 42080/11-15)

Mr Storey (The Minister for Social Development): There is no specific funding to bring people with psychological, physical and learning disabilities to and from day centres.

DSD's Volunteering Small Grants Programme delivers support direct to frontline volunteering organisations. The programme provides support to volunteer providing organisations to cover volunteer out-of-pocket expenses travel or equipment costs and over £1.4m has been allocated over the last two years supporting over 1300 organisations. The next phase of this programme is planned to launch in April / May 2015.

In addition the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) has confirmed that they work with the Department for Regional Development (DRD) to provide support for the Elderly and Disabled. Individuals receive concessionary travel on Rural Community Transport Partnership vehicles and DARD currently provides support to community and voluntary groups in rural areas.

DHSSPS has confirmed that some Health and Social Care Trusts may have service level agreements with local voluntary and community groups to bring people to and from day centres. These agreements may have statutory transport provided or have a transport element reflected in the contract or are designed for people who make their way independently to the Day Centre.

The criteria for statutory transport provision is provided in the Transport Strategy for Health and Social Care Services in Northern Ireland - August 2007 (http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/a_transport_strategy_for_health_and_social_care_services_in_northern_ireland.pdf). Annex 2 of this Strategy sets out the specific eligibility criteria for the provision of transport to facilitate access to social care services (adult services).

Department of Education

In this Bound Volume, page WA 296 please replace AQW 42242/11-15 with:

Fair Hill Primary School, Kinallen

Mrs Hale asked the Minister of Education to detail the cost of placing any additional mobile classrooms since the building of Fairhill Primary School, Kinallen.
(AQW 42242/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): The Southern Education and Library Board (SELB) who has responsibility for capital minor works at Fairhill Primary School, has advised that the cost of placing any additional mobile classrooms since the building of the school is as follows:-

**2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	Overall Total
£10,66	£1,100	*£-438	£23,610	£0	£0	£0	£34,933

* relates to accrued expenditure

** costs have only been provided for a period of six financial years in addition to the current financial year in line with the record retention policy of the SELB.

In this Bound Volume, page WA 297 please replace AQW 42244/11-15 with:

Donacloney Primary School, Armagh

Mrs Hale asked the Minister of Education to detail the cost of placing any additional mobile classrooms since the building of Donacloney Primary School, Donacloney.
(AQW 42244/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Southern Education and Library Board (SELB) who has responsibility for capital minor works at Donacloney Primary School, has advised that the cost of placing any additional mobile classrooms since the building of the school is as follows:-

The Southern Education and Library Board (SELB) who has responsibility for capital minor works at Donacloney Primary School, has advised that the cost of placing any additional mobile classrooms since the building of the school is as follows:-

*2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	Overall Total
£25,129	£10,354	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0	£35,483

* costs have only been provided for a period of six financial years in addition to the current financial year in line with the record retention policy of the SELB.

Journal of Proceedings

Minutes of Proceedings

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 16 February 2015

The Assembly met at noon, the Speaker in the Chair.

1. Personal Prayer or Meditation

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Public Petition

2.1 Public Petition – Save St Mary's University College

Mr Máirtín Ó Muilleoir was granted leave, in accordance with Standing Order 22, to present a Public Petition relating to St Mary's University College.

3. Assembly Business

3.1 Motion – Suspension of Standing Orders 10(2) to 10(4)

Proposed:

That Standing Orders 10(2) to 10(4) be suspended for 16 February 2015.

Mr P Weir
Ms C Ruane

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** with cross-community support *nemine contradicente*.

4. Executive Committee Business

4.1 Motion – The Jobseeker's Allowance (Maternity Allowance) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014

Proposed:

That the Jobseeker's Allowance (Maternity Allowance) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014 be approved.

Minister for Social Development

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

4.2 Second Stage – Budget Bill (NIA Bill 45/11-16)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel, Mr Simon Hamilton, moved the Second Stage of the Budget Bill (NIA Bill 45/11-16).

Debate ensued.

The Principal Deputy Speaker (Mr Newton) took the Chair.

The debate was suspended for Question Time.

The Speaker took the Chair.

5. Question Time

5.1 Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Questions were put to, and answered by, the First Minister, Rt. Hon. Mr Peter Robinson. The junior Minister, Mr Jonathan Bell, also answered a number of questions.

5.2 Finance and Personnel

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Finance and Personnel, Mr Simon Hamilton.

6. Executive Committee Business (cont'd)

6.1 Second Stage – Budget Bill (NIA Bill 45/11-16) (cont'd)

Debate resumed on the Bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) took the Chair.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) took the Chair.

The Budget Bill (NIA Bill 45/11-16) passed Second Stage (Division).

7. Adjournment

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 7.07pm.

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin
The Speaker

16 February 2015

Northern Ireland Assembly

16 February 2015
Division

Second Stage – Budget Bill (NIA Bill 45/11-16)

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 67
Noes: 19

AYES

Nationalist

Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr Brady, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Hazzard, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McKay, Ms Maeve McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr Ó Muilleoir, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Unionist

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

Other

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

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr McQuillan, Mr G Robinson.

NOES

Nationalist

Mr Attwood, Mr Byrne, Dr McDonnell, Mr McGlone, Mr McKinney, Mr A Maginness, Mr Rogers.

Unionist

Mr Allister, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson, Mr Elliott, Mr Kinahan, Mr McCallister, Mr B McCrea, Mr McGimpsey, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mr Swann.

Other

Mr Agnew.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr McKinney, Mr Rogers.

Total votes	86	Total Ayes	67	[77.9%]
Nationalist Vote	34	Nationalist Ayes	27	[79.4%%]
Unionist Votes	45	Unionist Ayes	34	[75.6%]
Other Votes	7	Other Ayes	6	[85.7%]

The Motion was carried on a cross-community vote.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on
12 February – 16 February 2015

1. Acts of the Northern Ireland Assembly

2. Bills of the Northern Ireland Assembly

3. Orders in Council

4. Publications Laid in the Northern Ireland Assembly

Court of Judicature Northern Ireland Land Purchase Account 2013-14 (DOJ).

Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service – Trust Statement 2013-14 (DOJ).

Northern Ireland Audit Office Review of Continuous Improvement arrangements in Policing (DFP).

Maze Long Kesh Development Corporation Annual Report and Accounts 2013-14 (OFMDFM).

5. Assembly Reports

6. Statutory Rules

S.R. 2015/52 The Social Security (Industrial Injuries) (Prescribed Diseases) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 (DSD).

S.R. 2015/53 The Misuse of Drugs (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 (DHSSPS).

S.R. 2015/54 The Misuse of Drugs (Designation) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2015 (DHSSPS).

7. Written Ministerial Statements

8. Consultation Documents

9. Departmental Publications

Department for Social Development Housing Repossessions Taskforce Final Report 2015 (DSD).

Department of Finance and Personnel Memorandum on the Twenty Fifth Report from the Public Accounts Committee Mandate 2011-2016 – The Future Impact of Borrowing and Private Finance Commitments and Belfast Metropolitan College's Titanic Quarter PPP Project (DFP).

10. Agency Publications

11. Westminster Publications

12. Miscellaneous Publications

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 17 February 2015

The Assembly met at 10.30am, the Speaker in the Chair.

1. Personal Prayer or Meditation

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Executive Committee Business

2.1 Statement – Findings of the Evaluation of the Individual Funding Request Process

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, Mr Jim Wells, made a statement regarding the findings of the evaluation of the individual funding request process, following which he replied to questions.

2.2 Consideration Stage – Budget Bill (NIA Bill 45/11-16)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel, Mr Simon Hamilton, moved the Consideration Stage of the Budget Bill (NIA Bill 45/11-16).

No amendments were tabled to the Bill.

Clauses

The question being put, it was agreed without division that Clauses 1 to 9 stand part of the Bill.

Schedules

The question being put, it was agreed without division that Schedules 1 to 5 stand part of the Bill.

Long Title

The question being put, the Long Title was agreed without division.

The Budget Bill (NIA 45/11-16) stood referred to the Speaker.

2.3 Assembly Consent Motion – The Public Bodies (Abolition of the Advisory Committees on Pesticides) Order 2015

Proposed:

That this Assembly consents to The Public Bodies (Abolition of the Advisory Committees on Pesticides) Order 2015 in the form of the draft laid before the UK Parliament on 15 December 2014.

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

2.4 Motion – The draft Judicial Pensions Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015

Proposed:

That the draft Judicial Pensions Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 be approved.

Minister of Justice

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

2.5 Motion – The draft Police Pensions (Consequential Provisions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015

Proposed:

That the draft Police Pensions (Consequential Provisions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 be approved.

Minister of Justice

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

3. Private Members' Business

3.1 Second Stage – Road Traffic (Speed Limits) Bill (NIA Bill 30/11-15)

Mr Pat Ramsey moved the Second Stage of the Road Traffic (Speed Limits) Bill (NIA Bill 30/11-15).

Debate ensued.

The sitting was suspended at 12.31pm.

The sitting resumed at 2.00pm, with the Principal Deputy Speaker (Mr Newton) in the Chair.

4. Question Time

4.1 Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, Mr Jim Wells.

4.2 Justice

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Justice, Mr David Ford.

5. Private Members' Business (cont'd)

5.1 Second Stage – Road Traffic (Speed Limits) Bill (NIA Bill 30/11-15) (cont'd)

Debate resumed on the Bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) took the Chair.

The Road Traffic (Speed Limits) Bill (NIA Bill 30/11-15) passed Second Stage without division.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) took the Chair.

6. Adjournment

Mrs Brenda Hale spoke to her topic regarding Dromore Central Primary School.

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 7.24pm.

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin MLA
Speaker

17 February 2015

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 17 February 2015

1. Acts of the Northern Ireland Assembly
2. Bills of the Northern Ireland Assembly
3. Orders in Council
4. Publications Laid in the Northern Ireland Assembly
5. Assembly Reports
6. Statutory Rules

S.R. 2015/64 The Pneumoconiosis, etc., (Workers' Compensation) (Payment of Claims) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 (DSD).

S.R. 2015/65 The Mesothelioma Lump Sum Payments (Conditions and Amounts) (Amendment) Regulation (Northern Ireland) 2015 (DSD).

7. Written Ministerial Statements
8. Consultation Documents
9. Departmental Publications
10. Agency Publications
11. Westminster Publications
12. Miscellaneous Publications

Northern Ireland Assembly Legislation:

Stages in Consideration of Public Bills

First Stage: Introduction of Bill.

Second Stage: General debate of the Bill with an opportunity for Members to vote on its general principles.

Committee Stage (Comm. Stage): Detailed investigation by a Committee which concludes with the publication of a report for consideration by the Assembly.

Consideration Stage (CS): Consideration by the Assembly of, and an opportunity for Members to vote on, the details of the Bill including amendments proposed to the Bill.

Further Consideration Stage (FCS): Consideration by the Assembly of, and an opportunity for Members to vote on, further amendments to the Bill.

Final Stage: Passing or rejecting of Bill by the Assembly, without further amendment.

Royal Assent.

Proceedings as at 18 February 2015

2011-2016 Mandate
Executive Bills

Title & NIA Bill Number	First Stage	Second Stage	Comm. Stage to Conclude	Report Ordered to be Printed	CS	FCS	Final Stage	Royal Assent
Marine Bill 5/11-15	21.02.12	05.03.12	06.07.12	05.07.12	30.04.13	13.05.13	21.05.13	17.09.13
Welfare Reform Bill 13/11-15	01.10.12	09.10.12	19.02.13	14.02.13	10.02.15 & 11.02.15			
Education Bill 14/11-15	02.10.12	15.10.12	08.04.13	08.04.13				
Planning Bill 17/11-15	14.01.13	22.01.13	07.06.13	06.06.13	24.06.13 & 25.06.13			
Tobacco Retailers Bill 19/11-15	15.04.13	23.04.13	18.10.13	09.10.13	3.12.13	10.02.14	18.02.14	25.03.14
Carrier Bags Bill 20/11-15	03.06.13	11.06.13	30.11.13	26.11.13	28.01.14	25.02.14	10.03.14	28.04.14
Financial Provisions Bill 22/11-15	17.06.13	01.07.13	13.12.13	11.12.13	11.02.14	24.02.14	04.03.14	28.04.14
Public Service Pensions Bill 23/11-15	17.06.13	25.06.13	29.11.13	27.11.13	14.01.14	27.01.14	04.02.14	11.03.14
Licensing of Pavement Cafés Bill 24/11-15	17.06.13	25.06.13	13.12.13	05.12.13	04.03.14	25.03.14	07.04.14	12.05.14

Title & NIA Bill Number	First Stage	Second Stage	Comm. Stage to Conclude	Report Ordered to be Printed	CS	FCS	Final Stage	Royal Assent
Health and Social Care (Amendment) Bill 27/11-15	16.09.13	24.09.13	11.12.13	04.12.13	20.01.14	28.01.14	11.02.14	11.04.14
Local Government Bill 28/11-15	23.09.13	01.10.13	20.02.14	20.02.14	18.03.14 & 19.03.14	01.04.14	08.04.14	12.05.14
Road Races (Amendment) Bill 29/11-15	18.11.13	26.11.13	/	/	2.12.13	9.12.13	10.12.13	17.01.14
Reservoirs Bill 31/11-15	20.01.14	04.02.14	04.07.14	24.06.14				
Budget Bill 32/11-15	10.02.14	11.02.14	/	/	17.02.14	18.02.14	24.02.14	19.03.14
Legal Aid and Coroners' Courts Bill 33/11-15	31.03.14	08.04.14	20.06.14	18.06.14	16.09.14	30.09.14	13.10.14	17.11.14
Work and Families Bill 34/11-15	28.04.14	12.05.14	30.11.14	08.10.14	11.11.14	24.11.14	02.12.14	08.01.15
Road Traffic (Amendment) Bill 35/11-15	12.05.14	27.05.14	27.03.15					
Budget (No.2) Bill 36/11-15	09.06.14	10.06.14	/	/	16.06.14	17.06.14	30.06.14	16.07.14
Justice Bill 37/11-15	16.06.14	24.06.14	27.03.15					
Education Bill 38/11-16	06.10.14	14.10.14	/	/	21.10.14	11.11.14	17.11.14	11.12.14
Insolvency (Amendment) Bill 39/11-16	07.10.14	10.11.14	13.03.15					
Off Street Parking Bill 40/11-16	13.10.14	21.10.14	09.12.14	08.12.14	13.01.15	26.01.15	03.02.15	
Food Hygiene (Ratings) Bill 41/11-16	03.11.14	11.11.14	08.05.15					
Pensions Bill 42/11-16	10.11.14	18.11.14	26.03.15					
Regeneration Bill 43/11-16	08.12.14	20.01.15	28.05.15					
Budget Bill 44/11-16	09.02.15	16.02/15	/	/	17.02.15			

2011-2016 Mandate
Non-Executive Bills

Title & Bill Number	First Stage	Second Stage	Comm. Stage to Conclude	Report Ordered to be Printed	CS	FCS	Final Stage	Royal Assent
Road Traffic (Speed Limits) Bill 25/11-15	17.06.13 Bill fell. Re-introduced as Bill 30/11-15 (see below)							
Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Further Provisions and Support for Victims) Bill 26/11-15	24.06.13	23.09.13 & 24.09.13	11.04.14	11.04.14	20.10.14	01.12.14	09.12.14	13.01.15
Road Traffic (Speed Limits) Bill 30/11-15	09.12.13	17.02.15	15.04.15					
Children's Services Co-operation Bill 44/11-15	08.12.14	26.01.15	09.03.15					

/ Bill progressing by accelerated passage

** Please note that any bills that received Royal Assent in the previous session have been removed from the table.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 23 February 2015

The Assembly met at noon, the Speaker in the Chair.

1. Personal Prayer or Meditation

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Public Petition

2.1 Public Petition – Mental Health and Well-being Education within the Northern Ireland School Curriculum

Mr Roy Beggs was granted leave, in accordance with Standing Order 22, to present a Public Petition relating to mental health and well-being education within the Northern Ireland School Curriculum.

3. Executive Committee Business

3.1 Further Consideration Stage – Budget Bill (NIA Bill 45/11-16)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel, Mr Simon Hamilton, moved the Further Consideration Stage of the Budget Bill (NIA Bill 45/11-16).

No amendments were tabled to the Bill.

The Budget Bill (NIA Bill 45/11-16) stood referred to the Speaker for consideration in accordance with Section 10 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

3.2 Motion – The draft Public Service (Civil Servants and Others) Pensions (Consequential Provisions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015

Proposed:

That the draft Public Service (Civil Servants and Others) Pensions (Consequential Provisions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 be approved.

Minister of Finance and Personnel

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion, was **carried** without division.

4. Private Members' Business

4.1 Motion – Reductions in the Block Grant

Proposed:

That this Assembly recognises that the persistent reductions to the block grant create significant challenges for the Executive in the delivery of frontline services; welcomes agreement on the Budget 2015-16; further recognises that the Executive has additional revenue generating powers which have not been explored fully as part of the budget process; and calls on the Executive to collectively identify progressive options to raise local revenue and increase the local budget.

Mr D McKay
Mr M Ó Muilleoir
Ms M Boyle

4.2 Amendment 1

Proposed:

Leave out all after 'frontline services'; and insert:

"further recognises that the Executive has additional revenue-generating powers which have not been explored fully as part of the budget process; recognises that there has not been a consistent approach to reducing waste and pursuing public sector reform to ensure that additional resources are available for frontline services; and calls on the Executive to identify, collectively, progressive options to raise local revenue, tackle waste and pursue public service reform to effectively increase the local budget."

Mrs J Cochrane
Mr C Lyttle
Mr S Dickson

4.3 Amendment 2

Proposed:

Leave out all after '2015-16;' and insert:

"notes the success of the Executive in securing the devolution of corporation tax and air passenger duty for long haul flights; further notes the work being conducted by the Department of Finance and Personnel on the potential for devolving specific additional fiscal powers; and calls on the Minister of Finance and Personnel to bring forward recommendations on further fiscal devolution to the Executive."

Mr P Girvan
Mr P Weir
Mr A McQuillan
Mr I McCrea

Debate ensued.

The debate was suspended for Question Time.

The Principal Deputy Speaker (Mr Newton) took the Chair.

5. Question Time

5.1 Regional Development

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister for Regional Development, Mr Danny Kennedy.

5.2 Social Development

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister for Social Development, Mr Mervyn Storey.

6. Private Members' Business (cont'd)

6.1 Motion – Reductions in the Block Grant

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) took the Chair.

Debate resumed.

The Question being put, Amendment 1 fell (Division 1).

The Question being put, Amendment 2 was made (Division 2).

The Question being put, the motion, as amended, was carried (Division 3).

6.2 Motion: Magee Campus of Ulster University

Proposed:

That this Assembly recognises the importance of expanding higher education across Northern Ireland and particularly the importance of expansion at Ulster University's Magee campus in driving economic growth in the North West; notes the 50th anniversary of the publication of the Lockwood Commission report; affirms its commitment to the One Plan targets of expanding to 9,400 full time equivalent students by 2020 and increasing the maximum student number by 1,000 by 2015; and calls on the First Minister and deputy First Minister, as chairs of the North West Ministerial Sub-Group, to liaise directly with the Ulster University and the Minister for Employment and Learning to prioritise the expansion at the Magee campus to ensure its full delivery.

Mr P Ramsey
Mr C Eastwood
Mr M Durkan

6.3 Amendment

Proposed:

Leave out all after 'report;' and insert:

"notes the commitment within the One Plan to an expansion to 9,400 full time equivalent students by 2020 and increasing the maximum student number by 1,000 by 2015; and calls on the Minister for Employment and Learning to examine the options for supporting the One Plan target."

Mr T Buchanan
Mr S Anderson
Mr W Irwin

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Amendment fell.

The Question being put, the motion was carried.

7. Adjournment

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 5.47pm.

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin
The Speaker

23 February 2015

Northern Ireland Assembly

23 February 2015
Division 1

Motion – Reductions in the Block Grant – Amendment 1

Proposed:

Leave out all after 'frontline services'; and insert:

"further recognises that the Executive has additional revenue-generating powers which have not been explored fully as part of the budget process; recognises that there has not been a consistent approach to reducing waste and pursuing public sector reform to ensure that additional resources are available for frontline services; and calls on the Executive to identify, collectively, progressive options to raise local revenue, tackle waste and pursue public service reform to effectively increase the local budget."

Mrs J Cochrane
Mr C Lyttle
Mr S Dickson

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 11
Noes: 76

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dickson, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCallister, Mr McCarthy, Ms Sugden.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dickson.

NOES

Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Ms P Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Buchanan, Mr Byrne, Mrs Cameron, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dallat, Mr Devenney, Mrs Dobson, Mr Dunne, Mr Durkan, Mr Easton, Mr Eastwood, Mr Elliott, Mr Flanagan, Mrs Foster, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hazzard, Mr Humphrey, Mr Hussey, Mr Irwin, Mr G Kelly, Mr Kennedy, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McCausland, Ms McCorley, Mr B McCrea, Mr I McCrea, Dr McDonnell, Ms McGahan, Mr McGimpsey, Mr McGlone, Mr M McGuinness, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McKay, Mrs McKevitt, Mr McKinney, Mr McMullan, Mr McQuillan, Mr A Maginness, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr Ó Muilleoir, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr Ramsey, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr McQuillan, Mr G Robinson.

The Amendment **fell**.

Northern Ireland Assembly

23 February 2015
Division 2

Motion – Reductions in the Block Grant – Amendment 2

Proposed:

Leave out all after '2015-16;' and insert:

"notes the success of the Executive in securing the devolution of corporation tax and air passenger duty for long haul flights; further notes the work being conducted by the Department of Finance and Personnel on the potential for devolving specific additional fiscal powers; and calls on the Minister of Finance and Personnel to bring forward recommendations on further fiscal devolution to the Executive."

Mr P Girvan
Mr P Weir
Mr A McQuillan
Mr I McCrea

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 71
Noes: 16

AYES

Mr Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms Boyle, Ms P Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Buchanan, Mrs Cameron, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Devenney, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Mr Flanagan, Mr Ford, Mrs Foster, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hazzard, Mr Humphrey, Mr Hussey, Mr Irwin, Mr G Kelly, Mr Kennedy, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyttle, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCartney, Mr McCausland, Ms McCorley, Mr I McCrea, Ms McGahan, Mr McGimpsey, Mr M McGuinness, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McKay, Mr McMullan, Mr McQuillan, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr Ó Muilleoir, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr McQuillan, Mr G Robinson.

NOES

Mr Agnew, Mr Allister, Mr D Bradley, Mr Byrne, Mr Dallat, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Mr McCallister, Mr B McCrea, Dr McDonnell, Mr McGlone, Mrs McKevitt, Mr McKinney, Mr A Maginness, Mr Ramsey, Ms Sugden.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr A Maginness, Mr McKinney.

The Amendment was **made**.

Northern Ireland Assembly

23 February 2015
Division 3

Motion – Reductions in the Block Grant (as amended)

Proposed:

That this Assembly recognises that the persistent reductions to the block grant create significant challenges for the Executive in the delivery of frontline services; welcomes agreement on the Budget 2015-16; notes the success of the Executive in securing the devolution of corporation tax and air passenger duty for long haul flights; further notes the work being conducted by the Department of Finance and Personnel on the potential for devolving specific additional fiscal powers; and calls on the Minister of Finance and Personnel to bring forward recommendations on further fiscal devolution to the Executive.

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 72
Noes: 15

AYES

Mr Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms Boyle, Ms P Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Buchanan, Mrs Cameron, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Devenney, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Mr Flanagan, Mr Ford, Mrs Foster, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hazzard, Mr Humphrey, Mr Hussey, Mr Irwin, Mr G Kelly, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCartney, Mr McCausland, Ms McCorley, Mr I McCrea, Ms McGahan, Mr McGimpsey, Mr M McGuinness, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McKay, Mr McMullan, Mr McQuillan, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr Ó Muilleoir, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr McKay, Mr G Robinson.

NOES

Mr Agnew, Mr Allister, Mr D Bradley, Mr Byrne, Mr Dallat, Mr Eastwood, Mr McCallister, Mr B McCrea, Dr McDonnell, Mr McGlone, Mrs McKevitt, Mr McKinney, Mr A Maginness, Mr Ramsey, Ms Sugden.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr A Maginness, Mr McKinney.

The motion, as amended, was **carried**.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on
18 February – 23 February 2015

1. Acts of the Northern Ireland Assembly

2. Bills of the Northern Ireland Assembly

3. Orders in Council

4. Publications Laid in the Northern Ireland Assembly

5. Assembly Reports

Report on Women in Politics and the Northern Ireland Assembly NIA 224/11-16 (AERC).

6. Statutory Rules

S.R. 2015/41 The Motor Vehicle Testing (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 (DOE).

S.R. 2015/42 The Public Service Vehicles (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 (DOE).

S.R. 2015/43 The Goods Vehicles (Testing) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 (DOE).

S.R. 2015/44 The Local Government (Executive Arrangements) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 (DOE).

S.R. 2015/50 The Attorney General's Human Rights Guidance (Youth Justice Agency – Conditions of Detention) Order (Northern Ireland) 2015 (AGNI).

S.R. 2015/51 The Attorney General's Human Rights Guidance (Probation Board for Northern Ireland) Order (Northern Ireland) 2015 (AGNI).

S.R. 2015/56 The Health and Personal Social Services (Superannuation), Health and Social Care (Pension Scheme) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 (DHSSPS).

S.R. 2015/69 The Teachers' Superannuation (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 (DE).

S.R. 2015/68 The Local Government Reorganisation (Compensation for Loss of Employment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 (DOE).

S.R. 2015/75 The Rates (Regional Rates) Order (Northern Ireland) 2015 (DFP).

S.R. 2015/XXX The Civil Legal Services (Cost Protection) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 (DOJ).

S.R. 2015/XXX The Criminal Legal Aid (Disclosure of Information) Rules (Northern Ireland) 2015 (DOJ).

S.R. 2015/XXX The Civil Legal Services (Disclosure of Information) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 (DOJ).

S.R. 2015/XXX The Civil Legal Services (Appeal) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 (DOJ).

For Information Only

S.R. 2015/35 (C. 4) The Education (2014 Act) (Commencement No. 1) Order (Northern Ireland) 2015 (DE).

S.R. 2015/49 (C. 5) The Planning (2011 Act) (Commencement No. 3) and (Transitional Provisions) Order (Northern Ireland) 2015 (DOE).

S.R. 2015/57 (C. 6) The Child Maintenance (2008 Act) (Commencement No. 15) Order (Northern Ireland) 2015 (DSD).

S.R. 2015/59 The One-Way Traffic (Belfast) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2015 (DRD).

S.R. 2015/60 The Parking and Waiting Restrictions (Belfast) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2015 (DRD).

S.R. 2015/67 The Parking and Waiting Restrictions (Londonderry) Order (Northern Ireland) 2015 (DRD).

7. Written Ministerial Statements

Age Discrimination Legislation (OFMDFM).

8. Consultation Documents

9. Departmental Publications

10. Agency Publications

11. Westminster Publications

12. Miscellaneous Publications

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 24 February 2015

The Assembly met at 10.30am, the Speaker in the Chair.

1. Personal Prayer or Meditation

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Executive Committee Business

2.1 Motion – The draft Local Government (Standing Orders) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015

A valid Petition of Concern was presented in relation to the motion, under Standing Order 28, on Monday 23rd February 2015 (Appendix 1).

Proposed:

That the draft Local Government (Standing Orders) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 be approved.

Minister of the Environment

Debate ensued.

Question being put, the motion was negatived on a cross community vote (Division 1).

2.2 Further Consideration Stage – Welfare Reform Bill (NIA Bill 13/11-15)

The Minister for Social Development, Mr Mervyn Storey, moved the Further Consideration Stage of the Welfare Reform Bill (NIA Bill 13/11-15).

27 amendments were selected for debate.

Debate ensued.

The sitting was suspended at 12.29pm.

The sitting resumed at 2.00pm, with the Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) in the Chair.

3. Question Time

3.1 Agriculture and Rural Development.

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, Mrs Michelle O'Neill.

3.2 Culture, Arts and Leisure

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, Ms Carál Ní Chuilín.

The Speaker took the Chair.

4. Executive Committee Business (cont'd)

4.1 Further Consideration Stage – Welfare Reform Bill (NIA Bill 13/11-15) (cont'd)

Debate resumed.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) took the Chair.

The Speaker took the Chair.

The sitting was suspended at 7.31pm and resumed at 7.46pm with the Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) in the Chair.

Clauses

After debate, Amendment 1 to Clause 10 was negatived on division (Division 2).

After debate, Amendment 2 to Clause 26 was not moved.

After debate, Amendment 3 to Clause 27 was not moved.

After debate, Amendment 4 to Clause 30 was not moved.

The Speaker took the Chair.

After debate, Amendment 5 to Clause 44 was negatived without division.

After debate, Amendment 6 to Clause 44 was not moved.

As Amendment 5 was not made and Amendment 6 was not moved, Amendment 7 was not called.

After debate, Amendment 8 to Clause 47 was not moved.

After debate, Amendment 9 to Clause 47 was not moved.

After debate, Amendment 10 to Clause 47 was not moved.

After debate, Amendment 11 to Clause 70 was negatived on division (Division 3).

After debate, Amendment 12 to Clause 78 was made without division.

After debate, Amendment 13 to Clause 81 was made without division.

After debate, Amendment 14 to Clause 81 was made without division.

After debate, Amendment 15 to Clause 89 was negatived on division (Division 4).

After debate, Amendment 16 inserting new Clause 103A was not moved.

After debate, Amendment 17 inserting new Clause 120A was negatived on division (Division 5).

After debate, Amendment 18 to Clause 121 was made without division.

After debate, Amendment 19 inserting new Clause 121A was negatived on division (Division 6).

After debate, Amendment 20 to Clause 130 was made without division.

After debate, Amendment 21 to Clause 131 was negatived without division.

After debate, Amendment 22 inserting new Clause 132A was made without division.

After debate, Amendment 23 inserting new Clause 132B was made without division.

After debate, Amendment 24 inserting new Clause 132C was made without division.

After debate, Amendment 25 inserting new Clause 132D was not moved.

After debate, Amendment 26 to Clause 135 was made without division.

Schedules

After debate, Amendment 27 to Schedule 1 was not moved.

NIA Bill 13/11-15 stood referred to the Speaker for consideration in accordance with section 10 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

4.2 Final Stage – Budget Bill (NIA 45/11-16)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel, Mr Simon Hamilton, moved that the Final Stage of the Budget Bill (NIA 45/11-16) do now pass.

Debate ensued.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) took the Chair.

The Budget Bill (NIA 45/11-16) passed Final Stage (Division 7).

5. Adjournment

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 12.50am.

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin MLA
Speaker

24 February 2015

Appendix 1

Northern Ireland Assembly

The undersigned Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly presented a Petition of Concern, in accordance with Standing Order 28, on Monday 23 February 2015, in relation to the draft Local Government (Standing Orders) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015.

- Mr Sydney Anderson
- Mr Jonathan Bell
- Ms Paula Bradley
- Mr Thomas Buchanan
- Mrs Pam Cameron
- Mr Gregory Campbell
- Mr Trevor Clarke
- Mr Jonathan Craig
- Mr Sammy Douglas
- Mr Gordon Dunne
- Mr Alex Easton
- Mrs Arlene Foster
- Mr Paul Frew
- Mr Paul Girvan
- Mr Paul Givan
- Mrs Brenda Hale
- Mr Simon Hamilton
- Mr David Hilditch
- Mr William Humphrey
- Mr William Irwin
- Mr Nelson McCausland
- Mr Ian McCrea
- Mr David McIlveen
- Miss Michelle McIlveen
- Mr Adrian McQuillan
- The Lord Morrow
- Mr Stephen Moutray
- Mr Robin Newton
- Mr Edwin Poots
- Mr George Robinson
- Mr Peter Robinson
- Mr Alastair Ross
- Mr Jimmy Spratt
- Mr Mervyn Storey
- Mr Peter Weir
- Mr Jim Wells
- Mr Sammy Wilson
- Mr Maurice Devenney

Northern Ireland Assembly

24 February 2015
Division 1

Motion – The draft Local Government (Standing Orders) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015

Proposed:

That the draft Local Government (Standing Orders) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 be approved.

Minister of the Environment

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 58
Noes: 29

AYES

Nationalist

Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mr Dallat, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Hazzard, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Dr McDonnell, Ms McGahan, Mr McGlone, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McKay, Mrs McKevitt, Mr McKinney, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr Ó Muilleoir, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr Ramsey, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Unionist

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

Other

Mr Agnew, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dickson, Mr Ford, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCarthy.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Eastwood, Mr A Maginness.

NOES

Unionist

Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Mr Buchanan, Mrs Cameron, Mr Campbell, Mr Craig, Mr Devenney, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mr Hamilton, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr McCausland, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr Moutray, Mr Newton, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Anderson, Mr G Robinson.

Total votes	87	Total Ayes	58	[66.7%]
Nationalist Vote	37	Nationalist Ayes	37	[100%]
Unionist Votes	42	Unionist Ayes	13	[31.0%]
Other Votes	8	Other Ayes	8	[100%]

The Motion was **negatived** on a cross-community vote.

Northern Ireland Assembly

24 February 2015
Division 2

Further Consideration Stage – Welfare Reform Bill (NIA Bill 13/11-15) – Amendment 1

Proposed:

Clause 10, Page 4, Line 38

At end insert -

'(3A) Where an additional amount under subsection (2) can be awarded at two different rates, the lower rate shall be no less than two thirds of the higher rate.'

Mr S Agnew

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 13
Noes: 71

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Attwood, Mr D Bradley, Mr Byrne, Mr Eastwood, Mrs D Kelly, Dr McDonnell, Mr McGlone, Mrs McKevitt, Mr McKinney, Mr A Maginness, Mr Ramsey, Mr Rogers.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Agnew, Mr A Maginness.

NOES

Mr Anderson, Mr Beggs, Mr Bell, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Ms P Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Buchanan, Mrs Cameron, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Ford, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hazzard, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr G Kelly, Mr Kinahan, Mr Lunn, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Mr McCallister, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McCausland, Ms McCorley, Mr B McCrea, Mr I McCrea, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr M McGuinness, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McKay, Mr McMullan, Mr McQuillan, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr Ó Muilleoir, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Ms Ruane, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr McQuillan, Mr G Robinson.

The amendment **fell**.

Northern Ireland Assembly

24 February 2015
Division 3

Further Consideration Stage – Welfare Reform Bill (NIA Bill 13/11-15) – Amendment 11

Proposed:

Clause 70, Page 56, Line 32

At end insert -

‘(6) Regulations may not provide for the reduction of an existing award where a claimant declines the offer of suitable alternative accommodation.’

Mrs D Kelly
Mr A Attwood
Mr A Maginness
Mr P Ramsey

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 12
Noes: 69

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Attwood, Mr D Bradley, Mr Eastwood, Mrs D Kelly, Dr McDonnell, Mr McGlone, Mrs McKevitt, Mr McKinney, Mr A Maginness, Mr Ramsey, Mr Rogers.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr McGlone, Mrs McKevitt.

NOES

Mr Anderson, Mr Beggs, Mr Bell, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Ms P Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Buchanan, Mrs Cameron, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hazzard, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr G Kelly, Mr Kinahan, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Mr McCallister, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McCausland, Ms McCorley, Mr B McCrea, Mr I McCrea, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr M McGuinness, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McKay, Mr McMullan, Mr McQuillan, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr Ó Muilleoir, Mr O’Dowd, Mrs O’Neill, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Ms Ruane, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr McQuillan, Mr G Robinson.

The amendment **fell**.

Northern Ireland Assembly

24 February 2015
Division 4

Further Consideration Stage – Welfare Reform Bill (NIA Bill 13/11-15) – Amendment 15

Proposed:

Clause 89, Page 64, Line 24

At end insert -

‘(3A) A person entitled to personal independence payment shall receive the award no later than 16 weeks after the date on which a claim for it is made or treated as made.’

Mr S Agnew

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 12
Noes: 69

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Attwood, Mr D Bradley, Mr Eastwood, Mrs D Kelly, Dr McDonnell, Mr McGlone, Mrs McKevitt, Mr McKinney, Mr A Maginness, Mr Ramsey, Mr Rogers.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Agnew, Mr A Maginness.

NOES

Mr Anderson, Mr Beggs, Mr Bell, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Ms P Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Buchanan, Mrs Cameron, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hazzard, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr G Kelly, Mr Kinahan, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Mr McCallister, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McCausland, Ms McCorley, Mr B McCrea, Mr I McCrea, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr M McGuinness, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McKay, Mr McMullan, Mr McQuillan, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr Ó Muilleoir, Mr O’Dowd, Mrs O’Neill, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Ms Ruane, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr McQuillan, Mr G Robinson.

The amendment **fell**.

Northern Ireland Assembly

24 February 2015
Division 5

Further Consideration Stage – Welfare Reform Bill (NIA Bill 13/11-15) – Amendment 17

Proposed:

New Clause

After clause 120 insert -

'Duty to ensure access to independent advice

120A.—(1) The Department shall ensure that any person making a claim under this Act shall be entitled to have access to independent confidential advice and assistance provided free of charge in relation to making a claim under this Act.

(2) For the purposes of subsection (1) the Department must bring forward guidance on the independent confidential advice and assistance which is to be developed in consultation with the Northern Ireland Advice Services Consortium, within 3 months of the commencement of this section.'

Mrs D Kelly
Mr A Attwood
Mr S Agnew

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 21
Noes: 59

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Attwood, Mr Beggs, Mr D Bradley, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson, Mr Eastwood, Mr Elliott, Mr Gardiner, Mrs D Kelly, Mr Kinahan, Dr McDonnell, Mr McGlone, Mrs McKevitt, Mr McKinney, Mr A Maginness, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mr Ramsey, Mr Rogers, Mr Swann.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr A Maginness, Mr McGlone.

NOES

Mr Anderson, Mr Bell, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Ms P Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Buchanan, Mrs Cameron, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Craig, Mr Dickson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hazzard, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Mr McCallister, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McCausland, Ms McCorley, Mr B McCrea, Mr I McCrea, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr M McGuinness, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McKay, Mr McMullan, Mr McQuillan, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Mr Moutray, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr Ó Muilleoir, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Ms Ruane, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr McQuillan, Mr G Robinson.

The amendment **fell**.

Northern Ireland Assembly

24 February 2015
Division 6

Further Consideration Stage – Welfare Reform Bill (NIA Bill 13/11-15) – Amendment 19

Proposed:

New Clause

After clause 121 insert -

'Duty to report on operation of this Act

121A.—(1) The Department must, not later than 3 years after this Act receives Royal Assent, publish an independent report on the operation of this Act.

(2) The Department must lay the report before the Assembly.'

Mr S Agnew

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 12
Noes: 69

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Attwood, Mr D Bradley, Mr Eastwood, Mrs D Kelly, Dr McDonnell, Mr McGlone, Mrs McKevitt, Mr McKinney, Mr A Maginness, Mr Ramsey, Mr Rogers.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Agnew, Mr A Maginness.

NOES

Mr Anderson, Mr Beggs, Mr Bell, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Ms P Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Buchanan, Mrs Cameron, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hazzard, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr G Kelly, Mr Kinahan, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Mr McCallister, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McCausland, Ms McCorley, Mr B McCrea, Mr I McCrea, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr M McGuinness, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McKay, Mr McMullan, Mr McQuillan, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr Ó Muilleoir, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Ms Ruane, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr McQuillan, Mr G Robinson.

The amendment **fell**.

Northern Ireland Assembly

24 February 2015
Division 7

Final Stage – Budget Bill (NIA 45/11-16)

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 58
Noes: 21

AYES

Nationalist

Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr Brady, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Hazzard, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McKay, Mr McMullan, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr Ó Muilleoir, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Ms Ruane

Unionist

Mr Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Mr Buchanan, Mrs Cameron, Mr Craig, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mr Hamilton, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr McCausland, Mr B McCrea, Mr I McCrea, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Mr Moutray, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir

Other

Mr Dickson, Dr Farry

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr McQuillan, Mr G Robinson.

NOES

Nationalist

Mr Attwood, Mr D Bradley, Mr Eastwood, Mrs D Kelly, Dr McDonnell, Mr McGlone, Mrs McKevitt, Mr McKinney, Mr A Maginness, Mr Ramsey, Mr Rogers.

Unionist

Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson, Mr Elliott, Mr Gardiner, Mr Kinahan, Mr McCallister, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mr Swann

Other

Mr Agnew

Tellers for the Noes: Mr D Bradley, Mr McKinney

Total votes	79	Total Ayes	58	[73.4%]
Nationalist Vote	37	Nationalist Ayes	26	[70.3%]
Unionist Votes	39	Unionist Ayes	30	[76.9%]
Other Votes	3	Other Ayes	2	[66.7%]

The Motion was **carried** on a cross-community vote.

Welfare Reform Bill
Annotated Marshalled List of Amendments
Further Consideration Stage
Tuesday, 24 February 2015

Amendments tabled up to 9.30 am Thursday, 19 February 2015 and selected for debate

Amendment 1 *[Negatived on division]*
Clause 10, Page 4, Line 38
At end insert -
'(3A) Where an additional amount under subsection (2) can be awarded at two different rates, the lower rate shall be no less than two thirds of the higher rate.'

Mr Steven Agnew

Amendment 2 *[Not moved]*
Clause 26, Page 13, Line 14
At end insert -
'(c) the production of explanatory documentation on sanctions to be given to the claimant prior to the imposition of a sanction.'
Mrs Dolores Kelly

Mr Alex Attwood
Mr Alban Maginness
Mr Pat Ramsey

Amendment 3 *[Not moved]*
Clause 27, Page 13, Line 36
At end insert -
'(c) the production of explanatory documentation on sanctions to be given to the claimant prior to the imposition of a sanction.'

Mrs Dolores Kelly
Mr Alex Attwood
Mr Alban Maginness
Mr Pat Ramsey

Amendment 4 *[Not moved]*
Clause 30, Page 15, Line 20
At end insert -
'( ) An authorised person under this section is a person exercising a function or functions of a public nature.
( ) Section 6 of the Human Rights Act 1998 shall apply to an authorised person as defined under this section.'

Mrs Dolores Kelly
Mr Alex Attwood
Mr Alban Maginness
Mr Pat Ramsey

Amendment 5 *[Negatived without division]*
Clause 44, Page 21, Line 17
Leave out sub-paragraphs (iv) to (vi)

Mr Steven Agnew

Amendment 6 *[Not moved]*
Clause 44, Page 21, Line 22
Leave out sub-paragraphs (ix) to (xi)

Mr Steven Agnew

Amendment 7 *[Not called]*
Clause 44, Page 21, Line 29
At end insert -
'(3A) Regulations to which this subsection applies shall not be made unless a draft of the regulations has been laid before and approved by a resolution of the Assembly.
(3B) Subsection (3A) applies to regulations under any of the following alone or with other regulations —
(a) section 9(2) and (3) (standard allowance);
(b) section 10(3) and (4) (children and young persons element);
(c) section 11 (housing costs element);
(d) section 19(2)(d) (claimants subject to no work-related requirements);
(e) sections 26 and 27 (sanctions);
(f) section 28 (hardship payments).'

Mr Steven Agnew

Amendment 8 *[Not moved]*
Clause 47, Page 25, Line 40
At end insert -
'(c) the production of explanatory documentation on sanctions to be given to the claimant prior to the imposition of a sanction.'

Mrs Dolores Kelly
Mr Alex Attwood
Mr Alban Maginness
Mr Pat Ramsey

Amendment 9 *[Not moved]*
Clause 47, Page 26, Line 29
At end insert -
'(c) the production of explanatory documentation on sanctions to be given to the claimant prior to the imposition of a sanction.'

Mrs Dolores Kelly
Mr Alex Attwood
Mr Alban Maginness
Mr Pat Ramsey

Amendment 10 *[Not moved]*
Clause 47, Page 28, Line 12
At end insert -
'(c) the production of explanatory documentation on sanctions to be given to the claimant prior to the imposition of a sanction.'

Mrs Dolores Kelly
Mr Alex Attwood
Mr Alban Maginness
Mr Pat Ramsey

Amendment 11 *[Negatived on division]*
Clause 70, Page 56, Line 32
At end insert -
'(6) Regulations may not provide for the reduction of an existing award where a claimant declines the offer of suitable alternative accommodation.'

Mrs Dolores Kelly
Mr Alex Attwood
Mr Alban Maginness
Mr Pat Ramsey

Amendment 12 *[Made without division]*
Clause 78, Page 59, Line 6
Leave out 'making personal independence payments' and insert 'personal independence payment'

Minister for Social Development

Amendment 13 *[Made without division]*
Clause 81, Page 60, Line 32
Leave out subsection (3)

Minister for Social Development

Amendment 14 *[Made without division]*
Clause 81, Page 60, Line 39
Leave out paragraph (c) and insert -
'(c) must provide for relevant medical evidence to be taken into account in assessing a person and may make provision about other matters which are, or are not, to be taken into account.'

Minister for Social Development

Amendment 15 *[Negatived on division]*
Clause 89, Page 64, Line 24
At end insert -
'(3A) A person entitled to personal independence payment shall receive the award no later than 16 weeks after the date on which a claim for it is made or treated as made.'

Mr Steven Agnew

Amendment 16 *[Not moved]*
New Clause
After clause 103 insert -
'**Appeal in respect of sanction imposed under this Act**
103A. After Article 15 of the Social Security (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 there is inserted —
"Appeal in connection with sanctions
15A. Where the amount of an award of any social security benefit is to be reduced as a consequence of any failure by a claimant which is sanctionable under the Welfare Reform Act (Northern Ireland) 2015 —
(a) a claimant is entitled to an appeal hearing within four weeks of the notice of sanction being issued; and
(b) the amount of any relevant award shall not be reduced before the appeal is decided."'

Mrs Dolores Kelly
Mr Alex Attwood
Mr Alban Maginness
Mr Pat Ramsey

Amendment 17 *[Negatived on division]*
New Clause
After clause 120 insert -
'**Duty to ensure access to independent advice**
120A.—(1) The Department shall ensure that any person making a claim under this Act shall be entitled to have access to independent confidential advice and assistance provided free of charge in relation to making a claim under this Act.
(2) For the purposes of subsection (1) the Department must bring forward guidance on the independent confidential advice and assistance which is to be developed in consultation with the Northern Ireland Advice Services Consortium, within 3 months of the commencement of this section.'

Mrs Dolores Kelly
Mr Alex Attwood
Mr Steven Agnew

Amendment 18 *[Made without division]*
Clause 121, Page 88, Line 26
Leave out 'and' and insert -
'(aa) the standards of advice and assistance provided under section 132B of the Welfare Reform Act (Northern Ireland) 2015; and'
Minister for Social Development
Amendment 19 *[Negatived on division]*
New Clause
After clause 121 insert -
'**Duty to report on operation of this Act**
121A.—(1) The Department must, not later than 3 years after this Act receives Royal Assent, publish an independent report on the operation of this Act.
(2) The Department must lay the report before the Assembly.'

Mr Steven Agnew

Amendment 20 *[Made without division]*
Clause 130, Page 92, Line 26
After 'housing benefit' insert 'or universal credit'

Minister for Social Development

Amendment 21 *[Negatived without division]*
Clause 131, Page 93, Line 39
At end insert -
'(6A) Regulations may not provide for the reduction of an existing award where a claimant declines the offer of alternative accommodation.'

Mrs Dolores Kelly
Mr Alex Attwood
Mr Alban Maginness
Mr Pat Ramsey

Amendment 22 *[Made without division]*
New Clause
After clause 132 insert -
'Payments to persons suffering financial disadvantage
Payments to persons suffering financial disadvantage
132A.—(1) The purpose of this section is to enable the Department to make payments to persons who suffer financial disadvantage as a result of the changes to social security benefits and tax credits contained in this Act and the Welfare Reform Act 2012.
(2) The Department may by regulations make provision for the purpose mentioned in subsection (1).
(3) Regulations under this section may in particular make provision —
(a) for determining whether a person has suffered financial disadvantage as a result of the changes mentioned in subsection (1) and, if so, the amount of that disadvantage;
(b) for determining eligibility for payments, including provision for payments to be made only in prescribed circumstances or only to persons who meet prescribed conditions;
(c) for determining —

(i) the amount of payments;
(ii) the period or periods for or in respect of which payments are to be made;
(d) for claims for payments to be made in prescribed cases and in the prescribed form and manner and for the procedures to be followed in dealing with and disposing of such claims;
(e) for payments to be made in prescribed cases without any claim being made;
(f) imposing conditions on persons claiming or receiving payments, including conditions requiring them to provide to the Department such information as may be prescribed;
(g) for payments to cease to be made in prescribed circumstances;
(h) for the disclosure of information relating to payments in prescribed circumstances or to prescribed persons;
(i) for the recovery of payments by the Department in prescribed circumstances;
(j) requiring or authorising reviews (whether by the Department or by prescribed persons) of decisions made by the Department with respect to the making or recovery of payments;
(k) imposing functions on a statutory body other than the Department in connection with the administration of the regulations;
(l) for such other matters as appear to the Department to be necessary or appropriate in connection with the making of payments including provision creating criminal offences and provision amending or applying (with or without modification) any statutory provision.
(4) Payments are not to be regarded as a social security benefit; but regulations under this section may provide for any statutory provision relating to a social security benefit (or to such benefits generally) to apply with prescribed modifications in relation to payments.
(5) The Department shall, in respect of each financial year in which payments are made, prepare and lay before the Assembly a report on the payments made in that year.
(6) No regulations shall be made under this section unless a draft of the regulations has been laid before, and approved by resolution of, the Assembly.
(7) If regulations under this section impose functions on any statutory body other than the Department, the Department must consult that body before making the regulations.
(8) A power conferred by this section to make regulations includes power —
(a) to make such incidental, supplementary, consequential or transitional provision as appears to the Department to be necessary or expedient for the purposes of those regulations;
(b) to provide for the Department to exercise a discretion in dealing with any matter.
(9) In this section —
"prescribed" means prescribed by regulations under this section;
"payment" mean a payment under this section;
"statutory body" means a body established by or under a statutory provision.*'*

Minister for Social Development

Amendment 23 *[Made without division]*
New Clause
After clause 132 insert -
'Duties of the Department
Duty to ensure availability of advice and assistance
132B. The Department must ensure that advice and assistance are made available free of charge to persons making a claim under this Act in connection with that claim.*'*

Minister for Social Development

Amendment 24 *[Made without division]*
New Clause
After clause 132 insert -
'**Duty to report on operation of this Act**
132C.—(1) The Department must, not later than 3 years after this Act receives Royal Assent, publish a report on the operation of this Act.
(2) The Department must lay the report before the Assembly.*'*

Minister for Social Development

Amendment 25 *[Not moved]*
New Clause
After clause 132 insert -
'**Review**
132D. The Northern Ireland Joint Standards Committee for the Social Security Agency and Child Maintenance Service shall monitor the standards and quality of decision making with regard to the sanctions defined under this Act and report to the Social Security Agency and Child Maintenance Service on an annual basis.*'*
Mrs Dolores Kelly
Mr Alex Attwood
Mr Alban Maginness

Mr Pat Ramsey

Amendment 26 *[Made without division]*
Clause 135, Page 95, Line 37
At end insert -
'( ) section 132A (payments to persons suffering financial disadvantage);
( ) section 132B (duty to ensure availability of advice and assistance);
( ) section 132C (review of this Act);*'*

Minister for Social Development

Amendment 27 *[Not moved]*
Schedule 1, Page 99
Leave out lines 3 to 7

Mrs Dolores Kelly
Mr Alex Attwood
Mr Alban Maginness
Mr Pat Ramsey

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 24 February 2015

1. Acts of the Northern Ireland Assembly

2. Bills of the Northern Ireland Assembly

3. Orders in Council

4. Publications Laid in the Northern Ireland Assembly

5. Assembly Reports

6. Statutory Rules

S.R. 2014/322 The Justice (Northern Ireland) Act 2002 (Amendment of section 46 (1)) Order (Northern Ireland) 2014 (DOJ).

S.R. 2015/39 The Planning General Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 (DOE).

S.R. 2015/40 The Planning (Use Classes) Order (Northern Ireland) 2015 (DOE).

S.R. 2015/58 The Planning (Claims for Compensation) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 (DOE).

S.R. 2015/61 The Planning (Hazardous Substances) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 (DOE).

S.R. 2015/62 The Planning (Local Development Plan) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 (DOE).

S.R. 2015/63 The Planning (Statement of Community Involvement) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 (DOE).

7. Written Ministerial Statements

8. Consultation Documents

9. Departmental Publications

10. Agency Publications

11. Westminster Publications

12. Miscellaneous Publications

Cross-border broadband initiative: the Bytel project (NIAO).

Northern Ireland Assembly Legislation:

Stages in Consideration of Public Bills

First Stage: Introduction of Bill.

Second Stage: General debate of the Bill with an opportunity for Members to vote on its general principles.

Committee Stage (Comm. Stage): Detailed investigation by a Committee which concludes with the publication of a report for consideration by the Assembly.

Consideration Stage (CS): Consideration by the Assembly of, and an opportunity for Members to vote on, the details of the Bill including amendments proposed to the Bill.

Further Consideration Stage (FCS): Consideration by the Assembly of, and an opportunity for Members to vote on, further amendments to the Bill.

Final Stage: Passing or rejecting of Bill by the Assembly, without further amendment.

Royal Assent.

Proceedings as at 25 February 2015

2011-2016 Mandate
Executive Bills

Title & NIA Bill Number	First Stage	Second Stage	Comm. Stage to Conclude	Report Ordered to be Printed	CS	FCS	Final Stage	Royal Assent
Marine Bill 5/11-15	21.02.12	05.03.12	06.07.12	05.07.12	30.04.13	13.05.13	21.05.13	17.09.13
Welfare Reform Bill 13/11-15	01.10.12	09.10.12	19.02.13	14.02.13	10.02.15 & 11.02.15	24.02.15		
Education Bill 14/11-15	02.10.12	15.10.12	08.04.13	08.04.13				
Planning Bill 17/11-15	14.01.13	22.01.13	07.06.13	06.06.13	24.06.13 & 25.06.13			
Tobacco Retailers Bill 19/11-15	15.04.13	23.04.13	18.10.13	09.10.13	3.12.13	10.02.14	18.02.14	25.03.14
Carrier Bags Bill 20/11-15	03.06.13	11.06.13	30.11.13	26.11.13	28.01.14	25.02.14	10.03.14	28.04.14
Financial Provisions Bill 22/11-15	17.06.13	01.07.13	13.12.13	11.12.13	11.02.14	24.02.14	04.03.14	28.04.14
Public Service Pensions Bill 23/11-15	17.06.13	25.06.13	29.11.13	27.11.13	14.01.14	27.01.14	04.02.14	11.03.14
Licensing of Pavement Cafés Bill 24/11-15	17.06.13	25.06.13	13.12.13	05.12.13	04.03.14	25.03.14	07.04.14	12.05.14

Title & NIA Bill Number	First Stage	Second Stage	Comm. Stage to Conclude	Report Ordered to be Printed	CS	FCS	Final Stage	Royal Assent
Health and Social Care (Amendment) Bill 27/11-15	16.09.13	24.09.13	11.12.13	04.12.13	20.01.14	28.01.14	11.02.14	11.04.14
Local Government Bill 28/11-15	23.09.13	01.10.13	20.02.14	20.02.14	18.03.14 & 19.03.14	01.04.14	08.04.14	12.05.14
Road Races (Amendment) Bill 29/11-15	18.11.13	26.11.13	/	/	2.12.13	9.12.13	10.12.13	17.01.14
Reservoirs Bill 31/11-15	20.01.14	04.02.14	04.07.14	24.06.14				
Budget Bill 32/11-15	10.02.14	11.02.14	/	/	17.02.14	18.02.14	24.02.14	19.03.14
Legal Aid and Coroners' Courts Bill 33/11-15	31.03.14	08.04.14	20.06.14	18.06.14	16.09.14	30.09.14	13.10.14	17.11.14
Work and Families Bill 34/11-15	28.04.14	12.05.14	30.11.14	08.10.14	11.11.14	24.11.14	02.12.14	08.01.15
Road Traffic (Amendment) Bill 35/11-15	12.05.14	27.05.14	27.03.15					
Budget (No.2) Bill 36/11-15	09.06.14	10.06.14	/	/	16.06.14	17.06.14	30.06.14	16.07.14
Justice Bill 37/11-15	16.06.14	24.06.14	27.03.15					
Education Bill 38/11-16	06.10.14	14.10.14	/	/	21.10.14	11.11.14	17.11.14	11.12.14
Insolvency (Amendment) Bill 39/11-16	07.10.14	10.11.14	13.03.15					
Off Street Parking Bill 40/11-16	13.10.14	21.10.14	09.12.14	08.12.14	13.01.15	26.01.15	03.02.15	
Food Hygiene (Ratings) Bill 41/11-16	03.11.14	11.11.14	08.05.15					
Pensions Bill 42/11-16	10.11.14	18.11.14	26.03.15					
Regeneration Bill 43/11-16	08.12.14	20.01.15	28.05.15					
Budget Bill 45/11-16	09.02.15	16.02/15	/	/	17.02.15	23.02.15	24.02.15	

2011-2016 Mandate
Non-Executive Bills

Title & Bill Number	First Stage	Second Stage	Comm. Stage to Conclude	Report Ordered to be Printed	CS	FCS	Final Stage	Royal Assent
Road Traffic (Speed Limits) Bill 25/11-15	17.06.13 Bill fell. Re-introduced as Bill 30/11-15 (see below)							
Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Further Provisions and Support for Victims) Bill 26/11-15	24.06.13	23.09.13 & 24.09.13	11.04.14	11.04.14	20.10.14	01.12.14	09.12.14	13.01.15
Road Traffic (Speed Limits) Bill 30/11-15	09.12.13	17.02.15	15.04.15					
Children's Services Co-operation Bill 44/11-16	08.12.14	26.01.15	09.03.15					

/ Bill progressing by accelerated passage

** Please note that any bills that received Royal Assent in the previous session have been removed from the table.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 2 March 2015

The Assembly met at noon, the Speaker in the Chair.

1. Personal Prayer or Meditation

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Executive Committee Business

2.1 Statement – Reduction in the number of Northern Ireland Civil Service departments: Names and functions of departments

The First Minister, the Rt Hon Peter Robinson, made a statement regarding a reduction in the number of Northern Ireland Civil Service departments and the names and functions of departments, following which he replied to questions.

2.2 First Stage – Special Educational Needs and Disability Bill (NIA Bill 46/11-16)

The Minister of Education, Mr John O'Dowd, introduced a Bill to amend the law relating to special education and disability discrimination in schools.

The Special Educational Needs and Disability Bill (NIA Bill 46/11-16) passed First Stage and ordered to be printed.

2.3 Legislative Consent Motion – Health and Social Care (Safety and Quality) Bill

Proposed:

That this Assembly endorses the principle of the extension to Northern Ireland of the provisions of the Health and Social Care (Safety and Quality) Bill, as introduced in the House of Commons on 2 July 2014, contained in clause 5 and paragraphs 1-6 of the Schedule dealing with the objectives of regulators of health and social care professionals.

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was carried without division.

2.4 Motion – The Donaghadee Harbour (Transfer of Harbour Undertaking) Order (Northern Ireland) 2015

Proposed:

That the Donaghadee Harbour (Transfer of Harbour Undertaking) Order (Northern Ireland) 2015 be affirmed.

Minister for Regional Development

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was carried without division.

2.5 Motion – The Rates (Temporary Rebate) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2015

Proposed:

That the Rates (Temporary Rebate) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2015 be affirmed.

Minister of Finance and Personnel

Debate ensued.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) took the Chair.

The Question being put, the Motion was carried without division.

2.6 Motion – The Rates (Exemption for Automatic Telling Machines in Rural Areas) Order (Northern Ireland) 2015

Proposed:

That the Rates (Exemption for Automatic Telling Machines in Rural Areas) Order (Northern Ireland) 2015 be affirmed.

Minister of Finance and Personnel

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was carried without division.

2.7 Motion – The Rates (Owners Allowances) Order (Northern Ireland) 2015

Proposed:

That the Rates (Owners Allowances) Order (Northern Ireland) 2015 be affirmed.

Minister of Finance and Personnel

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was carried without division.

3. Committee Business

3.1 Motion – Extension of Committee Stage – Children's Services Co-operation Bill (NIA Bill 44/11-16)

Proposed:

That, in accordance with Standing Order 33(4), the period referred to in Standing Order 33(2) be extended to 3 July 2015, in relation to the Committee Stage of the Children's Services Co-operation Bill (NIA Bill 44/11-16).

Chairperson, Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was carried without division.

3.2 Motion – STEM in Schools

Proposed:

That this Assembly notes the recent publication of the Education and Training Inspectorate's evaluation of the implementation of The World Around Us, the Confederation of British Industry Northern Ireland Step Change Report, the Momentum Digital Strategy Action Plan and the Engineering UK 2015 Report, all of which highlight the importance of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) in schools; recognises the role of STEM as a key driver of the economy; and calls on the Minister of Education to support and encourage the full implementation of the STEM aspects of the curriculum in order to bring about high quality learning for all children.

Chairperson, Committee for Education

Debate ensued.

The debate was suspended for Question Time.

The Speaker took the Chair.

4. Question Time

4.1 Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Questions were put to, and answered by, the deputy First Minister, Mr Martin McGuinness. The junior Minister, Ms Jennifer McCann, also answered a number of questions.

4.2 Education

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Education, Mr John O'Dowd.

5. Committee Business (cont'd)

5.1 Motion – STEM in Schools (cont'd)

Debate resumed on the motion.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) took the Chair.

The Question being put, the Motion was carried without division.

5.2 Motion – Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Inclusion Framework

Proposed:

That this Assembly notes the effective impact the Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Inclusion (TRPSI) Framework has had on the farming and rural community; and calls on the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to implement the recommendations outlined in the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development position paper on the Review of the TRPSI Framework.

Chairperson, Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was carried without division.

6. Adjournment

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 5.38pm.

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin
The Speaker

2 March 2015

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on
25 February – 02 March 2015

1. Acts of the Northern Ireland Assembly

2. Bills of the Northern Ireland Assembly

3. Orders in Council

4. Publications Laid in the Northern Ireland Assembly

Retention and Disposal Schedule for Employee Records – Department of the Environment (DCAL/PRONI).

Retention and Disposal Schedule for Employee Records – Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL/PRONI).

Retention and Disposal Schedule for Employee Records – Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (DCAL/PRONI).

Retention and Disposal Schedule for Employee Records – Department of Education (DCAL/PRONI).

Retention and Disposal Schedule for Employee Records – Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DCAL/PRONI).

Retention and Disposal Schedule for Employee Records – Department for Regional Development (DCAL/PRONI).

Retention and Disposal Schedule for Employee Records – Department of Justice (DCAL/PRONI).

Retention and Disposal Schedule for Employee Records – Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DCAL/PRONI).

Retention and Disposal Schedule for Employee Records – Department for Social Development (DCAL/PRONI).

Report on an Unannounced Inspection of Magilligan Prison 27 May – 5 June 2014 (DOJ).

Post-legislative scrutiny of the Pensions Act (Northern Ireland) 2015 (DSD).

The Executive's Third Annual Report on the Child Poverty Strategy 2011-14 (OFMDFM).

5. Assembly Reports

Report on the extent to which Standing Orders should permit the Attorney General for Northern Ireland to participate in proceedings of the Assembly: Part 1 – Impartiality of the Office of AGNI, Registration of Interests and participation of the AGNI in Assembly proceedings in respect of areas other than Statutory Rules NIA 232/11-16 (Committee on Procedures).

Inquiry into allegations, arising from a BBC NI Spotlight programme aired on 3 July 2013, of impropriety or irregularity relating to NIHE managed contracts and consideration of any resulting actions – Phase 2 NIA 190/1-16 (Committee for Social Development).

6. Statutory Rules

S.R. 2015/12 The Public Service Pensions (Employer Cost Cap) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 (DFP).

S.R. 2015/77 The Local Government Pension Scheme (Governance) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 (DOE).

S.R. 2015/78 The Firefighters' Pension Scheme Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 (DHSSPS).

S.R. 2015/79 The Pension Protection Fund and Occupational Pension Schemes (Levy Ceiling) Order (Northern Ireland) 2015 (DSD).

S.R. 2015/82 The Rates (Social Sector Value) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 (DFP).

S.R. 2015/83 The Rates (Transitional Relief) Order (Northern Ireland) 2015 (DFP).

S.R. 2015/109 The Social Security (Claims and Payments) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 (DSD).

7. Written Ministerial Statements

8. Consultation Documents

Cross-border broadband initiative: the Bytel project (NIAO).

Consultation on the Interim Report of the Review of the Implementation of the Welfare of Animals Act (NI) 2011 (DARD).

9. Departmental Publications

Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2014 (DOJ).

Forbairt Acmhainní do Shainriachtanais Oideachais (Comhad Acmhainni do scoileanna le tacú le páistí a bhfuil Sainriachtanais Oideachais acu atá ag foghlaim trí mheán na Gaeilge).

Capacity Building for Special Educational Needs (A Resource File for schools to support children with Special Educational Needs learning through the medium of Irish (DE).

10. Agency Publications

11. Westminster Publications

12. Miscellaneous Publications

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 3 March 2015

The Assembly met at 10.30am, the Speaker in the Chair.

1. Personal Prayer or Meditation

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Executive Committee Business

2.1 Statement – North South Ministerial Council Institutional meeting

The deputy First Minister, Mr Martin McGuinness, made a statement regarding the North South Ministerial Council Institutional meeting held in Stormont Castle on 25 February 2015, following which he replied to questions.

2.2 Statement – Future Delivery Model for Congenital Cardiac Services for the Population of Northern Ireland

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, Mr Jim Wells, made a statement regarding the future delivery model for congenital cardiac services for the population of Northern Ireland, following which he replied to questions.

3. Committee Business

3.1 Motion – Report on Inquiry into Wind Energy in Northern Ireland (NIA 226/11-16)

Proposed:

That this Assembly approves the report of the Committee for the Environment (NIA 226/11-16) on its Inquiry into Wind Energy in Northern Ireland; and calls on the Minister of the Environment to implement the recommendations contained in the report.

Chairperson, Committee for the Environment

Debate ensued.

The sitting was suspended at 12.32pm.

The sitting resumed at 2.00pm, with the Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) in the Chair.

4. Question Time

4.1 Employment and Learning

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister for Employment and Learning, Dr Stephen Farry.

4.2 Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, Mrs Arlene Foster.

5. Committee Business (cont'd)

5.1 Motion – Report on Inquiry into Wind Energy in Northern Ireland (NIA 226/11-16) (cont'd)

Debate resumed on the motion.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) took the Chair.

The Speaker took the Chair.

The Question being put, the Motion was carried without division.

6. Private Members' Business

6.1 Motion – McCreesh Park

Proposed:

That this Assembly expresses its concern at the decision by Newry and Mourne District Council to approve again the naming of the Patrick Street Play Park in Newry after convicted IRA terrorist Raymond McCreesh; notes that the vote was taken prior to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland making a final formal ruling on the matter; further notes the seemingly lethargic approach of the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland in pursuing this case; and calls on the Minister of the Environment to respond to the vote in light of the requirement for councillors to act in a way that promotes good relations by providing a positive example for the wider community to follow and, crucially, acting in the interest of the whole community.

Mr W Irwin
Mr N McCausland

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was carried (Division).

The Principal Deputy Speaker (Mr Newton) took the Chair.

7. Adjournment

Mr Oliver McMullan spoke to his topic regarding the development and investment of industry in the East Antrim coastal corridor.

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Principal Deputy Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 7.07pm.

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin
The Speaker

3 March 2015

Northern Ireland Assembly

3 March 2015
Division

Motion – McCreesh Park

Proposed:

That this Assembly expresses its concern at the decision by Newry and Mourne District Council to approve again the naming of the Patrick Street Play Park in Newry after convicted IRA terrorist Raymond McCreesh; notes that the vote was taken prior to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland making a final formal ruling on the matter; further notes the seemingly lethargic approach of the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland in pursuing this case; and calls on the Minister of the Environment to respond to the vote in light of the requirement for councillors to act in a way that promotes good relations by providing a positive example for the wider community to follow and, crucially, acting in the interest of the whole community.

Mr W Irwin
Mr N McCausland

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 65
Noes: 26

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Attwood, Mr Beggs, Mr D Bradley, Ms P Bradley, Mr Buchanan, Mrs Cameron, Mr Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dallat, Mr Devenney, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Durkan, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mrs D Kelly, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCallister, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Dr McDonnell, Mr McGlone, Miss M McIlveen, Mrs McKevitt, Mr McKinney, Mr McNarry, Mr McQuillan, Mr A Maginness, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr Ramsey, Mr G Robinson, Mr Rogers, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr McQuillan, Mr G Robinson.

NOES

Mr Boylan, Mr Brady, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Hazzard, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McKay, Ms Maeve McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr Ó Muilleoir, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr McCartney, Ms Ruane.

The motion was **carried**.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 3 March 2015

1. Acts of the Northern Ireland Assembly
2. Bills of the Northern Ireland Assembly
3. Orders in Council
4. Publications Laid in the Northern Ireland Assembly
5. Assembly Reports
6. Statutory Rules

S.R. 2015/111 The Social Security Revaluation of Earnings Factors Order (Northern Ireland) 2015 (DSD).

S.R. 2015/112 The Social Security Pensions (Low Earnings Threshold) Order (Northern Ireland) 2015 (DSD).

S.R. 2015/113 The Police Pension Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 (DOJ).

7. Written Ministerial Statements
8. Consultation Documents
9. Departmental Publications
10. Agency Publications
11. Westminster Publications
12. Miscellaneous Publications

Northern Ireland Assembly Legislation:

Stages in Consideration of Public Bills

First Stage: Introduction of Bill.

Second Stage: General debate of the Bill with an opportunity for Members to vote on its general principles.

Committee Stage (Comm. Stage): Detailed investigation by a Committee which concludes with the publication of a report for consideration by the Assembly.

Consideration Stage (CS): Consideration by the Assembly of, and an opportunity for Members to vote on, the details of the Bill including amendments proposed to the Bill.

Further Consideration Stage (FCS): Consideration by the Assembly of, and an opportunity for Members to vote on, further amendments to the Bill.

Final Stage: Passing or rejecting of Bill by the Assembly, without further amendment.

Royal Assent.

Proceedings as at 4 March 2015

2011-2016 Mandate
Executive Bills

Title & NIA Bill Number	First Stage	Second Stage	Comm. Stage to Conclude	Report Ordered to be Printed	CS	FCS	Final Stage	Royal Assent
Marine Bill 5/11-15	21.02.12	05.03.12	06.07.12	05.07.12	30.04.13	13.05.13	21.05.13	17.09.13
Welfare Reform Bill 13/11-15	01.10.12	09.10.12	19.02.13	14.02.13	10.02.15 & 11.02.15	24.02.15		
Education Bill 14/11-15	02.10.12	15.10.12	08.04.13	08.04.13				
Planning Bill 17/11-15	14.01.13	22.01.13	07.06.13	06.06.13	24.06.13 & 25.06.13			
Tobacco Retailers Bill 19/11-15	15.04.13	23.04.13	18.10.13	09.10.13	3.12.13	10.02.14	18.02.14	25.03.14
Carrier Bags Bill 20/11-15	03.06.13	11.06.13	30.11.13	26.11.13	28.01.14	25.02.14	10.03.14	28.04.14
Financial Provisions Bill 22/11-15	17.06.13	01.07.13	13.12.13	11.12.13	11.02.14	24.02.14	04.03.14	28.04.14
Public Service Pensions Bill 23/11-15	17.06.13	25.06.13	29.11.13	27.11.13	14.01.14	27.01.14	04.02.14	11.03.14
Licensing of Pavement Cafés Bill 24/11-15	17.06.13	25.06.13	13.12.13	05.12.13	04.03.14	25.03.14	07.04.14	12.05.14

Title & NIA Bill Number	First Stage	Second Stage	Comm. Stage to Conclude	Report Ordered to be Printed	CS	FCS	Final Stage	Royal Assent
Health and Social Care (Amendment) Bill 27/11-15	16.09.13	24.09.13	11.12.13	04.12.13	20.01.14	28.01.14	11.02.14	11.04.14
Local Government Bill 28/11-15	23.09.13	01.10.13	20.02.14	20.02.14	18.03.14 & 19.03.14	01.04.14	08.04.14	12.05.14
Road Races (Amendment) Bill 29/11-15	18.11.13	26.11.13	/	/	2.12.13	9.12.13	10.12.13	17.01.14
Reservoirs Bill 31/11-15	20.01.14	04.02.14	04.07.14	24.06.14				
Budget Bill 32/11-15	10.02.14	11.02.14	/	/	17.02.14	18.02.14	24.02.14	19.03.14
Legal Aid and Coroners' Courts Bill 33/11-15	31.03.14	08.04.14	20.06.14	18.06.14	16.09.14	30.09.14	13.10.14	17.11.14
Work and Families Bill 34/11-15	28.04.14	12.05.14	30.11.14	08.10.14	11.11.14	24.11.14	02.12.14	08.01.15
Road Traffic (Amendment) Bill 35/11-15	12.05.14	27.05.14	27.03.15					
Budget (No.2) Bill 36/11-15	09.06.14	10.06.14	/	/	16.06.14	17.06.14	30.06.14	16.07.14
Justice Bill 37/11-15	16.06.14	24.06.14	27.03.15					
Education Bill 38/11-16	06.10.14	14.10.14	/	/	21.10.14	11.11.14	17.11.14	11.12.14
Insolvency (Amendment) Bill 39/11-16	07.10.14	10.11.14	13.03.15					
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Food Hygiene (Ratings) Bill 41/11-16	03.11.14	11.11.14	08.05.15					
Pensions Bill 42/11-16	10.11.14	18.11.14	26.03.15	19.02.15				
Regeneration Bill 43/11-16	08.12.14	20.01.15	28.05.15					
Budget Bill 45/11-16	09.02.15	16.02/15	/	/	17.02.15	23.02.15	24.02.15	

Title & NIA Bill Number	First Stage	Second Stage	Comm. Stage to Conclude	Report Ordered to be Printed	CS	FCS	Final Stage	Royal Assent
Special Educational Needs and Disability Bill	02.03.15							

2011-2016 Mandate
Non-Executive Bills

Title & Bill Number	First Stage	Second Stage	Comm. Stage to Conclude	Report Ordered to be Printed	CS	FCS	Final Stage	Royal Assent
Road Traffic (Speed Limits) Bill 25/11-15	17.06.13 Bill fell. Re-introduced as Bill 30/11-15 (see below)							
Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Further Provisions and Support for Victims) Bill 26/11-15	24.06.13	23.09.13 & 24.09.13	11.04.14	11.04.14	20.10.14	01.12.14	09.12.14	13.01.15
Road Traffic (Speed Limits) Bill 30/11-15	09.12.13	17.02.15	15.04.15					
Children's Services Co-operation Bill 44/11-16	08.12.14	26.01.15	03.07.15					

/ Bill progressing by accelerated passage

** Please note that any bills that received Royal Assent in the previous session have been removed from the table.