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<i>Minister for Regional Development</i>	Mr Conor Murphy
<i>Minister for Social Development</i>	Ms Margaret Ritchie
<i>Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development</i>	Ms Michelle Gildernew
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<i>Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister</i>	Mr Jeffrey Donaldson
	Mr Gerry Kelly

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Monday 23 June 2008

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

ASSEMBLY BUSINESS

Mr Attwood: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. At the start of business on Tuesday 17 June, you said:

“I wish to inform the Assembly that the application for judicial review to which Mr Attwood referred, and any allegation of bad faith or discrimination, has been withdrawn by the applicants.” — [*Official Report, Bound Volume 31, p303, col 2*].

That concerned a judicial review case against you and the Assembly Commission. As I understand it, it is correct that the application for judicial review was withdrawn; however, will you seek clarification about and confirm whether the allegation of bad faith or discrimination has also been withdrawn? It is important that the House be kept fully and accurately informed about this matter.

Mr Speaker: The Member raised this matter on a previous occasion, and he knows that it is not a point of order. I have allowed the Member some latitude on this matter, and I am not prepared to say anything further, or take any more points of order, about it. It is a matter for the Assembly Commission, which is dealing with it.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE BUSINESS

Libraries Bill

Royal Assent

Mr Speaker: I will try again. I inform Members that the Libraries Bill has received Royal Assent. The Libraries Act (Northern Ireland) 2008 became law on 17 June 2008.

Health and Social Care (Reform) Bill

First Stage

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Mr McGimpsey): I beg to introduce the Health and Social Care (Reform) Bill [NIA 21/07], which is a Bill to make changes to the administrative structure for health and social care and for connected purposes.

Bill passed First Stage and ordered to be printed.

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

Budget (No. 2) Bill

Further Consideration Stage

Mr Speaker: I remind Members that under Standing Order 35(2), the Further Consideration Stage of a Bill is restricted to debating any further amendments that are tabled to the Bill. As no amendments have been tabled, there is no opportunity to discuss the Budget (No.2) Bill today. Members will, of course, be able to have a full debate at the Bill's Final Stage. The Further Consideration Stage of the Bill is, therefore, concluded. The Bill stands referred to the Speaker.

Child Maintenance Bill

Further Consideration Stage

Mr Speaker: I remind Members that under Standing Order 35(2), the Further Consideration Stage of a Bill is restricted to debating any further amendments that are tabled to the Bill. As no amendments have been tabled, there is no opportunity to discuss the Child Maintenance Bill today. Members will, of course, be able to have a full debate at the Bill's Final Stage. The Further Consideration Stage of the Bill is, therefore, concluded. The Bill stands referred to the Speaker.

Social Security Benefits Up-rating Order (Northern Ireland) 2008

The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie):
I beg to move

That the Social Security Benefits Up-rating Order (Northern Ireland) 2008 be approved.

The uprating Order is an annual Order that increases rates of contributory and non-contributory benefits, together with the various premiums that form part of income-related benefits. As usual, the increases are based on changes to the relevant price indicators over the 12 months ending in September. Most social security benefits rise in the usual way in line with the retail prices index, which this year is 3·9%. Income-related benefits — income support, housing benefit and income-based jobseekers's allowance — are increased by the Rossi index, which sets the increase at 2·3% this year.

The basic state pension is, and will remain, the foundation of pensioners' incomes, and this year it rises by £3·40 a week to £90·70 for single pensioners and by £5·45 for couples to £145·05 a week. Increases in pension credits mean that no single pensioner will need to live on less than £124·05 a week, and couples need not live on less than £189·35 a week.

The Order provides extra money for disabled people and carers and those who are of working age. Child-related allowances, paid in the income-related benefits, are increased in parallel with child-tax credits. From April, the allowance paid for a child who is dependent on income-related benefits increased by £5·14 a week to £52·59, which is a rise of almost 11%.

The uprating provides an opportunity for us to deal with anomalies and make the system simpler. The single-person rate for income support and jobseeker's allowance is now the same for all 16- to 24-year-olds. For the relatively small number of 16-year-olds and 17-year-olds who claim, that amounts to an increase of £12·30, raising their weekly benefit from £35·65 to £47·95. The change will give extra help to a small number of vulnerable teenagers, as well as simplifying the benefit structure.

My Department has no power to set different benefit rates for Northern Ireland, and is empowered to uprate benefits only to the same rates as in Great Britain.

The total cost of uprating benefits for this year is approximately £150 million. I am sure that all Members will wish to ensure that people in Northern Ireland, including some of the most vulnerable, will be able to receive these new higher rates of benefit.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development (Mr Simpson): The Committee for Social Development considered the Social Security

Benefits Up-rating Order (Northern Ireland) 2008 at its meeting on 13 March 2008. These regulations are a parity measure, and set out the increased rates of contributory and non-contributory benefits in order to reflect changes in the rate of inflation. The Committee recommends that the regulations be confirmed by the Assembly.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Social Security Benefits Up-rating Order (Northern Ireland) 2008 (SR 2008 No. 92) be approved.

Occupational Pension Schemes (Levies) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2008

The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie):
I beg to move

That the Occupational Pension Schemes (Levies) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2008 (SR 2008 No. 145) be approved.

The Pensions Act 2004 set up on 6 April 2005 a UK-wide pension protection fund in order to provide compensation for members of eligible occupational pension schemes where the sponsoring employer is insolvent and the scheme has insufficient assets to pay benefits at the fund's compensation levels. The pension protection fund is funded through an annual levy that is charged to all qualifying defined benefit occupational pension schemes. The administration on eligible schemes means that they, rather than the general taxpayer, will fund the board's administration costs.

The proposed regulations amend the Occupational Pension Schemes (Levies) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005 in order to provide for the rate at which the pension protection fund's administration levy is payable in respect of 2008-09 and in subsequent years. The amount payable by an individual scheme depends on the number of members in the scheme. The smallest schemes, those with fewer than 12 members, pay £42 per year. Larger schemes pay a levy per member on a sliding scale, subject to a prescribed minimum.

The combined effect of the regulations, and the corresponding Great Britain regulations, is to set the levy at a level that is necessary to collect £22.6 million to cover running costs of £19.9 million, and to recover a £2.7 million deficit from 2007-08.

I am sure that Members will agree that it is important to ensure that the pension protection fund has the resources to enable it to carry out its very important task efficiently and effectively.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development (Mr Simpson): The Committee for Social Development has considered the Occupational Pension Schemes (Levies) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2008 at its meeting on 3 April 2008. The regulations are a parity measure, and, as the Minister said, they will provide an increase in the rates of levy in order to cover the running costs of the board of the pension protection fund. The Committee recommends that the regulations be confirmed by the Assembly.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Occupational Pension Schemes (Levies) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2008 (SR 2008 No. 145) be approved.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Further Education Lecturers' Dispute

Mr Speaker: I have received notice from the Minister for Employment and Learning that he wishes to make a statement regarding the further education lecturers' dispute.

12.15 pm

The Minister for Employment and Learning (Sir Reg Empey): Members will be aware of yesterday's joint statement from the Association of Northern Ireland Colleges and the University and College Union announcing an immediate suspension of industrial action and action by college employers to remove any threat of staff being suspended. It has been a long-running dispute, which has been debated in the House several times. Indeed, over the past 13 or 14 months, I have received copious amounts of correspondence from Members on the issue.

The dispute was inherited, and it arose from the decision of Her Majesty's Government to impose a pay policy throughout the United Kingdom on public-sector workers, which includes further education lecturers. In fact, they are the only group of education workers in the United Kingdom who are covered and affected directly by the dispute.

I welcome the significant step forward in what has been a prolonged and damaging dispute. At the end of last year, I took steps to help to mediate in the dispute, with the appointment of Sir Joseph Pilling. However, the proposals that emerged from the negotiations arranged by Sir Joseph Pilling were rejected. Since then, I have urged college employers and unions to re-engage in discussions in a further effort to find a resolution.

Last Thursday, I had a lengthy meeting with the union, which coincided with the employers issuing a letter threatening to suspend college lecturers if they failed to comply with requests to honour all aspects of their contracts. Although there has been no recent strike action, there has been action short of that in some colleges, which has impacted on a series of important information-gathering reports. Furthermore, no help was given with the recruitment process for the academic year commencing September 2007.

I am delighted that both sides have affirmed their determination to address the matters again. I fully appreciate the difficulties imposed by the constraints of the public-sector pay policy and the extent to which it has proved to be a stumbling block to a resolution. Earlier this year, the Executive concluded, with reluctance, that Northern Ireland would have to abide by that pay policy. Despite those constraints, I remain

confident that, with goodwill on both sides, it will be possible to identify an acceptable way forward.

The involvement of the Labour Relations Agency is a positive step. Although the agency is an NDPB of my Department, it treasures its independence and will not be influenced by the Department or anyone else in the advice and help that it offers to employers and employees. I assure honourable Members that my Department will fully support those discussions in any way possible.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning (Ms S Ramsey): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his statement and for his commitment to finding a resolution to the dispute. I asked that the dispute be put back on the Committee's agenda because I was concerned about the approach that was being taken by employers, which I did not think was an appropriate way to do business in 2008. Therefore, I welcome the news that there will be breathing space for further work. Have any sanctions been imposed, or disciplinary action been taken, against staff in further education colleges? Will the Minister provide a timetable for a resolution to the dispute?

The Minister for Employment and Learning: At this point in time, no action has been taken against staff. The letter stated that action would be taken, but I am not aware of any lecturer being subject to disciplinary action on the issue.

Given the imminent summer break, there was anxiety that individuals who are suspended at this stage would have no pay during the summer months and no solution until the autumn.

College employers and the unions decided to withdraw the letter that threatened to take action, and the ongoing low-level industrial action has been suspended. Furthermore, all the necessary information that has been requested of staff by the colleges will be provided, and the Labour Relations Agency will be asked to assist. Moreover, a three-month negotiating period will begin on 1 September 2008, which will provide an opportunity to consider the pay settlement for 2008-09. That settlement has not been considered during any previous agreements, and it must be addressed.

I pay tribute to Sir Joseph Pilling's efforts. Unfortunately, his proposal was unacceptable to the trade unions, and several ballots — one of which was held approximately one week ago — rejected the proposal. The wage negotiations will focus on the 2008-09 pay deal and, of course, the overall situation must be resolved. Members will know that, had we been left to our own devices and had the public-sector pay restraint not existed, we could probably have settled the dispute for half of 1% additional in September 2007.

However, that is not the current situation, and it is important to support the negotiations fully and hope

that they result in a positive outcome. The Department is involved only because of its obligation to enforce public-sector pay. Industrial relations issues are better dealt with by employers and employees; departmental involvement is not normally advisable.

I am glad that the employers and the unions are meeting; we have advocated that since the beginning of the dispute. I discussed that matter with those groups on 19 June and made it clear that I will not, for a third time, approach the Executive to suggest breaching pay policy; that will not provide a resolution, and, furthermore, it could jeopardise the Executive's spending programmes.

I support the steps that the employers and unions are taking, and I hope that they are afforded the time and space necessary to resolve this long-running and damaging dispute.

Mr Newton: I welcome the Minister's statement. The educational profession will, undoubtedly, breathe a huge sigh of relief at the developments. The Assembly welcomed the Minister's initiative to appoint Sir Joseph Pilling to liaise, work and produce a report. I urge the Minister to be innovative in settling the holistic aspect of the dispute. It is important that we all —

Mr Speaker: The Member must ask a question.

Mr Newton: I do not have a question; I want to welcome the statement. The trade unions' goodwill gesture, which the Minister mentioned, is welcome and must be built on. The Association of Northern Ireland Colleges and the trade unions should continue their engagement. This side of the House welcomes a resolution.

Mr B McCrea: I warmly welcome the Minister's statement. It is important to realise that, when a difficult situation arises, everyone tries their level best to sort it out. The Minister has discussed this matter with his Executive colleagues — will he confirm to the House that he received the complete support of the Executive for his proposed way forward? What steps will he take to arrive at a satisfactory resolution of the dispute?

The Minister for Employment and Learning: I shall first deal with the points that were made by the Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning, Mr Newton. It is my belief that the employers and the unions will get together with the Labour Relations Agency. As is normal, that agency will do its best to bridge the gaps that exist and help to facilitate an agreement. Flowing from that, it may be that suggestions will be put to the Department.

Mr Newton called on the Department to be innovative. The Department will have to see what proposals are put to it. I assure Mr Newton that the

Department will do all that it can to resolve matters. The only reason that the Department has become involved is because of implications for public-sector pay policy.

I turn to the questions that were posed by the Member for Lagan Valley Mr Basil McCrea. I brought this matter to the attention of Executive colleagues on several occasions, because of the public-sector pay dimension. On at least two occasions, the Executive have taken the view that we cannot breach public-sector pay policy because of the repercussive effects on other budgetary issues in Northern Ireland. A clear Executive position was expressed on at least two occasions. I have little doubt that, had I raised the matter again, that position would have stayed the same. It is to be hoped that we can put that behind us and concentrate in the months ahead on finding a solution that will satisfy the lecturers' needs.

I wish to put on record that those education workers are vital to our long-term economic development policy and to the implementation of a range of social and economic policies. I am sure that the Chairperson and the Deputy Chairperson of the Committee will agree with that. We have placed a great deal of emphasis on essential skills, upgrading skills and addressing the needs of hard-to-reach clients. The lecturers have an important role to play as changes in policy for their sector take effect.

The days are gone when the colleges taught the courses that they decided to teach. It is now a demanded service, which forms a vital part of our economic strategy. It is important that the lecturers be rewarded, motivated and valued. Sadly, we have been caught up in a national dispute that was not of our making. I hope that we can find a way through, because it is in everyone's interests — particularly the students, who are the beneficiaries — that the colleges are able to provide the skills necessary to obtain good, rewarding jobs in future.

I assure Members that that aim will be at the forefront of my mind. However, in common with everyone else, we were put in this position by the Government's pay policy. Will that change, or will it be possible for the Government to maintain their current pay policy? The Chancellor is trying hard, but the current rate of inflation will make it very hard to keep public-sector pay rises below a 2% ceiling. That is something that we will have to discuss on another occasion. Let us take what we have got, work with it, and try to deliver a solution.

Ms Lo: I thank the Minister for his statement and welcome the agreement of the union and the employees not to continue the industrial action. The Minister is right: the further-education sector has gone through a great deal of change, and morale has been

very low because of this long and damaging dispute. Is the Minister confident that, with the help of the Labour Relations Agency, the dispute will be resolved in the next few months and before the start of the new academic year in September?

12.30 pm

The Minister for Employment and Learning: As the Member rightly said, the sector has witnessed many changes. In the past year, 16 colleges have been amalgamated to create six. Changes on that scale in any organisation produce anomalies and difficulties, and it would be foolish to deny that. There has been an impact on morale. To my knowledge, that group of workers has never been on strike before, although seven days of strike action were taken before devolution was restored. Those workers lost money as a result. Any dispute between an employer and its workforce is bound to have a negative impact on morale. The trouble is that such a negative impact can express itself through the organisation performing less well than we would like. That is always a risk.

The Member asked whether I am confident. As the Member knows well, there is no absolute guarantee of success, but I am as confident as I can be. The expertise and skills of the Labour Relations Agency, the fact that it is engaged in the work that it is there to do, and the fact that both sides have been willing to connect with it are all positive points. I am, therefore, confident that we can see the beginning of the end of that long-running dispute.

COMMITTEE BUSINESS

Stranmillis and St Mary's University Colleges

Mr Speaker: 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 wish to speak will have five minutes.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning (Ms S Ramsey): I beg to move

That this Assembly calls on the Minister for Employment and Learning to delay the introduction of a new funding model for Stranmillis and St Mary's University Colleges to allow sufficient time for the consideration of the future funding and educational options for the two institutions, in view of the Committee for Employment and Learning's stakeholder review of teacher training.

Go raibh maith agat. At the outset, it is important to state that the Committee agreed to table the motion at its meeting on 4 June. However, it was divided. Eight Committee members were present, six of whom voted yes and two of whom voted no.

It is also important to state that the Committee's problems and issues with the way in which the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) is reforming teacher education are entirely to do with the process, or rather the lack of process that has been followed to date. I am sure that all Committee members will have different views on the best way in which to structure teacher education.

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

The problem is that the Committee has not had the opportunity to hear the range of arguments and information on the matter from key stakeholders. I venture that the Executive Committee have not heard the full range of issues and arguments either. That is why my Committee has formally launched a stakeholders' review of teacher education, the objective of which is:

"To collate and consider the options and views of those involved in, and affected by, proposed changes to teacher education and to produce a report of recommendations to the Minister of Employment and Learning."

The Committee will take its first formal evidence in that review when it hears from representatives of Queen's University on Wednesday.

The review will not make any judgements on what the Minister should, or should not, do about future funding. The Committee simply asks for time to listen to and consider evidence from stakeholders. Today, we will hear many statistics about teachers' difficulties in finding work. The fact is that many statistics on the issue exist, and they have not been fully aired and challenged. The Committee's review will allow that

process to happen. Statistics on teacher employment comprise only one element of the issue. We are talking about the future of two of our highest-quality third-level teaching institutions.

It is important that I outline the sequence of events that led the Committee to table the motion. The Minister asked for the opportunity to brief the Committee in closed session on his proposal to introduce a new funding model for the teacher-education colleges.

That meeting took place on 12 March 2008. The critical aspect of it was the Minister's statement that, although a new method of funding for teacher-training colleges is needed, he is open-minded about future options. Importantly, the Minister also asked that the Committee be involved and that it assist in processing policy options. The Committee is now striving to do that.

The Committee took evidence from representatives of both Stranmillis and St Mary's University Colleges on 16 April 2008. During that meeting, the Committee learned how far the proposals for changes to the structures of funding had advanced. The proposed merger of Stranmillis University College with Queen's University was also raised at that meeting. Members of the Committee were told that there would be sufficient time for full consideration of the relevant options. However, the chairman of the board of governors of Stranmillis University College appeared on news bulletins the next evening stating that the merger was effectively a done deal.

Rarely have I encountered such anger in a Statutory Committee of the Assembly as I did regarding the manner in which the process has been handled. The Committee learned that not even the Minister had been made aware of the detailed level of negotiations that had taken place between the two institutions. Indeed, the Minister forwarded to the Committee a copy of his correspondence with the chairman of the board of governors of Stranmillis University College. In that correspondence, the Minister reminded the chairman that due process must be followed if the merger is to be successful. There has even been confusion about the precise nature of the legislative vehicle that the Department will have to introduce to facilitate that merger. Surely the fact that the Minister was kept in the dark proves that the reform process has moved too quickly without due process being followed and without recognition of the democratic structures and political institutions.

Teacher education has been on the policy agenda for many years. Importantly, although policy work was conducted and options were considered during direct rule, no direct rule Minister made any difficult decisions. The mechanisms that allow for full consideration and local accountability are now in

place. However, the pace of reform is not allowing for adequate consultation and scrutiny.

It is important to note some of the issues that were raised in the key policy reviews that have been conducted in the past few years. The Taylor and Usher Report of 2004, 'Aspects of Initial Teacher Education in Northern Ireland', examined issues such as diversification, population projections, and costs. Colleges were encouraged to diversify, and, indeed, Stranmillis University College, with its early childhood studies, and St Mary's University College, with its liberal arts degree, have both developed successful courses in that regard. Those two courses fit perfectly with tackling social disadvantage, as outlined in the Programme for Government. However, it appears that both colleges are being penalised for diversifying.

Taylor and Usher also discussed improving the ratios of teachers to pupils and the potential for specialised educational delivery, such as improving the provision of education for children with autism. The Osler Report of 2005 also assessed the potential for teacher growth areas in subjects such as citizenship and modern languages. Indeed, the Minister has indicated that he wishes to explore building the capacity of the colleges in areas such as continuous professional development.

Since devolution, the Committee has worked with a range of stakeholders from the field of education and training. Committee members have made it clear that they want local proven capacity and capability to be protected. The Committee does not want capacity to be reduced, only to be required at a later date. There is evidence of such a situation having arisen in Dublin, when a decision was made some time ago to close and sell off a college. It is very difficult — if not impossible — to rebuild quality capacity after it has been removed.

The motion aims to allow the necessary time to be given for the full consideration of those topics and to allow the Committee to assist the Minister with reform. Taylor and Usher also recognised the difficulties of producing comparative costs for each teacher. That is the reason that further time must be allowed for a full analysis of the financial statistics that are often quoted in this policy debate.

As I mentioned, the Committee does not have hard-and-fast views on what constitutes the best teacher-education model for the future. I stress that the Committee wants value for money to be delivered in this policy area. Given the failure under direct rule to deal with teacher education, the Committee asks simply for due process to be facilitated in the democratic institutions.

A delay in the funding model will not increase public expenditure. Rather, it will allow both institutions to operate as they have been in recent

years; that is, as distinctive, high-quality institutions that produce excellent teachers for our education system and that add significantly to the local communities in which they operate.

I look forward to the Minister's response to the debate because I know that he has been involved in intensive negotiations on the matter. Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle.

Mr Newton: This is an important motion. I am a member of the Committee for Employment and Learning, and, as the Chairperson said, the future funding and educational options for Stranmillis and St Mary's have come before the Committee and caused concern across the political make-up of the Committee.

Northern Ireland is approaching a time when extensive discussions on the matter are required and when decisions must be made in the best interests of the children, the provision and professionalism of teacher education and the economy. I am sure that all Members are concerned that we achieve the highest standard of education for all children and young people, and that the education and levels of motivation to achieve their full potential and ensure a bright future are the foundation stones on which educational provision will be built.

Everyone knows about the demographic trends and the influence that those trends will have on the future provision of teacher education. The population of school-age children will decline rapidly in the coming years. In that context, we have to implement a demand-led strategy at the same time as ensuring that the available provision is of the highest quality and one that will produce teachers with excellent qualifications, good teaching practice experience and bright career prospects.

So often, we have encouraged intelligent and well-qualified A-level students who have gone into the teaching profession, yet the potential for them to secure a career is diminished by the over-provision from the teacher-training colleges, which are not aligned to the demographic trends.

The projected need for teacher numbers will fall. That is becoming increasingly evident, and it will impact on the primary sector and lead into the second-tier provision. Under the circumstances, it is difficult to argue for the full retention of the status quo. In determining future policy, synergy must be identified between the need for a professionally equipped teacher supply and a need to address the scale and costs of future provisions.

The Assembly's thinking should be driven by the efficient and effective use of the public's money. It is not an option to merely do nothing on the matter, and the Committee for Employment and Learning has already received evidence from Stranmillis and St Mary's. In both cases, their concern was evident,

although Committee members have been concerned about the process entered into between Stranmillis and Queen's University regarding a potential merger. That has already been mentioned by the Committee Chairperson. A few eyebrows were raised on that issue — especially since the Minister was unaware of the merger dinner that was held to commemorate the done deal and the fact that senior civil servants were not involved in the process. That is a totally unacceptable position.

The Department of Education and the Department for Employment and Learning are carrying out a review of teacher education. In a reply to a question for written answer — AQW 6038/08 — from my colleague Mr Ross on the review of education, the Minister of Education said that the review was almost complete and that she and Sir Reg Empey, the Minister for Employment and Learning, will consider carefully the way forward on all aspects of teacher education in the coming months. They will consider matters such as the introduction of a bursary scheme to support teachers continuing professional development and the way forward on all phases of teacher education — initial teacher education; induction, early and continuing professional development, and so on.

There is a need to look at the oversupply of teachers and to ensure that teacher education is of the highest quality and can be benchmarked favourably against the standards of excellence anywhere in the world and that any future system will enjoy the confidence of the teaching profession throughout Northern Ireland.

12.45 pm

Mr B McCrea: I oppose the motion, mindful of the good intentions of my colleagues on the Committee for Employment and Learning. The motion fails to recognise the urgent need for a new funding model for Stranmillis and St Mary's University Colleges, and it fails to recognise the imperative need for the Minister for Employment and Learning to act now to provide a sustainable funding arrangement for teacher education in Northern Ireland.

Year on year, the Minister of Education has repeatedly reduced the number of teachers required. The cumulative effect of that has obvious implications for our teacher training colleges. The Minister for Employment and Learning must respond to the demand figures produced by the Department of Education. That reduced demand has revealed a further problem — the funding formula appears to give more money to colleges for producing fewer teachers. That unsustainable position must be addressed. Some people feared that the new funding formula would result in the closure of one, or both, of those university colleges; some felt that that was a long-term ambition of the establishment. To my knowledge, that is not the intention of the Department.

There are prolonged and ongoing difficulties in resolving the education debate, and I can understand why some Members might be concerned that we now enter a similar situation. However, those Members need not be concerned. I hope that the Minister for Employment and Learning will take a somewhat different approach to that taken by the Education Minister, seeking to engage, inform and build consensus on a cross-cutting and important issue.

Almost every week, we hear from the Minister of Education that we must accept change. The UUP accepts the need for change — change is all around us and we are all the better for it. However, change does not take place in a vacuum, it seldom goes unchallenged, and it usually has unforeseen side effects. Those who are being asked to make changes can be sure of one thing: it will not be easy. Those involved are not sure whether those changes will be of any benefit to them. It is important that we explain to those affected why change is necessary. We must sell the benefits of change and we must take time to understand and address the concerns of everyone who might be affected.

Through discussions with stakeholders, I have sought to understand the situation as best I can. I was pleased to discuss matters with St Mary's about its liberal arts course — and I confess that that was, beforehand, something of a mystery to me. I was pleased to learn about the important work that colleges do in encouraging participation, and I have been made aware of those colleges' fears regarding the funding formula. However, I understand — and the Committee Chair did mention it — that the Minister, the colleges and the Departments have had positive and constructive discussions and perhaps the Minister will be in a position to tell us more.

It is worth mentioning for the record that the Minister of Education is responsible for policy in this matter. It is she who sets the pupil:teacher ratios, the curriculum, and the rationalisation of the school estates. Furthermore, over recent years, she has forecast a reduction in the number of teachers required. We must address that and the 50,000 empty desks.

Although there are shortages in STEM-based subjects — and perhaps even in some languages — which will allow a modest increase in initial teacher education, the overriding concern is the need to develop some form of activity that will maintain the status of university colleges as teacher-training colleges. Although diversification subjects are useful as part of the solution, they do have limitations. One could anticipate the use of professional development courses, but that is in the gift of the Department of Education.

When it comes to a situation of this sensitivity, I can think of no better person than the Minister for Employment and Learning to handle it. I believe that he will find a way forward for the betterment of all concerned.

The UUP has heard the change of beat in the education debate and looks forward to playing its constructive part in a four-party mandatory coalition.

Mr Attwood: I acknowledge that the issue has been very healthy for the Committee. It is a good example — if not one of the best examples since the Assembly was set up — of a Committee punching at its weight and fulfilling its statutory responsibilities of oversight and calling a Minister to account. The Assembly can learn something, generally, by looking at how the Committee has handled the matter, even though it has created some tensions, as one can hear in the background.

I look forward to hearing what the Minister has to say because I want to hear that there has been some change in student numbers and in funding for Stranmillis University College and St Mary's University College. However, although there may or may not be adjustments in those two matters, I want to hear the Minister addressing some of the four fundamentals that lie behind the motion and the issue.

The first fundamental is the future of teacher training. It is not a full argument for Basil McCrea to say that numbers of students in teacher training are reducing, and that the Department of Education has been responsible for that. The full picture is that for the past five years, the Department for Employment and Learning and the Department of Education have been conducting a review of the future of teacher training, and that review has not concluded.

Is it fair to teacher training in the North, and to Stranmillis University College and St Mary's University College in particular, that five years after a review commenced, it has not concluded? Earlier this year, when one of the colleges involved sent a submission to the Department, that submission was not even acknowledged. Is it appropriate, or fair, for the Minister to announce a change in the student funding formula earlier this year when there had not been any announcements about the overall review of teacher training? That is the key issue. Those colleges have a big role to play in the future of teacher training, especially if their responsibilities are to include addressing all the needs of students and pupils in the North. That is a fundamental issue that must be addressed by the motion.

Secondly, St Mary's University College is one of the most successful teacher training and liberal arts institutions in Northern Ireland. That is not just speculation from a Member for the West Belfast

constituency; it is hard fact. Why is it that a college such as St Mary's University College, which is second in attracting students from the lowest economic backgrounds in Northern Ireland and Britain, has had questions raised about its viability? Why is it that a college for which students need more points for entry than are required for the University of Ulster, and which is not far behind the level of points required for entry to Queen's University, is not being promoted, protected and valued?

Why is a college that has a 91% student satisfaction rate — the highest in the North — having any issue raised about its future? The truth is that St Mary's University College is a model that should be protected and enhanced in the future — not have questions asked about its viability now and in coming years. That is the second fundamental issue that the Minister must address. A college with that profile and success should be protected in the future, rather than have further question marks over it.

Thirdly, there is the West Belfast issue. The Minister knows from his previous ministerial experience, when he received the West Belfast Task Force report, how important a college like St Mary's University College is to the economic community and for providing access to education for people in that constituency. In the future review, both by the Department and by the Committee, I want that to be centre stage. How does one protect such a college, given its importance to the constituency of West Belfast?

My final point is this: senior people who are involved in the issue told me that the original proposals from the Department were intended to provoke a situation and that the Department did not want to have a half-baked mini-university on the Falls Road. That is not a good attitude to St Mary's University College or teacher training or Stranmillis. That has to change.

Ms Lo: We are all waiting for the Department of Education and DEL's review of education. It is frustrating that it has taken so long for that review to be published. The Taylor report of 2004 and the Osler review of 2005 identified the challenges facing initial teacher education (ITE): demographic changes are leading to declining demand for, and overprovision of, teachers. Every Member has heard complaints from constituents that newly qualified teachers are unable to secure teaching jobs and that some are unemployed and forced to apply for jobseeker's allowance. It is very demoralising for a young person who has been through three or four years of higher education to be unable to get a job.

The new funding model has obviously put a lot of pressure on the two colleges. It is bound to have had some impact on the decision by Stranmillis University

College to rush to agree to the proposed merger. Senior teaching staff in Stranmillis, who are my South Belfast constituents, told me that they heard all the rumours about the proposed merger, but no one told them officially and they first heard the decision announced on the radio. There was a lack of consultation with staff, the Department and the Committee.

The Alliance Party wants to see a wider debate and an examination of overall provision of ITE in Northern Ireland. At present, five institutions provide 590 student places — that is only the size of a primary school. There must be duplication of resources in that arrangement, and it is unsustainable. There are many changes —

Mr B McCrea: Does the Member suggest a merger of the two colleges?

Ms Lo: The Taylor report provides for a fourth option: a fully integrated or federated structure, with overarching responsibility for all the providers of ITE.

We are going through many changes. There is widespread political consensus in Northern Ireland that there must be change, and change in the transfer procedure is proceeding. We need to take a wider view. We have the opportunity to go further and include in the debate all the institutions, together with the Departments, and bring together all the bodies to provide a single structure so that there is more efficiency and integrated education.

However, as the Taylor report suggests, we must be determined to break down barriers and prejudices in Northern Ireland, so that we can all work together, teach our children together and embrace a better and shared future.

Mr Ross: I consider that the Committee's approach is sensible. It will ensure that a comprehensive review of teacher-training models will be conducted, and how that will impact on St Mary's and Stranmillis.

As my colleague Mr Newton stated, decisions must be taken. It is a shame that the review is taking so long.

1.00 pm

There is little doubt that teacher training in Northern Ireland must be reformed. According to a written answer to me from the Minister of Education, in the region of 7,000 young teachers cannot find a job in Northern Ireland. Each year, we train young people — at a significant cost — to be teachers. However, if those young people want to follow a career in that profession, they must travel to England, Scotland or Wales to find positions.

There is an article in today's 'Irish News' about the crisis facing newly qualified teachers. The article states:

"Fewer than 40 of 800 graduate teachers got jobs in Catholic schools last year ... Figures show that a relatively small number of graduates secured employment in the Catholic sector and most were only awarded temporary contracts."

It goes on to state:

"Just 38 of these gained employment in Catholic schools — 18 securing full-time posts and 20 being called in to cover maternity leave or secondments."

The article continues:

"Of the 229 new jobs in primary schools last year only 12 were given to newly qualified staff."

Despite those figures, the Minister of Education insists that there is no requirement to decrease the number of teachers who are trained at St Mary's. In fact, she recently said that additional teacher-training places were required there. Furthermore, the Minister is unwilling to introduce an induction year, which would allow these young teachers to gain experience in a teaching post before applying for full-time positions.

We cannot continue to train so many young people for a profession in which they have no prospect of getting a job. Therefore, reform of teacher training is necessary. However, there are concerns about the manner in which that process of reform is being conducted — in particular the way in which the Stranmillis and Queen's University merger has come about.

As the Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning said in proposing the motion, both Stranmillis and St Mary's are widely recognised as first-class teacher-training institutions. Both institutions are very important to the areas in which they are situated, and both have a distinctive ethos. Although a merger of Queen's University and Stranmillis may be in the best interest of the long-term future of Stranmillis University College, all members of the Committee have raised questions and concerns about how the merger process was conducted.

The Minister briefed the Committee in closed session on the future of teacher training in Northern Ireland on 12 March. At that stage, the Committee was asked to become involved in the process. On 16 April, representatives from Stranmillis and St Mary's presented evidence to the Committee.

During that evidence session, the Committee learned of the impact of proposed changes, in particular the advanced nature of a possible merger of Queen's University and Stranmillis. After questioning from my colleague Mr Spratt and, I believe, Mr Attwood, the chairman of Stranmillis University College's board of governors — Mr Steven Costello — left the Committee in little doubt that the decision to merge had already been taken at a high level by the two institutions. Indeed, that was confirmed the following evening when Mr Costello announced that the merger was to proceed.

A significant step such as that requires detailed discussion, not least on the legal framework in which the merger would be conducted under the Colleges of Education Order (Northern Ireland) 2005. However,

the Minister for Employment and Learning stated that he was unaware of the merger, reiterating that such a merger would require legislation in this House, and that there was no done deal.

However, that was not the impression given by Mr Costello, who is either certain that the merger will go ahead or naive in not recognising the legislative process required before such a merger could proceed. Indeed, not only had meetings taken place between officials from the Department and the institutions — meetings between the two institutions had been taking place for some time — but, as Mr Newton said, a dinner took place on 26 May to celebrate the merger.

I have already stated that a merger may be the best option. However, there are genuine concerns over the impact on the ethos of Stranmillis University College, given the secular ethos of Queen's University. There are also concerns about assets and staffing issues. Moreover, the Department, the Minister and the Committee have yet to see the business case for the merger, and they have received no assurance that the ethos of Stranmillis University College will be protected — a point that I have raised with the Minister before in the House.

Mr Attwood raised issues that concern St Mary's, such as projected student numbers, required teachers and the impact that a revised funding model will have on that institution. Those concerns must also be addressed.

The Committee has therefore decided that it should review the merger and discuss options with stakeholders and student bodies. That is a good approach to take. Ultimately, the Minister's decision may prove to be the correct one. However, we must ensure that the process adopted is the right one and that we achieve the right outcome for children, teachers and students, and for educational training in Northern Ireland.

Mrs McGill: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I declare an interest as a former resident of the parishes surrounding St Mary's and Stranmillis.

Therefore, I have a keen interest in the motion. I am a member of the Committee and I commend the other members, and the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson, for proposing this motion.

All joking aside, and thinking particularly of St Mary's, where I spent more time than at Stranmillis, the quality of teacher training at both institutions has been repeatedly mentioned in Committee and in the House. Members have been granted power over the future, and it would be unacceptable for us to lose St Mary's, which, as its mission statement makes clear, is dedicated to Catholic teacher training.

Mr Ross has mentioned the ethos of Stranmillis, and the threat faced by that college. I do not want either

college to lose its ethos. I welcome the fact that discussions are ongoing but, to repeat what has been said earlier, there are difficulties with that process.

When I first heard about the proposals I was concerned that there was a done deal, and I was worried about what would happen to St Mary's. There is a lot of talk about the number of teachers needed to meet the requirements of the pupil population. Nobody wants graduates to be unemployed. However, it is possible to address that issue.

In my time in both colleges, I had uniquely valuable, college-specific experiences. Therefore, the ethos of each college is tied into its role, whether the institution is Catholic, non-denominational or controlled. We must protect the particular culture, ethos and good quality training that they provide.

I am open to correction on the figure, but 'The Irish News' has been referred to, and I see that Stranmillis is funding £400 of the £440 it costs for distance learning at the University of Glasgow in the certificate in religious education that St Mary's provides. The religious education certificate enables Stranmillis graduates to teach in Catholic schools.

It is important that Members consider all the issues. The Minister for Employment and Learning recently attended a meeting of the Committee, during which the Chairperson questioned him about the delay in the funding model. I welcome the fact that the Minister appeared to have his ears open, and I think that he will be reasonable. The debate, therefore, is welcome. I hope that all the issues can be satisfactorily resolved. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr McClarty: The five teacher-training providers in Northern Ireland offer an outstanding service, which produces particularly high-quality teachers of whom we should all be proud. In comparison to other parts of the United Kingdom, we generate teachers who are extremely well-respected and who are crucial to our society and to our economy.

Our main priority should be to ensure that the high standards in all our teacher-training facilities are maintained and, indeed, built on. Having worked with my colleagues on the Committee for Employment and Learning and with the Minister, I know that, although some differences exist, our shared aim is to ensure the maintenance of those high standards.

As has been mentioned already, initial teacher training is the responsibility of the Department for Employment and Learning and the Department of Education. DEL is responsible for the funding and administration of teacher-training institutions, and the Department of Education is responsible for the determination of student-intake numbers. Although high standards are being produced, an anomaly currently exists in the way in which teacher training in

our two university colleges — St Mary's and Stranmillis — is funded.

The current funding model is based on a block-grant allocation, which is uplifted annually for inflation, with a deduction for student fees then applied to it. However, that model results in a situation whereby a reduction in student intake can result in an institution being allocated more of the block grant. The fewer the students, the more central funds are made available to an institution. That is, surely, not a defensible practice at a time when we are so concerned about increasing efficiency. Although I recognise the concerns of my colleagues on the Committee, the Ulster Unionist Party cannot support the motion.

In light of that anomaly, the Minister and his departmental officials have developed a revised teacher-demand-based funding methodology, which is based on the practice in similar institutions in England. The desirability of change is exemplified by the reducing intake numbers and the number of trained teachers currently seeking employment. As we have already heard, the number of teachers on the Northern Ireland substitute-teacher register is in the region of 7,000. The 2006 school census confirms that the school population is set to decline by 13,109 pupils by the academic year 2011-12, and there are 50,000 empty school desks. Those are compelling reasons why change is necessary.

If we do not change the funding model and respond to the need to reduce student numbers, we will be failing the taxpayer as well as new teachers, who will not be able to find a job. Failing to change could cost the Department for Employment and Learning millions of pounds every year and add to the already saturated teaching sector.

Diversification in the colleges has been discussed today. That policy served a valuable purpose when it was introduced in 1997, and it still does today. However, it would fundamentally change the character and ethos of both Stranmillis and St Mary's if we continue to allow them to increase their allocation of diversified places by the number of initial teacher-education places that are cut. Questions would be asked about the duplication of opportunities that are available elsewhere in higher education in Northern Ireland, and the specialised nature and high standards of the colleges could be jeopardised.

Changes to the funding and diversification models should guarantee the colleges' futures rather than jeopardise them. The Minister seeks to introduce a fit-for-purpose model that is transparent, open, and understood by all, and that guarantees the best use of public money while respecting both institutions' ethos.

Although it is correct to scrutinise the Minister on this crucial issue, we should also recognise that the

Minister has informed the Committee, his Executive colleagues, and the university colleges of his plans throughout the entire process. I am sure that he will continue to work with the Committee and to respect its input and any report that it produces. However, passing the motion would hurt the colleges. Change is needed — we cannot, and should not, shy away from that necessity. I oppose the motion.

Mr K Robinson: I declare an interest as a former student of Stranmillis University College, many years ago.

I was also involved in initial teacher interviews. I agree with my colleagues who spoke about the quality of students who entered the college and their standing — once they have completed their course — as being among the best prepared teachers in the United Kingdom.

1.15 pm

Although I recognise Members' concerns, the funding model for Stranmillis and St Mary's is neither sustainable nor defensible. Rather than being based on student numbers, the recurrent grant allocation of the colleges is calculated by uplifting the previous year's gross estimated requirement by the same percentage as that used for the universities with the student income fee deducted. Therefore, when there are fewer students, less fee income is deducted and the Department provides more central funds to the colleges — the fewer the students, the more the Department and the taxpayer are forced to pay, which is an indefensible position.

As several Members have mentioned, there is an over-provision of teachers — more than 7,000 teachers are seeking employment through the Northern Ireland substitute-teacher register, 30% of whom are under 30. No profession is sustainable in the long run without new blood, so that must be challenged. Therefore, the Department of Education is expected to reduce the student intake numbers incrementally over the next five years.

Continuing with the current funding model under those circumstances would potentially cost the Department for Employment and Learning millions of pounds. At a time when we have a Budget that somewhat relies on efficiency savings for feasibility, it could be considered negligent not to make a change. Equally, not reducing teacher numbers would be detrimental to those teachers who cannot find jobs, and to any students who enter the system. That could also add to the recognised problem of the brain drain from Northern Ireland.

It is part of the Minister for Employment and Learning's role to fit together the higher-education sector, the employment sector and the economy. In this instance, the Minister of Education, in her role of setting intake levels, must recognise those departmental and Executive goals.

Much has been made of diversification. Since 2005, it has become the practice for both colleges to seek approval to increase their allocation of diversified places by the number of initial teacher-education places that have been cut. With a speculated reduction in the number of initial teacher-education places, there could be a fundamental transformation of teacher-training colleges in Northern Ireland.

It is of paramount importance that teacher training be the main priority of colleges and that their expertise in those areas, which has been built up over generations, be maintained. Therefore, the Minister for Employment and Learning was correct to suggest a cap on the number of diversified places.

Some of the Members who spoke in the debate referred to the ethos of the two colleges, which is central to the role of both. Much understanding has gone into the fact that diversification would help colleges to address problems that they were suffering from at that level. However, we must look towards the future. If diversification continues, it must be strictly controlled or we shall risk tipping the balance in a direction that none of us wants.

Change is required — the new funding model will make the colleges sustainable in the long term, which is vital for our whole society. The new model will be open and transparent. Further diversification of the colleges would undermine their expert role as teacher-training colleges, and will raise questions about duplication in other areas of higher education, which should not escape scrutiny. Such scrutiny should not be focused on only the two colleges, because there are other institutions that also deal with teacher training.

The Minister respects, and will try to guarantee, the ethos of both colleges — it is important to say “both colleges”. Any amalgamation between Stranmillis and Queen’s University will require legislation, which will have to be scrutinised by the Committee for Employment and Learning and the Assembly. Therefore, in its present form, the motion should be opposed.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Education (Mr Storey): As the Chairperson of the Committee for Education, I wish to raise an important issue that relates to the debate, but not directly to the issue of the new funding model. As part of the Committee’s scrutiny of the draft Budget proposals, the Committee examined the cost of employing newly qualified teachers to cover part of the planning, preparation and assessment time of teaching principals, and of introducing a guaranteed induction year for newly qualified teachers, as is the case in Scotland.

At that time, the Committee heard about the numbers of qualified teachers who were not employed in the teaching profession, as has already been mentioned. I note that an article in today’s ‘Irish News’

highlights the fact that fewer than 40 of 800 graduate teachers secured jobs in maintained schools last year, which the newspaper describes as “the crisis facing young teachers”.

The Committee specifically recommended to the Minister of Education that active consideration should be given to using newly qualified teachers — at a cost of approximately £24,500 — as opposed to using experienced teachers as substitutes, at an approximate cost of £42,000.

The Committee welcomed the allocation of some £12 million in the current Budget period to specifically help primary-school teaching principals, but very much regrets that measures suggested to address the employment of newly qualified teachers have not, to date, been prioritised in the Education budget, and have not been progressed.

I assure Members that, as part of its scrutiny role, the Committee for Education will continue to raise this issue with the Minister.

Mr Beggs: To do nothing about the current teacher-training situation is not an option. Over recent years, there has been an oversupply of teachers in comparison to the vacancies that exist. Thousands of newly qualified teachers are seeking employment in the teaching profession. The current system is not good for students who wish to become teachers and it is wasteful of our limited resources.

Changes have occurred, and there has been a gradual reduction in the number of teacher vacancies at our colleges. However, I recently learned of a situation in which there were 55 applications for one teacher vacancy. That is a reality that does not seem to have been addressed. Indeed, the Department and the colleges are lagging behind the job opportunities, because there is still a significant oversupply of teachers. Therefore, changes are required.

I understand that there are likely to be even fewer teaching vacancies in future because it is less likely that existing teachers will be granted early retirement packages. I draw Members’ attention to an answer to a recent question that was posed to the Minister of Education in which she acknowledged that 440 teachers who took early retirement packages are currently being re-employed in primary schools as substitute teachers. That means that those teachers were effectively being paid twice from public funds: they received a retirement package, and were then paid a second time. That also means that there are fewer job opportunities for young teachers who are seeking to get on a career path.

The motion calls for a delay in the introduction of a new funding model. Sometimes, a delay is used as a mechanism to stop change. If that is the aim of the motion, I oppose it, because change is required.

As other Members indicated, the current funding arrangement is not viable. It is ridiculous that more public money should go into teacher colleges for producing fewer teachers. What part of the private sector, or, for that matter, what other part of the public sector would agree to such funding arrangements? There is huge pressure on the public purse, and we must ensure that we get value for money from our limited funds. Therefore, it is right that changes to the funding package occur.

An intermediate stage to allow the colleges to readjust to the package should be considered. However, fundamental changes to the outdated and outmoded funding arrangements must occur.

Other Members have drawn attention to the article on the front page of today's 'Irish News' about the fact that fewer than 40 of the 800 graduate teachers produced last year have secured employment in the maintained sector. In fact, only 18 graduates gained full-time employment; a further 20 were employed to cover leave. That is a drastic situation, which must be addressed.

Should such a teaching mechanism be in place? Speaking in a personal capacity: why must trainee teachers be taught separately? Why can there not be an arrangement whereby trainee teachers are taught together, but are provided with the options and modules that are required by their particular educational sectors. Why can trainees who require a certificate of religious education not be provided with that option? It is good practice for all teachers to be taught together under one system. Ultimately, if we want children to be taught, to live, to play, and to work together, teachers should also be taught under one system.

There are sound economic reasons for opposing the motion. In the long term, to continue with this outmoded system is not in the best interests of the public purse, students, and the colleges. I oppose the motion.

The Minister for Employment and Learning (Sir Reg Empey): In the time that is available, I will do my best to address the many issues that have been raised.

I welcome the opportunity to address the motion, and I thank the Members who contributed to the debate. I also thank the Committee for Employment and Learning for its constructive approach to this important issue.

During his contribution, Mr Attwood said that he felt that the Committee was punching above its weight, and that it was doing its job in holding me to account. I strongly support that. I remind him that, during the 1998 negotiations, I was involved in designing the Committee system, which I support fully. I strongly believe in the Committee system. Indeed, had my party had its way, there would have been no Ministers — only Committees and Chairpersons. However, during

the negotiations, it was clear that Mr Attwood's party was keen to appoint Ministers. He may not be particularly keen on the fact that his party has ended up with only one Minister, but that is the way the negotiations worked out.

I want to be clear: my first and fundamental priority is to ensure that initial teacher education in Northern Ireland continues to be of the highest quality. That is where everything starts, and we should remain focused on that. The calibre of our teaching workforce is well known and it makes an immense contribution to society and to the economy. Nevertheless, we are faced with a situation whereby supply outstrips demand, and many highly committed newly qualified teachers are unable to find employment in their chosen career. Throughout the debate, we heard numerous Members draw our attention to that.

Results from the 'Destination of Leavers from Higher Education' survey show that 79% of students qualifying in teacher education in 2005-06 were employed in the teaching profession six months after qualifying. However, of that 79%, only 20% held a permanent contract. Members made reference to the number of empty desks and substitute teachers in schools. The Chairperson of the Education Committee commented on that matter. There is an issue about who takes those posts, and the Department is cognisant of that. The Assembly can certainly work on that issue, which will help. We, as an Assembly, must pursue that.

The new pension arrangements, to which reference has been made on numerous occasions, could result in up to approximately 400 fewer places per annum being available. That is big issue, which we must address.

There are five providers of initial teacher education: the colleges, the two universities, and the Open University, which provides a small number of flexible places. Members are aware of the breakdown of numbers between the Department of Education and my Department on that matter. The Department of Education has consistently reduced those numbers, and we know that that is anticipated to continue for the next number of years.

1.30 pm

I recently met representatives of the senior management of both colleges, and those meetings went extremely well. I am pleased to tell the House that I had discussions with the Education Minister and that we reached agreement on the number of initial teacher-education students for the forthcoming year. That is a policy decision taken by the Minister of Education — my task is to provide the funding and administration — to improve the situation in which we find ourselves. Nevertheless, based on enrolment figures supplied by the colleges, and intake figures supplied by the Department, initial teacher-education student numbers for the forthcoming

academic year will decrease marginally compared with the 2007-08 figures.

While diversification by the university colleges into other areas of provision may appear to provide a simple solution, that is not always the case. In 1998, following a report by the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO), the colleges were allowed to diversify, to a controlled extent, into non-teacher-education provision. Each college was given an allocation of 200 places, which were filled between 1999 and 2001. The diversification provided an opportunity to reduce costs; it was driven by trying to keep the cost base down. However, the audit report recommended that diversification should take place only in areas related to teacher education. Currently, colleges are operating at diversification levels of just over 30%.

Over recent years, reducing teacher-education intakes also highlighted the fundamental deficiency in the historic approach that was used to fund the colleges. Members have clearly articulated the difficulties that we face. The model seems to indicate that the fewer students there are, the more money the Department will provide. With the best will in the world, that is a model that no one in this House could defend and the general public would find hard to understand.

I listened very carefully, however, to members of the Committee who are concerned about “viability” — a word used by Committee members and a number of other Members. That is a matter for the Committee, but it is my view that postponing or delaying the introduction of a new funding model will add to the uncertainties, which will continue. People will wonder what will happen next year, and they will wonder when the new model will be introduced. However, I believe that we have a solution that will provide stability for the period ahead and still meet the Department’s ambitions to move to a new funding model.

Because there will be a period of change, I believe that we can justify a conversion arrangement in which resources are made available to the colleges to help them bridge the gap. Initially, I anticipated that that would be available to the colleges in 2008-09. However, after representations and discussions with the colleges, I believe that it is more appropriate to extend that into 2009-2010, in order to provide a two-year period for the colleges to work with us and the Minister of Education, and to deal with the options that are open to them.

For the next two years, that arrangement — combined with other matters that I will mention with regard to numbers — will provide the colleges with a stable platform to work out a way forward. I hear the Committee’s anger about the announcement by Stranmillis University College, but the danger is that two issues are being confused. I have to wait and see what the business case is for Stranmillis before the

Department can sign off on it. It has then to go through the legislative process.

A number of Members talked about the celebratory dinner. Last week, I met Sir David Fell — the chairman of the senate at Queen’s University Belfast — and Mr Costello in my office. I asked specific questions about that matter, and I received all of the paperwork. Previously, I had been furnished with some of it, as were other Members, but the initial letter was not presented until then. I was assured that the dinner was not a celebratory event; rather it was an event that brought together all those who would be involved in the arrangements and discussions for reviewing how the proposed merger might work.

I reiterated, ad nauseam, the concern that had been expressed and the issues about staffing. They have agreed to set up a communication network with the Department, and I have also urged them to engage significantly with the staff to ensure that anxieties are allayed. Nevertheless, in order to give the colleges space, I have proposed that conversion funding be made available for the next two years.

I had a good meeting with representatives from St Mary’s University College last week. The colleges and the Department now have a clear vision of the way forward, which will be to concentrate on teacher education. We have asked, and the Minister of Education has agreed, to consider the issue of early development, and continuous professional development, and find out whether it is possible for that workload to be allocated to those colleges in order to bring in additional work that is related to teaching. The Minister of Education has agreed to consider that issue urgently and, if that can be achieved, we would be moving in the right direction. St Mary’s University College made it clear that it is keen to pursue such additional work, and that also goes for Stranmillis.

As regards a dispute over the number of diversified students, the Department set a target of 260 in a letter to the colleges in March. The colleges argued that that was misleading, because if they go by the correspondence from last summer, they should have been able to recruit more diversified students in the coming year. I did not want to get into an argy-bargy over letters and who said what. I decided that, in order to move matters forward and to give the colleges the breathing space that they need, the current number of diversified students — which I believe is 286 — will apply for next year as well as this year. The net effect will be that the colleges will have extra time and space to enable them to work with the Department over the next year to settle the matter and find a clear way forward. The colleges have accepted that, and they recognise that their concerns, and the concerns expressed by the Committee on several occasions, are being met.

Mr Attwood referred to the significance of the college to West Belfast. He does not need to tell me about that, because I accept the situation fully. However, I was concerned when Mrs McGill spoke about losing the college. I want to make it absolutely clear that I have no intention of closing either of the colleges as venues for initial teacher education; that is not required. Northern Ireland is not about to become an ethos-free zone. Parental choice is an issue, and that cannot be ignored.

I cannot tell what the future may bring, but I understand fully that there was an unfortunate interface between higher and further education in the West Belfast constituency that has left a sour taste. St Mary's University College has enormous potential. However, if both colleges cease to become primarily initial teacher-education institutions, as some of my colleagues have suggested, the focus inevitably shifts, and that brings uncertainty into the picture. Other universities may expand their campuses in the Belfast area, and that may bring a suite of courses within walking distance of north and west Belfast, especially if the University of Ulster were to expand its site at York Street. That will put a college that depends on one humanities degree at great risk.

The future for those colleges is clear; they will continue to do what they do best by educating teachers. Research must be carried out to determine how to introduce continuous professional development, and conversion funding should be extended for a second year to achieve that. This year, in accordance with the agreement I reached with the Minister of Education and the understandings we reached on diversified places, the colleges should be given the breathing space that the Committee members are keen to provide and for which I accept that there is a requirement.

That will allow the Department to get on with solving the problems that have been mentioned, such as the oversupply of teachers. However, we must also bear in mind that, because of the new economic circumstances, we must improve the continuous professional development of teachers. Additional work is required to achieve that. It is not a matter simply of shifting the existing workload but of expanding continuous professional development and introducing early development. The issue of induction, to which the Chairperson of the Committee for Education referred, is critical.

I say to the Committee that a requirement to retain the existing funding model would be a constraint and would increase uncertainty. My Department and the Department of Education have gone as far as they reasonably can to meet the genuine concerns that the Committee expressed.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann

Comhairle. I thank all those who stayed to listen and take part in the debate. Members who do not sit on the Committee for Employment and Learning contributed also, which demonstrates the wider interest in the issue and makes the debate worthwhile. I thank the Committee staff for their work over the past couple of weeks: it is appreciated. They have been working flat out to ensure that the stakeholder review will be arranged before the summer recess.

Every Member who spoke in the debate mentioned the positive work of Stranmillis University College and St Mary's University College, and I agree with their comments. Most, if not all, Members mentioned the need for reform that I stressed in my opening remarks. I went as far as saying that the Committee may reach the same conclusion as the Minister, but that members wanted a review because of the many other issues involved, not least the proposed merger of Stranmillis University College and Queen's University. The Committee, and I, as its Chairperson, simply tried to obtain as much information as possible to enable us reach a collective decision.

In the course of the debate, it struck me that there are two main themes, one of which is policy; and the Committee argues that the policy must be reformed. Notwithstanding the proposed merger of Queen's University and Stranmillis University College, the process caused the Committee members the greatest concern.

I agree with the Deputy Chairperson of the Committee who said that children and the economy must come first, and that that ties in with the Programme for Government. I highlighted the fact that in Dublin a decision to close a teacher-training college was taken based on population trends, but that there is now a realisation that the college is needed. It is important for the Committee's review to continue and that we talk to all relevant stakeholders.

Alex Attwood said that St Mary's University College had a good record of achieving participation by lower socio-economic groups, and, based on evidence from the West Belfast Task Force, I agree with him. However, I must stress that Stranmillis University College has a good record also.

Anna Lo expressed her frustration that the review is taking so long and at the lack of consultation with staff from both colleges. I cannot argue with that, and it is important that people working on the ground in the community and voluntary sector and in the colleges are aware that the Committee is being proactive.

Alastair Ross mentioned the need for reform and, given that that was the reason that the Committee tabled the motion, I agree with him. In fairness, the debate has reached this stage only because the Committee was able to press for the debate. We will continue to

carry out a review of stakeholders. The Committee will probably work closely with the Minister, and we may reach the same conclusions and possibly make his job of introducing some of the proposed changes a bit easier.

Claire McGill mentioned the quality and ethos of both Stranmillis and St Mary's. Those are important issues and were mentioned by a lot of Members. That is why the Committee is inviting submissions from everybody; the Committee is open to anyone who wishes to discuss the matter.

Ken Robinson, David McClarty, Basil McCrea and Roy Beggs all mentioned the quality issue, the funding model, and efficiency savings — I think they must all be subject to a 10-line whip, because their speeches referred to the same issues. However, I could not argue with any of that. As Chairperson of the Committee, I am not just concerned with a single issue, and I know that the former Deputy Chairperson shares that view. Rather, we are concerned with a number of issues, and wished to open those issues to discussion.

1.45 pm

A number of Members, including the Minister and the Chairperson of the Education Committee, mentioned statistics, and in my opening remarks I said that in the debate we would hear a number of statistics regarding the difficulties faced by teachers seeking work. The fact is that there is a range of statistics on the issue, and that has not been fully aired and challenged. St Mary's is actually challenging some of the statistics provided by the Department, and the Committee's review will allow those challenges to be heard. We are trying to get through all of those issues.

I welcome the commitment of the Minister and his officials in trying to come to a conclusion on the issue. The Minister is highlighting and outlining the process. I know that he has been working up until the eleventh hour, and I commend him for his commitment. The priority is to maintain the quality of those two institutions, and the fact that the conversion funding arrangements have been extended from one year to two years is to be welcomed. I agree with the Minister that that provides a stable platform to allow us all collectively to come together to try to propose a way ahead.

Having heard what the Minister and other Members have said, I am not going to push the motion to a vote. I beg leave to withdraw the motion. Go raibh maith agat.

Motion, by leave, withdrawn.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Free and Fair Elections in Zimbabwe

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 30 minutes for the debate. The proposer of the motion has also tabled an amendment, which has been selected. The proposer will have 10 minutes to propose the motion and the amendment and 10 minutes to wind up, and all other Members will have five minutes.

Mrs Long: I beg to move

That this Assembly condemns the threats against the opposition in Zimbabwe; calls for free and fair elections in the presidential run-off election on 27 June 2008; further calls for appropriate international monitoring of the election; and encourages all sides to accept the outcome of the election.

I also beg to move the following amendment: Leave out all after "Assembly" and insert:

"condemns the threats and violence against the opposition in Zimbabwe; recognises that an environment for free and fair elections does not exist; expresses alarm that Morgan Tsvangirai felt he had no alternative but to withdraw from the presidential run-off scheduled for 27 June 2008; and calls on the international community, including the United Nations and the African Union, to take all available steps to ensure democracy, human rights and the rule of law in Zimbabwe."

I thank the Assembly for setting time aside to debate the motion at such a critical juncture in Zimbabwe's history. I thank the Speaker for accepting the amendment, which reflects the changed situation, which has been rapidly deteriorating even in the course of the last few days.

Zimbabwe formally became independent from the UK in 1980, the last southern African country to do so, having had a rough journey to its sovereignty. Its first elections in its new status were won by Robert Mugabe and his ZANU party (Zimbabwe African National Union), which was relatively unknown, but throughout the 1980s came to be seen as the voice of relative calm in an unstable region. However, after the democratic successes of neighbouring states, such as Mozambique, Botswana and Zambia, the Zimbabwean Government's behaviour became at best erratic, and at worst sinister.

The flight of Zimbabwe's white population, which even the highest estimates now place at under a sixth of pre-independence levels, was hastened by Government land grabs in rural areas. However, that has been followed by mass emigration of all tribes, even the majority Shona tribe, to the extent that a quarter of the population was thought to have crossed the border to South Africa or other neighbouring countries by 2007.

Furthermore, the economy has collapsed entirely and the currency is now valueless. Life expectancy has fallen to the lowest in the world — around 35 years of age in 2006. Education levels, which were once the highest in Africa, have fallen as a result of the brain

drain. Law and order has broken down almost completely. Institutionally, the country is effectively a malign dictatorship.

The challenges that Zimbabwe faces are not unique to the region. However, the extreme nature by which they manifest is stark. As Members will be aware, the Zimbabwean general election was held in March 2008. ZANU-PF (Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front) lost its parliamentary majority, and almost certainly lost the election outright, given that that loss of majority became public knowledge rather than be suppressed. However, the questionable final result in the presidential election meant that a run-off would be required between President Robert Mugabe and the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) candidate, Morgan Tsvangirai, a well-known trade unionist. Tsvangirai was forced to leave the country and has spent most of the time since the election in Botswana. In the intervening period, there have been several increasingly violent so-called re-education campaigns to try to ensure a win for Mugabe in the run-off.

Human Rights Watch indicates that, around the country, the ruling party and its allies have blocked access to villages and have prevented people, including those who need medical treatment, from fleeing. A great deal of violence has been aimed at ex-ZANU-PF supporters who voted for the opposition. Local institutions have identified at least 2,000 beatings and cases of torture. At least 36 people have been killed, including abducted MDC activists. Such activists have, in fact, been fleeing the country for some years. News of individual attacks continues to leak from Zimbabwe, despite the ban on free reporting and the exclusion of the world's media.

Amnesty International has indicated that the leaders of the Zimbabwe Election Support Network — a coalition of 38 organisations that deployed local observers during the elections — are being harassed actively by the authorities in an attempt to prevent their observing any possible run-off election in coming weeks. Five days after their arrests, dozens of people who sought refuge at the MDC offices remain in custody, where they risk torture or other ill-treatment. Even people who are not MDC members, but simply potential voters for the opposition, have, during the past several weeks, been forced to trade their election-registration cards in order to access food and aid. None of us can take fair and free democracy, human rights or freedom for granted. Even to our community, which is emerging from conflict, the scale of abuses that we see on our television screens and the degree to which fair and free democracy has been compromised in Zimbabwe is difficult to comprehend fully.

My party's concern and focus when it tabled the original motion was whether it would be possible to have fair and free elections in a context of suppression,

intimidation and violence. We tabled the motion in the wake of Morgan Tsvangirai's visit to the recent Liberal International conference in Belfast, and as a result of our ongoing contact with exiled MDC members in Belfast and members of the Botswana Civil Society Solidarity Coalition for Zimbabwe. The debate was timed to precede the presidential run-off election, which was due to be held on 26 June. Members are all aware that the MDC leader, Morgan Tsvangirai, has now withdrawn from the election, not only because of concerns at how free and fair such elections can be but in the hope that his doing so will halt the escalation of violence and intimidation against party activists, supporters and others who are in opposition to the Government.

Many of us will have seen the footage that was shown on television yesterday of violent gangs of Government supporters attacking people who had tried to attend an opposition rally, for which permission by the courts had been sought in order for it to proceed. Even if the run-off is to be a farce, the timing of the motion is, nevertheless, appropriate. The UN Security Council will meet today to discuss the situation. It is clear that if Zimbabwe's future is to hold out any hope for people who are currently suffering, collective pressure and diplomacy by the international community are critical. Nowhere is that more so than in the African Union's response. It is not only best placed to challenge the notion that Mugabe has peddled in his own community — that opposition is simply a Western-led construct — but it has most to lose if the current humanitarian crisis and political instability that is bubbling up boils over into wider conflict and regional instability.

Some may wonder what impact the Assembly can have on the situation. We have a duty to highlight issues that are important to our constituents — and this issue is important to the people of Northern Ireland. We can also demonstrate that, despite media suppression and interference with international-development and aid agencies, which try to assist those who are most in need, the world is watching and seeing what is happening in Zimbabwe.

We can offer our support for human rights and democracy not only here, but in other places. Perhaps most importantly, we can offer support and solidarity to those in our midst who have been exiled from Zimbabwe and to those with whom they have contact in Zimbabwe and who are suffering the worst excesses of that Government's regime.

In commending the motion and the amendment to the House, I reflect on the words of Robert Mugabe. Recently, he stated that only God could remove him from power. I simply pray that, for the sake of the people of Zimbabwe, He does, and swiftly.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

Mr Shannon: I support the motion, as amended, and I congratulate the Members who brought this matter before the House. Robert Mugabe said that God put him in office and that only that God can remove him. Along with the previous Member who spoke, I pray that God removes him sooner rather than later.

In Zimbabwe, one in five people has AIDS, 80% of the population is jobless, the life expectancy of a woman is 34 years, a loaf of bread costs \$10 million and the monthly wage of a farm worker is \$30 million, which is enough to buy three loaves of bread for the month, and nothing else. People who once worked for the Government in a menial capacity are able to relax on \$60,000 a month — not even the price of a tenth of the price of a loaf of bread.

Those are the facts for the majority of people who live in Zimbabwe. Those facts are the reason that, in the elections of 29 March 2008, Mugabe's Government was overthrown by the voice of the people, who elected Morgan Tsvangirai. Officially, his party, the MDC, won 47% of the vote to Mugabe's 43%, but that was not the true margin of victory. Mugabe rigged and manoeuvred so that the polls were more favourable to him. The burning question is, given that Mugabe's wrangling and illegal machinations left him with only 43% of the vote: how low was his original figure?

The people have spoken, yet they are now to be silenced. A second round of elections has been put off to enable Mugabe to coerce and beat more people into voting for him. Yesterday, photographs and television coverage clearly showed Mugabe's young pretenders in police uniforms rushing into rural areas to punish people for their lack of loyalty. That punishment can be anything from beating people to within an inch of death, to burning people's homes to the ground. On some horrible occasions, men have been tied to the door of their home while it was burned.

I have recently been emailed some disturbing and incredibly graphic photos from missionaries who are serving in Zimbabwe. The photos show the beating and burnings that people have endured, the mere sight of which turned my stomach. None of us can imagine the pain and oppression that those people face, but we must do all that we can to stop it.

Members of the opposition MDC have confessed to rigging election votes in their favour, but the fact that those confessions took place in torture chambers gives a sense of how real they are. The confessions are not true; they have been forced out of people through beatings. Mugabe did not get the result that he wanted, so he is reverting to form. In 1976, he said:

“The people's votes and the people's guns are always inseparable twins.”

He is sticking to that view now, which we have heard before.

People who are illiterate will have the thoughtful help of a policeman or a Government official to fill in their voting form. It is clear where things are and where they are going: this black Hitler has sworn that he will not give up his role, no matter what. He is quoted as saying:

“No matter what force you have, this is my territory and that which is mine I cling to unto death.”

Anyone with a radio or a TV can be under no illusion about the situation, although I doubt that everyone understands how bad it is in Zimbabwe.

It is time for the UK to take a stand and employ diplomatic measures to evoke change and ensure that the will of the people prevails. How can that be done if Mugabe will not listen to Western opinion or take notice of sanctions? The answer is to apply international diplomatic measures, and pressure to neighbouring African nations. Mozambique, Namibia and Angola refused to offload weapons from China that were intended for Zimbabwe because they feared that those weapons would be used against the people. The outcome of that was that Mugabe had a boatload less of weapons by which to intimidate and kill people into submission.

Such diplomatic pressure must be replicated even more strongly throughout Africa, not least on the nations that surround landlocked Zimbabwe — Botswana, Zambia, Mozambique and last, but by no means least, South Africa. Those countries have a humanitarian duty to act, and we must apply as much pressure as possible to ensure that they fulfil that duty to bring about true democracy in Zimbabwe. No country has more power to act than South Africa, and it and its outgoing president, Thabo Mbeki, have much to answer for.

2.00 pm

Sanctions can and must be employed to bring about democracy and to stabilise that once great African nation — the breadbasket of Africa. I sincerely urge Members to join me in asking the UK to take a stand and do as much as it possibly can to help that country.

Evil triumphs when good people do nothing, and that hard lesson was learned with Hitler, when propaganda was allowed to gloss over the loss of democracy. The self-named black Hitler should feel the same disapproval from upstanding people. No man is an island, and Zimbabwe's corrupt cabal of officials must not survive. I urge Members to support the motion and the amendment.

Ms Anderson: Go raibh maith agat. Ba mhaith liom tacaíocht a thabhairt don rún. I support the motion and the amendment. The peoples of the African continent and, indeed, many others in the world who have experienced the consequences of imperialism and colonialism are deeply disappointed by the manner in which Robert Mugabe is handling the situation in

Zimbabwe. That disappointment was reflected in South African President Thabo Mbeki's comments when he said that his priority is to help Zimbabwe to find answers through dialogue and negotiations, rather than by an imposed solution from abroad. Yesterday, his spokesperson added that the situation requires a mediated settlement.

Over the weekend, the crisis in Zimbabwe deepened with the announcement that the leader of the Movement for Democratic Change had pulled out of the presidential contest. Zimbabwe was once a prosperous country; today it is in crisis. The people responsible for that are not from the former colonial power, Britain, but from Robert Mugabe's Government. Therefore, I welcome the motion and the amendment.

Zimbabwe's history of colonisation and oppression at Britain's hands means that it is all too easy for the Mugabe regime to opportunistically represent Britain's protests as western imperialism. However, he cannot, and must not, dismiss the will of his people, and those from other African nations, who have worked tirelessly to secure a peaceful resolution to the situation in Zimbabwe.

In particular, I praise the African Union and the South African Development Community for taking a lead in the search for a peaceful solution. I also commend the efforts of ordinary workers in South Africa and Mozambique to support human rights in Zimbabwe. At the end of April, it was dock workers in the South African Transport and Allied Workers Union who refused to unload weapons shipments that were bound for Zimbabwe, and it was the International Transport Workers' Federation that was decisive in preventing Mozambique from being used as an alternative destination.

In the interests of all people in Zimbabwe and, indeed, the entire African continent, the people must be allowed to express their democratic will, which is clearly not the case in Zimbabwe. Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have confirmed that opponents of the Mugabe regime — particularly those in the Movement for Democratic Change — have been brutalised, tortured and murdered, and that the country's economy has collapsed causing untold poverty and hardship for millions of ordinary citizens.

Against that backdrop, MDC decided to pull out of the presidential run-off election. I fully understand that decision; however, I hope that there can still be a peaceful and negotiated settlement in Zimbabwe. The entire African continent wants that, and we must remember that Zimbabwe, as a nation that has emerged from a brutal colonial past, has an opportunity to become a beacon for other struggling peoples.

Zimbabwe can demonstrate that it is possible to create a better society, and the Mugabe regime must

afford its people genuine democracy and freedom. I hope that we will soon witness the drawing together of genuine democracy, freedom and equality in Zimbabwe and, indeed, in all nations that have been victims of imperialism and occupation — including my own.

Mr Kennedy: I welcome the opportunity to speak in this important debate, and I thank the Members who tabled the motion for doing so.

In the present climate in Zimbabwe, there was little hope of this week's election being either free or fair. Now that Morgan Tsvangirai, the candidate for the Movement for Democratic Change, has withdrawn from this week's election, it has become a complete farce. The past weeks in Zimbabwe have been characterised by a campaign of terror; dispossession; enforced famine; murder; and violence against supporters, activists and officials of the Movement for Democratic Change.

Regime change in Zimbabwe is an urgent necessity. It is not just an issue of removing the tyrant Robert Mugabe from the presidency; it is one of removing his henchmen, the military and security-service leadership who may have done his bidding in the past but whose prisoner he has now effectively become. Mugabe is little more than a figurehead for a gang of murderers who know that if they lose power, they will face justice and well-deserved punishment for their heinous and wicked crimes. After 28 years of Mugabe's patronage, ZANU-PF stalwarts hold nearly all the positions of power and enjoy all its perks. All military chiefs and senior Government officials, most judges and media editors, the majority of bureaucrats, and now, ironically, the owners of most big farms, owe everything to ZANU-PF. Therefore, it is not just Mugabe who has to go, but the whole apparatus of his regime. The dimensions of the issues that surround any hopes of ridding Zimbabwe of Mugabe are far greater than might be first imagined. Indeed, they might be compared to the difficulties that the Allies faced in dealing with the Nazis in Germany after World War II.

The supine role played by the South African Government, and, in particular, President Mbeki, has given Mugabe succour and enabled him to survive for too long. South Africa needed to show greater leadership in dealing with this pan-African problem. It is sad, pitiful and disgraceful that the South African regime has not shown greater strength in its dealings with Robert Mugabe.

Likewise, we must not forget the other disturbing dimension to this conflict — the involvement of the emerging great military power of China, which is working in the shadows behind Mugabe. China is mineral hungry and is very active in Africa, including in Zimbabwe. It already gets 5% of its oil from the Sudan, where genocide has already occurred in the Darfur region. China has supplied Mugabe with a

radio-jamming device for a military base outside the capital, preventing independent stations from providing media coverage to balance that provided by the state-controlled media during the election campaign. The list goes on. Chinese companies will build new coal mines and three thermal power stations in the Zambezi valley on the Zambian border. In exchange, Zimbabwe will provide China with chrome. Mugabe has drawn strength and succour from all that. He has boasted that the Chinese are coming and will bring in billions of dollars in investment and that soon everything will be restored.

Beneath Zimbabwe's outstandingly fertile soils lie deposits of mineral wealth. However, Zimbabwe has barely resorted to exploiting that reservoir of wealth. It could rapidly become the world's greatest producer of quality platinum, with ore reserves markedly greater than those remaining in South Africa. Zimbabwe still boasts an infrastructure and a business, academic and professional base that outstrips any in other parts of Africa.

In addition, there are still many senior professionals, academics and civic leaders who can help to rebuild that country. However, we need regime change immediately.

Mrs Hanna: I welcome this debate and thank those who proposed the motion.

There are very few who do not recognise that Mr Tsvangirai, whose party is the largest in the Zimbabwean Parliament, and who secured the largest vote in a hotly disputed first round of presidential elections amid allegations of widespread vote-rigging by ZANU-PF, is entitled to be considered by the rest of the world as the democratically elected leader of the Zimbabwean people.

It is clear that the evil, wilful tyrant Robert Mugabe has absolutely no intention of heeding the ballot box, and is determined to hold on to power to the bitter end and at all costs, even if that means the destruction of his own country. The tragedy of Zimbabwe is destabilising the rest of southern Africa, particularly South Africa and Botswana. It is for the other African states, particularly the 14 member states of the Southern African Development Community, and for President Mbeki, to help to bring this awful situation to an end.

Mugabe has been clever in playing the racial card, in sowing division among his opponents, and in heaping blame on Britain, the former colonial power. Few would deny that colonialism has left a very negative legacy.

The appalling humanitarian situation in Zimbabwe can be glimpsed in a number of statistics: female life expectancy has declined from 63 years to 54 years, and male life expectancy from 60 years to 53 years. The infant mortality rate has climbed from 53 to 81 deaths per 1,000 live births. An estimated 1.8 million of a population of 12 million Zimbabweans have HIV, while 3.4 million people have fled the country as a result of economic

hardship — most of them to South Africa, which is struggling with enormous problems of its own.

The destruction of the apartheid regime was one of the most heartening events in my life, and I remember the feeling of hope for the future that we all had when Zimbabwe won its independence on 18 April 1980, after 100 years of British colonialism. The country is fertile, and has a high literacy rate. Sadly, Robert Mugabe, in whom the hopes of millions were invested at the outset, has been a crushing disappointment as, year by year, he has mutated into an ever more vicious tyrant.

I want to focus on the humanitarian implications of this crisis for the ordinary people of Zimbabwe. NGOs estimate that up to four million people could be dependent on food aid, medical support and clean water in order to survive. The situation has been made worse by drought. All aid and humanitarian agencies have been ordered out of the country, and they have been blackguarded by Mugabe's party, which claimed that they were supporting the democratic opposition. NGOs must be allowed to continue to provide assistance to vulnerable communities, in which up to four million people — almost half of those remaining in Zimbabwe — could be dependent on food aid when the current, very poor, harvest ends.

Though we are thousands of miles away here, it is important that we stand up for justice, and let people know that we really do care.

Rev Dr Ian Paisley: I want to thank those Members who put down this motion for giving us the opportunity to express ourselves in this House today.

People may well ask what influence this House can have on the situation in Zimbabwe. It is the influence of knowing that the people of Northern Ireland, as represented in the Assembly, are expressing the deep feelings that are in their own hearts and minds.

Those thoughts and attitudes about the situation are vital.

2.15 pm

Our eyes are now on the United Nations. It has the authority and the backing of the world if it should care to take the right road, and I hope that it will do so. Otherwise, I would feel very sad for the people of that land. I have some missionary connections with that land, and I receive up-to-date weekly appraisals of the situation from the missions and churches in which I have an interest, and it is a terrible, sad story. One would have thought that the world would have left behind such stories, but now the story is being repeated: a country is being devoured by the wolves of terrorism in an evil and vicious way.

Yesterday's rally in Zimbabwe could not take place, even though it was backed by the courts of the land. There have been massacres in the country, and, when

the full story is told, what a terrible story it will be. The UN must take definite steps; it is not enough to call in the leaders of other African countries to tell them to take action. The UN should give those countries the leadership and support that they need, because no country in Africa can afford to break the unity unless they are assured that they will be supported in doing the right thing, which is to intervene. It will lead to some direct occupation, because some Zimbabweans are determined to take over the country irrespective of the ballot's results. Therefore, I trust that the UN will heed the message from countries all over the world and show that it has the strength and determination to see the matter put right. It will be put right only through a fair system of voting, and people can express, without threat, whom they desire to rule over them.

Mr A Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Members have covered a lot in their contributions. However, it is a matter of deep regret that, throughout the decolonisation process, many Zimbabweans fought for the liberation of their country, and people throughout the world looked up to Robert Mugabe and others who fought for their country's freedom. In fact, they demonstrably proved that there could be a better way forward, and they fought to bring democracy to their country. Indeed, for some years, there were good examples of the type of transformation that emanated from Zimbabwe. Unfortunately, however, the situation has deteriorated to a point where Zimbabwe is now being held up as an example of deep failure, which has cost many of its people dearly.

It is important to acknowledge that asylum seekers have fled Zimbabwe and arrived in Belfast to seek refuge. I have spoken to, and worked with, a number of those families, and our thoughts are with them, because they are concerned about the events unfolding in their country. Although all parties and all Members have criticised the current circumstances in Zimbabwe and have recognised its serious difficulties, we must also express solidarity with people who seek refuge on our shores.

Mr Shannon: Does the Member agree that neighbouring countries such as South Africa should do more for Zimbabwean refugees, instead of allowing tribal warfare to take place on the border, where Zimbabwean refugees who flee to neighbouring countries encounter further pressure?

Mr A Maskey: I thank the Member for his intervention. Although people here — such as Members during today's debate — express disappointment at events in Zimbabwe, we must extend our solidarity to refugees who arrive on our shores. I appeal to political parties here to support families who seek refuge here and who need society's support. Our thoughts are with those people.

Neighbouring countries — such as South Africa — have a responsibility, and I welcome the recent contributions from the African Union and some surrounding African countries, because Africa has experienced a long and sad history of colonisation and a positive history of decolonisation and liberation struggle.

We must ensure that we do not seek to impose solutions on the people of Zimbabwe. However, we must echo the comments about the necessity of finding a solution to the difficulties in Zimbabwe in order to allow people to escape the poverty and chaos shown daily on TV. The fact that people have been forced to withdraw from the electoral process means that Zimbabweans will be unable to exercise their franchise and vote in elections that were scheduled for next week. That is a bitter disappointment to all of us who want the process of decolonisation to continue successfully, not only in Africa, but globally.

Mr Simpson: This year marks the thirtieth anniversary of the massacre of British missionaries by Robert Mugabe's people in Vumba, Zimbabwe. Some weeks ago, I tabled an early-day motion in the House of Commons to remind Parliament of that disastrous event, during which nine missionaries and four children were killed. A six-year-old boy, a five-year-old girl, a four-year-old girl, Mr Roy Lynn from Northern Ireland, his wife and their three-week-old daughter were among the casualties. According to witnesses, the missionaries were praying for their killers as they died. In 1978, the world should have recognised the brutality of the devil that they did not yet know — politically, Robert Mugabe is undoubtedly that.

In succeeding years, Mugabe has inflicted considerable distress on his own people. In 1998, economic problems provoked riots, and strikes paralysed the country. In 2000, war veterans — backed by the Government — seized hundreds of white-owned farms claiming that they had been seized illegally by colonists. In 2001, ZANU-PF devised tough laws on security, media and election rules solely to keep Mugabe in power. In 2002, the Commonwealth suspended Zimbabwe, and the EU imposed travel bans and froze the assets of Mugabe's associates. Furthermore, Mugabe ordered thousands of white farmers from their farms. In 2003, the EU and the Commonwealth renewed their sanctions, and, in the same year, Mugabe vowed that the MDC would never rule Zimbabwe.

The leaders of the main trades unions and dozens of rights activists were arrested as riot police broke up protest marches. The IMF announced that it had begun steps to expel Zimbabwe, saying that its policies failed to address economic woes. When the Commonwealth submitted an agreement to continue Zimbabwe's suspension, Mugabe quit it.

In 2005, the US labelled Zimbabwe as one of the world's six outposts of tyranny. Tens of thousands of shanty dwellings were destroyed, and the UN estimated that about 700,000 people were left homeless. After a four-day visit, UN humanitarian chiefs said that Zimbabwe was in meltdown.

In 2006, inflation exceeded 1,000%. In 2007, Morgan Tsvangirai was hospitalised after his arrest at a rally, and one man was shot dead as riot police moved to disperse the gathering. Zimbabwe officially ran out of bread as wheat production collapsed. This year, Mugabe lost his majority for the first time since independence in 1980.

Just this month, Mugabe announced that foreign non-governmental organisations and aid agencies were to be banned from Zimbabwe with immediate effect. Some four million Zimbabweans — approximately one third of the population — depend on food aid. On 5 June 2008, British and US diplomats were held while trying to investigate political violence. On 18 June 2008, four opposition activists were found beaten to death. Now, under threat of a nationwide massacre and in the teeth of widespread violent repression, the opposition has been forced to pull out of the planned elections.

When the West decided that Ian Smith's regime had to go, it decided that Mugabe would be assisted in his efforts to assume control of Zimbabwe. For too many years, too many people turned a blind eye to the cruelty and brutality that have marked Mugabe's rule. The West stood to one side and watched as he abused and traumatised his entire nation. Sadly, as is often the case, the United States has said little and done less. Zimbabwe's near neighbours have failed utterly in their responsibility to assist the peace and security of that part of Africa.

What we are doing here today is only a small step. I support the motion and the amendment.

Mr Deputy Speaker: As Question Time commences at 2.30 pm, I suggest that the House take its ease until that time. This debate will continue after Question Time, when the first Member called to speak will be Mr David McNarry.

The debate stood suspended.

2.30 pm

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

Oral Answers to Questions

OFFICE OF THE FIRST MINISTER AND DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER

Regeneration at the Maze/Long Kesh Site

1. **Mr Poots** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what consideration it has given to regeneration projects at the Maze/Long Kesh site other than the master plan agreed by the Maze implementation panel. (AQO 4115/08)

The deputy First Minister (Mr M McGuinness): At this point, we have not considered regeneration projects for the Maze/Long Kesh site other than those contained in the 'Maze/Long Kesh Masterplan and Implementation Strategy' that was published in 2006. We are developing a paper to bring to the Executive.

Mr Poots: The First Minister has suggested that, given the value of the site, it would be wrong to allow it simply to grow weeds. I assume that the deputy First Minister agrees with that. On that basis, if plan A, which we are currently examining, is discontinued, will he put a viable and deliverable plan B in place before dropping plan A?

The deputy First Minister: It is a very valuable site, and under no circumstances will we allow it simply to grow weeds. However, a plan B will not be considered unless, and until, the present proposals reach a conclusion. We are considering the current proposals for the development of the Maze/Long Kesh site, including the Department of Finance and Personnel's assessment of the business case; moreover, we are assessing the outcome of the major procurement process for the appointment of a private-sector development partner for the site. That procurement is based on the delivery of the key master-plan elements, such as the multi-sports stadium, the international centre for conflict transformation, the Royal Ulster Agricultural Society showground, light industrial development and other related proposals.

Development plans of that size and complexity require very careful consideration, and we aim to make an informed decision on the complex proposal as soon as possible.

Mr Kennedy: What is the deputy First Minister's response to the stinging attack that was made by the

former Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure on the obstruction of the Maze project by leading civil servants? What action will the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) take to address the issue that was highlighted by Mr Poots? In particular, will it hand over the Maze project to the Strategic Investment Board or private developers, as the former Minister has suggested?

The deputy First Minister: I will not respond at all, except to say that we are in possession of an assessment, or analysis, by the Department of Finance and Personnel, which we will have to consider in order to take the matter forward. Any allegations that may be made are a matter for those who wish to make them. I am interested in hearing from people who can furnish me with facts, figures and details. However, that has not happened thus far. I have heard only the media reports.

If we are to take the matter forward sensibly, we must do so in a way that deals with a site that is very valuable to our economy and our people. As we progress, it is incumbent upon everyone to recognise the importance of seeing the matter through to its final conclusion. A big debate, involving many different interests, surrounds the project at present. I understand that, and I can understand that people are fighting their corners. However, it is sensible for us to analyse the situation and bring a paper to the Executive, and that is what we propose to do.

Mr Butler: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I welcome the deputy First Minister's comments, in particular that the master plan for the site has not been ruled out, because it best fits the objectives of regeneration of the site. Furthermore, it meets the strategic and long-term needs of all three sporting organisations. Will upgrading existing stadia meet those needs? Go raibh maith agat.

The deputy First Minister: To date, there has been no assessment of the cost of building new stadia to meet the needs of football, rugby and Gaelic games. However, the outline business case for the multi-sports stadium estimates that enhancing those sports' existing facilities to an acceptable standard would require between £86 million and £95 million, excluding infrastructure costs. Upgrading existing stadia would not meet the strategic needs of the three sports and would be subject to considerable planning and infrastructural constraints.

NI Executive Office in Brussels

2. **Mr Neeson** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister when its Ministers last used the Executive's office in Brussels. (AQO 4108/08)

The deputy First Minister: The Executive's office in Brussels is available for use to the Assembly and its Committees, to wider civic society, including local government, universities and other groups seeking to

engage in Europe, as well as to the Executive's Departments and Ministers.

Ministers in our Department have used the office on five occasions over the past year. Most recently, on 2 April 2008, junior Ministers Donaldson and Kelly used it to prepare for a meeting with Commissioner Danuta Hübner on the launch of the report of the European Commission task force. In January 2008, the office facilitated a high-level visit by the former First Minister Ian Paisley and me to meet the European Commission's President Barroso to discuss the task force. That visit also included meetings with Commissioner Hübner, Commissioner Fischer Boel and the Irish and UK permanent representatives to the European Union. Indeed, members of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister will visit the office later this week.

Mr Neeson: I thank the deputy First Minister for his response. Clearly, he appreciates the importance of having a Northern Ireland presence in Brussels. However, compared with the UK's other devolved institutions, Northern Ireland is underrepresented in Brussels. Will the deputy First Minister consider reviewing the resources that are available in the Northern Ireland office in Brussels? Will he encourage greater use of that office by ordinary Assembly Members, rather than it being used only by the Executive?

The deputy First Minister: I receive the Member's second point positively — we should encourage as many people as possible to use the office. The officials who work in the office are anxious to assist all Members of the House in carrying out their duties.

During our stay in Brussels, the former First Minister and I visited the Welsh and Scottish offices. It is true that resources in those offices — particularly in the Scottish office — are much greater than in ours. There must be an ongoing monitoring of the situation. EU institutions must develop policies that are relevant to us, and up-to-date information must be available to Ministers and Departments. We must ensure that our interests are fully represented in policy development in the EU institutions. We must raise the Assembly's profile among European policy-makers and opinion formers. We also need to form interregional links with other parts of Europe and improve the Assembly's and local government's contacts with the EU.

The Northern Ireland office in Brussels exists to assist all areas of Government, civic society, local government, universities and other organisations in their dealings with the European Union. In addition to providing space for visitors from here, staff in the office are often asked to speak to groups and organisations that are visiting from other countries.

We must ensure that we have adequate resources, on a level that is comparable to the Welsh and Scottish

offices, to stake our claim and our place in Europe. We will monitor that situation on an ongoing basis.

Mr G Robinson: I am sure that OFMDFM is well aware of the value of the office in Brussels as a means of promoting Northern Ireland and attracting inward investment and tourism to the Province. Will the deputy First Minister assure the Assembly that the Executive's office in Brussels will continue to play a central role in all that?

The deputy First Minister: I state without fear of contradiction that our office in Brussels will play a central role.

It is critical that we are represented in Brussels, that we have access to all regions of the European Union and that they know what we have to offer. The staff in Brussels do an excellent job on our behalf. Tourism is a huge earner for our economy, and it is important that we use the office and get the best out of it with regard to inward investment and tourism.

Mr W Clarke: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. How does the role of the office in Brussels fit with the wider international strategy?

The deputy First Minister: In pursuing strategic international objectives, the importance of our relationship and interdependence with Europe in economic and social terms cannot be underestimated. Our approach to Europe is outlined in the strategy document for 2006-2010, 'Taking our Place in Europe'. The strategy provides a framework for the Government and civil society to engage in Europe, and it has been given a significant boost by the European Commission task force report, which will help us achieve our economic goals through a strengthened long-term partnership with the European Union.

The task force forms the basis of a reinvigorated working relationship between this Administration and Europe whereby we exert even greater influence on policy, make maximum use of the wide range of available opportunities and become firmly embedded in the European networks.

The work of the Executive's office in Brussels is critical to the success of our strategy in Europe and of the work of the task force.

Mr Speaker: Question 3 has been withdrawn.

Joint Working for Sustainable Development

4. **Mr F McCann** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the extent of joint working between Departments in the promotion of sustainable development. (AQO 4123/08)

The deputy First Minister: A Cheann Comhairle, as you and the House will be aware, we recently instructed OFMDFM officials to begin work on developing a new sustainable development strategy. One reason behind that decision is our desire to encourage greater co-ordination of sustainable development-related activities across all Departments as a means of promoting a more strategic approach to the issue.

As part of our work on the new sustainable development strategy, OFMDFM officials are meeting with their counterparts from other Departments. They are in discussions with colleagues from other Departments to examine ways in which the principles of sustainable development can be incorporated effectively and harmonised across the regional development strategy, the regional economic strategy and the forthcoming rural White Paper. Equally importantly, we will ensure that our new sustainable development strategy is developed in such a way that those and other major plans, such as the Programme for Government and the investment strategy, are taken into account fully.

With the support of almost every other Department, our officials have developed a comprehensive training programme that is being delivered with the co-operation of the Centre for Applied Learning, which is part of the Department of Finance and Personnel. In developing the course, with the assistance of officials from across the Civil Service, we have sought to ensure that training on sustainable development is as current and relevant to all participants as possible.

One of the key outcomes of that programme will be to raise awareness of sustainable development across the Government and for Departments to promote the principles and practices of sustainability in the execution of their functions.

Mr F McCann: The deputy First Minister has answered my question.

Mrs Long: I thank the deputy First Minister for the information that he has provided. During a recent Committee review of sustainable development, it was highlighted that a draft memorandum of understanding between the Sustainable Development Commission and OFMDFM was drawn up — I think that it was done about a year ago. I understand that it has not been signed or redrafted for further discussion, as yet. Will the deputy First Minister inform the House how and when that will be taken forward and formalised?

The deputy First Minister: That is still under consideration, and it is hoped that it will be dealt with expeditiously.

Rev Dr Robert Coulter: Under its remit for the oversight of the machinery of government, and in the interest of good Government, will OFMDFM investigate how the entire planning process could be simplified

and streamlined if the unreal distinction between local and regional planning were removed?

The deputy First Minister: That question would be more accurately directed to the Minister of the Environment. There have been difficulties in planning for some time, and both the previous and the present Minister of the Environment have indicated that the issue will be tackled conscientiously.

2.45 pm

Peace Walls

5. **Mr Lunn** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what plans his Department has to reduce the number of peace walls. (AQO 4107/08)

The deputy First Minister: A Cheann Comhairle, we recognise that the continuing presence of peace walls needs to be reviewed, and we are working hard to create the conditions whereby the need for those walls no longer exists. We all look forward to a future without barriers, where society is characterised by respect, integration and interdependence, and where sectarianism and racism are things of the past.

On 22 April there was a very useful Adjournment debate on interfaces in north Belfast during which it was recognised that although no one wants a continuing need for peace walls, they are a reality. We can, and should, only seek the removal of peace walls when local communities feel safe and comfortable. That must happen at a pace with which the communities are content and be considered in conjunction with a security assessment from the police. It is essential that plans to remove peace walls must be community driven primarily and with the benefit of the views of locally elected representatives. Policy responsibility for the erection and removal of peace walls remains with the NIO.

Mr Lunn: I thank the deputy First Minister for his answer. He will be aware of the campaign that is under way by the Peace People to appoint a Minister for peace. In the meantime, what steps have been taken to assign responsibility for a strategy to bring down peace walls to either, or both, of the junior Ministers?

The deputy First Minister: All of the Ministers in the Executive are Ministers for peace: they are all anxious to see a normal society. Every Member recognises his or her responsibility to lead by good example and to show people that we can do things differently.

Some of the greatest barriers are in our minds. It is only when people feel comfortable with each other that communities across the North will recognise the importance of working together to rid our society of sectarianism and racism. That will not happen overnight, but all indications are showing that we are getting there.

A few days ago, alongside the former First Minister Ian Paisley I was privileged to attend an inspirational event in Ballymena. School principals supported by education authorities and a large number of young people — between 200 and 250 — from all nine post-primary schools in the Ballymena area, came out to declare that this is the new way forward. That gives me tremendous hope and encouragement for the future. When our young people are engaged in the reconciliation process; that more than adequately complements the work — work that I think is tremendous — that has been done in the Assembly over the past year.

It is still early days, and there is still much more work to do. However, the greatest barriers are in our minds, and when we bring down those barriers, the dismantling of the peace walls will be a very easy operation indeed.

Mr McCausland: Does the Minister agree that peace walls, which are predominantly in north Belfast — and of course the wall in west Belfast between the Falls Road and the Shankill Road — can only come down completely with the consent of the people who live adjacent to them? Those people must have confidence that their safety and security are ensured, and that can only take place in the wider context of a strategy for creating social cohesion. It is wrong to consider peace walls in isolation.

Would the deputy First Minister agree that it would be a good step, with respect to the wall between the Falls Road and the Shankill Road, if, on Saturday, the members of the Whiterock Orange Lodge and the Whiterock band were able to come onto the Springfield Road to get as far up as their hall which is celebrating its 50th anniversary? It would be a generous and welcome development —

Mr Speaker: Order. I remind Members to stick to the question.

The deputy First Minister: I agree with the sentiments of the initial question about the responsibility of all of us in political life to recognise the importance of the views of people who live alongside the peace walls. I believe that we are as one in respect of how we should try to make that happen in the time ahead.

I place on record my recognition of the work that went on behind the scenes that resulted in last Friday's Tour of the North parade being an example of how dialogue can significantly reduce negativity and tension all round. The interviews with the leaders of the Orange Order and the local communities reflected their desire to find an accommodation that would benefit all of the people of north Belfast. I take great heart from that.

No one will take last Friday's good outcome for granted ahead of the Whiterock parade, which is due to take place this weekend. Nothing good happens without

a lot of hard work, constructive dialogue, and sensitivity about the issues that are important to people and communities. The people who have enabled the last few peaceful summers know that only too well. Each time agreement is reached by communities, the record of success is extended, and we build on that for the future.

The First Minister and I are keenly interested in the progress that has been made in north Belfast, and the junior Ministers are actively involved in supporting the work on the ground, as are all Members who represent those communities. North Belfast has significance beyond the area itself, and I am sure that we will all want to recognise what has been done by interface workers, the Churches, community leaders and by the Loyal Orders. Those discussions are not easy — they are intensive and fraught. What is gained for individuals, communities and, ultimately, our society — as we saw last Friday night — is a significant reduction in the tensions and negativity of past years. That allows for the mutual respect and dignity of the communities involved to expand.

The conduct of everyone who is involved in dialogue, agreement and the positive actions that emanate from agreement should be commended. All of the difficult dialogue that has taken place to bring about the reduction in tension has been worth every minute. We commend more widespread dialogue toward local resolutions, and a calmer summer.

I will finish by saying that the a Cheann Comhairle, himself, our own Speaker, has played a very powerful role in the north-west, along with others, in bringing about a totally transformed situation in the city of Derry. It is the type of leadership that has been given by elected representatives, by the community and voluntary sector that will see us through all of these difficulties in the end. I hope that those difficulties continue to diminish as the years go on.

Ms Ní Chuilín: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. What steps is the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister taking to establish a task force in north Belfast on interfaces and conflict resolution? Go raibh maith agat.

The deputy First Minister: In his closing statement during the Adjournment debate on interfaces in north Belfast on 22 April 2008, junior Minister Donaldson confirmed that Carál Ní Chuilín's proposal to create a task force for the North Belfast constituency would be considered.

That work has been progressed in the interim period under the auspices of the junior Ministers and a north Belfast working group. In the meantime, the Department and the north Belfast community action unit is continuing to engage with communities on an interdepartmental basis to address the important interface and conflict resolution issues that exist in the area.

We recognise the invaluable work that communities have undertaken to build sustainable relationships, which have been the foundation for the peaceful summers over recent years. Increased funding of £100,000 has been provided to the north Belfast community action unit for summer youth diversionary programmes to help reduce tensions over the coming months. An additional £400,000 has been provided by OFMDFM for summer diversionary activities to all five education and library boards, and £160,000 of that is for Belfast — at least £40,000 of that will be specifically allocated to the youth sector in north Belfast.

Over the past few years, the north Belfast community action unit has facilitated a working group, comprising representatives from statutory agencies and community groups, to develop an action plan for interfaces in north Belfast. The action plan contains 10 key recommendations for addressing interface issues. The unit continues to work with the interface working group, and is facilitating the group in developing an application to the International Fund for Ireland, to help progress the key recommendations of the action plan.

I commend everyone in north Belfast from the loyalist, unionist, nationalist and republican communities for the tremendous efforts that have been made on our behalf on a day-to-day basis. I have recently attended various events in north Belfast, and it is inspirational to see people who previously were opponents working together proactively and in the interests of all the people of that area.

Mr A Maginness: I wish to associate myself with the remarks of the deputy First Minister in relation to the Tour of the North. A big step has been taken towards securing a peaceful summer in north Belfast, throughout Belfast and, perhaps, throughout Northern Ireland.

However, I urge the deputy First Minister and the First Minister to make a public demonstration of their will to take down the peace walls by visiting north Belfast and urging communities to find a way forward. In that way, they could demonstrate publicly their commitment to tackling sectarianism and division in Belfast and elsewhere.

The deputy First Minister: The First Minister and I are absolutely dedicated and committed to leading by example, and are resolutely opposed to any sectarianism, racism or communal division in our society. We will have to consider how to demonstrate that. The key people in the process are those who work proactively on the ground.

The First Minister and I are showing leadership at a political level by being in these institutions together, and by working in a spirit of co-operation with each other. That work will continue. How we express that in the community has yet to be decided, but we will do so

in a sensitive way and in one that does not disrupt or create controversy among communities that, at present, beaver away on their own and make an extremely good job of it. They have our full support.

Ministerial Subcommittee on Children

6. **Mr Beggs** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister when the next meeting of the children's ministerial subcommittee will be held.

(AQO 4073/08)

The deputy First Minister: The next meeting of the ministerial subcommittee on children and young people will take place tomorrow, Tuesday 24 June.

Mr Beggs: The Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister previously held responsibility for administering the Executive programme for children. Until April this year, the centrally controlled children's fund supported 57 childcare projects administered through Playboard, which provided breakfast clubs and after-school clubs. Will the deputy First Minister ensure that such funds will be discussed at the ministerial subcommittee?

Current funding arrangements have failed. The Minister of Education, who has responsibility for childcare and extended schools, has refused to incorporate funding for those projects to date. Does the deputy First Minister acknowledge that those projects bring benefits to a multitude of Departments, yet individual Departments do not recognise their importance? Will he ensure that funding of such childcare projects is discussed at the ministerial subcommittee for children?

The deputy First Minister: All the issues raised in the Member's question will be seriously discussed at the ministerial subcommittee.

The children and young people's funding package, which incorporated the children's fund, ended in March 2008. The decision was made that, in cases where individual projects were considered to be of significant value, their funding streams should be incorporated within the Department's programmes, rather than managed through central funds. However, additional money was secured in the Budget to develop programmes that were previously supported by the central package, and the junior Ministers urged ministerial colleagues to mainstream and protect funding for children and young people throughout the budgetary process.

The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety acted as a central distribution point for centrally earmarked resources to fund 89 children's fund projects. The children's fund, as the Member knows, was formerly an Executive programme and

was an element of the children and young people's funding package.

The children's fund came to an end on 31 March 2008, and the junior Ministers, who have particular responsibility for children and young people, held several meetings with Departments, including the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, and the Department of Finance and Personnel, to identify a way forward for all projects. Following discussions, the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety has agreed to continue to administer funding for all projects for a further year — that is, until March 2009 — to enable sufficient time for it to source alternative funding or implement an exit strategy.

3.00 pm

Some of the concerns that have been expressed need to be dealt with through a joined-up approach by Departments. I have no doubt that that will happen.

ENVIRONMENT

Mr Speaker: Question 1 has been withdrawn.

Tree Preservation Orders

2. **Mr Easton** asked the Minister of the Environment what plans he has to increase fines for those who break tree preservation orders. (AQO 4058/08)

The Minister of the Environment (Mr S Wilson): I thank Members for their congratulations.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

The Minister of the Environment: At present, any person in contravention of the provisions of a tree preservation order — that is the cutting down, uprooting or wilful destruction of a tree, the wilful damaging of the tops of trees or lopping a tree in such a manner as to be likely to destroy it — is guilty of an offence under article 66 of the Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1991. That person is liable, on summary conviction, to a fine not exceeding £30,000, and, on conviction on indictment, to a fine determined by the courts. I am satisfied with the legislative measures in place and have no plans to change them.

Mr Easton: I congratulate the Minister on his elevation — it is richly deserved.

In light of the Minister's comments, is he disappointed with the number of prosecutions for breaking tree preservation orders? Dozens of such orders have been broken in my constituency. There seems to be a lack of will to prosecute those breaking tree preservation orders.

The Minister of the Environment: I thank the Member for his congratulations. He will know that I, as a keen environmentalist, sought this post — *[Laughter]*. I hope to fulfil my obligations in it.

Over the past five years, the Department of the Environment has investigated more than 60 cases, in which it was alleged that trees protected by tree protection orders had been destroyed or damaged contrary to the Order. The Department can take several approaches to dealing with such violations, one of which is to seek negotiations with developers to insist that they replace such trees with mature trees, which can be an expensive undertaking. Such action would avoid court proceedings.

Although Members can identify cases in their constituencies, the Department has been successful in many prosecutions. For example, the City of Derry — city of Londonderry — Golf Club was convicted of cutting down and destroying trees and was fined £200.

Although the maximum fine is £30,000, it is up to the courts to decide what fine is appropriate, and that is sometimes outside the control of the Department. However, in some cases, for example in Hamiltonsbawn, someone who cut down a tree was fined £2,500 and was made to pay court costs of £6,600. Moreover, the Department insisted that a tree costing £7,000 should replace the one that had been cut down. The Department is not soft on the issue.

Mr Butler: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I also congratulate the new Minister of the Environment. I hope that he will uphold his reputation as a champion of the environment and as a “tree-hugger”, as someone from this side of the House said. *[Interruption.]*

At the weekend, a colleague of mine had to intervene and literally throw herself in front of a developer who was cutting down trees in Dunmurry. However, the Planning Service does not seem to provide an out-of-hours service to report such actions by developers. As the Minister — as a champion of the environment — may know, many developers cut down trees early on a Saturday or Sunday morning and do not care about the fines imposed.

Will the Minister tell the House what measures will be taken to establish an out-of-hours service in order that the Planning Service can be telephoned when trees are being damaged?

The Minister of the Environment: I thank the Member for his congratulations. I wondered whether Sinn Féin had nominated me for the post, just to get me away from the Minister of Education in the Committee for Education. I do not know whether that is true. I will probably see more of her in the Executive than I did at Committee meetings.

I understand the point that the Member made. I am sure that all Members, in their constituencies, have experienced the difficulty that he has outlined. Even if departmental officers were available 24 hours a day, developers could still mount pre-emptive strikes, because it does not take long to cut down trees.

Members of the public must have more opportunity to contact the Department. However, rather than expecting a 24-hour service, the real answer is to deliver the message to developers who want to cut down mature vegetation or defy tree preservation orders that there will be severe penalties and that the Department will follow up on those penalties. That is the real answer to the question that the Member asked, and I hope that developers will increasingly get the message that their pockets will be hit if they continue to defy the law.

Rev Dr Robert Coulter: May I also congratulate the Minister on his elevation and wish him well in his portfolio.

I come from Ballymena; therefore, will the Minister state how much money has been received in fines for breaches of tree preservation orders over the past three years?

The Minister of the Environment: I thank the Member for his congratulations and for asking me a question to which, to be frank, I do not have an answer. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Durkan: Resign. *[Laughter.]*

The Minister of the Environment: I am not avoiding questions being asked by Members, and, if I have notice of a question as detailed as that, I will seek out the information. However, now that the Member has raised the issue and given me a puzzle in the form of a question that I cannot answer — I hope that there are not too many of those today — I will write to him with the figures.

Road Safety

3. **Mr Lunn** asked the Minister of the Environment to outline the new money that he plans to spend to increase road safety. (AQO 4098/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The Department’s budget for road safety in 2008-09 is approximately £59 million, comprising allocations of £5 million for road safety division and £54 million for the Driver and Vehicle Agency. It does not take into account any income as additional resources to the Department. Additional funding for road safety division, which was approved in the most recent comprehensive spending review, amounted to approximately £500,000 for 2008-09, £1.2 million for 2009-2010 and £1.6 million for 2010-11.

Mr Lunn: I also congratulate the Minister on his appointment and wish him well.

Given that young novice road users and cyclists, in particular, are among the most vulnerable groups on the roads, what priority will he give to road safety and cycling proficiency instruction in schools?

The Minister of the Environment: I thank the Member for his congratulations. Today is probably the only day on which I will be congratulated by everybody in the House; therefore, I am basking in it while I have the opportunity.

The Member asks an important question. He knows, as a member of the Committee for Education, that young people are being encouraged to walk or cycle to school. That will succeed only if parents believe that there is a safe environment for their children to do so. It is not a responsibility solely for the Department of the Environment; the Department for Regional Development has a responsibility, and it is trying to create better and safer cycle routes to school for children through the Safe Routes to School scheme. The PSNI and the schools also have roles to play.

The Department will use some of the additional money for a road safety strategy. That strategy will cover a range of issues and I hope that, when it comes out for consultation, the Member will find that it includes the issues that he has raised today.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I also congratulate the Minister and I wish him well — he has been left a very good foundation to start from.

On a serious note, every week — especially at the weekends — we hear of road tragedies. Will the Minister outline his plans to meet his counterpart in the South and the Road Safety Authority, so that they can deal with the serious road safety issues relating to border roads?

The Minister of the Environment: I hope that the Member was serious when he was congratulating me, not just when he was raising the other, more serious, issue.

The Member has identified an important issue. There is, of course, a flow of traffic across the border between Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic, so road safety issues do not stop at the border. In fact — and this may come as a surprise to the Member — I hope to meet my Irish counterpart on Thursday to consider the issue of disqualifications. It is important that people who are disqualified from driving in the Irish Republic, or who have a reputation for bad driving, should not be able to wreak havoc on the roads in Northern Ireland, and vice versa.

That is one area of cross-border co-operation that I do not believe anyone could possibly take offence at or regard as being political in any way — it will simply enhance the safety of road users in Northern Ireland. Although I will be discussing a focused range of issues

with the Irish Minister of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government on Thursday, I hope that we will widen the range of our discussions over the year ahead.

Mr Ross: I, too, welcome the Minister to his new role. The Minister will be aware that graduated driver licensing has been introduced in other parts of the world and has had a positive effect in reducing fatalities on roads. When will the consultation on graduated driver licensing be launched? Does he support the graduated driver licensing scheme?

The Minister of the Environment: It is important that, before young people begin using the roads, they are well-trained and have all the skills that are required to drive safely. It is also important that there is additional training and help for them for a period after they have obtained their driving licences.

My predecessor indicated that she was happy to consider the graduated driver licence scheme, and the Department will be consulting on a range of the issues relating to that scheme fairly shortly. As the Member will know, some of those issues are fairly controversial, so it will be interesting to see the response to that consultation. Some of the elements of the graduated driver licence scheme could profitably be applied to Northern Ireland and would save the lives of young drivers.

Water Extraction Licences

4. **Mr Storey** asked the Minister of the Environment to outline the steps taken to minimise the cost for farmers of a water extraction licence. (AQO 4102/08)

The Minister of the Environment: In order to ease the administrative and financial burden on those farmers who require an abstraction licence, the Environment and Heritage Service (EHS) has introduced the following steps: an advice and guidance service; a tailored application form; no requirement for flow metering; assistance with locating abstraction points; the provision of a water-usage estimation tool; and a recommendation that no annual charges will apply to the vast majority — 95% — of farm businesses.

EHS believes that, taken together, those steps will significantly minimise the cost of a water abstraction licence to those farmers who require one.

3.15 pm

Mr Storey: Although I do not want to buck the trend, I am almost reluctant to congratulate the Minister on his new position, given that he has transferred responsibility for checking the green credentials of the Education Minister onto my shoulders. However, I welcome the Minister to his first Question Time in his new capacity.

Water extraction licences were described by the Ulster Farmers' Union as another layer of unnecessary

Brussels bureaucracy and could even be called an EU water tax. Will the Minister reassure the House that no charges — either for registration or for the volume of water that is used — will be introduced until he has examined the responses in the consultation, which is due to finish at the end of the month, especially as the proposed commencement date for the charges is 1 July?

The Minister of the Environment: I echo the Member's sentiments. Too often, regulations and directives are imposed on us by Europe. As one who believes that the touch of Europe on Northern Ireland should be much lighter, I totally agree with him.

The Member will know that the Water Abstraction and Impoundment (Licensing) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006, to which he refers, are a result of two EU directives — the water framework directive and the habitats directive. Therefore, I agree that the situation is a result of interference from Brussels, which may cost people money.

The consultation is due to finish today, 23 June. Before I came to the Chamber, I checked the responses to the consultation and noted that some groups that should have a significant interest in the issue have not yet responded. I hope that those groups respond and make their views known before the end of the consultation period.

Given that the consultation period ends today, it would be unfair and unreasonable to impose charges by 1 July. Although the charges and how they will be applied are in the consultation, I want time to analyse the results and to make a judgement on the appropriate action. One reason for including the charges was the statement in HM Treasury guidelines on fees and charges that any new regulations should be cost-neutral — in other words, the full cost of applying the regulations should be recovered. However, a case can be made against the charges and, after examining the consultation, I will ask whether they are necessary.

Mr K Robinson: I, too, congratulate my East Antrim colleague on his elevation to the Front Bench. However, I hope that the party that entrusted him with ministerial power will not entrust him with the nuclear option for East Antrim. *[Laughter.]*

What steps has the Department taken to protect the level of the water table in the context of the debate on extraction licences? Is a comprehensive record kept of all private water extractions to ensure that the water-table protection is enforceable?

The Minister of the Environment: I thank the Member for his congratulations. There are several nuclear options for East Antrim that we want to avoid.

Although there is an EU directive on water extraction, it is not as important in Northern Ireland as it is in other parts of the United Kingdom or in Europe, because most water extraction here is from surface rather than underground collection. That is an example of the

problems that are caused by EU directives that apply across the union, regardless of whether they are suitable for each member state. As I said earlier, there will not be a requirement for flow metering.

The Member will be aware that if that kind of measurement is required, an additional cost will be imposed. The people who will be hit most severely by that cost, and, probably, by the monitoring, will be the extractors who take out more than 100 cu m a day. I do not think that the Member will want — for I certainly do not want — a farmer, who may have sunk a borehole and who extracts very little from the water table, to be subject to over-regulation.

Environment and Heritage Service Enforcement Officers

Mrs McGill: Ceist uimhir a cúig.

The Minister of the Environment: I assume that that means “Question No 5”. It would be helpful were Members to speak to me in a language that I understand.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

The Minister of the Environment: I was wary about saying that, because some of my constituents might ask me how I understood what was asked. I would then be in trouble were I to admit that I understand Irish.

5. **Mrs McGill** asked the Minister of the Environment how many enforcement officers the Environment and Heritage Service currently employs. (AQO 4119/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The Environment and Heritage Service has 63 members of staff, whose main role is the enforcement of legislation. Other staff in EHS regulate the industry and also conduct some enforcement action in the event of breaches of legislation.

Mrs McGill: I thank the Minister for his answer. I also congratulate him on taking up his new post. I wish him well and congratulate him on his knowledge of Gaelic. *[Laughter.]*

Are protocols and processes in place in EHS that enable its officers to deal with illegal dumping quickly and effectively?

The Minister of the Environment: I thank the Member for that question. The whole issue of illegal dumping causes many of us concern. In my constituency, I have seen the eyesore that illegal dumping causes, and many areas of natural beauty that are huge tourist attractions are spoiled by such actions.

The issue must be considered on two levels. The first level concerns small-scale illegal dumping, which the Department addresses quickly. The Department is considering measures that fall short of court action but that result in quick responses and get the message across

quickly to offenders that they will be punished through the imposition of fines, penalties and other sanctions.

The second level concerns the almost industrial scale of illegal dumping. The Member will be aware that we have taken action by setting up the environmental crime unit, which will be established fully during 2008. Considerable successes have already been achieved through using existing law. To date, hundreds of thousands of pounds have been obtained from those who are guilty of illegal dumping, and vehicles can now be seized. I hope that the Serious Organised Crime Agency (SOCA), which has taken over the Assets Recovery Agency, will also penalise those who have profited from such activities.

Mr Gallagher: I also congratulate the Minister on his recent appointment and wish him well. Given his initial comments on assuming office, which were widely reported, I also wish the environment well. *[Laughter.]*

The Criminal Justice Inspection's review of the performance of EHS was published a few months ago. Does the Minister support the review's findings?

The Minister of the Environment: I do — and let me assure the Member that the environment is safe in my hands.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

The Minister of the Environment: I hope that the Member will pass on that message to those in his party who would love to spoil the countryside with the unregulated building of houses.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

The Minister of the Environment: Perhaps Mr Gallagher will also pass that message to his colleague, the Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment, so that, at least, the SDLP maintains a degree of consistency.

The Department and I have accepted the findings of the Criminal Justice Inspection's review, and the Department has already taken action to implement some of the recommendations. In a 12-month period, the Department has taken 19 cases to the Public Prosecution Service and secured 12 convictions. The Department has looked at the findings of the Criminal Justice Inspection's review; it has committed itself to implementing the review's recommendations, and, as a result, has started to see some success.

Mr Ford: On behalf of Guardian-reading muesli-eaters, I congratulate the Minister on his appointment. I am sure that he will be as robust in protecting the environment as he was in defending grammar schools in his previous role.

As regards EHS's enforcement activities, I refer the Minister to the two recent major pollution incidents that took place in the Ballymartin River and Sixmilewater River. Talking about prosecutions fails to recognise the fact there have been two huge fish kills. Recently, I

discussed how that might be remedied with some of the Minister's officials. Will the Minister assure the House that instead of pursuing prosecutions, he will pursue resources for EHS to ensure that those types of incidents do not happen again?

The Minister of the Environment: I thank the Member for his question. He has 'The Guardian' bit; the muesli-eating bit and the beard bit, but I wonder whether he is wearing his sandals today — I am not too sure; perhaps we will ascertain that later.

Anyone who saw the vivid pictures of the destruction that was caused on 18 June cannot but be outraged. I am not running away from the matter; I want to address the Member's question.

However, the first point that I ought to make is that, in all instances, EHS is not responsible for the pollution in rivers. The people responsible are those who, in order to avoid costs, deliberately dump pollutants into rivers. Let us point the finger of blame at those people.

I accept that the Department is responsible for ensuring that the careless or callous people responsible for that particular incident are pursued, and that officers on the ground seek to ensure that everything that can be done will be done. Officers were at the scene and taking samples within 50 minutes of the incident being reported. Those samples are being tested to discover which chemicals or pollutants resulted in the fish kill. Prime suspects — who, as the Member will know, were found to be responsible for previous pollution incidents — have already been visited.

Officers are going along the river banks to identify pipes through which pollutants may have flowed into the river. Every action is being taken to identify the perpetrators; it will then be up to the Department to present a robust case to the courts, which must ensure that the maximum penalties are imposed.

That is certainly the message that I have given to my officials. I felt that the courts have been slightly dilatory in this matter, so I have asked officials to contact the Lord Chief Justice and remind him of the nature of the problems and devastation that those instances cause. It is hoped that the magistrates and judges will take the necessary action.

3.30 pm

FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

Downturn in Property Market

1. **Mr Savage** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of the current downturn in the property market and the effect this will have on his ability to meet the budget capital spending plans.
(AQO 4097/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr Dodds): Although recognising the current state of the property market, it is essential that Departments in Northern Ireland secure the planned level of capital receipts that was set out in the 2008-2011 Budget. I am confident that Departments will work with the support of the capital assets realisation team to maximise the level of capital receipts.

That is necessary so that capital investment projects such as schools, primary healthcare facilities and hospitals, roads and the newbuild social housing programme can be taken forward as planned. Furthermore, it should be remembered that the current market conditions should lower the cost of delivering capital projects; for example, in both the acquisition of land and in construction costs. Therefore, with the current downturn in the property market impacting on the cost of capital projects, as well as the receipts from asset sales — and with the support of the capital assets realisation team — I am content that the Budget capital spending plans are manageable.

Mr Savage: Will the Minister detail the implications of the recent revelation that the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) site at Crossnacreevy is now worth less than £6 million, compared to the original valuation of £200 million? Will the Minister detail the roles of the Department of Finance (DFP) and Personnel and Land and Property Services in that flawed valuation on which budgets were based?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I thank the Member for his question. As the Member knows, the anticipated level of receipts for the Crossnacreevy site — which was £200 million — that was included in the Budget document was based on the planning assumptions at the time. In light of the more recent information regarding likely planning permission, the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development raised the issue of the valuation of the Crossnacreevy site with my Department as part of the June monitoring round. The Executive will consider the best way forward regarding that issue in the strategic stocktake that is planned for the autumn.

I remind the House that income from the sale of the Crossnacreevy site was not factored into spending plans until the financial year 2010-11. I assure the House that the provision of £50 million for the farm nutrient management scheme has already been built into Budget 2008-2011 for this financial year, and that will not be altered.

Mr Simpson: Will the Minister indicate when the capital realisation task force report will be published?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I thank the Member for his question. The capital realisation task force report is an important issue, from which arose the capital asset realisation team. In the Chamber,

on 31 March 2008, my predecessor, Mr Peter Robinson, indicated that it was important that the task force report was published as soon as possible, so that all of its recommendations could be implemented.

As I mentioned, the capital assets realisation team, which was a particularly important part of that task force report, is already up and running. The team is getting up to speed very quickly since the Executive have already made assumptions regarding the likely level of further disposals in this financial year.

Mr Ford: The Minister referred to the programme as being manageable, on the basis of reduced capital costs on issues such as building land as compared to reduced assets. However, given that other aspects of the capital programme — such as IT systems — are not experiencing the same reduction, will he assure us that he is satisfied that the departmental budgets are robust at this stage?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I appreciate the import of the question and the thrust behind it. It will be the responsibility of individual Departments to address the shortfall in capital receipts by identifying other surplus assets for disposal, or by making adjustments to their capital investment plans.

Members will recognise that several issues are involved, not least equal pay. The Executive want to support the Departments that have taken every possible action to address the shortfall in capital receipts.

Procurement Guidelines: Equality

2. **Ms J McCann** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how the new procurement guidelines can be applied to create equality of opportunity and deliver the Executive's priorities of tackling poverty and disadvantage. (AQO 4155/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: Guidance on integrating equality of opportunity and sustainable development in public-sector procurement was launched by my predecessor on 29 May 2008. That guidance provides practical advice and case studies for policy-makers and practitioners to assist them to more effectively integrate equality of opportunity and sustainable considerations into public-sector procurement. Although the guidance has been developed by Central Procurement Directorate, working in conjunction with the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, it is for individual Departments to determine how best to apply it in their respective business areas.

Equality considerations must be mainstreamed into all decisions, including high-level or overarching policies and strategies. Departments are individually responsible for ensuring that equality of opportunity has been properly mainstreamed, and in providing

such assurances to Ministers. It is the implications of the guidance — supported by appropriate training — that will support the Executive's approach in the delivery of their priorities under the Programme for Government.

Tackling poverty and disadvantage requires concerted and co-ordinated action across a range of departmental programmes that can collectively address the many cross-cutting issues.

Ms J McCann: Go raibh maith agat. Will provision be made in any future public-sector procurement to allow local small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and social-economy enterprises the opportunity to bid for contracts from which previous parameters would have largely excluded them? Will there be provisions in procurement requirements to specifically target and benefit geographical areas and resource profiles that help to address poverty in disadvantaged priorities?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I listened carefully to what the Member said, and I will bear it in mind. She knows about the background to the policy and the new guidelines that have been introduced, because discussions have taken place on that matter with her and others.

The fundamental principle of best value for money underlies all procurement policy. However, as part of that, we can take into account the optimum combination of whole-life cost and quality to meet the customer's requirement, which allows for the inclusion, as appropriate, of social, economic and environmental goals. As part of that, I take on board what the Member said about the role of SMEs and social-enterprise bodies. However, as part of the Executive, the Department is constrained by procurement policy and rules.

Mr McClarty: Will the Minister detail the procurement guidelines that exist to ensure that small and medium-sized enterprises can compete fairly and equally for business from the Northern Ireland Executive and the wider public sector in Northern Ireland?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The question that was raised by the Member, and touched on by the previous Member, is important. We all want to ensure that the many small and medium-sized enterprises in Northern Ireland are able to compete — as far as possible — for part of that business. A considerable amount of investment for infrastructure in Northern Ireland — almost £20 billion — will take place under the investment strategy for Northern Ireland. The Member raised an important issue, and I will be happy to liaise with him. As far as we can, we should encourage as much investment as possible to go towards our own indigenous companies and industries.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh míle maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. My question is not unrelated to the previous question. Is the Minister not concerned that

some procurement opportunities are structured in such a way that local firms cannot easily avail of them, if at all in some instances? Will he commit to conduct an in-depth review of the present procedures with a view to ensuring that local firms compete on a level playing field?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: Should the honourable gentleman wish to highlight in writing any particular concerns about a specific procurement exercise or company, I would be happy to examine the information. All Members share a common view on how to progress and create a level playing field for everyone, subject to the rules that must apply when dealing with public money.

Performance and Efficiency Delivery Unit

3. **Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on the latest developments in the performance and efficiency delivery unit.

(AQO 4090/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: As previously indicated, the initial focus of the performance and efficiency delivery unit (PEDU) was on the planning process and rate arrears. PEDU staff met those in charge of the Planning Service and have been analysing and assessing detailed information on their processing times for planning applications. PEDU staff also met those in charge of Land and Property Services, and they are currently examining performance information on rate arrears and the method used to set the agency's cash collection targets for rate revenue.

More widely, my Department, in consultation with PEDU, requested delivery plans for the schemes being supported through the innovation fund. PEDU's main role was to produce guidance on delivery plans and, in due course, it will assess those plans to gauge whether each scheme has robust delivery arrangements in place.

PEDU continues to lead my Department's work on the establishment of a robust performance management and monitoring system to drive the delivery of the commitments and targets to which the Department signed up when it secured funding from the Budget.

Mr Weir: I welcome the Minister to his first Question Time in the capacity of Minister of Finance and Personnel; an occasion that seems to have escaped the attention of other Members in the House.

I am a firm believer that PEDU can make a positive contribution. However, will the Minister offer some assurance that PEDU's work will not lead to cuts in jobs and particularly in front-line services?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I am grateful to the honourable Member for his comments. I assure him that PEDU's role is not to remove funding from the front line but to ensure that, through efficiency

and the proper targeting of resources, additional funding can be released for front-line services. Efficiency savings must be genuine and achieved by using fewer resources to deliver the same, or even additional, outputs. I will not stand for cuts in services being dressed up as genuine efficiencies; nor would anyone in the House condone that. PEDU aims to reduce bureaucracy and costs, not services. It is in the interest of every Member, Department and the public services generally to ensure that PEDU is able to work effectively in close co-operation with departmental officials.

Mr P Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I also congratulate the Minister on the first Question Time in his new role. Given the recent underspend by all Departments and the non-delivery of several PSA targets, including one of the Department of Finance and Personnel's targets, will the Minister detail how DFP can become more involved with PEDU to ensure that services are delivered, the departmental spend is more efficient and targets are met? Go raibh maith agat.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I am grateful to the Member for his comments. His question goes to the heart of PEDU's role. Going by the gist of his question, the Member shares the Department's aim that PEDU should be concerned with ensuring that Departments deliver the PSAs and objectives that are set out in the Programme for Government. It is one thing to secure funding from the Budget for Departments, all of which request resources to enable them to implement particular programmes and objectives. After the money has been allocated, the objectives set and the agreements entered into, Departments must ensure that they deliver. There must be a commitment to, and a focus on, delivery, and on the most effective and efficient use of resources.

The aim is not to make cuts but to ensure that the hard-pressed taxpayers, ratepayers and others in Northern Ireland who contribute so much to public services receive the services that they deserve. That should happen with a minimum of red tape and bureaucracy but with the level of support and administration required to deliver a first-class, even world-class, service.

That is what we in Northern Ireland must be about, and I am determined that, in working in collaboration with other Departments, that will be the true aim of PEDU.

3.45 pm

Mr Burnside: I also congratulate the Minister on his promotion. Performance efficiency units sound very well, but we must judge them on how they deliver results. How much discretion does the Finance Minister have to, for example, send the performance efficiency unit into a chosen Department to evaluate, qualify and quantify the performance of its Minister, permanent civil servants and consultants? Could that

unit be sent to, for example, the Department of Education, which, by any performance and efficiency criteria is the worst-run Department by any Minister of any operational Department since the formation of the present Executive?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I am grateful to the honourable Member for his best wishes. He raised the issue of discretion with regard to what we can do where specific Departments are concerned. I am always willing to hear of any areas in which Members think that the resources of PEDU can be best utilised. It is getting up and running, and it will take time to get to full speed. I stress that PEDU has no different remit to that of the Department of Finance and Personnel. My Department, as well as PEDU, is charged with ensuring that value for money is secured for the taxpayer, to which the efficiency and effectiveness of public spending is central. However, having a single unit that is dedicated to focusing on a particular issue is extremely helpful to the Executive and the Assembly.

I assure the Member and the House absolutely that, in so far as the Department of Education is concerned — or, indeed, any other Department — I, along with colleagues, will scrutinise carefully all expenditure to ensure that there is minimum waste and that there is no diversion of resources from the key goals that were outlined in the Programme for Government.

Central Procurement Directorate: Maze/ Long Kesh Regeneration Site

4. **Mr Poots** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what has been the role of the Central Procurement Directorate in developing the process to engage private-sector delivery partners at the Maze/Long Kesh regeneration site. (AQO 4136/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: Northern Ireland public-procurement policy requires that all procurement is undertaken by a centre of procurement expertise. The Central Procurement Directorate (CPD) acted as the centre of procurement expertise in the procurement of a private-sector delivery partner for the Maze/Long Kesh regeneration site, using the competitive dialogue process.

Public procurement must comply with The Public Contracts Regulations 2006. The competitive dialogue process is one of the procedures that can be used to lead to the award of a public contract that is compliant with the regulations. The CPD advised the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, the Strategic Investment Board (SIB), and their legal advisers in the preparation of the tender documentation. The CPD also administered the procurement process.

Mr Poots: Will the Minister join with me in commending the CPD's work in that particular procurement

exercise, particularly the building in of a pain/gain mechanism that will ensure that the private sector will bear the burden of risk? As a consequence, the figure of £379 million that was quoted in the press can be halved, and further tens of millions can be wiped off that for the cost of regeneration at the Maze.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I am happy to hear what the Member said about the role of the CPD, and I concur with his view about the excellent work that that body has done. It had no input into the development of business cases for the projects, or any involvement in the business-case assessment. The Member and the House will, of course, be aware that a preferred bidder has not yet been appointed and that the procurement process is therefore still live. Detailed information on the bids cannot therefore be made public at this stage, as to do so would be in breach of procurement rules.

Mrs D Kelly: Perhaps the Minister will give some indication of how many millions of pounds of public money have already been spent on the Maze/Long Kesh project. Does he agree that the divisions in his party on the Maze project are another indication that a huge economic and social opportunity is being lost in favour of what some see as the DUP acting out of short-term political necessity?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: It never surprises me when the Member seeks to ask such a question. Facts are stubborn. The fact is that the outline business cases that were produced by the accounting officers in OFMDFM and the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) have concluded that a value-for-money case has not been demonstrated for the scale of public expenditure that is involved in the proposals that they sent to my Department. In those circumstances, there is nothing to approve since no unqualified recommendation has been received from either Department.

In order to inform future Executive considerations of the proposals, DFP has produced a strategic analysis of the material that the two Departments provided. All of the facts and figures that DFP analysed and quoted came directly from the material that was supplied by the two Departments concerned. Therefore, conclusions that were reached by the officials and accounting officer in DCAL, their counterparts in OFMDFM and officials in DFP all concur on the value-for-money position. Therefore, when the Member has sat down and read the documents, got the facts into her head and realised what the factual position is, perhaps she can come up with a more sensible question next time.

Mr Lunn: Given the requirement that the Maze site be developed for community use, will the Minister outline what the likely cost of regeneration would be without the stadium, as opposed to with the stadium,

and thereby give the House an indication of the real cost of a stadium at the Maze?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: So far, the Department has received outline business cases from DCAL and OFMDFM. In a previous answer, I explained the position as regards those outline business cases. It is highly unusual that they should be put forward without a recommendation on value for money. Nevertheless, the Department will consider all of the options carefully. It is absolutely essential that the tremendous and valuable site at the Maze should be regenerated and used for the benefit of the local community and the wider community of Northern Ireland. There is a fantastic opportunity, which we want to realise as quickly as possible. We will do so on the basis of all of the facts and available information. Ministers will make the final decision.

Cost of Fuel: Mileage Allowance

5. **Mr Boylan** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, in the light of the current high cost of fuel, whether he will raise the mileage allowance available to civil servants and individuals employed by statutory bodies. (AQO 4145/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I am committed to ensure that civil servants are properly reimbursed when they provide their vehicles for carrying out official business. The current mileage rates that are payable to civil servants who use their cars to travel for business reasons are 40p per mile for the first 10,000 miles and 25p per mile thereafter. The rates are based on those that have been set by HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) and have remained unchanged since 2002. I understand that those rates are in place in the Civil Service elsewhere in the United Kingdom.

I realise that since 2002, fuel prices have increased by more than 30p per litre. In view of that, I have asked my officials to review current rates in order to determine whether they are still appropriate. It is worth noting that if mileage rates were raised above the HMRC-approved rate, there would be tax implications for each individual as well as additional cost to Departments for the administration of any sum that exceeds the approved amount of 40p.

It is not within my remit to comment upon the mileage rates that are payable to individuals who are employed by other statutory bodies.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I congratulate the Minister and wish him well in his new post. I thank him for his answer. Given the current fuel crisis, which seems certain to continue, and the Assembly's commitments on climate change and environmental protection, will the Minister agree that

it is imperative that the relocation of public-sector jobs throughout the North — not only to deal with those issues, but with the imbalance in the distribution of jobs — should be given serious consideration by the Executive? Go raibh maith agat.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The Member raises a wider issue about the location of public-sector jobs. He will be aware that Sir George Bain is currently carrying out a review on that particular matter, which I hope to discuss with him soon. I understand that he plans to bring forward proposals as quickly as possible.

When considering the location or relocation of public-sector jobs, all the issues come into play, and people having to travel to work is one of them. Given the recent increases in the price of petrol and diesel, driving and maintaining a car is much more expensive than it used to be. That is why I have instigated a review of Civil Service mileage rates. I will inform Members of the outcome of that review when it is known.

Mr Armstrong: I congratulate the Minister on his new role; I hope to work with him in bringing jobs to Mid Ulster.

Given the high cost of fuel, does the Minister agree that the proposed increase of 2p a litre on fuel duty in the autumn will disadvantage consumers and the economy? Will the Minister detail any representation that he has made to the Chancellor of the Exchequer on the effect of spiralling costs on the people of Northern Ireland?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I am grateful to the honourable Member for his comments. The 2p fuel increase is an important issue, and I have already made representations on it in another place. As the Member is aware, tax revenues are a matter for the national Parliament, not the Assembly. However, he can be assured that we are continuing to raise those issues. He will also be aware that the Executive have established a fuel poverty task force, led by the Department for Social Development. That task force has already committed to make representations to increase the winter fuel payment. I support that; I have supported it elsewhere, and I will continue to make representations to the Chancellor of the Exchequer as appropriate.

Mr A Maginness: I congratulate the Minister on his promotion and on his translation from his previous Department. Perhaps “translation” is too much of a Church term.

I listened to the Minister’s reply carefully. I ask him to be wary of any mileage increase for public servants because it may create reasonable resentment among ordinary workers who do not have that advantage. Will the Minister seek ways and means of alleviating the problem of travelling for other workers? It is becoming

a huge burden, particularly on those who travel from country areas to Belfast.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I thank the Member for his comments; he made a good point about the danger of carrying out such a review on public servants. However, it is intended to reimburse civil servants and other public officials when they are using their own vehicle in the exercise of public duties. In those circumstances, it is fair that they should be reimbursed at a reasonable rate, and all of that will be reviewed.

The Member asked what could be done on the wider issue. Many of the solutions to the wider issues fall outside the remit of the Assembly and the Executive. Nonetheless, we are conscious of their impact, and that is why the fuel poverty task force was set up. That is why the Executive decided to freeze the regional rate, which should allow extra income to remain in people’s purses and in their household budget.

We will consider other ways in which we can lessen the effect of the rising cost of living on people’s budgets. That is one of the benefits of devolution: we may not be able to deliver everything that people want, but at least we can tackle the issues in a much more sympathetic way than would ever have been the case under direct rule.

Proposed Competition Analysis Board

6. **Mr Attwood** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what action he will take to set up a competition analysis board with an obligation to issue annual reports, based on the model of the National Competitiveness Council in the Republic of Ireland, as recommended by Sir David Varney. (AQO 4054/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I appreciate why Sir David Varney recommended the establishment of a competition analysis board.

It would be helpful to the Executive to have contemporary data on our competitiveness performance in order to ensure that, if necessary, timely remedial action can be taken. Nevertheless, I must further consider the practicalities of making progress with that proposal, and, if a decision is taken to set up such a board, it is important that it should be established in a manner that allows it to operate as efficiently as possible.

4.00 pm

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

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Free and Fair Elections in Zimbabwe

Debate resumed on amendment to motion:

That this Assembly condemns the threats against the opposition in Zimbabwe; calls for free and fair elections in the presidential run-off election on 27 June 2008; further calls for appropriate international monitoring of the election; and encourages all sides to accept the outcome of the election. — [Mrs Long.]

Which amendment was:

Leave out all after “Assembly” and insert

“condemns the threats and violence against the opposition in Zimbabwe; recognises that an environment for free and fair elections does not exist; expresses alarm that Morgan Tsvangirai felt he had no alternative but to withdraw from the presidential run-off scheduled for 27 June 2008; and calls on the international community, including the United Nations and the African Union, to take all available steps to ensure democracy, human rights and the rule of law in Zimbabwe.” — [Mrs Long.]

Mr McNarry: In the House, taking part in a debate is a right that, perhaps, is easy to take for granted. The traditions of British parliamentary democracy are a cherished inheritance that have shaped proceedings in the House, other United Kingdom devolved assemblies and democratic parliaments across the globe. That tradition finds expression in free and fair elections, respect for an independent judiciary, the rule of law and religious freedom.

Those are characteristics of decent, civilised societies, and they are principles that are valued by diverse societies in every continent — in countries large and small — that secure peace, prosperity and freedom. However, those principles are rejected and trampled underfoot by a dictator who is clinging to power in Zimbabwe — namely, Robert Mugabe. His refusal to accept the Movement for Democratic Change's (MDC) election victory in March is another example of his regime's moral bankruptcy.

Now, more than ever, his regime holds on to power through fear and violence alone. In recent weeks, the violent repression of the opposition has reached dramatic levels. In addition to denying political and civil rights, Mugabe has acted to deprive Zimbabweans of their religious freedoms. His decision to deploy riot police against Anglican congregations in Harare because Zimbabwe's Anglican Church dared to criticise his regime is a most disturbing development. Denying the right to religious freedom is a sure sign that a regime is moving towards totalitarianism.

Furthermore, under Mugabe, a once proud and prosperous country has been economically bankrupted and brought to its knees. Zimbabwe was once a food exporter — the breadbasket of Africa. Now it faces a serious food and a drastic humanitarian crisis.

Mugabe's regime has presided over economic mismanagement of criminal proportions that has crippled Zimbabwe with hyperinflation. A Government that delivers 100,000% inflation must be held to account for its betrayal of the national interest and the destruction of an entire society's economic well-being.

Faced with the crisis in Zimbabwe, the international community's inaction has been little short of a scandal. South Africa's moral cowardice in the face of Mugabe's dictatorship is a betrayal of millions of Africans' hopes and dreams, and China's insistence on providing political and economic support for Mugabe's regime is nothing but the export of its abuse of human rights to the heart of Zimbabwe.

There is a real need for meaningful and effective international action to remove Robert Mugabe in order to free the Zimbabwean people from his violent regime. I believe firmly that further pressure must be instigated by African countries, which can no longer spectate from the sidelines. As the largest regional power, South Africa must demonstrate, by its actions and deeds, that it is fully prepared to defend democracy and the freedom of the Zimbabwean people. It is paramount that it sets an example to the region.

In this small country, acting with credibility because of our understanding of conflict and our withstanding of terrorism, we would do well to send a message that Northern Ireland supports the people in Zimbabwe who are making sacrifices in order to restore law and order and the democratic process. In that vein, and with that in mind, I support the amendment.

Ms Ritchie: I support the motion and the amendment. There are two types of abuse happening in Zimbabwe. On the one hand, there is the completely illegal violence that the Mugabe regime has visited on the democratic opposition. That has already resulted in hundreds and thousands of deaths. On the other hand, there is the harassment and repression of the opposition party, the MDC, the constant arrest of its leaders, and the false charges up to and including treason, where some facade of legality is retained. That led to Morgan Tsvangirai's withdrawal yesterday from the presidential campaign.

The Mugabe regime is aided by various kinds of repressive legislation, which a supine Parliament passes and a judiciary that does not meet the proper standards of independence implements. Mugabe is increasingly resorting to threats of illegal violence. He has openly incited the war veterans to oppose an MDC victory by violent overthrow, but he is also using and

abusing emergency legislation and emergency powers to retain his grip on office.

It is not enough for us to oppose his violent methods. We must also oppose and condemn his use of repressive legislation and technically legal policing methods to defeat democracy. We must remember that regimes that seek to hold on to power in the face of rising democratic opposition have always used a combination of illegal and technically legal methods. It happened here, too.

In South Africa in 1963, the apartheid regime wanted to introduce legislation to suppress the wave of protests that followed the Sharpeville massacre. On that occasion, speaking to the all-white Parliament, the then Minister of Justice, B J Vorster, said that he:

“would be willing to exchange all the legislation of that sort for one clause of the Northern Ireland Special Powers Act.”

He was referring, of course, to the famous section that gave the Minister of Home Affairs here the power to determine that anything that he had forgotten to make an offence in the legislation would, in any case, be an offence, if he said so.

On Saturday, I met a group of South African housing activists, and it provided the opportunity to make the point that South Africa, with its history of, and emergence from, tyranny, has a special and vital role to play in pushing for true democracy in Zimbabwe. Today, as Robert Mugabe surveys the rising tide of democratic opposition, he may be thinking that it would be nice if he could just lock them all up for a while — say, for 42 days or so. He could probably get another piece of emergency legislation through the Parliament, citing some clear and present danger to the country, because, as has often been said, patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel. It should be no problem for Robert Mugabe to produce some credible-sounding intelligence information that shows that the MDC is, after all, a major threat to national security.

However, respecting human rights is not just about lecturing dictators, nor is it a political option among many. It is about living and legislating according to a basic, consistent code of decency. It is about sticking to the rule of proper law and the basic tenets of a lawful society in good times and bad.

We have come a long way in this part of the world, but we do not yet occupy the high ground. Even as we speak, there remains the unresolved screaming injustice that has been visited on Robert McCartney and his family and the wall of silence that surrounds the murder of Paul Quinn. Let us redouble our efforts to help the families of those people, too.

In conclusion, we must condemn Mugabe and do everything in our power to support democracy in Zimbabwe. We hope that the rest of the world — the European Union, the American continents and other countries — can put pressure on Zimbabwe in order to

bring about a proper regime of justice and democracy, and, of course, we must finish the job of establishing a just democracy in our own land.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom tacaíocht a thabhairt don rún agus ár gcéad tacaíocht a thabhairt do mhuintir Zimbabwe.

I support the motion and the amendment, and I thank the Members who brought this matter before the House.

It goes without saying that all in the Assembly should be in favour of fair and free elections, and that those who participate in any forthcoming election should allow it to take place in a peaceful and democratic atmosphere.

The decision of Morgan Tsvangirai, taken against a backdrop of wholesale violence against his supporters, is a cause for great concern, and undermines any sense that the election on 27 June will have any legitimacy. The recent presidential election was, obviously, very flawed, and those flaws were pointed out by international observers.

Zimbabwe's neighbours South Africa and Mozambique said that the democratic process in Zimbabwe was in disrepute, and placed an unnecessary strain on the region, with regard to not just the electoral process, but to the democratic, economic and social stability of Zimbabwe. Their effort to find a way forward has, at its core, the people of Zimbabwe, not narrow political considerations. Irrespective of the previous colonial relationship between Zimbabwe and the British Government, the Government in Harare cannot reject the will of the people — nor can they abdicate, through rhetoric, that it is in the interests of Britain or Europe to see the end of Robert Mugabe. It is the people who are sovereign, and only a free and fair election is the way to determine their will.

To ignore that not only postpones the moment of truth, but sows the seeds of mistrust and further misrule, with the inevitability of conflict. We are right to call for free and fair elections, and the sovereignty of Zimbabwe and its people must be paramount. We must recognise, too, those in this country who are seeking refuge, particularly those who have fled the political situation in Zimbabwe.

We must also be supportive of the African Union Commission, and the steps that it is taking to ensure that any forthcoming elections are free and fair. We must ensure that the necessary economic assistance is in place in order to alleviate the dire circumstances in Zimbabwe. Sin an tslí ar aghaidh. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr Weir: The motion, particularly considering the amendment that takes account of the tragic events of the past few days, when Morgan Tsvangirai felt that it was impossible to carry on with the election, is something around which this House should unite.

I was disappointed that a previous contributor attempted to draw analogies with proposals for 42-day detention in previous legislation. Such a comparison is facile, and is not a fair reflection of the facts. Indeed, it is offensive to compare anything that is happening in the UK with the situation in Zimbabwe.

Although is it right for the Assembly to unite in condemning the violence and the denial of freedoms and civil liberties in Zimbabwe, their outworking is a humanitarian crisis in Zimbabwe on a scale that none of us can fully comprehend with respect to the effect on people's daily lives.

I do not wish to rehearse statistics that were quoted earlier. However, under Mugabe's rule, Zimbabwe has gone from a country that was once described as the "breadbasket of Africa" to the basket case of Africa. The country descended into mediaeval conditions a number of years ago, and is now moving into Stone Age conditions, with levels of life expectancy plummeting.

Furthermore, what has happened in Zimbabwe in the past few months should come as no great surprise to many of us who have studied the history of that country. As David Simpson said, some of Mugabe's thugs were involved in the most brutal violence even before independence, so we should not be surprised that he abuses his position when he is in power. There were early warnings of that abuse in the 1980s when Robert Mugabe fell out with his one-time ally Joshua Nkomo. Indeed, there were massacres and genocide on an enormous scale in Matabeleland, where ZANU-PF has failed to attract support through tribal loyalties.

4.15 pm

At the beginning of the decade, so-called war veterans seized land. They did not do it for social justice reasons; rather they did it on behalf of a despot who was attempting to maintain power.

I, too, have met Zimbabweans who have had to flee the country, and some of them have managed to find homes and settle in Northern Ireland. Those people gave up everything to come here. They gave up their possessions, their life savings and their jobs, yet they — and it is hard to have to say this — are the lucky ones, as they managed to get out of the country. Others who have managed to get a much shorter distance are in great difficulties in South Africa. However, millions of people are still trapped in the brutal regime in Zimbabwe. The one message of hope that we can draw on is the courage and strength of the Zimbabwean people.

More than five years ago, during the Cricket World Cup in 2003, two of Zimbabwe's cricketers — Henry Olonga and Andrew Flower — effectively gave up their international careers by taking the courageous stand of wearing black armbands, which was a political gesture, to mourn the death of democracy. In many ways, they put their families' lives at risk. In fact, Henry Olonga

and his family had to be smuggled out of Zimbabwe. Sadly, the lessons were not learned at that stage.

There is a limited amount that the Assembly can do, but, in one clear voice, it can tell the British Government that they need to ratchet up the level of sanctions that are being imposed. We need international co-operation through the UN to ensure the removal of the Mugabe regime. We need the African Union to step up to the mark, particularly in its regional strength. South Africa, which is the largest and most powerful country in that region, has, at times, been too indulgent of the regime in Zimbabwe. South Africa and other neighbouring countries must send a clear signal that enough is enough. I urge Members to support the motion and the amendment.

Mr Hamilton: I support the motion and the amendment. As my colleague Peter Weir said, at times there is a sense that what we say during a debate on such an important subject is of no consequence. Yet, we must say something. We have long-standing connections with Zimbabwe. Britain was a former ruling power in Zimbabwe, which gives us a heartfelt connection to that part of the world. As several Members said, many people, including white farmers and members of the MDC, have had to flee their homeland and seek refuge in this part of the world. As Peter Weir said, we have all met several of those people and heard about their plight.

We should say something today simply because it is the right thing to do. We have all heard, and it has been repeated today, that Zimbabwe is hurtling towards failed-state status. We have heard about violence, corruption and inflation. Last week, there was utter pandemonium when our most recent inflation rate of 3.3% was released, but Zimbabwe's inflation rate has probably increased by 3.3% since I started speaking. There is abject poverty, hunger, disease, countless refugees, and millions of Zimbabweans have been displaced in their country. All of that is well documented.

As Peter Weir correctly said, what was once the breadbasket of Africa has been transformed into a basket case.

We have all experienced difficult elections in Northern Ireland. However, we cannot compare our experiences to the electoral situation in Zimbabwe. There should not have been a run-off election at all. We have all stood in councils awaiting our own results or others' results for two days. However, that wait was not to allow the incumbent the time to fix the vote and to design a result to suit his ends.

Withdrawing from the elections yesterday, Morgan Tsvangirai — whose courage I praise — listed seven reasons: state-sponsored violence; the inability to campaign viably in Zimbabwe; MDC's decimation through violence and murder; lack of confidence in an electoral commission that has been hollowed out by

ZANU-PF activists; lack of access to the media; Mugabe's defiant assertion that only God could remove him; and the anticipated election-rigging, which we all know is likely to happen. In the luxury of standing where we do, we might claim that he should have fought on and that democracy would have triumphed eventually. However, Tsvangirai illustrated the situation aptly when he said:

"We cannot ask the people to cast their vote ... when that vote will cost their lives."

That sums up the gravity of the situation. Many people have died, but, perhaps, the biggest blow has been to Zimbabweans' hope that their ordeal was coming to an end.

It appears that Morgan Tsvangirai's gamble of going in to a run-off election has failed. However, his actions send a clear message to the world that, at the minute, it is impossible to conduct free and fair elections in Zimbabwe. The response, which has hitherto been hallmarked by inaction, must change radically. In particular, the United Nations has a legal right and a moral duty to intervene decisively.

The force of freedom and the power of democracy are wonderful things, which an increasing number of people, globally, are experiencing for the first time. Freedom and democracy are irresistible forces, and I hope — as we all do — that the people of Zimbabwe will soon discover how freedom feels, instead of feeling the force of the jackboot of a horrible dictator.

Mr Dallat: Although I welcome the motion, I worry that it will have little or no impact on those people who can change the course of history in Zimbabwe. Why has the Western World, for so many years, observed while the people of that beautiful, fertile country have suffered in despair? Can anyone explain why a tyrant — in a long line of tyrants — has been allowed to commit genocide while no one seems to care? Is it because there is no oil in Zimbabwe? That question has been asked a few times. More than likely, it is. However, Britain, surely, has a moral duty to come to the aid of its former colony, once called Southern Rhodesia.

Although it is difficult to say with certainty where Cecil Rhodes's soul is today, surely someone in Britain must accept that he, as a British citizen, laid the foundation stone for one of the sorriest stories of this century.

Until recently I received emails from a friend in Gwanda, a small town south of Bulawayo, the second city in this once-prosperous country, aptly named — as others have said — the breadbasket of Africa. Those emails told horrifying stories of murder and torture on a scale that no one here could imagine. I do not receive those emails any more, and I do not know whether my friend is still alive.

For us in the Western World, it is difficult to understand why Robert Mugabe survives and why neighbouring

countries — particularly South Africa, and its President Mbeki — ignore the atrocities. South Africa is considered a model for peace and reconciliation, yet it ignores the situation on the northern border. That is, undoubtedly, connected with the past and the hatred for the empires that previously plundered their continent. In Malawi — where my wife Anne is — there is support for Mugabe.

He goes there regularly. Last year, a road outside Blantyre was named in his honour. I mention that because he and his cohorts murdered tens of thousands of Malawian migrant workers, whose crime was to work on white-owned farms — the very farms that were producing food for Malawi. I make the point because Mugabe did not just create famine in his own country, but in neighbouring countries that were dependent on Zimbabwe for survival.

As Members know, Mugabe turned up recently in Rome, at the heart of the European Union. My God, where does it end? Searching the Internet last night, I saw an article that described Zimbabwe as a beautiful country to visit, and mentioned the Victoria Falls, the wildlife preserves and the capital, Harare. The article went on to rule out the possibility of going there because of the breakdown of law and order, the violence and the criminality. That is a shame, because Zimbabwe is truly one of the most beautiful countries that I have ever had the privilege of visiting, and its people are beyond reproach.

It has been a long time since Cecil Rhodes and his form of tyranny; and it has been a long time since Ian Smith finally gave in to democracy. Could anyone have predicted that such a tyrant as Mugabe would have emerged from the ashes of a particularly cruel form of apartheid? It is more pertinent to ask why the world has looked on for so many years and done nothing to bring relief to the millions of people who are now expected to live to no more than 37 years of age in the case of men and 35 years in the case of women.

Why does a country that had the highest levels of literacy now have few teachers? It was because they were not paid. Why have many female teachers left the classrooms and gone to Harare to survive as prostitutes? Why is Zimbabwe riddled with HIV/AIDS? Why is the most fertile land in the world lying idle — occupied illegally by so-called war veterans? As Dr Paisley said earlier, what is the United Nations doing? Why is America plundering Iraq when it could be involved in peace-keeping duties in Zimbabwe? Perhaps that is a daft question, and not a good idea, but I am sure that oil rather than human rights is dictating the activities of the big powers of the world. That is rotten to the core.

Finally, what are we going to do? Let us hope that the Assembly's all-party group on international development can do something. Perhaps the Assembly's branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association

can debate the issue. In the meantime, we look on in despair. The re-run of the election is a farce, now that the MDC has pulled out. However, who could have expected that party to carry on with most of its campaign team murdered? Cry, Zimbabwe.

Lord Browne: I support the motion and the amendment. As previous contributors have pointed out, the withdrawal yesterday of Morgan Tsvangirai from the presidential election run-off has radically altered the political landscape of Zimbabwe. Obviously, it is pointless to call for free and fair elections, since the violence and intimidation employed by the supporters of President Mugabe have made that impossible.

It is now imperative that the United Nations Security Council takes up the issue and intervenes to prevent civil war breaking out in Zimbabwe. The Assembly should call on the United Kingdom Government to use all their influence in the United Nations and in other forums, such as the European Union, to achieve that aim.

Mugabe is justly reviled by all right-thinking democrats throughout the world. However, it is not often recognised that he is a very intelligent and, of course, dangerous man. He had a broad education at a Jesuit mission school and won a scholarship to the University of Fort Hare in South Africa where he received a bachelor of arts degree in English and history. He subsequently became a dedicated and committed Marxist. By the mid 1960s, he had abandoned the principle of liberal democracy and embraced the abhorrent doctrine that intimidation and murder are appropriate instruments with which to achieve political ends.

After independence was achieved in 1980, it appeared that, for several years, Mugabe had succeeded in establishing a multi-racial liberal state, with a Government that were committed to social justice.

Unfortunately, it subsequently became clear that Mugabe had in no way abandoned his allegiance to authoritarianism and political violence. As Members will be aware, he has not hesitated to use brutality and murder to suppress political opposition and to intimidate all the people of Zimbabwe. Today, we have heard vivid accounts of the savage methods that he has employed in his country.

4.30 pm

Mugabe's career is an object lesson for us all. It shows that an intelligent and well-educated individual can become addicted to political violence and corrupted by power to such an extent that he despises and silences anyone who dares to criticise him. Even worse, he callously turns his back on the terrible economic deprivation suffered by his own people and intimidates and murders men, women and children without a second thought.

There can be no end to the tragedy in Zimbabwe while that man remains in power. As it is impossible for the Zimbabwean people to express their wishes democratically, action by the United Nations is essential. Therefore, I wholeheartedly support the motion and the amendment.

Dr Farry: It is a matter of regret that the Alliance Party had to table an amendment to the original motion, which was overtaken by events; however, for the people of Zimbabwe, those events have been a tragedy. It is right and appropriate that the Assembly speaks out on behalf of the people of Northern Ireland, as Dr Paisley said, and expresses its solidarity with the Zimbabwean people. We should note that people from Zimbabwe live among us, many of whom are members of the Zimbabwe Solidarity Campaign and of the local branch of the MDC.

We owe a debt to Morgan Tsvangirai, and we must recognise the impossible position in which he has been placed: he had no alternative but to withdraw from the election. It is worth noting that there has been a history of election problems in Zimbabwe, particularly in recent years. In the past, Mr Tsvangirai has been in very difficult situations, and we should not forget that he was once sentenced to death on a charge of treason trumped-up by the Mugabe regime.

The outcome of the recent presidential elections was far from clear, although there was a school of thought that there was a clear winner. Rather than force the issue with Mr Mugabe, the international community put pressure on him to allow the run-off to take place. Now the run-off cannot take place because the environment for a free and fair election does not exist. The international community owes a debt to Zimbabwe on which it must follow through.

I wish to examine some of the issues on which the international community must follow through. There has been much talk about the United Nations and its role. I have no doubt whatsoever that the situation in Zimbabwe is a threat to international peace and security, which is the formal legal trigger to initiate international involvement by the UN. However, that requires the votes of both Russia and China on the UN Security Council, and those countries have taken a very constrained view of the appropriate approach of the international community towards what some would deem to be the internal affairs of states.

We must recognise the growing school of thought that says that we all have global responsibilities and that the international community has a responsibility to protect the weak and to engage in humanitarian intervention in all its forms.

It is worth noting that, ironically, the first time that the United Nations recognised a domestic situation as being a threat to international peace and security was

in 1965 when Ian Smith made a unilateral declaration of independence from Britain. The international community, led by the UK, regarded that, rightly, as intolerable, and, for the first time, the Security Council imposed sanctions on what was then Rhodesia.

Ironically, Mugabe's regime is just as illegitimate as Ian Smith's was. Mr Mugabe should reflect on that, rather than travelling around the world bemoaning so-called British colonial interference.

There is scope for increased sanctions from both the UN and the European Union. The African Union also has a particular responsibility to treat this matter extremely seriously. At the very least, fellow leaders should shun Mugabe when he travels internationally. The farce of Mugabe's attendance at a summit of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization in Rome must not be repeated.

The Mugabe regime should be formally shunned. A formal ban should be imposed on Mugabe's international travel and a referral to the International Criminal Court could also be considered. Sadly, Zimbabwe is not party to the International Criminal Court. However, the UN could declare that Mugabe is committing crimes against humanity and that he represents a threat to international peace. I support the motion and the amendment.

Mr O'Loan: The Assembly is limited in what it can do about the situation in Zimbabwe. However, it is valuable for any democratic legislature to register its disgust at this appalling travesty of democracy.

In 1980, many people's hopes were high when Zimbabwe won independence and Robert Mugabe took office. Mugabe was a man of great ability and — despite the war of independence — Zimbabwe was a land of immense promise. Julius Nyerere, the then President of Tanzania, told Robert Mugabe:

“You have inherited a jewel in Africa — do not tarnish it.”

Indeed, Robert Mugabe declared to a gathering of world leaders in 1980:

“The wrongs of the past must now stand forgiven and forgotten. If ever we look to the past, let us do so for the lesson the past has taught us, namely that oppression and racism are inequalities that must never find scope in our political and social system.”

Therefore, it was not unjustified to hope that Zimbabwe would have a peaceful and prosperous future and, indeed, that it might become a beacon and a model for the rest of Africa. The reality has been very different. Amnesty International's 2008 report ‘The State of the World's Human Rights’ summarised the situation in Zimbabwe as follows:

“The human rights situation in Zimbabwe continued to deteriorate in 2007 with an increase in organized violence and torture, and restrictions on the rights to freedom of association, assembly and expression. Hundreds of human rights defenders and members of the main opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), were arrested for participating in peaceful

gatherings. Scores were tortured while in police custody. The economy continued to decline. About four million people required food aid due to the declining economy, erratic rains and shortage of agricultural inputs such as maize seed and fertilizer. Victims of the 2005 mass forced evictions continued to live in deplorable conditions, and the government failed to remedy their situation.”

In the first presidential election earlier this year, votes were rigged; thousands of additional ballot papers were manufactured; journalists and observers were excluded; and those who opposed Robert Mugabe were brutally attacked. Despite all of that, Morgan Tsvangirai won a clear victory and, as Naomi Long pointed out, the MDC was convincingly victorious in the parliamentary elections.

Extreme violence has ensued since Mugabe forced a second poll; at least 86 people have died. Mr Tsvangirai responsibly decided to withdraw from that second poll. In doing so, he has probably saved many lives.

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

Mr O'Loan: I appreciate the time constraints — I have not been fortunate with those today. I strongly support the motion and the amendment.

Mr Ford: Since our debate began, the BBC website has posted a report headed ‘Tsvangirai seeks embassy refuge’. Last night, Morgan Tsvangirai sought refuge in the Dutch embassy in Harare — such is the threat to his life.

On 16 May, however, Morgan Tsvangirai was an honoured guest in our capital city when he attended the Congress of Liberal International. Belfast was one of the few places outside southern Africa that he visited in the time between what should have been the two rounds of elections. Despite the violence that had been perpetrated by ZANU-PF thugs across Zimbabwe, even before the first round of elections, it was clear at the time of Morgan Tsvangirai's visit to Belfast that the MDC had won the parliamentary election and he had come within a whisker of winning an outright majority in the presidential election — even on the basis under which that election was conducted. Few of us will believe that he was not the proper leader of Zimbabwe.

It was a privilege to host him, and to see that he was prepared to visit Belfast and to give his view, as the leader of Zimbabwe. He spoke as a man who had political and moral authority and as one who had a vision for the future. Not only did he speak of taking power — as one would expect a politician to do during an election campaign — but he spoke about the need for national reconciliation and building a new way of governing Zimbabwe. He did not talk of revenge; he talked about a way in which the people of Zimbabwe could move forward together. Considering what he and his supporters had to tolerate, those words are an example to the world.

I welcome the positive responses that have come from every side of the Chamber during today's debate; however, much needs to be done before the required action will come from the bodies that can make the necessary difference.

Morgan Tsvangirai came to Belfast with the assistance of President Waad of Senegal; yet it is clear that few African leaders provided the type of support that was deserved. Most notably, President Mbeki of South Africa failed to make the necessary changes in his country's policy. As has been highlighted, the dockworkers of Durban did more for the people of Zimbabwe than the South African Government did in recent weeks.

I welcome the belated and tentative moves by some of the regional authorities and such bodies as the Southern African Development Community (SADC) to see what can be done at local level. However, an enormous responsibility rests on world agencies. The people of Zimbabwe demand and require action in what they face — particularly by the United Nations, and by bodies such as the African Union, the European Union and Zimbabwe's neighbouring countries.

Before the first round of elections, the bulk of violence was directed in rural areas that traditionally supported the opposition. Since the first round of elections, violence has shifted into areas that previously supported ZANU-PF, but which changed in the run-up to the recent election, and even into Harare and other major towns. That violence has been carried out in the face of the world media, despite international observers. That is the measure of the corruption of the Mugabe regime, and the failure to take account of what needs to be done and what should have been done. It is obvious, therefore, why Morgan Tsvangirai and the MDC had no option but to pull out of the election that was due to be held on Friday. A free and fair election would have been impossible. The amendment was proposed in recognition of how the situation had changed since the motion was tabled.

There were 17 contributions to the debate, and that shows the Assembly's widespread interest. Naomi Long opened the debate by delivering a well laid-out description of how, in recent months, Zimbabwe had descended into a malign dictatorship. It was interesting that Jim Shannon joined her in the prayer that Robert Mugabe will soon be removed from power in the interests of all the people.

Moreover, Jim Shannon talked about the need for the United Kingdom to take a stance, and Martina Anderson pointed out that there are difficulties for those in the United Kingdom, given Mugabe's attitude to the former colonial power. However, things can be done, and other Members highlighted how the European

Union, in conjunction with some of the development agencies, can ensure that its voice is heard.

Danny Kennedy mentioned the patronage of ZANU-PF. He said that there was more to the situation than the simple matter of Mugabe being a dictator: the institutions that support him are also at fault.

Carmel Hanna pointed out the role that has been played by independent international non-governmental organisations in development work and that that is why they have now been expelled from the country — because they are telling the truth about what is happening. She made the situation very clear in her opening remarks when she said that Morgan Tsvangirai is the democratically elected leader of Zimbabwe.

4.45 pm

Dr Paisley talked about the updates that he has received from his missionary contacts and about the role of the UN. I do not know what the level of the UN role is — I am not sure that it is up to this Assembly to prescribe it — but it is certainly the role of the Security Council to carefully consider what must be done and the options for moving things forward.

There was an interchange between Alex Maskey and David Simpson over the question of Mugabe's role as a liberator as opposed to his role in the massacre of missionaries, which happened before liberation occurred. Both ignored the point that was made by Peter Weir, subsequently and which concerned the massacre of several thousand people in Matabeleland in the 1980s as part of the action taken against Joshua Nkomo and the Zimbabwe African People's Union. The way in which Mugabe behaved then was clear, and that has led a number of people — including John Dallat and Declan O'Loan — to ask why nothing has been done before now.

Raymond McCartney made the point strongly that there would be a lack of legitimacy in any election held at this stage. The necessity to move away from that second round of elections, which would have been flawed and would have further added to the violence, was summed up by Simon Hamilton when he talked about hope having died. We must ensure that hope does not die in those authorities where the Assembly has influence — the British and Irish Governments and the EU — and that people take their opportunities to learn from this crisis and move forward for the benefit of everyone.

John Dallat asked why the world has done nothing so far and what we can do now. There are clear issues that we can pursue. Lord Browne made the point that we have a role in persuading the UK and Irish Governments to get involved in UN and EU activities that support — however limited that support has been — those African states that have been supporting the cause for democracy, human rights and the rule of law in Zimbabwe. We must ensure that the notion that

Robert Mugabe is perceived as a liberator and can therefore do no wrong is utterly out of date.

Mugabe was likened in the Chamber to Hitler: my memory does not go back as far as Hitler — some people's does — but what is absolutely clear is that Mugabe is a force for evil across the world. He has created huge problems, not just for the people in Zimbabwe, but for those who have been forced out of Zimbabwe and are now living in this city; in other places across these islands; in Zambia — and particularly for those now living in South Africa where we have seen recent violence and difficulties. The point was well made by Stephen Farry when he said that a UN trigger motion could be successful — it is absolutely clear that the internal affairs of Zimbabwe are now a threat to international security and action should be taken.

Although individual Members have taken their own approach and received their information from different sources, it is absolutely clear that the House is united. I thank those who have contributed and who have supported the motion — which was appropriate when tabled — and this morning's amendment. I trust that if nothing else happens, the media and visitors in the Gallery will report back to those Zimbabweans living among us that we have taken the debate seriously. The message can go back to their friends and family at home in Zimbabwe that they are not forgotten.

The main point of the motion is not just to outline the problems that have happened but to call on the international community, through the UN, the African Union and the SADC, to take all available steps to promote democracy, human rights and the rule of law. The motion is not prescriptive; that is for others to decide. However, it is clear that the people of Zimbabwe spoke on 29 March: they gave the MDC a parliamentary majority and they chose Morgan Tsvangirai as their president; not Robert Mugabe. All of us who believe in democracy and the rule of law have a duty to assist in ensuring that that decision is put into place with the utmost urgency.

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

Main Question, as amended, put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly condemns the threats and violence against the opposition in Zimbabwe; recognises that an environment for free and fair elections does not exist; expresses alarm that Morgan Tsvangirai felt he had no alternative but to withdraw from the presidential run-off scheduled for 27 June 2008; and calls on the international community, including the United Nations and the African Union, to take all available steps to ensure democracy, human rights and the rule of law in Zimbabwe.

Adjourned at 4.50 pm.

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Tuesday 24 June 2008

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

MATTERS OF THE DAY

Murder in Londonderry

Mr Speaker: Mr Campbell has sought leave to make a statement on a matter that fulfils the criteria set out in Standing Order 23A. I shall call Mr Campbell to speak for up to three minutes on the subject. I shall then call a Member from each of the other political parties, as agreed with the Whips; those Members will have up to three minutes to speak. There will be no opportunity for interventions, questions or for a vote on the matter. I shall not take any points of order until the item of business is concluded. If that is clear, we shall proceed.

Mr Campbell: I raise the very serious matter of a murder that has been committed in Londonderry in the early hours of this morning. I trust that everyone in the House will offer their sympathies and condolences to the family of the young man who was the victim of the attack. Murder, in any circumstances, is wrong. It cannot be justified, defended or condoned.

Although it has only been a few hours since the attack, there has been universal condemnation across the political divide — it is quite right and proper that that should be so. More is required than simple condemnation of such an attack — information is essential, and evidence is required in order to bring the perpetrators to justice.

It is hoped that the Assembly — speaking as it does for the entire community across Northern Ireland — will send out a signal to the community of the Creggan estate in Londonderry to do whatever it can to give whatever information it has to the police in order to bring the perpetrators — the murderers — to justice.

Murder was wrong 30 years ago. It could not be defended, condoned or justified then; nor can it today. I hope that we can play a small part in bringing to justice those who carried out that heinous act.

Mr McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I am grateful to Gregory Campbell for bringing the matter so swiftly to the notice of the Assembly. My colleagues Martina Anderson and Raymond McCartney have been active in dealing with the local response. Our community is shattered and shocked at what happened. The deceased is my near neighbour — I know the family particularly well. I support all that Members have said. The situation demands a community response, and any information that can assist the PSNI in bringing the perpetrators to justice should urgently be made available to it.

If the Assembly stands for anything, it stands for resolution of our many differences through dialogue and discussion. There is no longer any scope for the gun in our society. I join Gregory Campbell in offering condolences to the family and earnestly expressing the hope that the perpetrators will be brought to justice swiftly.

Mr McClarty: I first heard reports of the incident on a news bulletin while travelling here this morning. Like everyone in the House, I am filled with shock and horror. I extend my deepest sympathy to the victim's family circle.

However, I note with concern the emergence of increasing intelligence that republican terrorist groups throughout the Province are stepping up their activities. We need to know as soon as possible who carried out the attack. In the light of this tragic death and the increase in such activities, the usual description of the perpetrators as “dissidents” is no longer acceptable. As soon as possible, the police must inform the public explicitly who was responsible for that cold-blooded murder. Locally, there has been some criticism of the police's response to the incident; but I have heard the police's explanation and am content with it. In the light of recent attacks in Castleterragh and Rosslea, it is perfectly understandable and correct for the police to have been cautious. Any injury or further loss of life would have been another tragedy.

I call on anyone who has the merest snippet of information about that dastardly murder to pass it on to the PSNI.

Mr P Ramsey: I thank my colleague Gregory Campbell for seeking leave to make a statement, because we need to pass on our sympathy and prayers to the family. I spoke with family members this morning, and they are shocked and anguished. The father is choked with emotion. However, they will appreciate and acknowledge the comments from all the Members and parties represented in the Chamber.

The feeling in the city is that the hurt, grief and turmoil are widely shared. In any circumstance, at any time, it is difficult to answer a knock on the door and be told that a member of one's family has been killed,

but to be told that a relative has been executed in his own city is not nice.

People in the Creggan community are appalled and grieving at the loss of a young man's life. The family also want it put on record that anyone with information that leads to the arrest of those who perpetrated that awful deed in Derry should come forward. I accept Gregory's point that no community should have to face or accept that type of violence under the new dispensation. There is hope, and, outside the House, people wish for the murder and mayhem of the past to remain in the past.

It is a sad reflection of society that such violence continues. As a result, a young man of 22 years of age has lost his life, leaving a grieving family. It is important that communities, irrespective of whether they are in Derry, Belfast or elsewhere, marginalise and give no comfort to those in the community who, for whatever logic or reason, carry out violence of any description. Such people should be marginalised and be given no comfort whatever. They carried out such acts in the past for ideological reasons, but should not now be conducting a campaign that leads to violence.

I repeat what other Members said: people must come forward with information. It is grand to express sympathy to the family of the victim, but in order to deter further similar acts of violence, intelligence and evidence must be produced that can put those who are responsible for such awfulness behind bars.

Dr Farry: I am grateful to Mr Campbell for bringing the matter to the attention of the House. I join with the other party spokespersons and express the sympathy of the Alliance Party to the family concerned.

The murder was extremely brutal and appalling. It is a tragedy, not just for the family, but for the entire community in Derry. The most poignant comment that can be made is that a young child who will be born in the next few days will grow up without a father. Those who are responsible for this brutal attack should reflect on that.

We should be at a stage in society where the justification — or the lack of — for murder is not discussed. There can be no justification, in any circumstances, for murder. We should not need to qualify that point. Murder is the most heinous crime, and there is no place for it in this or in any other society in the world, given that it constitutes a major threat to the rule of law.

There is speculation as to whether this murder was carried out by dissident republicans or by organised criminals. I agree that there is an urgent need for the police to clarify who was responsible as soon as possible. That said, I have confidence in the ability of our Police Service to respond robustly and effectively to this and to other serious crimes that occur in Northern Ireland. I endorse calls for the community to work closely with the police to bring those who are responsible for this heinous crime to justice as soon as possible.

ASSEMBLY BUSINESS

Mr Attwood: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I ask that the Speaker consider making a ruling on a matter on which the 'Northern Ireland Assembly Companion' is silent. Given that silence, I checked Erskine May on the matter on which I think that you should make a ruling. Page 74 of Erskine May reports a resolution that was made by the Public Service Committee of the House of Commons. *Inter alia*, that resolution states:

"it is of paramount importance that ministers give accurate ... information to Parliament, correcting any inadvertent error at the earliest opportunity."

If that is the standard that is expected of Ministers in giving information to the House of Commons, should the same standards not apply here? Indeed, should that apply not just to Ministers, but to the Assembly Commission and to the Speaker?

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member has exhausted that particular subject. I know where he is going, given that he has raised the same subject twice in the House. I have already told the Member — and the entire House — that I will not take any further points of order on that issue.

The Member knows that if he wants to ask either a question for oral answer or a question for written answer on issues that relate to the Commission, he can do so quite freely. That is the avenue that he should pursue; he should not raise further points of order on this matter.

Mr Attwood: Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker, I am not asking for a particular comment from you on any matter reported to this House; I am asking you to make a ruling on whether the Speaker is obliged, in the event that there has been inadvertence —

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member is coming very, very close to challenging the authority of the Speaker, and I warn him very, very closely on that issue. It is not an appropriate point of order for this House.

10.45 am

Mr Attwood: Further to the point of order. I will explore all other avenues in order to ensure that a standard is set for this House that all who report to it must attain.

Mr Speaker: I am happy for the Member to come and talk to me on the subject that he has raised, and to which he has referred in the House on two previous occasions.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT**North/South Ministerial Council —
Education Sectoral Meeting**

Mr Speaker: Order. I have received notice from the Minister of Education that she wishes —

Mr I McCrea: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. The cover-page of a statement that Members have received from the Minister this morning is totally in Irish. When I picked up the document outside the Chamber, I was unsure about the content of what I was lifting. Will you rule as to whether that statement's front page should be in English, so that Members know what they are picking up?

Mr Speaker: What the Minister has done is quite correct. The statement is in both Irish and English.

Mr I McCrea: Further to the point of order, Mr Speaker. I am not disputing that it is in Irish. I want the front page translated into English to enable Members to know what they are picking up.

Mr Speaker: That is not a matter on which the Speaker can rule. It is an issue on which the Minister may consider Members' points of view. I call the Minister of Education to make a statement on the North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC).

The Minister of Education (Ms Ruane): Go raibh maith agat. First of all, the statement is in English and Irish to enable Members to choose which they prefer to read.

Le do chead, a Cheann Comhairle, ba mhaith liom ráiteas a dhéanamh ar chruinniú den Chomhairle Aireachta Thuaidh/Theas i bhformáid rannach oideachais. Tionóladh an cruinniú seo in Ardscoil De La Salle, Dún Pádraig ar 28 Bealtaine 2008.

Roimh an chruinniú d'óstáil mé fáiltiú do phríomhoidí ó gach earnáil scoile sa cheantar áitiúil. D'ionadaigh mé an Coiste Feidhmiúcháin mar Aire Oideachais, in éineacht le Edwin Poots CTR, an tAire Cultúir, Ealaíon agus Fóillíochta.

That translates as: with your permission, Mr Speaker, I wish to make a statement regarding a meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) in its education sectoral format. The meeting was held at De La Salle High School in Downpatrick, County Down, on 28 May 2008.

Before the formal meeting convened, I hosted a reception for school principals from all school sectors in the area. I represented the Executive as Minister of Education. The then Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, Edwin Poots, also attended. The Irish Government was represented by Batt O'Keeffe, TD and Minister for Education and Science, whom I welcomed

to his first NSMC meeting. I look forward to meeting him again at the next meeting, which will be in the South of Ireland. My statement has been agreed with Edwin Poots and is made on behalf of us both.

The main points that emerged from the meeting range across all the agreed areas of educational co-operation, and I will summarize them as follows: on the issue of education, underachievement, joint presentations were given on best practice in Travellers' education and on the role of school leadership in tackling underachievement for all children.

The presentation on best practice for school leadership was led by Dr Tom Hesketh, director of the regional training unit. It also involved Adeline Dinsmore, principal of Ashfield Girls' High School in Belfast; Patrick McAleavey, principal of St Patrick's High School, Keady, County Armagh; Barry Sharvin, principal of De La Salle High School, Downpatrick; and Paddy Flood, the national co-ordinator of leadership development for schools.

The NSMC welcomed continuing practical co-operation to address educational underachievement, particularly in literacy and numeracy, and considered proposals for enhancing joint working, such as holding a joint conference for education professionals on the subject of numeracy in primary schools. That conference will be part of a joint approach to sharing best practice and identifying common research needs.

The NSMC agreed to convene a joint working group on educational underachievement that will initially consider the approach adopted in each jurisdiction towards raising overall levels of achievement and to tackling underachievement, particularly among more disadvantaged groups such as lower-income families, Travellers and young people from ethnic minorities.

The working group will report progress to the next NSMC meeting in education sectoral format.

We welcomed the proposal to organise a conference on best practice in the education of children from the Traveller community, and we look forward to receiving the published report, which will contribute to the development of specific objectives and targets in that area.

D'fháiltigh an Chomhairle fosta roimh bhunú coiste um oideachas pháistí Lucht Taistil ag mo Roinn, agus tá mo Roinn ag dréim le bheith ag comhoibriú leis an Roinn Oideachais agus Eolaíochta sa todhchaí.

The Council also welcomed my Department's establishment of a committee for the education of Traveller children and look forward to its future collaborative work with the Department of Education and Science.

The Council discussed steps to help to train teachers to achieve the Irish-language qualification required for

teaching in schools in the South of Ireland, thereby improving cross-border mobility. We noted that teachers pursuing the Irish-language qualification can avail themselves of training programmes that exist in several areas. In addition, information seminars on the primary-school curriculum are provided by the primary curriculum support programme in the Monaghan Education Centre to assist teachers seeking employment in Southern schools.

The Council welcomed the ongoing co-operation between the respective inspectorates of the Department of Education (DE) and the Department of Education and Science, including the agreement of a protocol for exchanges.

Chuir an Chomhairle fáilte roimh an chomhoibriú leanúnach idir cigireachtaí na Ranna Oideachais faoi seach, lena n-áirítear comhaontú ar phrótacal ar mhalartuithe.

We welcomed the standing conference on teacher education, North and South, including that on citizenship education and special educational needs, and we look forward to the outcome of its work on school leadership policy and practice. We noted that the regional training unit and the programme on leadership development for schools continue to work on a collaborative basis on leadership development issues and have agreed to develop a joint research project that will concentrate on how best to attract and develop new school leaders.

We also noted the progress that has been made by the working group that is considering the transfer of pension rights. The group is gathering evidence on the difficulties experienced by teachers as a result of the inability to transfer pension entitlements between both jurisdictions. It will report back to a future North/South Ministerial Council meeting.

The Council welcomed the significant progress that has been made on the development of the Centre of Excellence for Autism at Middletown in County Armagh and the fact that the centre has begun to deliver training courses. The autism research and information service is being developed and will begin delivery after the current recruitment exercise. The education assessment service and the learning support service will come on stream at a later date, because the new building must be completed in order to facilitate those two functions. The Council welcomed the progress that has been made by the centre in its consultations with parents, professionals and others to inform how the proposed services will be delivered, and we look forward to a formal report on the outcomes.

Thug muid faoi deara an rath a bhí ar an stocáireamh ar uathachas a rinne an Roinn Oideachais agus an Chigireacht Oideachais agus Oiliúna ar 10 agus 11 Márta 2008. Bainfear úsáid as an stocáireamh seo le

plean straitéiseach ar an uathachas a ullmhú don Roinn Oideachais chomh maith le comhsmaointeoireacht straitéiseach a cheapadh ar an uathachas. Thug an Chomhairle faoi deara fosta an rath a bhí ar an chomhdháil ar neamhoird speictrim uathaigh a tionóladh ar 15 Aibreán i bPáirc an Chrócaigh i mBaile Átha Cliath.

We noted the success of the autism stocktake by the Department of Education and the Education and Training Inspectorate on 10 and 11 March 2008. That will inform the development of an autism strategic plan for the Department of Education, as well as establishing common strategic thinking about autism. The Council also noted the success of the conference on autistic spectrum disorder that was held on 15 April 2008 at Croke Park in Dublin.

We noted the successful outcomes of the cross-border school and parent community partnership programme, which include the development of teaching and learning aids for autism, speech and language.

The Council was updated on educational exchanges and noted the ongoing co-operation between Departments. In 2008, 20 school- and youth-based exchange programmes will be undertaken.

The Council noted that a review of educational exchanges and supporting mechanisms has recently been completed. We are considering the recommendations and the appropriate joint processes and approaches that will be required to manage and co-ordinate educational exchanges in the future. The Council asked officials to report back on the progress on gaining agreement on a joint approach for the future management and funding of educational exchanges.

We agreed that the next meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council in education sectoral format should take place in autumn 2008.

Ar deireadh, shocraigh muid go dtionólfáil an chéad chruinniú eile den Chomhairle Aireachta Thuaidh/Theas i bhformáid rannach oideachais i bhfómhar na bliana 2008. Go raibh maith agat.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Education (Mr Storey): The Minister mentioned the significant progress in the development of a centre of excellence for autism in Middletown. She also said that the centre has begun to deliver training courses, which is one of its four functions. The Committee for Education recently received a briefing paper on autism from a key organisation in the sector. We plan to question representatives from the centre at Middletown in early September.

However, many parents are concerned about the significant delay in delivering the centre of excellence, given that it was first announced in 2002. The project

to develop a centre of excellence has received considerable public funding — in the region of several million pounds.

What is the total amount of funding — broken down into capital and revenue — that the Department has allocated to the Middletown centre for autism since 2002? How does that represent value for money and, most importantly, service delivery for those people to whose futures the centre of excellence is essential?

The Minister of Education: I welcome the Member's interest in the Middletown centre for autism, which is a wonderful project. The deputy First Minister and I visited the centre, and it is doing tremendous work. At the conference in Croke Park, representatives from the centre delivered a compelling presentation on their work.

The centre has been operational since December 2007, when training delivery began. The research and information service will begin after further staff recruitment. The educational assessment service and learning support service will come on stream when building work is completed, which is expected to be in autumn 2009. The senior management team is meeting education providers, North and South, to ascertain requirements. It is working on several areas, including staff recruitment, the development of the referral mechanisms, the development of a training prospectus and training delivery.

The board of directors of the Middletown centre for autism has met regularly since March 2007. The chief executive and the three heads of division are all in post. A further recruitment exercise is under way for training, research and administrative staff. Since December 2007, several training courses have been held in the newly refurbished accommodation on site. The centre commissioned an extensive consultation exercise with all relevant stakeholders involved with children and young people with autism in venues across Ireland — north, south, east and west — in December 2007 and January 2008. The purpose of that consultation was to inform and invite comments on how the centre will deliver the proposed services.

Funding for the purchase and cost of the Middletown centre is divided equally between the Department of Education and the Department of Education and Science in the South. At its education sectoral meeting on 11 April 2002, the North/South Ministerial Council jointly endorsed the decision to establish the Middletown centre for autism.

There were delays, but I am not going to take responsibility for direct rule delays. I assure Members that we are proceeding at full speed with the further development of the Middletown centre of excellence for autism. I have also met parents and representatives

of organisations who work for children with autism, and I welcome the work that has been conducted to date.

11.00 am

The Member enquired about the cost of the centre. The Department of Education spent £1.5 million on the purchase of the property. The annual running costs of the centre are estimated at approximately £3 million per annum and will be shared equally between the Department of Education in the North and the Department of Education and Science in the South. The building and refurbishment costs were estimated at approximately £3.5 million in total. However, in line with general increases in building costs, some of those estimates have risen, and officials are currently working through the detail.

I am sure that all Members will agree on the benefits and importance of the initiative, as well as the many other initiatives that have been undertaken about autism.

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. My question is also about the Middletown centre of excellence for autism. An increasing number of children have autistic spectrum disorders; therefore, I welcome the significant progress that the Minister reported today.

The centre in Middletown has four main functions, including the educational assessment service and the learning support service, which will cater for children with autism who cannot be catered for in the standard educational setting. Another key function of the centre will be the research and information service, which will benefit all children with autism as more research is conducted about their specific needs. Will the Minister comment on the benefits for all children with autism?

The Minister of Education: Go raibh maith agat as an cheist sin agus as an ráiteas sin. The Member rightly talked about the important services that the Middletown Centre for Autism will provide. The centre will be dedicated to improving the education opportunities for children and young people with autistic spectrum disorders. It is planned that the centre will provide an educational assessment service; a learning support service; a training and advisory service for parents, teachers and other professionals; and, as the Member said, a research and information service.

Provision will be made for the comprehensive educational assessment of children with a view to provide enhanced individual education plans. That may include a two-day to three-day multidisciplinary education assessment, and/or a five-week residential multidisciplinary education and learning support assessment that involves pre- and post-placement visits to parents, schools and other professionals who are involved with the children.

The centre will be multidisciplinary and will work in collaboration with local services. It will not replace or prevent the development of local provision, but will seek to enhance or support existing services through collaborative working arrangements.

The centre will work in co-ordination with all the other strategies that are being implemented in the Department of Education. One of the major benefits is that professionals in the field are currently learning from one another and sharing best practices. The conference that I attended in Croke Park was a wonderful example of that. All the people I talked to said that it was a good conference and that more such initiatives and events should be undertaken.

An autism stocktake was also conducted this year with a forum of administrators, special-needs professionals and education inspectors from Scotland, Wales and the North and South of Ireland, at which autism provision across the education sector was considered. The administrators exchanged examples of good practice, including research in children's early years. The event was organised by the Department of Education. I met all the people at the conference, which was a preparatory step in the development of the autism strategy in the North.

Officials and inspectors will develop a plan that they will present to me to map out a draft strategy for the provision of effective and consistent autism services for children across the North.

Mr B McCrea: Will the Minister address the issue of the location of the centre of excellence for autism? I have heard some suggestions that it should be located beside hospitals with high research capabilities. The fact that it is not appears to be a bit of a problem. Was the issue raised during the consultation that the Minister conducted? Furthermore, will she explain to the Assembly why the vast majority of stakeholders who were consulted are against the location of the centre in Middletown?

Does she agree that, if there is one issue that should not be politicised, it is dealing with services for those on the autistic spectrum? Will she give an undertaking to lead the charge to ensure that — for the sake of those children — the issue is not politicised?

The Minister of Education: First, the centre is ideally located; it is a North/South centre. Children will travel to it from all corners of the island. I absolutely agree that the issue should not be politicised. Equally, I throw that right back and ask every party not to politicise the issue, because we are dealing with some of the most vulnerable children in society who need the most professional help.

I am sure that Mr McCrea's colleague the Minister of Health would be concerned at any suggestion, which I am sure that the Member is not making, that

health provision in the Armagh area is not what it should be. Health provision is provided across the North; it is essential that there be no regional disparity in the provision of those services.

The centre's site is wonderful. It is important that people visit to see that for themselves. I do not accept that a vast majority of consultees raised concerns about the site. The site is ideally located for children across the island. We must get our shoulders to the wheel to support that innovative project. It is one of many of projects right across the North; we have projects in Belfast, Derry and Armagh which deal with a range of educational issues and cater for the North and South.

I thank the Member for saying that the issue should not be politicised. I hope that that will not happen.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh míle maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Maidir leis an cháilíocht Gaeilge do mhúinteoirí a luaigh an tAire ina ráiteas, an dtig liom a fhiafraí di cén fáth, cad chuige nó cad ina thaobh nach mbeidh na cláracha teagaisc ar fáil i gceachtar den dá choláiste oiliúna anseo i dTuaisceart Éireann mar chuid de oiliúint múinteoirí nó mar chúrsa iarchéime inseirbhíse? An bhféachfaidh an tAire chuige san am atá romhainn go mbeidh na cúrsaí sin ar fáil i gceann de na coláistí anseo i mBéal Feirste? Go raibh míle maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle.

Mr Poots: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. It is very clear in Assembly rules that speeches must be translated into English. We are not going to allow this to happen.

Mr Speaker: I thank the Member for that point of order. Members on all sides of the House know by now that when they choose to speak in another language they must also provide an English translation.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I apologise, Mr Speaker. I got carried away with the passion of my question; it was not an attempt to insult the House.

Why is the Irish language qualification for teachers not available in the two teacher-training colleges in Northern Ireland, either as a part of the teaching degree or as an in-service course? Will the Minister do all in her power to ensure that that course is made available in one of the two teacher-training colleges in Belfast?

I hope that I provided an accurate translation, Mr Speaker; from memory, it comes close. Go raibh míle maith agat.

The Minister of Education: Go raibh maith agat. First, I welcome the decision — taken at the North/South Ministerial Council education sectoral meeting at De La Salle High School, in Downpatrick — that steps will be taken to facilitate graduating teachers in achieving the necessary Irish language qualification for teaching in the South of Ireland. The proposal to

share the detail of that, including the means by which the necessary qualification can be achieved, at an early stage with student teachers and their lecturers will help to facilitate mobility for those interested in pursuing some part of their teaching career in the South.

Together with Reg Empey's Department and our colleagues in the South, I am currently working on the detail, and I expect that that proposal will become a reality very soon. In relation to the Member's question, I am also in discussion with Reg Empey about teacher training and courses. We have come to an arrangement regarding St Mary's and Stranmillis that I very much welcome. We are also exploring further many different issues.

Dr Farry: The Minister knows that my party and I are not hostile to the Irish language, but I will follow up on the last area of questioning. The Minister talked about trying to facilitate our citizens in gaining qualifications in Irish so that they are able to teach in the South of Ireland. However, is there not a stronger case for making representations to the Government of the Republic of Ireland to relax or remove that restriction?

It is not necessary to know Irish to teach maths, physics, science, history or geography. It is a restrictive practice. Bearing in mind that Southern citizens do not need that qualification to teach in Northern Ireland, it would be fair to lift that criterion and encourage the use of Irish through other methods. Go raibh maith agat.

The Minister of Education: Go raibh maith agat. Maith thú. I do not think that I need to translate that for the Member.

I accept that the requirement of the South's education system in relation to Irish language competency presents challenges for some of our student and graduate teachers. However, it is the national language of Ireland, so I do not think that that is an unreasonable requirement.

That said, in any education system — our own included — there is an expectation that teachers should be able to teach across the full curriculum. The primary curriculum in the South has a very clear and integral Irish-language component that runs throughout it, including the fields of maths, science, history and language. Those responsible for education policy and delivery deemed that it is necessary for teachers to have the ability to deliver that aspect of the curriculum, which I fully understand and respect.

I have, however, been in discussions about this issue, and I welcome the steps that were taken in recent years to review the requirement. It applies now only in the primary sector. In the post-primary sector, it applies only for the teaching of Irish and teaching through the medium of Irish. Teachers now have much more time in which to study and gain the qualification, even for the primary sector. The practice of differential rates of pay has also changed.

I also welcome from Southern colleagues the offer of information seminars designed to explain exactly what the requirement is for both students and academic staff in our teacher-education colleges who may be interested in applying for posts in the South. That is a very practical and helpful offer of support.

A different but related issue is that of what can be done to ensure that teachers are not discouraged from moving to live and work on either side of the border. It is possible that the absence of any facility to transfer pension entitlements could impact on that. The issue was raised at one of the North/South Ministerial Council meetings. The obstacles to pension rights were considered — not just in education, but right across the board. A working group was set up to address that issue, and we wait for officials to report back with its findings.

Mr McCausland: In her statement on cross-border co-operation, the Minister referred to school exchanges and youth exchanges; a review of educational exchanges; consideration of recommendations; and proposed joint processes, management and co-ordination.

As we sit here in Stormont, I remind the Minister that we are closer to Galloway than we are to Galway; we are as close to Dumfries as we are to Dublin; and the North Channel is a very narrow sea. Will she, therefore, tell us what plans she has to develop and support direct east-west exchanges, so that they are supported equally with North/South exchanges and that there is no differential or disparity?

Will she tell us whether she has discussed that with the Scottish Education Minister? What progress has been made in that area? For many children in Northern Ireland, their cultural connections are much more identifiable with Scotland than they are with the Irish Republic.

11.15 am

The Minister of Education: County Louth is near Newry. There is a road network between both parts of the island, and it is essential that we learn from each other and share best practice. Equally, it is important that we learn from our colleagues in England, Scotland and Wales. When speaking earlier about autism, I said that we had autism professionals from England, Scotland, Wales and the North and South of Ireland. It is important to develop exchanges at different levels across the island, and between England, Scotland and Wales and the island, and I look forward to continuing that.

I discussed the close links between Scotland and Ireland, and I am interested in examining Gaelic education in Scotland. A lot of work can be done and we can learn much from that system. I had a good meeting with the Scottish Minister for Schools and Skills, when the issue of underachievement was among the issues discussed, and I have since received

information from her on how Scotland tackles underachievement. We will examine that issue with our colleagues in the South and in Scotland.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Cuirim fáilte roimh ráiteas an Aire. Is maith an rud é go bhfuil an dul chun cinn suntasach déanta ar ábhair éagsúla i gcúrsaí oideachais ar fud na tíre.

Will the Minister give more detail on initiatives aimed at increasing and improving mobility between teachers, North and South? Is the significant surplus — or over-provision — of teachers in the North comparable to the deficit of teachers in the South?

Secondly, I will welcome additional detail on the significance of the autism stocktake and how it was carried out.

The Minister of Education: Go raibh maith agat as an cheist sin. It is important that all obstacles to mobility across the island are removed, and work has been carried out to identify options to resolve that problem. A teacher superannuation group was set up as part of the North/South Ministerial Council education work programme. That group identified a range of options for effecting transfer arrangements, as well as other complex issues to be addressed, including the implications for other public-sector schemes — particularly those with a high degree of movement of members — and the differential treatment of state pension arrangements. Given the cross-sectoral implications of any change in the existing pension arrangements, the North/South Ministerial Council meeting — led by the esteemed Member opposite, Ian Paisley Snr, and Martin McGuinness — agreed that a broad-based approach was preferred. The joint secretariat subsequently convened a working group of officials from relevant Departments — including Finance Departments — to consider the transfer of pension rights, in general, on a cross-border basis. The Member will agree that I have already answered the question on the Irish-medium sector, to ensure that we can have maximum exchanges.

As I said earlier, prior to the conference in Croke Park, the autism inspectors from Ireland, England, Scotland and Wales met to prepare for the autism strategy. A wonderful amount of work on special needs and autism is going on, North and South. I thank the Member for his interest in the matter.

Mr Poots: Minister Ruane will recall that, at that North/South Ministerial Council meeting, I raised the issue of transient children, as opposed to Traveller children. It was agreed that that issue would not be dealt with under the North/South regime, but by the Minister herself. What subsequent steps has she taken to end the discriminatory practices against Army children that were introduced by her predecessor in the previous devolved Administration? Those changed the

rules, which now work against children from the migrant community.

The Minister of Education: As the Member will know, that is not a North/South issue, because there are no British forces in the South of Ireland. As I said, I wrote to the then Minister about those issues, as they are not within the remit of the North/South Ministerial Council. There is a forum that deals with the issue of transient children. I absolutely refute the suggestion that there is any discrimination. In fact, transient children have a higher weighting than other children, apart from socially disadvantaged children, like those from the Travelling community and ethnic-minority groups. I absolutely refute the suggestion that there is discrimination; there is none. The Department is represented on a forum in relation to that issue.

The additional funding for children of army personnel is 0.2 of the basic age-weighted pupil unit — a cash value per pupil in 2008-09 of £393.23. That is intended to support schools in inducting those children during their transition to a new school and new curricular environment, and in designing learning programmes to bring them to the same stage as other pupils already in the school. There are 613 such pupils in the primary sector, and that costs £241,050; in the secondary sector there are 158, with a cost of £62,131; and in the grammar sector there are 93, with a cost of £36,571. That comes to a total of £339,702. I do not know how anyone can say that there is discrimination in that regard.

The Member will also be aware that, in the recommendations for review, Local Management of Schools (LMS) members have called for the weighting of the children of service personnel to be raised from the current level of 0.2. That issue was not progressed at the time it was raised, pending further assessment of the needs and additional costs associated with children in that group. The issue is kept under review, including as part of the review of special educational needs and the review of formula funding arrangements.

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

Mr K Robinson: Given the Minister's fixation with post-primary education, and her constant reference to the tail of underachievement in literacy and numeracy, will she now expand on what kind of practical co-operation the North/South Ministerial Council can bring to bear on that crucial area, in order to make a measurable difference? That deep-seated problem, which precedes the age of 11, was flagged up by the Department in 2002, when it told the Public Accounts Committee that:

“it was indefensible that around 20% of children left school unable to master the basics of reading and writing.”

The Westminster Public Accounts Committee, in a report dated 27 November 2006, also expressed its concern on the matter.

The Minister of Education: I thank the Member for his question, and for his interest in underachievement; he will know that I share that interest. I absolutely refute his statement that I am obsessed with transfer from primary to post-primary schools. In fact, this morning I have been speaking about special needs, Travellers, and underachievement. I am clear that I am here to work for the benefit of all children. One of the reasons why I put educational underachievement on the agenda of the North/South Ministerial Council is that I care deeply about all of our children. I am particularly concerned about the children who are failed by our system. That cannot continue to happen.

My Department has established a working group on educational underachievement. I strongly insisted that we listened to the leaders of schools that have done the business. They are the people who know what needs to be done. That is why we spent the majority of the meeting listening to those school leaders; to the regional training unit; to its counterpart in Dublin; to Adeline Dinsmore from Ashfield Girls' High; to Pat McAleavey; and to the key points in dealing with underachievement. I am sure that Edwin Poots will agree that that was a very useful part of the meeting.

A working group has been set up, which the relevant senior policy leaders in both Departments jointly chair. It will report to the next North/South Ministerial Council education sectoral meeting, which will be held in autumn 2008. During the summer, officials in my Department will liaise closely with counterparts in Dublin on those arrangements and on membership of the group. We will provide details of that as soon as possible.

The working group will also co-ordinate the work of existing joint working groups on literacy and numeracy and on attendance and retention in order to ensure that the current work of those groups is linked at strategic level with wider efforts to tackle underachievement. It will also be charged with identifying the scope for additional joint working in other areas of mutual benefit, such as joint research and joint dissemination of research findings. It will liaise with the existing joint working group on teacher qualifications and teachers' superannuation in order to ensure that work on school leadership and teachers' development is linked more closely with efforts to tackle educational underachievement. School leadership is a key element of that. It has been identified as a critical success factor for driving up standards in schools for all children. It is important that the steps that are taken to share learning and to promote best practice in that area are fully integrated into the agenda for the working group on educational underachievement.

Members will be aware that I issued a consultation document yesterday on tackling underachievement. I am aware that right before the summer is probably not the best time to launch such a document, but I was not

prepared to sit on the matter. I did not want to waste any time. However, I have extended the consultation period. I welcome everyone's contributions, because I understand that every Member shares my concerns about the underachievement of many of our young people. Therefore, we can learn much from one other. My Department will work closely with the Department of Education and Science in the South on the matter.

Mrs M Bradley: My question also relates to the Middletown centre. However, I have no criticism to make; indeed, I absolutely welcome the centre. The children who will attend the autism centre must remain there for five weeks. I am concerned about the duration of that five-week stay, because autistic children rely on familiar surroundings and people at all times. I wonder whether that lengthy five-week stay was negotiated with parents. Can the Minister assure the House that parents are content about it?

The Minister of Education: I welcome the Member's words of support for the Middletown centre. As she does, I believe that the centre is extremely important. As I have said, provision will be made for comprehensive educational assessments of the children to be carried out with a view to providing enhanced individual education plans. The point is that those plans must be individual; they cannot be "one size fits all". Every child, and his or her personal circumstances, is different. Some children will live near the centre, while others may be from as far away as Cork, Mayo, Galway, Ballymena or Derry. Therefore, every child will be considered individually.

Obviously, arrangements will be made for the children. A multidisciplinary educational and learning-support assessment will be carried out that involves pre- and post-placement visits to parents, schools and other professionals. There will be close working with children and parents. I am not sure whether the Member has visited the Middletown centre, but it is well worth a visit. It is a wonderful site, which has been specifically adapted and is perfect for the children. It is a centre of which we can be proud.

Mr Ross: It is interesting that Mr McElduff referred to a surplus of teacher-training places, yet the Minister wants to create extra places at St Mary's University College.

The Minister will be aware that, for many young people who live in deprived areas, education offers a way out — it can lead to social mobility and an escape from poverty. Does the Minister recognise that her proposals for the future of education in Northern Ireland will deny many people that chance to escape from deprivation? Furthermore, will the Minister indicate to the House what discussion she has had with her counterpart in the Irish Republic about the fact that, particularly in Dublin, parents who have lots of

money are able to buy houses that are within the catchment areas of the best schools?

The Minister of Education: I welcome the Member's concerns about socially disadvantaged children. I respectfully suggest, however, that he reads the research and examines the percentages of free school meals that are taken up in grammar schools. Therein lies the answer to the Member's question, so I do not agree with his point.

11.30 am

My proposals will give every child a fair chance. The present system is deeply unfair and deeply unjust. The proposals will change that system. At present, we are failing 12,000 young people; 47% of young people leave school without GCSEs in English and maths. I am sure that Members would not want their children to leave school without passing GCSE English and maths.

A fair system for all children must be created. I have already stated the admissions criteria. I look forward to a public welcome from the DUP; we will consider introducing social justice criteria to ensure that children are not disadvantaged. I am liaising with my counterparts in the South on educational underachievement. We will ensure that there is no postcode lottery, which currently exists. Certain children are advantaged, and a huge number of children are disadvantaged.

My proposals will bring about a fundamental overhaul of the education system in the North. For the first time, all children — not just some — will be helped to realise their full potential. In doing so, academic excellence must be kept in the system while ensuring that different pathways are kept open for all children at every possible point. I am sure that all Members will agree that the testing of children at the age of 11 to decide life pathways on the basis of the result of two one-hour tests is not the way to go. The examples of Finland and other Scandinavian countries, which do not operate a selective system, show that there is a better way to do things. We must move forward to bring about the necessary changes for all children.

In addition, there are 50,000 empty desks. Last week, I met a Member from the opposite Benches, who came to me with representatives from secondary schools who were crying out for change. As we heard last week, change is necessary because the secondary sector is bearing the brunt of demographic decline, and that is deeply and utterly unfair. I look forward to working with all parties in the coming weeks and months, but make no mistake: we will change the system and bring about an end to academic selection, which has been unfair to children.

Mr Beggs: The Minister advised that discussions took place on educational underachievement, particularly for disadvantaged groups. Has any discussion taken place on the adverse educational

effect on areas of need arising from her decision to reduce extended schools funding and not to fund breakfast clubs and after-school clubs? Do the Government in the Irish Republic, for example, provide educational assistance in that area? Were there any discussions about how breakfast clubs and after-school clubs can give additional educational and family support and, therefore, assist those who have been underachieving in schools?

The Minister of Education: I presume that the Member is referring to projects that were previously funded by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety rather than by the Department of Education. I am delighted that the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety has resolved that issue by deciding to continue to fund those projects.

In previous debates, I have been clear on the issue of extended schools. I wrote to the Minister of Finance and Personnel on many occasions as soon as I took up office; the number of times that I did that is on the record. I raised my concerns with the then Minister of Finance and Personnel about the cuts to the extended schools programme. I informed him that I would be unable to mainstream the £38 million that was given to extended schools activities, which was part of an overall package in which four Departments were involved. I have been clear about that.

To date, I have been disappointed by the former Minister of Finance's response, and I am waiting for the new Minister of Finance to respond to my request concerning extended schools. I have explained to him that the cuts have had a detrimental impact, and that I have managed to mainstream £16 million of funding. However, the argument that all of it should have been mainstreamed is totally wrong.

Every Member has been writing to me about the extended schools programme, and rightly so. Consequently, I urge Members to inform the Minister of Finance that I have raised the matter. I have requested further funding, and I am waiting for confirmation of that funding. Cutting the extended schools programme is not the way to proceed, and I look forward to receiving the money that is required for that programme as soon as possible.

The problem is that schools are planning activities as we speak, and they need to know how their personnel will be paid for. Some will be organising summer activities, and I note that schools in Newry are getting together under the extended schools programme to organise summer activities such as breakfast clubs, after-school clubs, homework clubs, sports and drama. If we are to make a difference, it is important to receive — and I look forward to receiving — the funding necessary for the extended schools programme.

Mr Attwood: I note the Minister's reply about the need for change in education, and nobody is disputing that. Borrowing a phrase that is doing the rounds in America — the problem is whether it is change in which we can believe, and the Minister should reflect on that.

Nevertheless, I welcome the statement. I refer the Minister to yesterday's debate about teacher training in Stranmillis University College and St Mary's University College. Given the comprehensive nature of education work North and South, will the Minister urgently place on the NSMC's agenda ways in which students and teachers in the South, where there is a lack of teacher-training capacity, could train at Stranmillis University College or St Mary's University College? Such measures should apply to first-teacher-training requirements and in-service requirements. Given that the future viability of the colleges is under threat, the Minister of Education and the Minister for Employment and Learning should be working together to maximise teacher-training opportunities in the North.

The Minister of Education: First, as to whether people can believe in change: as we speak, change is happening, and people should be under no illusion that it will continue — not changing is not an option. I look forward to working with everyone in order to bring about that change.

Secondly, I answered a question about teacher-training colleges earlier. I met Reg Empey, and we have agreed numbers for St Mary's University College, Stranmillis University College and other colleges, and, in due course, I will bring those forward. On a couple of occasions, I met with people from St Mary's, and I will have further discussions with them and with those in Stranmillis University College about making progress. Having visited both institutions on several occasions, I envisage them playing an important role in teacher training and in other areas. I also welcome the fact that Reg Empey has had discussions with both colleges, and I welcome his comments yesterday. Therefore, talking about threats to viability is not relevant to the issue.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

North/South Ministerial Council — Health and Food Safety Sectoral Meeting

Mr Deputy Speaker: I have received notice from the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety that he wishes make a statement regarding the North/South Ministerial Council health and food safety sectoral meeting.

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Mr McGimpsey): I will make a statement on the seventh North/South Ministerial Council meeting in the health and food safety sectoral format, which took place at Queen's University Belfast on Wednesday 28 May 2008. The Executive were represented by myself as Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and Michelle Gildernew, MP, MLA, the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. This statement has been endorsed by Minister Gildernew. The Irish Government were represented by Mary Harney TD, Minister for Health and Children, and Mary Wallace TD, the Minister of State responsible for health promotion and food safety.

I chaired the meeting, which opened with a progress report on a number of areas of co-operation in the health sector. Those areas included: the initial findings of the pilot studies into cross-border co-operation on GP out-of-hours provision; the continuing work on paediatric and congenital cardiac services; the second major cross-border emergency-planning exercise, which was held in April; the formal cross-border arrangement whereby fire-and-rescue appliances now respond jointly to incidents on the new road link between Newry and Dundalk; developments regarding the location of a satellite radiotherapy centre at Altnagelvin Hospital; and developments on cancer research.

Following the reorganisation and reform programmes for health and social services in both jurisdictions, Ministers noted and welcomed the update on the joint feasibility study, which will consider options and opportunities for greater co-operation in the sphere of health and social care. We look forward to examining the report in detail when it is completed.

Ministers received a presentation from Dr Jane Wilde, the chief executive of the Institute of Public Health in Ireland. We congratulated the institute on its achievements over the past decade, which complement and inform public health in both jurisdictions. Furthermore, we noted its plans to focus on research on estimates and forecasts for common chronic conditions, on a review of policy and practice approaches to young men, and on health inequalities. The council also welcomed the broad range of co-operation and health promotion currently under way. It

requested that officials bring to a future North/South Ministerial Council meeting a planned programme for mutually beneficial joint activities to promote public health and to tackle health inequalities, with input, as appropriate, from other health-promotion and public-health organisations.

Ministers welcomed the broad range of co-operation on suicide prevention and endorsed proposals for planned future co-operation in areas such as the all-island evaluation of the applied suicide intervention skills training (ASIST), the development of performance indicators relating to the all-island action plan, the production of an annual report on the all-island plan to be tabled annually at the NSMC; and the development of phase three of the all-island Promoting Mental Health public-awareness campaign.

We noted and welcomed the establishment of a co-ordinating group, led by senior officials in the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) and the Department of Health and Children (DOHC), and the development of a work programme to intensify co-operation on child protection, in accordance with the NSMC plenary decision of 7 February 2008.

Ministers welcomed plans to develop a cross-border awareness-raising campaign to address problems associated with the internet and social networking, and the production of generic cross-border information on issues such as the reporting of abuse, safe parenting and good employment practice, while recognising the separate legislative and structural arrangements. The council also welcomed the ongoing co-operation on cross-border monitoring and management of sex offenders.

Ministers discussed the legislative measures being introduced in the UK to improve further the safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults. I advised Minister Harney that there would be a significant strengthening of those arrangements if similar legislative arrangements could be introduced in the Republic of Ireland. Since the NSMC meeting, my officials have met their counterparts in the Republic of Ireland and have agreed a number of actions, including the establishment of a subgroup that will focus specifically on cross-border issues around vetting and barring.

Ministers welcomed the appointment of the new advisory board for Safefood, including the chairperson, Mr John Dardis, who attended the meeting with Martin Higgins, the chief executive.

11.45 am

We received a report updating the Council on the activities that Safefood has undertaken since the previous meeting, including the appointment of experts to advise on Safefood's proposals for an enteric reference library. We also noted the ongoing scientific and promotional

activities of Safefood, including: preliminary discussions with the Food Standards Agency in London with regard to sharing scientific information; the launch of new research projects, including those on infectious intestinal disease in the community and the completion of the gastroenteritis research project; the extension of the allergy awareness programme; the food hygiene awareness campaign; and the ongoing partnership work with other bodies and agencies that was highlighted in particular by the award of "best in show" stand at this year's Balmoral Show.

Ministers welcomed the establishment for three years of the all-island obesity action forum, noted the development of a range of communications initiatives in selected settings, including the workplace and educational settings, and noted work to build a new evidence base from a range of sources, including academia, research and action, and surveillance.

The Council agreed to hold its next meeting in the health and food safety sectoral format in October/November 2008.

The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Mrs O'Neill):

Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his statement, and I note that one of the areas to which he referred was suicide prevention. A recommendation in the Committee's recent inquiry called on the Minister to establish a designated suicide-prevention directorate that is along similar lines to that which exists in the South of Ireland. The Committee believed that such a team would provide a direct, central contact point for all stakeholders.

If the Minister were serious about acting on that particular recommendation, he would have talked about it at the meeting under discussion. Will the Minister say whether he discussed the issue? If not, why not? Furthermore, if he did not raise it at the previous meeting, will he consider raising it at the next?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:

I am not clear at which meeting I was expected to discuss the matter. I went to the Health Committee, but the Member is aware that I got the report very late and did not have an opportunity to prepare a definitive response. I have, however, taken further steps in regard to the Health Committee's report on suicide prevention. I called a meeting of the joint ministerial group on suicide prevention yesterday, and it has agreed its response to the Committee's report. That response will now go to the Executive. In doing that, I have done what the Committee asked me to do.

In addition, at my previous meeting with the Committee I indicated that the establishment of a suicide-prevention directorate is a sensible idea. I am familiar with such organisations, given that something

similar was established in the Irish Republic as part of the work that was done there on suicide prevention. Indeed, that recommendation is in the inter-ministerial group's joint report that will go to the Executive.

Mr Buchanan: The Minister referred to a joint feasibility study to consider options and opportunities in the spheres of health and social care, with a completed report due in the future. What is the total cost of that study, when is the final report due, and how much is it costing the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The feasibility study is a piece of work that I inherited. I anticipate that it will report to me shortly, and I look forward to reading it.

I am not clear about costs, but I can write to the Member in due course with details. However, I do not expect that the costs will be anything that would shock either him or me. The proposal is to provide a clear work programme of projects in areas that ensure mutual benefit. Those projects will be carried out in the next two or three years.

Rev Dr Robert Coulter: I thank the Minister for his statement. I note that the issue of legislative measures for child protection was discussed, and I welcome the Minister's commitment to strengthen arrangements in that area. Will the Minister continue to press Minister Harney and her colleagues in the Irish Government to address the issue immediately so that there is no disparity between both jurisdictions on such an important matter?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Safeguarding children and vulnerable adults is an important matter. In the UK, new legislative arrangements are being introduced, which will greatly strengthen measures for safeguarding children and vulnerable adults. Furthermore, a subgroup will be established in Northern Ireland to focus on safeguarding and vetting procedures. It will be a shared regime for the entire UK — that is, England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. However, we have a land border, and families routinely move across it. Therefore, it would be helpful if the Irish Republic were prepared to share its intelligence on individuals who pose a risk to children and vulnerable adults. I made that point at the previous sectoral meeting, and we have now established a group to progress work on vetting and barring procedures. However, the provision of mirrored legislation in the Irish Republic is a matter for the Irish Republic's Government, but it will require a constitutional amendment.

Mr Dallat: I also welcome the Minister's statement and acknowledge his sincerity. However, I wonder whether we are making significant progress to address serious health issues that impact on people as a direct

result of partition. Does the Minister agree that, after 10 years, we should be well beyond discussions, pilot and feasibility studies, as well as reports that have yet to be published? Is the Minister concerned that no date has been set for the next sectoral meeting, and that it may not take place until October or November?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The sector meets biannually, and, diaries permitting, the next sectoral meeting will be held in October or November. I cannot give the precise date, but two meetings a year is acceptable.

Each new project or action point routinely requires a feasibility study to evaluate what we are doing. That is sensible government, and it ensures value for money. The overriding principle is mutual benefit. My responsibility is to the people of Northern Ireland, and Mary Harney's responsibility is to the people of the Irish Republic. However, we both consider areas where joint actions would provide mutual benefit.

Progress has been made, considering that the bodies did not sit and did not work, because the House did not sit and did not work. During the past 10 years, the bodies met for two and a half years, which was followed by a long hiatus. However, we have been up and running for one year now, and progress has been made and will continue to be made. I am considering how we measure that progress.

Mr McCarthy: I also welcome the Minister's statement. We should all welcome and congratulate Dr Jane Wilde for her health promotion work throughout Ireland. However, the joint communiqué states that the Institute of Public Health plans to review policy and practice approaches to young men and alcohol and health inequalities. Have young women been deliberately left out of that review, because, as I understand it, the problem is as prevalent among young women?

In relation to common chronic conditions, was any mention made about the further promotion of easy access to tobacco products in the South of Ireland, as we are currently considering putting tobacco products out of the sight of young people so that they do not start to smoke in the first place?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I share Mr McCarthy's views about Jane Wilde's work. The Institute of Public Health in Ireland carries out a great deal of research that informs jurisdictions North and South. The institute has focused on young men and alcohol, which is a major problem with a range of impacts in areas such as physical health and suicide. However, that does not mean that we are ignoring, or excluding, young women — far from it.

We are also examining common chronic conditions. Members will be aware that I launched the

cardiovascular framework last week and announced my strategy to enhance stroke services the week before. We are working constantly on those issues in Belfast, and the same applies in Dublin. I have had discussions about those matters with the Dublin Government to determine areas of mutual benefit, just as I do in regular meetings with Government officials in London, Edinburgh and Cardiff.

Tobacco is an important issue because of the incidence of cancer. After cardiovascular disease, strokes and heart attacks, cancer is the big killer in Northern Ireland, and tobacco plays a large part in that. Combating the use of tobacco is one of the key features of our strategies to tackle cancer, and the same applies in the Republic of Ireland.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Mrs I Robinson): I apologise for missing the beginning of the Minister's statement, which I welcome.

The Committee's inquiry on suicide and self-harm highlighted the model used in the Republic of Ireland, which is now funded by the Irish Government; namely, Pieta House, which is a community home that is open to all persons suffering issues around suicidal tendencies and self-harm. Did the Minister have an opportunity to talk to his counterpart Mary Harney about setting up a similar project in Northern Ireland?

The Committee is keen to see that type of model introduced in Northern Ireland. The lack of provision for those young people who present themselves at accident and emergency departments means that they sometimes go away having received little or no help. That is not a criticism of the hospitals; they do not have the resources to deal with such issues. Will the Minister tease out those matters for us?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The idea of a community house for the prevention of suicide and self-harm offers promise, and I am aware that the Committee highlighted that in its report. The Committee also made proposals about a safe room in accident and emergency departments and a visiting card system, which is an excellent idea. As I said in my answer to Michelle O'Neill, the joint ministerial group yesterday agreed a joined-up approach for the Executive on the Committee's recommendations. That will be my next step. Following that, my Department will put appropriate measures in place, such as the ones that we have discussed.

Mr Easton: I thank the Minister for his statement. Will he inform the House whether he raised the issue of the job imbalance in the Food Safety Promotion Board (FSPB)? The vast majority of jobs in that agency are based in the Republic of Ireland, and Northern Ireland does not have its fair share. Did he

also raise the issue of any efficiency savings that he intends to make from the FSPB?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The budget for the FSPB is £2 million per annum. As the Member is aware, I am required to make efficiency savings across all areas of my budget, and I will look to do that.

12.00 noon

As for job imbalance, we inherited the existing arrangement of the cross-border bodies, such as the FSPB having its headquarters in Cork. However, there are swings and roundabouts when one considers the overall spread of jobs across Departments. I agree with the Member that the FSPB is concentrated in Cork and Dublin. However, the Food Standards Agency is based in Belfast. That Government body, which is independent of the Department of Health, does a similar job to that of the FSPB, so there are issues about overlap. Food safety is not ignored in Northern Ireland.

Given that cross-border bodies exist for mutual benefit, it is worth pointing out that the FSPB has offices in Cork and Dublin — although I have yet to visit either of them — but none in Belfast. However, that is not a priority right now.

Mr Attwood: I concur with Mr Dallat. Although good work is being done in the food safety and health sector of the North/South Ministerial Council, there is a need for a gear shift. The Minister referred to:

“the joint feasibility study, which will consider options and opportunities for greater co-operation in the sphere of health and social care”.

That crucial work should be measured over the coming decades, not only over the next few years.

When will that crucial feasibility report be available, and when will its recommendations be put into action? Can the Minister assure the House that that work, in which he is involved and which is so crucial to the welfare of the citizens of this island, will not be held up — even by one day — by the St Andrews-concocted review of North/South bodies, the content of which is not yet known?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I anticipate having that report in my hands this summer. I will examine it carefully, because, as I said, it is a piece of work that I inherited.

The St Andrews Agreement made provision for a review of existing North/South bodies and possible areas of future co-operation. The work on the feasibility report has carried on, and no obstacles have been put in its way. The overriding principle is one of mutual benefit. My responsibility is to the people of Northern Ireland, but, if there are areas in which the two jurisdictions can co-operate for mutual benefit, I

will subscribe to doing so. No obstacles will be placed in the way as far as that is concerned.

Mrs McGill: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Will the Minister provide an update about cross-border co-operation on GP out-of-hours provision in Strabane and Lifford? There are concerns about what is happening in Strabane. Has he had any specific discussions about those areas? Go raibh maith agat.

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: There are two pilot cross-border out-of-hours GP schemes. One serves Londonderry and Donegal and the other serves Keady and Castleblayney. Those services are operating, and we await the outcome of their evaluation by the Centre for Cross Border Studies. We will examine that evaluation, and it will inform any decision that my Department will make about the future organisation of such services. However, the information that I have suggests that the uptake of those services was very low.

Mrs Hanna: I welcome the Minister's statement, especially his reference to the Republic of Ireland's policy on young people and alcohol.

Is there an opportunity for the two Administrations to build co-operation against the common enemy of alcohol abuse? We must examine our attitudes to alcohol and the example that we set for our children. We must also support and welcome the strong statement made by the Chief Medical Officer yesterday.

Substantive measures have been introduced to tackle smoking. Therefore, alcohol abuse is now the biggest public-health challenge that we face. I hope that there will be an opportunity for the Minister — perhaps at the next meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council — to put the matter high on his agenda.

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I entirely agree with the sentiments expressed by Mrs Hanna. Alcohol abuse among young people is the major challenge facing our society, as it is in the Irish Republic, Scotland, Wales and England. I am examining the attendant mental- and physical-health problems and antisocial behaviour. We have a new strategic policy on drug and alcohol abuse and a policy to tackle binge drinking. In September 2008, I hope to outline other steps that can be taken. Scotland offers a good model for us and the Irish Republic to follow. The matter concerns both me and my Dublin counterpart. It is a common problem and shared solutions can provide the greatest benefit.

Mr Deputy Speaker: That concludes questions to the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety on the ministerial statement.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

June Monitoring Outcome

Mr Deputy Speaker: Notice has been received from the Minister of Finance and Personnel that he wishes to make a statement regarding the June monitoring outcome.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr Dodds): With permission, I will make a statement regarding the Executive's decisions on the June monitoring round. This is the first monitoring round of the 2008-09 financial year. Members will be aware by now that the role and purpose of the in-year process is to help the Executive make the most of the resources at our disposal by reviewing departmental expenditure plans in light of the most recent information and emerging pressures.

In recent months, a substantial and unprecedented pressure has come in the form of the Civil Service equal-pay claim, which was initially brought to the Assembly's attention by the then Minister of Finance and Personnel, Peter Robinson. At its meeting on 19 June 2008, the Executive agreed their approach to dealing with that pressure. In particular, Departments raised a number of spending pressures. The scale of the potential equal-pay liability and the potential impact on the delivery of public services means that the matter must be resolved before any significant allocations can be made to Departments. I will say more shortly on how we are seeking to deal with the issue.

I will now provide some context to the opening financial position for the 2008-09 in-year monitoring process, reflecting the decisions taken unanimously by the Executive in the course of the recent Budget for 2008-09 to 2010-11, which were subsequently agreed by the Assembly in January of this year.

In recent years, as Members will be aware, spending plans for public services here included an approach of overcommitting — that is, allocating more than is available — in recognition that the normal level of year underspend will ensure that total spending is contained within the Treasury control totals. However, unlike the previous direct rule Administration, the Executive firmly believe that there must be a sense of balance to that approach. Thus, the starting position for current expenditure this year, as set out in the recent Budget, is an overcommitment of £100 million, with further reductions to £80 million and £60 million planned in the next two years. That compares with the figure of over £150 million inherited by the Executive in May 2007. That approach was designed to strike a much better balance between maximising allocation in the Budget process and retaining a sufficient degree of flexibility in the course of the in-year process.

In addition, the Budget included specific dispensation for the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety so that it would not be required to declare reduced requirements as part of in-year monitoring, as well as having a prior call on the first £20 million of available resources throughout the year.

The Budget also pre-allocated £102 million of the £125 million in access to our current expenditure end-year flexibility stock for 2008-09, although £100 million of capital end-year flexibility stock is available to the Executive for allocation in the 2008-09 in-year process.

Those decisions, based on the information that was available at that time, provided a robust basis for the management of the financial position, and the associated delivery of public services, in this financial year.

At the first stage of each monitoring round for the 2008-09 in-year process, Departments identify resources that were allocated in previous Budget processes, which, for a variety of reasons, will not be spent in this financial year. Reduced requirements that Departments declared in this monitoring round amounted to £15.2 million of current expenditure and £21.3 million of capital investment. A further £5.9 million in room-to-manoeuvre for current expenditure is available to the Executive, most of which arose from the Barnett consequentials for Northern Ireland as a result of the Chancellor of the Exchequer's 2008 Budget.

The level of reduced requirements is similar to that declared in last June's monitoring round, after which Departments declared significant amounts of reduced requirements later in the year, when, unfortunately, it was too late to redeploy the funding to other services.

During the legislative stages of the Budget (No. 2) Bill, many Members mentioned areas for which they sought additional funding, and I suspect that that will be the case again today.

Departments have also identified more than £140 million in current expenditure pressures in their June monitoring returns. That includes a bid from the Minister of Education for the extended schools programme. Although there is scope for the Minister of Education to reprioritise the considerable resources that are already available to her, the invaluable services that are provided to children and their families from the extended schools programme are too important for the Executive not to act. I, therefore, assure Members that every effort will be made to provide additional funding for that programme at the next monitoring round.

However, allocations cannot be made to tackle pressures if Departments do not declare reduced requirements early enough in the year. Details of the reduced requirements that Departments declared are set out in my statement.

The Civil Service equal-pay claim, which has a potential one-off cost of well over £100 million — with further costs, depending on the approach that the Executive adopt — will have to be resolved. The liability relates to junior members of staff who work in general service grades in the Civil Service, whose work was evaluated as being broadly equivalent to a number of technical grades but whose salaries were lower.

The pressure has arisen as a consequence of the handling of pay issues for the relevant staff over the past 10 years. Hence, the national Government have responsibility for the situation, and that should be reflected in how the pressure is dealt with. In that context, my officials have been engaged with their Treasury counterparts on the matter, and I have written to the Chief Secretary to the Treasury to seek an urgent meeting with her to find an equitable solution to the problem.

Pending the outcome of those discussions with the Treasury, the Executive agreed that it would be imprudent to make any significant reallocations now. However, minor issues that were identified in the Budget process required specific in-year consideration. Although most of the 2008-09 access to the Executive's current expenditure end-year flexibility was allocated as part of the Budget process, £23 million remained for allocation to Departments. In the light of the constrained position on access to end-year flexibility, and reflecting the circumstances that applied to the funding of schools through the local management of schools mechanism, the Executive agreed that £16 million be allocated to the Department of Education. Furthermore, £7.7 million in current expenditure and £12.7 million in capital investment is required to cover previous commitments to projects funded from the integrated development fund.

As I said earlier, the Budget included provision for the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to have a prior call on resources that become available during the year, once the overcommitment position has been addressed. The equal-pay pressure and low level of reduced requirements means that insufficient resources are available for any funding from the first call to be allocated. However, in recognition of the importance of implementing developments in the Health Service, the Executive have agreed to make an allocation of £5 million.

Northern Ireland Departments have plans in place for £1.8 billion of capital investment this year, of which £550 million is to be derived from capital receipts.

Although the majority of those receipts were expected to come from the disposal of surplus assets, Members will be aware of the downturn in the local property market reflecting the trend across the United Kingdom. Although those softer market conditions should reduce the cost of delivering the Executive's

investment programme, the impact on capital receipts needs to be fully considered.

12.15 pm

Estimates provided by Departments for the current financial year suggest that there may be a shortfall of £140 million in the level of capital receipts originally planned for. Departments have identified bids to address pressures and improve services to the value of £109 million. However, in light of the shortfall in capital receipts and the potential for capital expenditure to provide some solution to the equal pay issue, the Executive have agreed to defer action on capital reallocations until the engagement with the Treasury has run its course. In the meantime Departments will continue to maximise the level of receipt from planned asset disposals as well as identify alternative disposal options.

The level of planned overcommitment for current expenditure sits at £85.1 million, as a consequence of the level of reduced requirements and the outstanding issues from the Budget, and we have unallocated resources of £105.9 million for capital investment.

Without doubt, public service provision in Northern Ireland is facing the most challenging in-year position ever. The circumstances mean that we face a potentially difficult engagement with the Treasury followed by hard choices later in the financial year.

To ensure that we do not act precipitously and that all recommendations on the way forward reflect the position reached with the Treasury, the Executive have agreed that we adopt a two-stage approach. That approach will involve the resolution of minor issues left over from the budget process and the more substantive matter of handling the full implications of the equal pay claim — which will be considered after discussions with the Treasury have been concluded.

However, I emphasise to Members that the position set out today represents the best-case outcome. Should discussions with the Treasury deliver a resolution on the equal pay claim then there will be no further changes to the in-year position until the September monitoring round. In the event that we do not make the progress that we hope for, we will then face significant and difficult choices.

The implications for public services regarding negotiations with the unions on the way forward in respect of the equal pay claim are fundamental. We all agree that there should be an equitable treatment for staff, and the Executive recognises the obligation on the trade unions to ensure that legal entitlements are met. However, the trade union movement needs to recognise the potentially devastating impact that the resolution of the equal pay claim could have on the provision of public services and on those public-sector workers that the unions have sought to defend in the past.

Within the context of the fixed budget that is available to the Executive, there is a necessary trade-off between cost and volume: to put it starkly; increased pay costs inevitably place significant constraints on staffing levels and pay rises across the public sector — that is a situation that we would all wish to avoid.

In conclusion, I recognise that the equal pay legacy that we have inherited from direct rule Ministers provides an unwelcome backdrop to the in-year monitoring process, particularly when Departments are facing real pressures in the delivery of services. However, the true test of any Government is not how they operate when times are good but how they respond in times of adversity. With the continued support of all parties in the Executive and the Assembly I have no doubt that this Government will pass that test; I commend the June monitoring position to the Assembly.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel (Mr McLaughlin): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the Minister's statement and his realistic and objective assessment of the external and internal pressures that are emerging. Although the external pressures are beyond the direct control of the Executive, some pressures do pose questions as to how the Departments will deal with them. Given the potential implication on the Executive's resources from the inherited equal pay claim — which the Minister has addressed — what is the timeline for concluding discussions with the Treasury and finding a resolution to that issue?

The Minister referred to the fact that the level of reduced requirements is similar to that which was declared in the June monitoring round last year: that indicates a lack of performance in financial management.

The provisional out-turn for 2007-08 shows that there has been an underspend of £177 million in current expenditure and £76 million in capital. Again, we are seeing the usual rush as Departments try to spend their money in one month at the end of the year.

Does the Minister see a risk of a similar pattern developing in 2008-09, with Departments not declaring reduced requirements early enough in the year to enable sensible reallocation to other priorities and front-line services, and what measures is he taking to rectify the situation?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I thank the Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel for his comments and for his recognition of the circumstances surrounding the in-year monitoring process. All parties in the Executive, and no doubt in the House, recognise the circumstances that I have outlined — particularly those concerning the equal pay claim. That is not only a legal obligation; it must be

addressed as an issue of fairness and equality. That obligation must be met.

As regards the timeline for engagement with the Treasury, I wrote to the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 17 June, asking her for an urgent meeting to draw her attention to the issues and to highlight the potential impact on the delivery of public services. My officials have been working with Treasury counterparts for a number of weeks on the technical options for addressing the equal pay issue. There will be further engagement at ministerial and official level over the next month or so to try to secure a satisfactory outcome for Northern Ireland. No stone will be left unturned in our efforts to ensure Treasury recognition of the inherited legacy that we have to grapple with on equal pay.

The Chairperson also highlighted an important point about reduced requirements. A relatively low amount of reduced requirements are being declared at this stage in the financial year, as I have said in my statement. The later in the year that reduced requirements are declared, and money handed back to the Department of Finance and Personnel, the more difficult our position becomes in reallocating that money. As a result, and inevitably, public services across Northern Ireland will not get the maximum output from the resources available. Some Departments declare very significant underspends at the end of the financial year, which then go into the end-year flexibility process, and they are sums for which we have to bid from the Treasury. Wherever possible, Departments should be looking rigorously at expenditure plans. Potential underspends must be avoided, and money must be declared as early as possible for reallocation to the same Department or to other Departments in due course over the financial year.

The Assembly must bear down on underspends strongly, and Members of Committees have a significant role to play. During Question Time yesterday, the role of the performance and efficiency delivery unit (PEDU) in working with Departments to realise the maximum output and use of resources was discussed. The issue is one that Members all have a responsibility to take very seriously and monitor very carefully.

The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel (Mr Hamilton): I welcome the Minister's statement. During the Budget process, the Committee sought assurances about funding for various Civil Service reform projects the Department of Finance and Personnel is taking forward. The Committee sought assurance that funding for those projects would be met out of this year's monitoring rounds. We have seen bids by DFP for that. Will the Minister assure us that those schemes will not be delayed in any way, given the efficiencies that they will deliver for all of the Civil Service? Will he advise Members about the level of access end-year flexibility

stock, which he referred to as being more constrained now than previously?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I am grateful to the Deputy Chairman of the Committee for his questions. He made the point that investment in the reform programme can release many resources for front-line services. That programme is therefore important, if the Executive and Assembly are to make progress.

In my statement I made the case that, apart from the first instalment of £20 million to the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, we are not in a position to make further allocations at this stage. There is nothing new about that: in last June's monitoring round, no allocations were made. However, we do not anticipate that there will be significant delays in the implementation of that programme, and I will keep it under review. As I said, when we have engaged with the Treasury, our position will be much clearer and we will be able to return to those issues — not least the reform programme to which the Deputy Chairman refers.

As to end-year flexibility, the Member knows that all available end-year flexibility has now been allocated to the Northern Ireland Executive up to 2007-08. As a result of the underspend by Northern Ireland Departments in 2007-08, our end-year flexibility stock has been increased by £200 million of current expenditure. As I have said, I will shortly open negotiations with the Chief Secretary to the Treasury in an effort to secure access to those moneys.

Mr O'Loan: This report is worrying. The Minister's Budget is now in serious difficulty. The two key issues are the equal pay issue, which is a one-off cost of £100 million, and a possible writing-down of capital receipts by £140 million.

I have already placed a question for written answer to the Minister on the equal pay issue. I now ask him what level of preparation was made for this when the Budget was written. The issue cannot have come out of the blue; what plan was made to deal with it? The equal pay issue will bear differently upon different Departments, which have varying proportions of female workers. It will be good if the Treasury comes through with a solution. If there is a significant impact on the money available to Departments, will the Minister assure us that he will fully protect Departments against the differential effect?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: We recognise that some Departments are affected more directly by equal pay than others — for instance, the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL), the Department for Social Development (DSD) and others. It makes no sense to insist that those Departments deal with the issue in isolation. This matter is for the Executive and the Assembly as a whole.

This is a legacy, or an inherited issue. What brings it to a head is the possibility of legal action on this front, which arises this year. My officials will work to clarify the precise level of liability in relation to the equal pay claim. Work that has been done suggests that the liability may amount to a figure in excess of £100 million as a minimum. However, we will not know conclusively until payments are calculated for each individual member of staff. We will engage extensively with the Treasury on this matter, because it has come to the Executive very late in the day. It has arisen as a result of matters not being addressed during direct rule. It is only right that we draw the entire position to the Assembly's attention. I am sure that the Member will join with his party colleague in the Executive, and other colleagues, in ensuring that we all put the best possible case to the Treasury to address this issue, so that public services in Northern Ireland are not significantly affected.

Dr Farry: I take this, my first opportunity, to congratulate the Minister on his appointment and welcome him to his post. I look forward to crossing swords with him.

12.30 pm

Regarding the commitment to grant the Health Service the first £20 million of any moneys released, does the Minister share my concern that providing that through monitoring rounds, rather than through the Budget, runs the risk of distorting the monitoring process? That is true in relation to a range of services, not least to how the equal pay issue is handled.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I thank the Member for his welcome and I look forward to "crossing swords", as he puts it. However, I am sure that there will be nothing to worry about in that respect.

The commitment for the first call of the £20 million in in-year monitoring was made in the last Budget and was agreed unanimously by the Executive and by this Assembly. As a result, the Department is committed to that process. I do not believe that it will have the major distorting effect envisaged by the Member, as there is recognition in the Executive and the Assembly of the priority afforded to the Health Service. Flexibility will remain in the addressing of the other pressures as they emerge, following the outcome of our discussions with the Treasury.

Mr Beggs: The Minister has indicated that departmental officials have engaged with Treasury officials regarding the £100 million plus Civil Service equal pay claim. He also indicated that he has written to the Chief Secretary to the Treasury.

Given the scale of the funding required for that pay claim and the other financial pressures — such as the reduced receipts from the sale of assets — will the Minister advise when DFP became aware of the scale

of that matter, as it cannot just have appeared from nowhere? Furthermore, why has no meeting occurred between Ministers of this Assembly and the Treasury to address the gravity of the issue?

Does the Minister agree that that issue needs to be resolved quickly, allowing better organisation of our own expenditure and better value for money, through the potential release of funds in-year?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: Much of what the Member has asked has been covered in my statement, and the answers that he requires are obvious to everyone. However, on the question of the engagement, I have been in contact with the Chief Secretary to the Treasury and my officials have been in contact with Treasury officials. Therefore, my Department and I are well aware of the gravity of the situation. I wrote to the Treasury on 17 June, and that communication will be followed up urgently.

The Member will know that the pay claim issue arose following a statement from the previous Minister of Finance and Personnel. It was agreed by everyone that there was a legal and moral obligation to those civil servants who had been underpaid for so long. It is an inherited, legacy issue; however, it falls to the Assembly to deal with it this year. We will strongly press the Treasury to provide the flexibility required to address the pay claim without having any adverse impact on public services.

Mr McQuillan: Given the track record of the Northern Ireland Departments with respect to under-spends, have the Executive considered an increase in the over-commitment to meet the pressures now?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The Member again draws attention to a point made by the Chairperson of the Committee, and one that I made in my statement — the significant level of underspend still occurring each year in Northern Ireland Departments.

There are various reasons for those underspends, but the pressure must be maintained to declare any reduced requirements early enough to ensure that those resources can be properly utilised in-year. As far as over-commitment is concerned, we will keep that under review. However, I am confident that the level of over-commitment outlined as a target for this and future years is broadly correct.

Mr F McCann: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I, too, congratulate the Member on his promotion to Minister of Finance and Personnel.

In order to enable Members to track the internal movements of finance, will the Minister provide a detailed breakdown of reallocations in each Department?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: That can be provided. Those figures are available as part of the statement because, as part of the process, Departments

announce their reduced requirements and the Department of Finance and Personnel announces in-year reallocations. There are also, as the Member said, many internal reallocations made in each Department.

If those figures are not already with the statement, they will be made available to Members as soon as possible. However, Departments have considerable flexibility to reprioritise in their budgets. Members may note that this year's monitoring exercise reflects a significant amount of reallocation in some Departments.

It is good that that is happening early, because it means that the money can be put to its best use by those Departments this year.

Mr I McCrea: I, too, take my first opportunity in the House to congratulate my colleague on his appointment as Minister of Finance and Personnel.

I welcome what the Minister said in his statement about the extended schools programme. It is disappointing, however, that the Education Minister did not reprioritise her budget in order to provide the money needed for the extended schools programme.

Will the Minister reassure the House that he sees the matter as an education priority and that he will take part in any discussions with the Department of Education that are necessary to ensure that the finance is allocated?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I thank the Member for his best wishes and for his question.

I highlighted in my statement the fact that the extended schools programme provides a broad range of valuable services to communities, which was mentioned earlier in the House. I explained why it would have been imprudent for the Executive to allocate additional funding to any programme until the broader financial context was clarified.

However, I indicated in my statement the priority that I attach and will afford to that programme. The funding position is primarily a matter for the Education Minister. In a budget of £1.8 billion, the bid of £5 million that has been lodged is relatively small. In the context of last year's underspend of £50 million in revenue and £36 million in capital, there seems to be very little risk of that being carried forward in the Department of Education.

I have listened carefully to the debate and to what Members have said, and I will deal with the matter, because I know from my experience and knowledge that extended schools is a very valuable programme. That is why I indicated the priority that I will attach to it.

I am absolutely content that there are sufficient resources available to the Department of Education to allow the extended schools programme to continue

until the funding has been confirmed; and I wish to emphasise that.

Mr Attwood: I, too, congratulate the Minister on his appointment. I welcome the commitment that he reiterated in respect of extended schools, and I am mindful of his comments about how the Department of Education manages the programme.

The Minister's statement is very stark and honest; particularly his comment that this is the most challenging in-year position ever to face the public service and that there could be hard choices later in the financial year. Against that backdrop and the general turbulence in the markets, is the Minister likely to return to the House later in the year with a supplementary Budget in relation to overall public expenditure in the North or might he direct Departments to increase their savings because of the strain on public funds?

Alternatively, is it possible that, given the strain on public funds, the Minister may direct Departments to increase savings later in the year?

On a different matter, what position is the Department of Finance and Personnel taking on the acquisition of Ministry of Defence sites at Forkhill, Shackleton and Lisanelly?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I am grateful to the Member for his comments not only about my new job but the extended schools programme. I hope that Members have taken my words on board and are reassured by them.

It is absolutely right that we are open, transparent and honest about the issue of the equal pay claim. It is a serious issue that must be dealt with, and we will do so very forcefully with the Treasury in the coming weeks. When that engagement with the Treasury is complete, I will report back to the Executive and the Assembly. At this stage, I do not want to speculate about what might happen thereafter. Our negotiations with the Treasury will proceed urgently, and, with goodwill on all sides, we should be able to come to an equitable arrangement.

The fact that this situation has arisen during the current financial year is beyond our control; it was not planned, nor would we have wished to have to deal with it in this way. Nevertheless, the issue must be dealt with, and that will be a test for all of us.

I will consider the issue of the Ministry of Defence sites and will get back to the Member.

Mr Butler: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his statement on the June monitoring round. He has informed the House of the reduced requirements of various Departments. Given the concerns that the Committee raised about regional investment disparities, particularly in areas

west of the Bann, the north-west, his constituency of North Belfast, and in West Belfast, will he explain why Invest NI has reduced inward investment by approximately £6 million?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I am happy to provide the Member with information on that issue, although his first port of call should be the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, which will, undoubtedly, be able to provide him with detailed information.

The only reason that any Department would announce a reduction in its requirement is if it felt that it would be unable to spend the money allocated to a particular project or programme during the current financial year. That is not to say that, in the course of the year, circumstances will not change; Departments may reallocate resources and make funding bids.

I commend the Departments for recognising reduced requirements early and making it clear that that money is available to the centre for other needy projects and programmes. However, the Member should contact the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an explanation for particular cases of reduced requirements.

Mr Weir: The Minister has highlighted the significance of the equal pay issue and the potential impact that it will have. In his statement and in his answers to a range of questions, he has also given a strong indication of the level of engagement with the Treasury. During the Minister's discussions with the Treasury, will he take advantage of the opportunity to raise the impact of cost-of-living issues, particularly the detrimental impact that fuel prices are having in Northern Ireland?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I thank the Member for his question, which raises an important issue. Currently, many of our constituents are concerned about the rising cost of living — particularly, the rise in fuel prices.

As I said yesterday in the House, a fuel poverty task force has been meeting through the Executive to address that issue. It has confirmed that it will make representations to the Chancellor for an increase in the winter fuel allowance, which I fully support, and will make other representations as appropriate.

12.45 pm

Fuel prices affect all parts of the country and, indeed, all countries. Interestingly, recent AA reports show that the price of petrol has increased by 16.8% in Northern Ireland in the past year compared with 17.4% in the UK as a whole. Similarly, the 27.3% increase in the price of diesel in Northern Ireland over the past year is slightly less than the average UK increase of 28.3%. However, those are still substantial rises for

consumers and motorists. Rises in the cost of fuel affect us all and have a knock-on effect on, for example, the cost of heating where both people's homes and departmental budgets are concerned. Those issues will also be subject to in-year monitoring. We will push HM Treasury on an individual and ministerial level on a range of issues that affect the well-being and quality of life of all our citizens.

Mr G Robinson: I congratulate the Minister on his appointment.

Why can the £180 million underspend for 2007-08 not be used to address the equal pay pressures? Given that over £100 million is available for allocation, why was it not possible to address any of the pressures that were identified by Departments on capital projects?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I thank the Member for his best wishes and for his questions.

The underspend is added to the end-year flexibility stock. As part of the financial package, we negotiated access to end-year flexibility stock. Under HM Treasury rules, all UK Departments must negotiate access to end-year flexibility stock in light of the UK fiscal position. Enhanced access to end-year flexibility will be one of the options that is considered as part of our discussions with HM Treasury.

In my statement, I said that we had unallocated resources on the capital side, but that, given the reduction in receipts, it was wise not to make any decisions on allocation at this stage, because the amount of capital money that is available may also be relevant to the settlement of the equal pay claim.

It is important that those matters are advanced, and Departments are still responsible for addressing the shortfall in capital receipts by identifying other surplus assets for disposal or by making adjustments to their capital investment plans. However, once the equal pay claim is resolved, some form of support will be considered for those Departments that have taken every possible action to address the shortfall.

Mr O'Dowd: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. In answer to a previous question, the Minister said that we are part of a global economy, which is experiencing a downturn. In addition, we have no control over our economic destiny, and that situation does not assist our position either.

I welcome two of the commitments that were given in the June monitoring round: first, the additional money that is being invested in health; and secondly, the Minister's commitment to extended schools. Although I do not agree with all that the Minister said about extended schools, I will not delay Members' lunches by debating his remarks further.

The Minister said that he is engaging closely with the Treasury and its officials on the equal pay claim.

Does he agree that close and intense engagement is also required with the trade union movement, which is — correctly — looking after its members, who have severely restricted budgets?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I thank the Member for his points. I welcome the fact that he recognises that, in light of the constrained position in which we find ourselves this year, the allocation to the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and the commitment that I made to extended schools are measures that he can support.

I have already talked about engagement with the Treasury. Furthermore, of course there must be close engagement with the trade unions. That has begun, and officials in my Department will continue to work with union representatives to address the issue of back pay and how it can be progressed. That will be important in resolving the matter. There will be an ongoing year-on-year impact on pay, and that will depend on how the Executive decide to address it.

Mr Deputy Speaker: That concludes questions to the Minister of Finance and Personnel on his statement on the June monitoring outcome.

Mr Attwood: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Members have raised this issue in recent months. I ask you and your colleagues in the Office of the Speaker to consider, during the summer recess, how to address the continuing problem of Ministers' failure to answer questions in the House. Although the Minister of Education is not the only offender, she has been the worst offender. I asked her a question today that was not only not fully nor partially answered but was not answered at all.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. How a Minister responds to a question is not the Office of the Speaker's responsibility.

Mr Attwood: Further to that point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker, if the Speaker or Deputy Speakers can direct Members to ask questions of the Minister, is it not time to introduce a provision that allows you to direct Ministers to answer those questions?

Mr Deputy Speaker: That is not a matter for the Office of the Speaker; it is a matter for the Minister. I will take no more points of order on that issue.

The Business Committee has arranged to meet immediately on the lunchtime suspension. I propose, therefore, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until 2.00 pm.

The sitting was suspended at 12.52 pm.

On resuming (Mr Deputy Speaker [Mr Dallat] in the Chair) —

2.00 pm

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE BUSINESS

Budget (No. 2) Bill

Final Stage

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

That the Budget (No. 2) Bill [NIA 18/07] do now pass.

As we reach the Final Stage of the Bill, I thank my colleague the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for so ably introducing and moving the Second Stage of the Bill on 9 June and 10 June.

I thank again the Committee for Finance and Personnel for agreeing to the accelerated passage of the Bill. Although accelerated passage for any Bill is not the Assembly's preferred route, in this case, it is a necessity for logistical reasons. It is imperative that the Bill is passed, given that Departments are spending cash and using resources based on the Vote on Account for 2008-09, which the Assembly passed in February 2008. It is imperative that the Budget (No. 2) Bill progresses through the Assembly — and receives Royal Assent — before the summer recess, otherwise Departments may run out of cash and resources before the Assembly sits again in the autumn. I know that the Committee for Finance and Personnel and the House fully appreciate the consequences involved. The Bill will ensure that Departments have money to spend in the coming months.

Debates have been interesting and constructive, and I thank Members for their contributions. There are few more important duties in the Assembly than authorising public expenditure by the Northern Ireland Departments. Therefore, I am delighted at the level of interest in the debates on the Supply Resolutions and the Second Stage of the Bill a couple of weeks ago.

I commend the Bill to the House, and I hope that it will receive the support of Members.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel (Mr McLaughlin): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. As the Minister acknowledged, the Committee was heavily involved in the Budget process, which is encapsulated in the Bill. It is fully aware of the consequences for departmental spending and the potential effect on front-line services should the Bill not progress through the Assembly before summer recess. The Committee was content

that it had been adequately consulted and that the Bill could proceed by accelerated passage.

The Committee is also aware that, from this autumn, the Executive intend to put in place a new Budget process for future years. It has, therefore, agreed to undertake an inquiry into the Budget process and scrutiny to inform the Executive's deliberations.

On behalf of the Committee for Finance and Personnel, I support the motion.

Mr O'Loan: Members of the House will remember that the SDLP expressed serious concerns about, and opposition to, the Budget. We voted against the Budget and the Programme for Government when those were debated. At that time, we were dismissed by some as if it were a political stunt; they might think otherwise today. Many of the fears that we expressed have proven to be valid; they have become a reality sooner than, perhaps, even we had expected.

I want to refer to a number of issues, the first of which is children and young people and the funding for services related to those groups. My party regretted the removal of Executive programme funds and, in particular, a cross-cutting fund for children and young people. Others said that the money should go to the Departments where it would be better used, and thereby reduce underspend. We asked how that joined-up approach would be achieved and how several Departments would contribute funding to a single project or a concerted approach. We were told not to worry about that. We were told that the public service agreements would define the objective, state which Departments would be involved, and specify a lead Department. We were assured that all the energies and resources of those Departments would be harnessed together to produce the desired outcome.

We were told that all would be well, but the outcome was very different.

I will refer to three strands of activity in relation to children and young people. First, the Youth Service — which is an important and difficult area of social provision that was debated deeply here — experienced significant budget cuts. It was not adequately funded.

I stress how important such social spending is — investment in our young people pays real dividends. We would have fewer social problems if money was put into education or into social provision for young people. In addition, those young people will make a much greater contribution as they enter into adulthood.

Secondly, there has been a crisis in the much-needed programme of extended schools. It seems that the Minister concerned did not give that issue sufficient priority and did not provide the necessary funding. This morning, in his statement on the June monitoring outcome, the Minister of Finance and Personnel made

it clear that, due to the importance of the extended schools programme, the Executive would have to provide a rescue plan. I welcome the proposed rescue plan because it is clear that it is needed.

Thirdly, a huge crisis emerged with school-age childcare, much of which is provided by the community and voluntary sectors. The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety provided a temporary rescue by putting funding into that area — but that will last only until December 2008. An attempt has now been made to fix that situation; I think that that is led by the Health Minister, although I am not certain. It is a cross-departmental attempt at a remedy by bringing together the resources of several Departments. Essentially, we are establishing a cross-departmental fund — something that we were told was not needed in the first place.

Another aspect of education is the reorganisation of secondary schools. Everyone in the House is aware of the shocking lack of clarity concerning our direction of travel on that matter. I talk to educators and I can report — as other Members can — that they have deep concerns about the future nature of our secondary school system. Not only are we unaware of the direction of travel and what the outcome will be; the system is not budgeted for. The Minister did not put the money in place to deliver that radical restructuring and change.

In his statement this morning, the Finance Minister spoke at length about equal pay; it was one of the biggest elements of his statement. As a one-off requirement, the Minister told us that it could cost £100 million, which he described as a legacy from direct rule; however, it cannot have come as a bolt from the blue. At the time of the discussions, one hopes that the then Minister, the present Minister and their colleagues were well informed that that issue was coming down the line.

I asked the Minister a question about that issue this morning and told him that I had submitted a question for written answer. With respect to the Minister, he did not give me an answer this morning, so I repeat the question: what preparation was made for that issue as the Budget was being drafted? What knowledge did the Department have about the issue and what preparation was made? The House is entitled to know.

A big element of the Budget depends on property sales, to which the Minister referred this morning. He revealed that, even in this financial year, there may be a reduction of £140 million in the anticipated gains from property sales. Although I try to follow these matters closely, I find myself confused, so I urge the Minister to provide more facts. I read the capital realisation task force document and saw a reference to potential gains of £295 million over three years. The Minister informed me that gains could be reduced by £140 million in this year.

I would like clarity on that from the Minister: if he can give it today, well and good; if not, I ask him to write to me. If he is not prepared to do either, will he please let me know so that I can ask him a question for written answer? I want to know the anticipated needs to meet this year's Budget as it was written; how much is anticipated over the three-year period; and the re-estimates of those figures.

As part of the property sales discussion, I refer to Workplace 2010 — which is a big element of property sales. Several question marks appear over Workplace 2010, but we also know that there is a major new issue with it that the House should be aware of. There are two residual bidders for the Workplace 2010 tender process — Land Securities Trillium, and Telereal. We know that Land Securities Trillium is minded to divest itself of the Trillium element of its business, and we know that one of the bidders for that element is Telereal. The clear link between those two companies could remove the necessary competitive tension as the tender is decided. I have no doubt that the Minister is aware of the issue and that his officials are taking it seriously. However, the potential to wreck the entire process exists and we must be aware that it is a significant risk to the delivery of the Budget.

If we add the two headline figures that the Minister quoted this morning — the equal pay figure of £100 million, and £140 million of potential losses in this year on property sales and a potential reduction in gains — we have a potential £240 million hole in this year's Budget. Such an amount of money could make a serious difference to departmental budgets.

I am all for efficiency savings when they are related to the reallocation of resources in Departments to better ends. However, it does not always work out as it should. There is evidence in certain sections — and health is included, although it is not unique to health — where the mechanism for achieving those savings is to have a no-replacement-of-staff policy. A no-replacement-of-staff policy means cuts in a section. If a member of staff leaves and they are not replaced, that service cannot be provided to the public. Cuts are happening as a result of efficiency savings.

I have presented a considerable list of concerns. I will not be at all surprised if the Minister brings a revised Budget to the House at some stage this year. Everything that I have said indicates that a considerably different Budget ought to have been proposed at the outset, because risks were visible then. I express my concerns, and the SDLP will oppose the Bill.

Dr Farry: Today's debate is the end of a long process in determining the Budget for the current financial year. The Alliance Party has, on many occasions, recorded its opposition to what is a flawed Budget. However, we are not minded to divide the House today, although I

appreciate that others may do so. The Alliance Party has placed on record its concerns and sought to divide the House to make its point, so we do not need to repeat the exercise and detain the Minister any further. However, we will see what happens.

Today is an opportunity to look forward. The Budget Bill will be passed, based on the voting system in the Chamber. However, it has lukewarm support — with the exception of the DUP, which has controlled the process from day one. The other parties in the Executive, to varying degrees, seem to express reservations. Even some Back Bench Members from the DUP have expressed reservations on occasion.

2.15 pm

A number of issues need to be flagged up for consideration in future budgetary processes, and I want to highlight several structural issues, which carry direct economic and financial costs to Northern Ireland. They also carry major opportunity costs due our not being able to spend money on the things that we wanted to do. We also need to appreciate that the savings will allow us to invest in new policies, practices and services and reflect new investments that are being made not just in other parts of these islands but elsewhere in the world.

I would disappoint Mr Hamilton, in particular, if I did not mention the cost of division. That must be central in handling public expenditure in Northern Ireland in the future. My party is committed to providing DFP with a paper on the issue before the beginning of the summer recess. However, rather than rehearsing the direct financial implications, I stress that the issue is wider than the direct financing of services in Northern Ireland. It has to be about the appreciation of how divisions distort the way in which people live, learn, work and play in Northern Ireland, and, as a consequence, the way in which public services respond to the sad realities on the ground.

I will highlight three potential issues. The first is labour mobility, the second is foreign and domestic decisions on investment, and the third is spatial planning. There are many more issues, but I will deal with those three today.

I echo Mr O'Loan's point about efficiency savings. I have no difficulty with efficiency savings, and I accept the departmental target of 3%. If anything, I recognise that 3% is perhaps the minimum, and that more ambitious targets may be possible as Northern Ireland public expenditure is restructured. Savings greater than 3% are routinely required from managers in the private sector. Therefore, they are possible.

However, there is an extremely fine line between genuine efficiency savings and cuts. The message coming back from the community, and in particular the health sector, as it wrestles with efficiency savings, is

that the savings are in fact cuts. Efficiency savings should be about shifting resources from old practices and policies that have become redundant as time has moved on or results have been achieved. Those resources should be freed up and reinvested to meet other priorities.

There are also major structural issues in relation to education, which is one sector that I want to highlight, in which a disproportionate amount of the budget is spent on school buildings, at the expense of genuine investment in pupils. In Northern Ireland, there is the bizarre situation in which there is one of the highest levels of spending per capita on education as a whole and a relatively low amount being spent on pupils.

Integrated education is the most sustainable way forward, but it is not being actively encouraged by the Executive at the moment. It must be seen as a preferred option, within a range of approaches towards shared schools that are also of merit and should be considered. The issue should not be about investment in new buildings, it can also be about transformation.

The health budget is barely sufficient for the Department to maintain basic service provision. In Northern Ireland, spending on health is falling behind that in the rest of the United Kingdom despite the record levels of investment referred to by the Finance Minister's predecessor on a regular basis. Sadly, in Northern Ireland, there is a much higher level of need than elsewhere. By 2011, spending on health will be about £200 million short of the level that it needs to be. Members can talk about efficiency savings in the health sector, but that is not about trying to do the same with less.

Efficiency savings must be used to free up resources in order that the delivery of health services in Northern Ireland can be restructured.

In the Chamber, many Members have discussed mental-health issues. However, only 8% of the resources that are available in the health budget will be spent on mental-health issues; the UK average is 12%. The Assembly must wrestle with that major structural challenge. Despite small additional funds being allocated for mental health, they will come nowhere near shifting that balance. Much more must also be done on preventative and public health.

It is ridiculous that cost was given as a reason for not having an independent environmental protection agency, which is a short-sighted approach. The Assembly must acknowledge the much wider financial and economic costs that will arise if the environment is not dealt with properly. I recognise that an independent environmental protection agency is not a panacea to all problems; however, it would provide a much more robust basis on which to move forward than the current set of proposals.

The Budget (No. 2) Bill is not green. At a time when everyone should be conscious of the challenges of sustainability and climate change, the investment strategy proposes to invest some 80% of transport capital on roads and only some 20% on public transport over the next 10 years. Already, Northern Ireland's situation is unsustainable compared with that of its neighbours, and it is set to get worse rather than better. The Assembly has taken a wrong turn in a climate in which sustainability has become pertinent because of the dramatic rise in fuel costs.

I want to stress the economic issues. The Assembly must have many more debates and think creatively beyond conventional wisdom. To be fair and realistic, much of Northern Ireland's economic potential depends on the macroeconomic situation that has been set by the UK Treasury; control does not lie in the hands of Northern Ireland's Ministers and Assembly. That framework works against Northern Ireland, and it is a UK regional policy in name only. The Assembly's major opportunity to effect a step change in the economy was a differential rate of corporation tax. The Executive have gone quiet on that issue, and the suspicion is that they have effectively given up.

Instead, discussion now centres on the parameters that were set by Varney II and on how to do more within the Assembly's existing range of powers. In a sense, Varney II takes existing economic thinking to its absolute extreme. However, the sobering fact is that Sir David Varney, when questioned by DUP members of the Committee for Finance and Personnel, accepted that, based on his recommendations, he did not envisage any meaningful gross value added conversions between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK.

Therefore, the facts that emerge from the UK Treasury, many independent business organisations and NGOs that have critiqued current documentation is that they do not expect the major economic growth that has been advertised on the basis of the Budget. That should form the basis of a much more serious discussion and a major rethink of the economy by the Assembly as it takes matters forward. I express my party's disappointment that there has not been enough discussion of the economy in the Chamber, given that its importance has been acknowledged by all Assembly parties.

Mr Hamilton: I welcome the Budget (No. 2) Bill. Although, elsewhere, I have welcomed the Minister to his new post, I have not done so formally in the Chamber. I wish, therefore, to do so now. It is fair to say that to be thrown into the midst of a Budget Bill is certainly to be thrown into the deep end of the finance brief. However, I am sure that all Members agree that the Minister has acquitted himself with the aplomb that we would expect. As he gets his head around Main Estimates, Supplementary Estimates, Supply resolutions and various numbered Budget Bills, the Minister will

also start to realise the great sense of déjà vu that other Members and I have experienced during Assembly debates, particularly those on budgetary matters.

I know better, so I will not accuse my colleague on the Committee for Finance and Personnel of something so awful, but I could almost swear that I listened to the same speech at Final Stage that I heard at Second Stage. The Minister will get used to hearing the same issues that we have heard throughout the debate on the Budget (No. 2) Bill, such as the raising of capital receipts, efficiencies, the old chestnut of health spending and, slightly later than normal, the cost of division.

Dr Farry: That was not the same speech, Simon.

Mr Hamilton: It was the same speech, although it was slightly changed.

The Minister will get used to the constant and seemingly insatiable demands on the limited resources that are at his disposal. It is fair to say that no Budget will satisfy everyone. I speak for everyone when I say that there will be areas of any Budget to which people would like more attention given and more resources allocated. However, we must deal with limited resources and, as was outlined by the pressing matter of the equal pay claim that was raised in this morning's statement on the June monitoring round, we operate within a very tight budgetary framework. Such pressures arise from time to time that put additional pressure on those limited resources.

I am sure that no Member will seriously oppose the Budget (No. 2) Bill and certainly not Members from parties that have Ministers in the Executive and who trotted through the Aye Lobby with the rest of us when other elements of the Budget were debated. I am sure that parties would not vote against their Minister because that would effectively give a vote of no confidence in their own Minister's judgement.

If Members were minded to vote against the Bill, it would not be sufficient for them to outline their opposition and their critique, although they are entitled to do that. They must also answer serious questions about what they would propose to do about the Budget. During direct rule, we all played the easy game of saying that we needed more money for x and y, and more resources for z. On the flip side of that, there are harsh and difficult questions. Anyone who may be of a mind to oppose the Final Stage of the Budget (No. 2) Bill should state in the Chamber how he or she proposes to pay for any additional allocations. If that is not to be done by increased rates, that Member should say, to use Dr Farry's word, what services he or she would "cut" in order to pay for the seemingly insatiable demands.

Mr O'Loan spoke at length about children and young people's funding and the Youth Service, and he specifically mentioned the extended schools programme. During the Second Stage of the Bill, I spoke at length

about the extended schools programme. It is very clear that the Minister of Education has a £1.8 billion budget at her disposal, and that, by the end of this Budget period, she will have had around £400 million a year in additional resources. A programme such as the extended schools programme, which requires less than £5 million, is an important programme that needs a minor amount of money when considered as part of that budget. Ample funds are available in the Department of Education's budget to fund that serious and important programme, if it is a priority for the Minister of Education.

Mr O'Loan also raised the issue of the equal pay claim. We all agree that that is a serious matter, and we are all acutely aware of the serious ramifications. He asked when people became aware of it. People were aware of it, but the sheer scale of the problem has only crystallised recently. We should focus not on how or when that issue arose but on the fact that the Executive appear to be committed to solving the matter.

Much work needs to be done, and I believe that we all want that injustice sorted out. However, that will take time, and I am grateful that time is being dedicated to it and that the focus is there to resolve the matter.

2.30 pm

I was almost moved to tears by Mr O'Loan's contribution, not through emotion — he did not stir me to that point — but because it comprised one lament after another. I know that he takes these matters seriously. There are many challenges ahead of the Assembly and the Executive, and no one thought that devolution would be a cakewalk or that Northern Ireland would be instantly transformed into a land of milk and honey. There were always going to be challenges ahead.

The Budget (No. 2) Bill demonstrates the distinctive mark that devolution, rather than direct rule, can put on a Budget. Such challenges — never mind some of the other problems raised by direct rule — are better addressed by locally accountable Ministers, who are answerable to the Assembly and the electorate, than by direct rule Ministers.

Dr Farry spoke about one of his other hobby horses, health spending. Those arguments have been well rehearsed. The subject has been touched on a number of times, much like the cost-of-division debate. As he said, record expenditure, underpinned by this Budget, has been allocated to health.

Mr O'Loan mentioned an interview with the head of the Health Service Executive in the Irish Republic that appeared a few weeks ago in a Dublin Sunday paper. There was a second interview the week after, and that was a clear-cut demonstration of the debate about resource management and accountability. That is the direction that this debate must take.

The former Finance Minister said that at the end of this Budget period, the public will not be discussing how much money Departments received, but, rather, what they delivered using those resources. The most important matter ahead is the debate about the accountability for, and management of, those resources. I welcome the Health and Social Care (Reform) Bill that is before the House, and I hope that it will provide an opportunity to discuss those matters.

Dr Farry mentioned another hobby horse — he has so many that he could stage his own Derby — the call for more fiscal control in the Assembly. He and I differ wildly on that point. This is a time of economic uncertainty — I will not mention the R-word, for fear of adding to the almost inevitable public outcry. Mentioning it would be a self-fulfilling prophecy. If ever there was a time when we would not want fiscal control, it is during a recession. It would be difficult for this Assembly, with its limited financial capabilities, to cope in a time of economic uncertainty.

Dr Farry: Does the Member's party still support Northern Ireland having a differential rate of corporation tax?

Mr Hamilton: The DUP was among the first political parties to call for a differential rate of corporation tax, and we still see merit in having such fiscal incentives for business. When one has banged one's head against a brick wall as many times as we have on that matter, one begins to feel the pain and to realise that one may not get through the wall as easily as one had hoped. The various Varney reports demonstrate that that is not something that the Treasury will grant easily, but we have not given up the fight. We are not quitters, and, given that there is a compelling case for fiscal incentives to encourage business growth in Northern Ireland, we will keep up the call.

It is for its focus on business and the economy that I most welcome the Budget (No. 2) Bill. It focuses full square on growing the economy in Northern Ireland. I understand that, at a time when we are experiencing the social problems that arise from economic uncertainty, some Members may be tempted to switch their focus from economic growth and development to social issues. Of course, we must address those pressing social needs and problems, but it is only by focusing full square on the economy and establishing a good, solid economic foundation that we can overcome them. For that reason, I wholeheartedly support the Bill, and I hope that Members will do likewise.

Mr F McCann: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I support the Budget (No. 2) Bill. Like Simon, and probably all other Members, I have difficulty with different aspects of the Budget. I know that we must grow the economy to provide a strong economy for the future. However, as we move towards that goal, we

must remember those in society who need to be taken care of in the here and now. We must deal with issues such as housing, fuel poverty, food-price rises, funding social deprivation and cuts for the community sector. It is on those issues that communities will judge us, especially those communities that are in need.

It would be remiss of me to let the Bill go through its Final Stage without mentioning the SDLP's contradictory position. For weeks, senior SDLP figures have lambasted us about the Budget and told us that they would not support it, yet their Minister, Margaret Ritchie, was doing the complete opposite at Executive meetings. They were telling all who would listen that they were taking a stand, but they must have also been planning to ditch the Minister or throw her to the wolves because of her support for the Budget.

Mr O'Loan: Will the Member give way?

Mr F McCann: No, I will not give way. The SDLP must explain why its Members walked through one Lobby to vote but its Minister went through another. The SDLP is a sorry spectacle of a party that does not know where it is going. If that is not the case, the SDLP must say what disciplinary action it has taken against Margaret Ritchie for that serious breach of party rules.

Mr O'Loan: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. In order to have proper order in the Chamber, should some training be offered to Members so that they can have the confidence to depart from their script —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. That is not a point of order.

Mr Beggs: I, too, congratulate the Minister of Finance and Personnel on his recent appointment to the post. However, like others, I believe that it is not a very fortunate time to take up office.

This debate is the final outworking of the Budget that was agreed in January. Money will have been advanced in the early stages of the budgetary process, and we are now discussing the final details and the transfer of funding to Departments. The Budget seemed reasonable at the time. If the Bill is not approved, money will stop flowing to our public services. Do Members really want some of our public offices to be shut down? If we do not approve the Budget within the appropriate time frame, that is what will happen.

Where were the proposed amendments at Consideration Stage and Further Consideration Stage? If Members wanted to propose sensible, constructive changes to the Bill, they should have tabled amendments. Are those Members saying that Government processes should be shut down in Northern Ireland? We must approve the Bill, warts and all.

That said, questions remain. Why were such significant errors made in the budgetary calculations? I am thinking of the sale of Government land at Crossnacreevy. The

land had been valued at £200 million, but it has now been valued at £6 million. We have been told that that revision is down to a planning matter. Anyone who understands the planning process for the Belfast metropolitan area plan will know that the land was either zoned or not zoned. How one can get around that process, I do not know.

In addition, why was no allowance made in the Budget for the Civil Service equal pay claim? I cannot believe that an additional demand of more than £100 million could have appeared so late in the day. There must have been issues that would have made senior staff in Departments, if not Ministers, aware of the cost implications of that process.

I am particularly concerned about children's funding. I am disappointed that so little unspent money was returned that there was insufficient funding in the monitoring round to deal with the in-year funding issues on children's issues.

The Budget process does not deal well with the issue of children's funding. A large number of the funding streams bring benefits to many Departments, and no one Department recognises fully the benefits that occur in others. I am aware that the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister and the junior Ministers — who are responsible for children's issues — are engaged in the matter actively. I hope that it will be addressed in subsequent monitoring rounds and in time for next year's budgetary process, in which we are currently engaged.

I said earlier that Minister Dodds was taking over in his role at an unfortunate time. I wonder whether he feels a bit like Alistair Darling, who, when he took over from Gordon Brown, had to deal with many of his predecessor's decisions coming home to roost. I hope that that is not the case. However, the evidence before us today makes it appear so.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I thank everyone who has taken part in this short debate. I suspect, however, that anyone who read the Second Stage debate, which I did, or, indeed, last year's Budget debate, would recognise many recurring themes.

In reply to Mr Beggs, I do not feel any difficulty, because any new Finance Minister would get nothing other than the same list of demands, pressures and complaints laid on him. In that respect, there is nothing new under the sun. This is a challenging job, but one in which I reflect the views of a unanimous Executive, despite some comments from some parties in the House. Perhaps if they took more cognisance of some of their colleagues, they would have a slightly different perspective on the issues.

I wish that I could say, as some Members seem to want me to be able to say, that I have a bottomless pit of money. Surprise, surprise, I do not. I know that that will come as a terrible shock to one or two Members,

but those more mature and sensible Members who understand reality will take cognisance of the situation.

I was impressed by the many Members who spoke carefully and realistically in the debate, even if, on occasion, they tended to veer off into a fantasy world. Nevertheless, most of their remarks were meant sincerely.

I will not be able to deal with all the points that were raised. I want, first, to acknowledge the point that was made by the Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel about the Committee's intention to examine the logistics of the Budget process. I welcome that, and I look forward to the outcome of those deliberations.

2.45 pm

Some Members raised the issue of equal pay in the Civil Service. I dealt with that issue during this morning's discussions on the in-year monitoring round. Mr O'Loan asked some questions, but then he helpfully stated that he had tabled a question for written answer on the issue. Therefore, I will helpfully respond by saying that I will reply to his question for written answer, and I am sure that he will look forward to receiving that. I thank him for tabling the question and for giving me the opportunity to respond in the way that I suggested.

It is nonsense to say that everyone sat back and knew about the problem but did nothing to address it. The matter crystallized and became an issue only when the previous Finance Minister brought it to the attention of the Executive. We must deal with it in the way that I have suggested — through serious, intense engagement with the Treasury. The issue is not the responsibility of the Executive; it is a legacy issue that was inherited from direct rule Ministers. Therefore, it would be completely invidious if we had to take a stance that would impact on public services.

In other places, I have had the full support of, and best wishes from, other party members. Although some Members have not expressed their best wishes, I am sure that I have them, as we tackle the Treasury on the issue.

Mr O'Loan and others raised the issue of capital receipts, and Mr Beggs referred to Crossnacreevy and to errors in the Budget. However, there were no errors in the Budget. I stated yesterday and today that the £50 million allocated this year for the farm nutrients scheme will proceed.

Crossnacreevy was part of a capital assets realisation project, which was in year three of the current comprehensive spending review period. The information on the project was provided in good faith, on the basis of best information available. The general issue of lower levels of capital receipts means that, in the current economic climate, there will be lower costs for some infrastructure; for instance, for acquiring land. Mr O'Loan looks slightly puzzled, but if property prices have gone down, the price of land has also gone down,

and it costs less to do things with it. It is a case of simple economics.

It is recognised, however, that there is an issue. Furthermore, no one referred to the fact that over £100 million in capital reserves has not been allocated. All those issues will be taken into account when we have met the Treasury to discuss the equal pay issue. Of the £295 million identified by the capital realisation task force, £200 million were included in the Budget.

I will reiterate the assurance that I gave this morning. When the equal pay issue has been resolved, consideration will be given to supporting Departments that have taken all possible steps to address the shortfall in capital receipts.

Mr Beggs, Mr O'Loan and others raised the issue of funding for children and young people. As part of the Budget process, funding from central funds, including the children and young people's funding package, was mainstreamed. That gave Departments the necessary flexibility to manage such issues in the context of their overall position.

In response to concerns from Departments, additional allocations were made as part of the process to ensure that all worthwhile projects could continue during the draft, and revised, Budget process. The main problem is that individual Ministers have not decided to discontinue funding certain projects; rather they have laid the blame elsewhere — notably at the Department of Finance and Personnel. There is nothing new in that — that happens during every monitoring round. Although the Executive will continue to consider the amount of resources available to individual public services, the primary responsibility lies with individual Departments to prioritise resources under their control.

Returning to the subject of underspending, when the sums involved are compared with the levels of departmental underspend last year, it is clear that Departments have the capacity to fund those projects. Recently, my predecessor issued a statement about underspend, and that raises serious issues about the effectiveness of spending and the best outputs for the people we represent.

Mr O'Loan raised the issue of post-primary education. I share his concerns for clarity on those arrangements. I hope that, initially, the Department of Education will meet any additional costs from its existing Budget allocation.

Mr Farry stuck to well-rehearsed and well-known themes as usual. He spoke about support for the Budget; however, I remind him that it was agreed by all members of the Executive in January 2008. Although the nature of the Budget process inevitably means that it is simply not possible to meet all pressures, I still believe that the allocations that have been made strike the right balance.

Mr O'Loan: Will the Minister give way?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I ask the Member to give me a moment.

We do not have a bottomless pit: if we did, we could continue to dole out money to everyone's favourite programmes and projects. However, we live in the real world, in which we have to balance all the resources that are available to us against all the pressures and demands on public services. We could go down the Alliance Party's favourite route of increasing taxation and put a greater burden on the hard-pressed working families and others in our community who are already suffering because of the increases in fuel prices and the cost of living. I doubt whether there would be much support for going down that route, particularly on this side of the House. At least the Alliance Party seeks to address how it would raise the money through the Budget process, and does it openly by saying that it would increase taxation.

It is noticeable, as Mr Hamilton said in his speech, that when others criticise the process and demand more money, they are reluctant, indeed absent, when it comes to making suggestions about where to find that money, either through increased revenue streams or by re-allocating it from somewhere else. Mr Beggs drew attention to that when he made the valid point that when the Bill was debated in the Assembly, not one single amendment was tabled. That would have been a real test of the sincerity of those Members who said that they wanted to increase allocations in one area by reducing allocations elsewhere, or by a re-allocation of resources. Not a single proposal was made, nor was a single amendment tabled.

Some Members may wish to make a political point or a token gesture today by voting against the Bill at its Final Stage. Let us be very clear. As another Member pointed out, the only effect of voting against the Budget (No. 2) Bill today will be to ensure that Departments run out of money over the summer. All the money for health, education, housing, fuel poverty, the environment, investment and tourism will run out. We will not only be in crisis mode, but people will ask what on earth the Assembly is playing at. If Members want to take such an irresponsible view of such a serious process, so be it.

I will give way to the Member, who appears to wish to go down that route. Perhaps he will clarify his intentions.

Mr O'Loan: I thank the Minister for giving way. I wish to make two points, and it is important that I put my first on record. Will the Minister agree that the Minister for Social Development voted as required by the ministerial code, but that in the Executive's discussions that led up to the Budget, she raised the points of concern that were visible at that time, and which I raised again today?

Secondly, the Minister has spoken about a threat to bring down the financial house and not to have the resources to keep the Government running over the summer. If the Budget (No. 2) Bill were to be voted down today, the onus would rest with the Minister to bring a different Budget to the House.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: We have heard it all now, Mr Deputy Speaker. The Members opposite are saying that if the Bill is voted down today, the responsibility will lie with those of us who voted against that proposition. What a piece of perverted logistical thinking that is.

That simply illustrates the lack of logic, common sense or any sort of economic or financial probity on the part of Members who say such things. To say that they will vote it down, and that I must then take the blame, is absolute nonsense.

The Member's other point concerned the role of his party's Minister. The bottom line is that she agreed the Budget in the Executive. The Executive were unanimous, and the Minister voted for the Budget in the Assembly. Those facts are on the record, no matter how awkward or embarrassing they may be for the party opposite.

Several Members, including Dr Farry, talked about efficiency savings. I welcome the acceptance of the need for Departments to examine the ways in which they operate to improve efficiency. As I said this morning and yesterday at Question Time, efficiencies should be about doing things better in order to release more money for front-line services; they are not about cuts. We share a common agenda in that respect. It is important that we pursue efficiencies so that we are not constantly seeking more money. Let us make better use of the money that we have to produce the output and results that we want.

Dr Farry raised the issue of the general economy and lower corporation tax. We continue to press the case for lowering corporation tax, because that is what we want. When I was Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, I was responsible for growing the economy, although the Programme for Government gave growing the economy centre stage in all Departments. We absolutely wish to have lower corporation tax, and we have not given up on achieving that. That continues to be our policy, and we will use opportunities to press our case, as and when appropriate.

We must also examine the other policy levers that are at our disposal. It would be foolish in the extreme to think that a lower rate of corporation tax will be a silver bullet that will solve all our problems. The Budget's growth projections are based on existing programmes that must be reviewed by the Executive. However, I welcome Members' calls that the Assembly should have a greater focus on economic matters in general.

Several Members spoke about children and young people's projects. I fully recognise the importance of delivering the best possible services for children and young people. The previous Finance Minister said that he would consider providing additional funding, based on an agreed list of projects from the relevant Departments. Those discussions are ongoing, and the issues will be returned to as part of the September monitoring round, once the equal pay issue is resolved.

I thank everyone who took part in the debate. We must balance available resources against emerging pressures in-year and the demands of all Departments and all the worthy issues that were mentioned.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Before we proceed to the Question, I remind Members that, because this is a Budget Bill, the motion requires cross-community support.

Question put.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 61; Noes 11.

AYES

NATIONALIST:

Mr Adams, Ms Anderson, Mr Boylan, Mr Brady, Mr Brolly, Mr Butler, Mr W Clarke, Mr Doherty, Mr G Kelly, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McElduff, Mrs McGill, Mr McKay, Mr McLaughlin, Mr Murphy, Ms Ni Chuilín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Ms S Ramsey, Ms Ruane.

UNIONIST:

Mr Armstrong, Mr Beggs, Mr Bresland, Lord Browne, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke, Rev Dr Robert Coulter, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dodds, Mr Donaldson, Mr Easton, Mrs Foster, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Irwin, Mr McCausland, Mr B McCrea, Mr I McCrea, Dr W McCrea, Mr McGimpsey, Miss McIlveen, Mr McNarry, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Newton, Mr Paisley Jnr, Rev Dr Ian Paisley, Mr G Robinson, Mrs I Robinson, Mr K Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Savage, Mr Simpson, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

Tellers for the Ayes: Miss McIlveen and Mr McQuillan.

NOES

NATIONALIST:

Mr D Bradley, Mrs M Bradley, Mr P J Bradley, Mr Burns, Mr Durkan, Mr Gallagher, Mrs Hanna, Mrs D Kelly, Mr A Maginness, Mr O'Loan, Mr P Ramsey.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr O'Loan and Mr P Ramsey

Total votes 72 Total Ayes 61 [84.7%]

Nationalist Votes 34 Nationalist Ayes 23 [67.6%]

Unionist Votes 38 Unionist Ayes 38 [100.0%]

Other Votes 0 Other Ayes 0 [0.00%]

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved (with cross-community support):

That the Budget (No. 2) Bill [NIA 18/07] do now pass.

Child Maintenance Bill

Final Stage

The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie): I beg to move

That the Child Maintenance Bill [NIA 17/07] do now pass.

The Child Maintenance Bill is an important piece of legislation that makes tackling child poverty the main priority of the child maintenance system. The Bill ensures that more maintenance is collected and that more of that maintenance goes directly to children.

In Northern Ireland at the moment, one in three non-resident parents fail to pay any money that is owed to their children, leaving 12,600 children without any maintenance and often suffering unnecessary poverty as a result. Measures contained in the Bill — together with the increased disregard of £20 a week by the end of 2008 and £40 a week from April 2010 — will ensure that many more children will benefit from maintenance and that will contribute to reducing child poverty in Northern Ireland.

Parents will be encouraged to make voluntary arrangements where appropriate. Where such arrangements are not appropriate, parents will be supported in making applications to the statutory maintenance service thus avoiding the risk of anyone slipping through the net. The new information and support service will work to meet the needs of parents: that service will support parents in making arrangements that are right for them personally, and offer an improved statutory service to ensure that more children receive the money that is due to them.

The Bill will put in place much needed reforms to deal with the well-publicised deficiencies of the current system, which have too often left parents confused and frustrated and made it very difficult for the staff charged with administering that system to offer the service that they wish to provide — a service that parents and children have a right to expect.

The proposals will bring into affect more streamlined and transparent child maintenance arrangements. The Bill makes provisions for the Department to obtain details of non-resident parents' income directly from HM Revenue and Customs.

That will provide the Department with easily accessible and accurate details of earned income, meaning that more money will flow more quickly to more children. That is the express purpose of the Bill — to ensure that money flows to children more expeditiously. Nobody in this House wishes to deny children who are in need the right to receive the money to which they are entitled at the same time as children in GB.

3.15 pm

The use of administrative liability orders will make the process of enforcing arrears considerably quicker, and the power to collect money from bank accounts and other financial resources will mean that the Department can collect the money as quickly as possible. There will be an extension to the type of accounts against which ongoing and lump-sum deduction orders can be made. The Department will be able to apply for an order to freeze a non-resident parent's assets if there is evidence that they are about to dissipate them to avoid paying child maintenance.

The current enforcement and compliance measures are not as effective as they could be, and the process does not facilitate swift enforcement action; therefore the provisions of the Bill place emphasis on stronger and more effective enforcement. I accept that the measures are strong, but the money in these cases is owed to the children. I stress again that the enforcement powers will be used only where non-resident parents will not — as opposed to cannot — pay. It is right and fair that effective measures should be used against parents who deny their children the maintenance that is due to them.

I read with interest the transcript of last Tuesday's debate on the report of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and the deputy First Minister on its inquiry into child poverty in Northern Ireland. I will study that report very carefully. I wholeheartedly agree with the Committee that the Executive should ensure that government services should respond decisively to the needs of low-income families. I intend to ensure that my Department does so. The provisions in the Child Maintenance Bill will put in place a new framework for the child maintenance system to benefit low-income families in Northern Ireland.

I thank the Chairperson, the outgoing Chairperson, and members of the Committee for Social Development — and indeed Members of the House — for their support in progressing this important Bill.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development (Mr Simpson): As the House is aware, this important piece of legislation was granted accelerated passage. As a result, the Committee for Social Development did not have a chance to scrutinise it in any great detail as would normally be the case. The Committee will play an important scrutiny role when the legislation has been passed.

During the Second Stage of the Bill, the Deputy Chairperson referred to several areas that were of interest to the Committee, one of which was the use of enforcement provisions. The Minister has assured the Committee — and the House — that only those parents who will not pay as opposed to those who cannot pay will be subject to such measures. I sincerely hope that that will

be the case. The Committee will be considering that issue in the future.

The Committee supports the drive to get parents to make their own arrangements for the payment of child maintenance, which should reduce levels of non-payment. It is of the utmost importance that the Department ensure that parents with care know their rights in the statutory maintenance system, and are not pressurised into entering into a voluntary arrangement. Voluntary arrangements will not suit every couple.

The Bill's most important aim is to get money to children who are entitled to it. If we are to focus on meeting the needs of children and to tackle child poverty effectively, we must ensure that more parents take responsibility for paying for their children and that more children benefit. However, it remains to be seen whether non-resident parents who will not pay under the statutory system will pay under a voluntary one.

The Committee supports the Bill, with those caveats.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. A central tenet of the Bill is to make a difference between those who cannot pay and those who will not pay. However, there are concerns about how the Bill will reduce child poverty; there is little evidence in it of how the Minister proposes to do that. There is concern about the Bill's effect on second families. Will the children of second families be more vulnerable to deprivation as a result of the Bill? Those questions have not been satisfactorily addressed. The Minister has given a commitment that an equality impact assessment (EQIA) will be made simultaneously with the Bill's implementation. I look forward to that.

The Minister has, in effect, broken parity with England, as the Child Support Agency (CSA) will continue to exist there, albeit in a revamped form. Here, the Minister proposes that the Social Security Agency will be responsible for the implementation of child maintenance payments. I question whether the infrastructure is adequate: has the Social Security Agency sufficient resources to implement the Bill or will it be given those resources?

The Minister said that she is more than aware of concerns about the Child Support Agency. I hope that resources will be made available to the Social Security Agency (SSA) so that it can implement the provisions of the Bill. Go raibh maith agat.

The Minister for Social Development: I thank Members for their contributions. I welcome the Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development to his new position, thank him for raising issues, pay him tribute and, as I have not yet had an opportunity to do so on the Floor of the House, wish him well. I expect the Committee to undertake scrutiny of the Bill's implementation, for that is its role.

We need to ensure that money flows as expeditiously as possible to the children who need it. Mr Simpson asked how we ensure that parents are not leant on to enter into voluntary arrangements. The information and support that my Department will provide includes a helpline with web-based support and face-to-face service where appropriate. Tools, such as a standard maintenance form and an on-line calculator to help with estimating the level of child-maintenance-based income, will be provided to enable parents to make informed choices with respect to maintenance agreements.

Mr Brady raised the issue of second families. The Bill provides for fairness between children of first and second families so that second families are not disadvantaged to finance the wellbeing of the first. I assure the House that the maintenance formula introduced in 2003 takes account of children in first and second families and the revised percentages will ensure that that continues.

Mr Brady also raised the subject of child poverty, about which I would like to make the following points. The Bill provides for the removal of the provision whereby the parent with care can lose £24.20 a week if a reduced benefit decision is imposed; enabling parents to keep more of the child maintenance that they receive by increasing the maintenance disregard to £20 a week by the end of 2008 and £40 a week from 2010; and the introduction of administrative liability orders. Those measures will speed up the process and reduce the time taken to enforce the collection of arrears.

It is the combined effect of the measures that will ensure that more children are lifted out of poverty. I hope that all absent parents demonstrate their responsibilities to their children. It is in our interest and in theirs that their children are properly cared for, both socially and financially, particularly at a time when we are all feeling the pinch given the higher cost of fuel, power and food. Indeed, those factors are most affecting those who are in the low-to-medium income groups, who are facing a higher level of inflation and incomes that are not necessarily rising to keep pace with that level of inflation.

Mr Brady is living with a misunderstanding as regards the Child Support Agency and parity. As a result of the Henshaw Review it was decided that, in Britain, the Child Support Agency should be kept at arm's length. I feel that it would be better to bring the agency into the core of the Department, where it could be subject to full scrutiny and where the problems of the past could be properly addressed, resolved and rectified. Furthermore, problems in getting money to children could be resolved in a more expeditious fashion. That is the purpose of the Child Support Agency, and I hope that everyone would be able to live up to their responsibilities in that respect.

I hope that I have responded satisfactorily to the points that have been raised. If I have missed any point, I will write to the Member concerned. During the debates on accelerated passage and Second Stage, I made the point that if Sinn Féin were to abandon its policy of abstentionism, and take its seats at Westminster, its members would have full and ample opportunity to debate the parent legislation. I make the point again today. I suggest to Mickey Brady that if his party's abstentionist policy were abandoned, it would have full opportunity for line-by-line scrutiny of the parent Bill.

In conclusion, this Bill is a child poverty measure: it removes the reduced-benefit decision and it deals with non-compliant, non-resident parents in a better, more expeditious fashion. The most important feature of the Bill is that it takes the side of children and parents with care. I do not believe that any Member of the House would resile from that viewpoint, as it is the view that was communicated in the Committee and in the House.

Child maintenance makes an important contribution to tackling child poverty, and it can make a significant difference to the lives of families. This Bill is good news, and it is a good news story for children in Northern Ireland. Again, I am grateful to the Chairperson, the outgoing Chairperson, the members of the Committee for Social Development, and Members for their positive contribution during the progress of the Bill, and for the level of consensus that the Bill has enjoyed across the Assembly.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Child Maintenance Bill [NIA 17/07] do now pass.

COMMITTEE BUSINESS

Public Inquiry into the Maureen McGinley Case

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

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

That this Assembly expresses concern that investigations by the Western Health and Social Care Trust and the Coroners Service have failed to provide a satisfactory explanation of the circumstances in which the late Mrs Maureen McGinley received a number of fractures following her death; commends the family of Mrs Maureen McGinley for their campaign in highlighting the issue; and calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to initiate, as a matter of urgency, a full, independent and time-bound public inquiry.

I first extend my deepest sympathy to the late Maureen McGinley's family, some of whom I believe are in the Public Gallery.

Maureen McGinley came from Strabane and died in Altnagelvin Hospital in Londonderry on Wednesday 3 January 2007, aged 78. The doctor would not issue a death certificate because Mrs McGinley had fallen at home a few days earlier, before being admitted to hospital.

3.30 pm

On Friday 5 January 2007, two days after her death, a post-mortem that was carried out at Belfast city mortuary concluded that Mrs McGinley had died from natural causes; namely, pneumonia or a lung infection. Heart disease was listed as a possible contributing factor. Most alarmingly, the autopsy also revealed that Mrs McGinley had suffered 34 fractures to her ribs. The autopsy report states:

“there was only a small amount of bruising associated with two of these fractures, strongly suggesting that the vast majority of them were sustained after death, probably as the body was being moved.”

In a letter to the hospital two months later, in March 2007, the deputy state pathologist, who carried out the autopsy, explained:

“post-mortem fractures of ribs and sternum are frequently encountered in cases where cardiopulmonary resuscitation has been attempted. However, I understand that no resuscitation had been attempted on Mary McGinley, and the distribution of rib fractures was not entirely consistent with the effects of resuscitation. Therefore, I concluded that they must have been sustained while the body was being moved after death. Very occasionally one or two post-mortem rib fractures may be identified at autopsy, particularly in the elderly, however a large number of post-mortem fractures is extremely unusual, even in the presence of marked osteoporosis. This would strongly suggest that at some point during the handling or moving of the body some considerable force had been applied to the chest,

however there are no specific features to indicate exactly how they were sustained.”

Investigations by the Western Health and Social Care Trust and by the Coroners Service have signally failed to provide any satisfactory explanation for how those fractures were sustained by Mrs McGinley after her death.

Mrs McGinley’s family have spent 18 months fighting, lobbying and campaigning incessantly for answers. The local community was rightly shocked by what happened and supports the family’s campaign for answers. They started a petition calling for a full, independent and public inquiry, and collected a staggering 18,500 signatures. That reflects an amazing amount of public disquiet.

That petition was brought to the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety on 28 February 2008. The Committee passed the petition to the Minister and urged him to launch an inquiry.

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety responded:

“events surrounding Mrs McGinley’s death have been subjected to a very comprehensive examination, both internally by the Trust, and by the coroner’s service, who took responsibility for delivering her body to the Belfast City Mortuary for post-mortem. Despite that comprehensive investigation it has not been possible to provide a totally satisfactory explanation for the fractures which Mrs McGinley sustained after her death.”

The Minister concluded that he was:

“of the view that any further review ... is unlikely to shed any further light on how this unfortunate incident occurred.”

That is totally unsatisfactory and unacceptable. One has to ask how difficult it can be to ascertain from duty rotas who handled the body and to then follow the process through to a satisfactory conclusion.

The death of a mother is a tragic and heartbreaking event in itself, but, in this case, not only had the family to suffer the grief and sadness of losing a loved one, they had the added shock of learning that something dreadful happened to their mother after her death, resulting in her having 34 broken bones. One of the principles of any civilised society is that we treat the dead with dignity and respect. The very least that the family should expect is a thorough investigation that gets to the bottom of what happened between the time of Mrs McGinley’s death on a hospital ward and the start of the post-mortem, two days later. The family cannot begin to grieve for their mother while those questions remain unanswered.

The family has made it clear that they are not interested in recriminations and that they just want answers. They want an explanation and an apology for what happened. We can all identify with the position in which the family find themselves. We just have to think of how we would react if the same thing happened to

any of our own mothers or to a close relative. We would go to any lengths and would leave no stone unturned until we got an explanation of how and why such an event happened.

Following her death on 3 January 2007, Mrs McGinley’s body was moved from the ward to the mortuary at Altnagelvin Hospital, and it remained there until it was collected by the undertaker early on the Friday morning and transported to the Belfast city mortuary in the grounds of Forster Green Hospital. Clearly, something happened to Mrs McGinley’s body during that period, and the family has a right to an explanation. The only way to get answers seems to be to hold a full public inquiry during which anyone who had any dealings with the body from the time of Mrs McGinley’s death in the hospital ward to the beginning of the post-mortem is questioned under oath.

The Minister may claim that he cannot set up an inquiry because the issues fall between two jurisdictions — namely, the Health Service, for which he has responsibility, and the Coroners Service, which is the responsibility of David Hanson MP, Minister of State. This case cries out for justice and for an explanation, and ways must be found to deal with any issues that fall between the two jurisdictions. Until now, the Minister has rejected all calls for an inquiry, saying that there is nothing to be gained from holding one. I ask the Minister to consider how he would react if a close relative of his had suffered such fractures after death. I therefore urge him to show the same compassion and sympathy to the McGinley family that he would expect in such circumstances and to set up an inquiry that will get answers. I urge Members to support the motion.

Mrs McGill: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I support the motion. I thank the Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety, and all members of that Committee, for bringing the matter before the House.

The motion states:

“the Western Health and Social Care Trust and the Coroner’s Service have failed to provide a satisfactory explanation of the circumstances”

that surround this case. I have looked at some of the documentation, and although I am neither a medic nor a forensic scientist, my reading of the papers shows inconsistencies and gaps. For example, I could not follow the chronology at all times.

As the Chairperson of the Committee said, as far as the family is concerned, this is not about blame; it is about finding out what happened. I appeal to the Minister to hold an inquiry, because this is about a mother and about a family that does not know what happened. It is also about the Health Service workers and all the other people who may have been around the body who do not know what happened.

For the sake of truth and fairness, a public inquiry will get the desired answers.

The second part of the motion commends the family of Maureen McGinley, and I echo that sentiment. The situation has not been easy for them, and the grieving process has not taken place because the issue remains unresolved. The family is seeking only a public inquiry. I repeat: this is not about blame.

A public inquiry is required in this case because the Assembly Ombudsman, in response to a complaint lodged with him against the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety by Mr Pat Doherty, MP for West Tyrone, said that his powers were limited. The legislative reasons for those limited powers can be discussed another day, but the fact that the Assembly Ombudsman is powerless in this situation is an issue in itself.

I was disappointed with the response from Elaine Way in a letter from the Western Health and Social Care Trust. The McGinley family's situation as regards losing their mother is known, as is the situation regarding what happened after that; however, the tone of the letter, which is dated 21 April 2008, was inappropriate:

“The trust is entirely satisfied that it has acted appropriately and consequently sees no benefit in attending a further meeting at which we could be confirming again the trust's position, which has been fully explained to you.”

I read that letter only recently, and there is coldness in it. That may be how such letters are written, but I return to the point I made at the beginning of my remarks — this issue is about a mother and what happened to her after her death. As the Chairperson of the Committee said; this is not about blame; it is about the people who were involved in the sequence of events between Mrs McGinley's death and the time that the family received the autopsy report. I appeal to the Minister to commission an inquiry, because that would go some way towards getting satisfactory answers.

Rev Dr Robert Coulter: The circumstances that have led to the motion are extremely sad, and I offer my deepest sympathies and those of my party to the McGinley family.

What happened to Maureen McGinley after her death would have been difficult for a family to come to terms with in any circumstances. However, still not knowing what happened is particularly difficult. I thank the Minister for coming to the Chamber to respond to the motion. I also thank him for meeting the McGinley family.

I recognise that the Western Health and Social Care Trust has carried out a comprehensive examination of the circumstances surrounding the case. I also recognise that the Minister believes that the trust acted appropriately. The Western Health and Social Care Trust has given assurances that Mrs McGinley was treated with the

utmost respect and dignity at all times. The Coroners Service for Northern Ireland made no recommendations to the trust about the procedures in place at Altnagelvin Hospital. Although I recognise those statements and have no reason to doubt them, in light of what we know about the case, they do not offer the closure and reassurance that the McGinley family requires and deserves.

I welcome that the McGinley family has employed Professor Christopher Milroy to examine the post-mortem injuries suffered by Maureen McGinley.

I also welcome the fact that the Minister has stated his intention to consider the report if it reaches a different conclusion to that of the investigations that have already been conducted.

3.45 pm

In Northern Ireland, we have a strong history of treating people with dignity, respect and care. The staff in the Health Service and in the Coroners Service are dedicated, professional and caring. I know that they, as much as anyone, want the McGinley family to receive the answers that they deserve.

It is regrettable that the issue had to be brought to the Floor of the House. Although I welcome the meeting earlier today between the Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety and the Minister, it is unfortunate that such a meeting was not requested by the Minister at an earlier date.

Mrs Hanna: I convey my deepest sympathy to the family of the late Maureen McGinley. Her case is sad, and, naturally, the family has been badly affected by it. I have the utmost respect for the McGinley family, who are trying desperately to discover how Mrs McGinley sustained so many fractures. They have shown great courage and strength during a difficult time. It is hard enough to get through the grieving process without this awful issue hanging over them. It has been a long struggle, and, unfortunately, it seems that satisfactory answers have not yet been provided.

When the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety considered Maureen McGinley's case, I tried to imagine how I would feel had it happened to a relative of mine and what I would want to establish and find out. The family wants and deserves answers, to which they are entitled; I would want the same. They want to know what happened to their mother's body that resulted in 34 fractures and how it happened. It is an extraordinary number of fractures, and questions need to be asked and answered.

Minister McGimpsey turned down a request for a full independent inquiry on the grounds that it is unlikely to uncover the cause of the injuries. I appreciate the fact that the Committee has today called on the Minister to initiate a public inquiry.

The family wants an independent public inquiry into the case and have started a petition, and they have picketed outside Altnagelvin Hospital to highlight their demand. I understand that the Western Health and Social Care Trust conducted an investigation and that the Coroners Service also undertook an independent inquiry. Unfortunately, the senior coroner concluded that the service had not been able to establish how Mrs McGinley's ribs came to be fractured. However, it was made clear that Mrs McGinley suffered from osteoporosis, which may have contributed to her ribs being fractured with little force.

Unfortunately, the question about when and how the fractures occurred remains unanswered. Obviously, more information is required to establish how the fractures were sustained. I do not know whether that information can be teased out. The McGinley family have appointed an independent expert — Professor Christopher Milroy — and I am glad that the Coroners Service has offered him full co-operation. I have no doubt that the Minister and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety will do the same. The results of Professor Milroy's inquiry will be interesting.

It is important that all avenues are explored to ensure that nothing is overlooked in this case. I hope that the family gets the answers that they so much want and need, and that they can put the issue to rest and get on with their grieving.

Mr Buchanan: I also support the motion fully and unequivocally. I welcome the members of the McGinley family who are present today. I have no doubt that this is another difficult time for them in this stage of their grieving process for their mother. I thank the Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety for tabling the motion and for outlining the case at the outset of the debate.

I am not an advocate of public inquiries. However, when we examine this particular case and the failure of the Western Health and Social Care Trust, the Department of Health, and the Minister to provide satisfactory answers to the McGinley family after almost 18 months, it is evident that a full, independent and time-bound inquiry is the only way forward for the family. I must commend the family for their courage in pressing the matter to this stage. Today, I ask the Minister to take note of the public interest in this particular matter and of the petition of some 18,000 signatures. Not only must the Minister take note of that, but he must act upon it.

When a loved one passes away in hospital it is assumed that their remains will be treated with the utmost care, respect and dignity. Yet on the occasion in question, Mrs McGinley's body, from the point of death until the coroner's examination, sustained a staggering total of 34 fractures. That raises the question: what

happened between those two points in time? Of course, the McGinley family is fully justified to seek answers: not only to allow them to bring closure to their mother's death, but to allow them to complete the grieving process.

On previous occasions, the Minister has said, in his responses to Assembly questions and in press statements, that he is satisfied that the trust acted appropriately and in accordance with hospital protocol. However, in light of the incident, I question whether those protocols are appropriate or need to be reviewed. I also note that the coroner Mr John L Leckey informed the McGinley family that their mother's injuries were caused by accident, although they were unable to identify at what stage or under what circumstances they were sustained. However, someone somewhere knows what happened. The McGinley family seeks to get to the bottom of that. What happened to their mother after her death for her to sustain those injuries?

Today, I am not pointing the finger at the nursing or front-line staff, who provide an excellent service for patients, for which we are most grateful. However, I must lay the blame at the door of the managers and the Minister, who have failed to provide appropriate answers for the family.

It is the Minister's responsibility to provide the McGinley family with the answers that they seek. To have a blank sheet is simply not acceptable. We need answers about what happened. The Health Committee has received conflicting reports on whether or not Mrs McGinley's body was washed after her death, which highlights and strengthens the need for an inquiry.

The McGinley family has exercised patience and displayed great courage in their efforts to date to gain results without success. During that time they have been unable to grieve for a mother — as other families can do — due to the lack of closure.

Today, I tender my sympathy to them. I hope that their ordeal will be over soon. The responsibility now lies with the Minister; if he has nothing to hide then he will act upon the Committee's call, through the House today, to initiate — as a matter of urgency — a full, independent and time-bound inquiry to get answers for the McGinley family, which they rightly deserve.

Mr Doherty: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I congratulate the Chairperson, Iris Robinson, and the Deputy Chairperson, Michelle O'Neill, and, indeed, all of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety for bringing this motion forward.

I also wish to reiterate the Assembly Health Committee's call for Minister Michael McGimpsey to initiate a full, independent public inquiry into the circumstances by which deceased Strabane woman Maureen McGinley was found, upon post-mortem, to have sustained 34 rib fractures following her death at Altnagelvin Hospital on 3 January 2007.

There are many disturbing aspects to that case, which have not only served to cause immense additional trauma, but widespread public concern about the deficiencies in the present arrangements between hospitals and the Coroners Service when a deceased person is sent for post-mortem.

The fact that the McGinley family was not informed about the injuries that their mother sustained until more than 10 weeks after her death is grounds in itself for a public inquiry. Furthermore, the subsequent in-house inquiry that was carried out by Altnagelvin Hospital — its critical incident review report — was basically an exercise in absolving itself and the Coroners Service of any responsibility regarding how those injuries were sustained.

Through unfounded conjecture and assumptions, the Altnagelvin inquiry attempted to place the blame at the door of the undertaker who transported the body of Maureen McGinley from Altnagelvin to the post-mortem in Belfast. If any attempt had been made to ascertain, from the undertaker in question, the methods by which he secures a body to a stretcher, it would have been established that he affixes straps across the shoulders, knees and ankles — a method that could not have caused the fractures to the chest area that were sustained by Maureen McGinley.

Contradictory statements were made about whether the body of Maureen McGinley was washed following her death at Altnagelvin. Those must also be studied. The McGinley family has been courageous in their campaign to secure the truth about what happened to their mother, and have exhausted every possible avenue in pursuit of that cause — only to find their efforts frustrated at every turn.

On 25 February, I accompanied the McGinley family to a meeting with the Health Minister, Michael McGimpsey. At that meeting, he stated that he would rule nothing out, including the possibility of establishing a full, independent public inquiry. The McGinley family left the meeting with the renewed hope that they could, at long last, secure the answers that they deserved and which would enable them to finally bring closure to what has been a devastating ordeal. One can therefore understand their extreme disappointment when Michael McGimpsey, in his written response on 6 March following our meeting, merely regurgitated the arbitrary assumptions that the McGinley family have been fed from day one.

The Minister initially declined the McGinley family's request to meet, and they now feel that the only reason that the Minister finally agreed to meet them on 25 February was because failure to do so would have attracted adverse media attention to the Minister and his Department. It now seems that the Minister merely went through the motions at the meeting, and when the

door closed behind us it was a case of out of sight, out of mind.

More than 18,000 people have signed a petition that calls for a full, independent inquiry into the case of Maureen McGinley. It is clear that the case is a matter of major public concern, as it is directly linked to the issue of healthcare for elderly people in our society.

The fact that the Coroners Service is an agency of the NIO and, as such, remains a reserved matter, should not be used as an excuse to rule out an inquiry. It is essential for an inquiry to be established, not only to secure the truth about what happened in the case of Maureen McGinley, but also to ensure that the confidence in the system that the public have lost as a result of this disturbing case is restored.

Mr Easton: I support the motion.

The good practice and guidance that is usually applied in the NHS to build better pathology services has been well received, because it put patients and bereaved families at the centre of its concerns. When a patient dies, families need to know that the mortuary service will deal with the body of their loved one in a safe, secure and sensitive manner, whether the death has taken place in a hospital or the body has been taken to the hospital mortuary after death.

The public usually has confidence in those who have such an important role in providing that service, and confidence that there is a balance between the need to ensure safety and efficiency, and showing respect and sensitivity at such a critical moment in a family's grief.

The application of eight key principles in the NHS improvement plan has done much to encourage and assure people in the Province that they can be confident that staff are encouraged to develop a standard of excellence in that area.

4.00 pm

The care offered by the NHS in the event of a death is important to a family as they grieve for the loss of a loved one. However, that was not the case for the McGinley family. Mrs McGinley died from pneumonia, but for the family to learn that her body had sustained 34 fractures after her death without receiving a rational explanation was a horrifying experience. Now, a year and a half later, they still have not received a satisfactory explanation. To my mind, that is scandalous.

The statements that the family has received have been couched in official language. The family is entitled to clear and precise answers to their questions, and that has not happened. If the Minister had responded sufficiently in the two letters that he sent to the Health Committee, and if clear answers had been provided to the family, there might have been no need for a debate. The family has my personal sympathy, and that of the

vast majority of Members. I commend the family for their continuing campaign to highlight the issue.

The investigations by the Western Health and Social Care Trust and the Coroners Service have been unable to provide satisfactory answers. Only a full, independent and time-bound inquiry will give the family the closure that they need, and I call on the Minister to provide such an inquiry.

Mr Durkan: I also support the motion. I commend the Committee for the consideration it has shown to the needs of the McGinley family, and I commend the Chairperson and the Deputy Chairperson for their work in trying to take the matter forward.

It is difficult for the McGinley family to hear their situation debated in the Chamber. We must show sensitivity to the confusion of emotions that that family are feeling. They have had to endure grievance on top of grief, and no family should have to undergo that. The family found out weeks and weeks later that their mother had received multiple fractures after her death. They are asking why and how that happened and why they were not told, but they have not been given any answers. It is not enough for any of us to suggest to the family that it was a mystery event that they will have to get over, or that they at least take comfort from the fact that the injuries happened only after their mother's death, and that that is all the assurance they need. They need to know, and they have a right to ask. We have a duty of consideration and care. If accountability means anything, it means that the McGinley family, and the public representatives who have been working on their behalf, should be looked in the eye and given answers, and people should be available to provide those answers.

We often refer to leaving no stone unturned. If any of us found ourselves in the same situation with a close relative, we would want to believe that no stone would be left unturned in finding out what had happened, and how and why, and to ensure that it would not happen to another family. The McGinley family feel that the system appears to be saying that some stones will be left unturned, because either nothing new will be found or something unwanted might be found. It is incumbent on the Assembly and the Minister to pursue any inquiry or any means of investigation that is needed to provide answers.

We have been told that there is no satisfactory explanation for the fractures. That in itself cannot be a satisfactory outcome — it adds to the sense of frustration, scandal and hurt that is felt by the family. It is not just the family, their friends and neighbours who feel that way; as the petition shows, there is widespread and strong public concern about what has happened. That concern has been compounded by the lack of answers and by the apparent attempt to suggest that it is somehow untoward to pursue answers to those questions through an inquiry.

We have also heard that the trust offered assurances that the body was treated with respect at all times. The Minister is clearly on the record as believing those assurances. I do not know how the rest of us can rely on them: given that we have neither the evidence nor the insight to do so, we cannot commend those assurances to the family, or, indeed, to the wider public, which deserves to have its confidence restored.

People working in the healthcare system and those who work in the hospital concerned want to see that wider confidence restored, because in a sense, there is a cloud over everyone. As Pat Doherty implied, suggestions have been made that different people might be to blame. Veiled references have been made to the role of the undertaker, and questions have been asked about nurses and other hospital staff. None of us wants to see those sorts of questions ricocheting around unanswered, hurting a lot of people as well as grieving the McGinley family. That is the reason that a public inquiry is needed.

Mr G Robinson: I offer my sympathy to the McGinley family, and I congratulate them for their efforts to establish the truth of this case. I also commend the people who carry out daily the difficult work in mortuaries quietly and unassumingly. I speak not to criticise them, but to find the truth of this one case.

All of us wish — and expect — that dignity, care and respect be shown to a family member or friend when they die. That is assumed by us all, and we take that for granted as the norm. In the majority of cases, that is exactly what happens. It is also the aim of the second, sixth and seventh principles of the document 'Care and Respect in Death: Good Practice Guidance for NHS Mortuary Staff'. There are, however, occasions, such as that now under debate, when something goes wrong. In such circumstances, it is only dignified, respectful and professional that the families are told the truth of what has happened. That will perhaps help them to begin their grieving process.

Something went seriously wrong in this case, and I am sure that the Minister knows that. He should be prepared to commit to a public inquiry to identify any potential flaws in the system, but, most importantly, to get to the truth for the McGinley family. A public inquiry would also prevent the same circumstances occurring again.

I will therefore ask the Minister two questions. First, does he dispute the findings of Dr Bentley, who stated that the numerous fractures were caused post mortem? Secondly, does the Minister accept that the Coroners Service told the family that the injuries were caused by accident? If he does accept that, he must accept that the Coroners Service is apparently in the possession of facts that confirm the accidental status of the injuries and their post-mortem cause but that all previous enquiries have apparently been unable to establish, or have

overlooked. A public inquiry is certainly justified in this case, and, in my view, it is a necessity.

The McGinley family are reported by the Press Association on 25 April as saying that they do not want any money because that is not what this matter is about. For that I commend them. What the family, and all of us, want is the truth — not a witch-hunt, not money, just the truth. I say to the Minister that I support them in their search for the truth, and I urge him to launch a public inquiry as soon as possible so that the truth in this case can be established and a similar occurrence in can be prevented. I commend the Chairperson of the Health Committee for bringing the motion to the House. I support the motion.

Mr McCarthy: I support the motion and offer my sympathy, and that of my party, to Mrs McGinley's family. Losing a loved one is hard enough. What the family has had to endure, however, is totally unacceptable. No one should suffer that further blow after a loved one's death.

I thank my United Community group colleague Dr Kieran Deeny for the hard work that he has carried out on this deplorable incident. His efforts are widely appreciated by all who are involved in this terribly sad case. Unfortunately, due to family circumstances, Dr Deeny cannot be present for the debate, although he fully supports the motion.

It is abundantly clear that the family, and other people, do not believe that the Coroners Service has provided a satisfactory explanation for the circumstances of Maureen's injuries; far from it, in fact. I do not wish to attribute blame, but merely to say that I know from what Dr Deeny and others have said that the circumstances have not been fully clarified. As other Members have pointed out, the McGinley family deserve full credit for their campaign. Their endurance must be applauded. Mrs McGinley's case may not be the only one of its kind in the UK or Ireland. Therefore, her family have not only served their own cause, but, perhaps, that of other families.

We must determine what action should be taken on the case. First, clarification is needed on whether the care and respect in death good-practice guidance was adhered to. The guidance contains eight key principles. It is worth seeking evidence on whether those were properly applied. It is highly possible, for example, that the process of moving Maureen's body, or working with it, could have caused fractures. That is why it must be known whether correct procedures were followed. I am aware that the family has been informed that no further action will be taken by the Coroners Service unless further information becomes available. The question is how such information can be made available.

I am aware that 34 rib fractures, without bleeding, were found during a post-mortem of Mrs McGinley's body. Those fractures must have occurred after death. That is frightening. We must establish precisely what happened. We cannot simply wait for information to become available. The explanations that have been put forward so far — that the fractures were caused by restraints that were used by the undertaker, movement of the body from the hospital, and even resuscitation attempts — range from the unlikely to the impossible.

The call for a public inquiry is tempting. My party will not oppose that call. However, the key word in the motion is "independent". An independent inquiry would answer questions on how more information about what happened to the late Maureen McGinley can be made available in a way that delivers clarity — and is seen to do so.

I thank the Chairperson of the Health Committee, who tabled the motion. On behalf of the United Community group, I state our full support for the motion and, specifically, for an independent and time-bound inquiry.

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Mr McGimpsey): I, like other Members, will begin by expressing my sincere sympathy with the McGinley family. Any family death creates a sad loss. However, the loss of a mother, who is, often, the source of the family's love and support, is extremely difficult. I understand how difficult it must be for the family, not only to lose their mother, but to learn that she sustained injuries after her death. Anyone would be distressed and disturbed to learn that a loved one's body had suffered injury after death.

That is why the McGinley family's desire to know how that happened is understandable. When I met the family in February, it was clear that they were still grieving for their mother and that they were naturally upset and angry that they still did not have a clear explanation about how the fractures were sustained. I understand and appreciate the increasing difficulty that that must continue to pose almost 18 months after Mrs McGinley's death and the impact that such uncertainty must have on immediate family members and on the wider family circle.

4.15 pm

Death is not an uncommon experience for nursing staff. Each year, there are around 15,000 deaths in Northern Ireland, more than half of which occur in hospitals. As a result, healthcare staff are familiar with the processes and procedures that are required to provide appropriate care for the body of a deceased individual. That does not mean that healthcare staff are not affected and distressed by the death of a patient; rather, they take forward their duties in a highly professional manner.

At all times, staff know to treat a body with due respect, care and dignity.

It should be remembered that, along with everyone else, healthcare staff will suffer the loss of a loved one. Throughout their training, they are instilled with the ethos of caring for patients at all times. Today, we are even more aware than we were previously of the dignity and respect that must be afforded to the deceased and their families. Several years ago, the outcome of the human organs inquiry was instrumental in bringing about improved communication and greater consideration of the wishes of the family.

Although we are discussing the unfortunate events that took place after Mrs McGinley's death, it is important to emphasise two matters. First, her death was a result of natural causes and, secondly, there has never been any question about the quality of the medical care that she received while she was in hospital. When I met members of the McGinley family in February, they told me that they were content that their mother had been well cared for in Altnagelvin Hospital during the period of her short illness.

It would be useful to set out the background to the case and to detail the actions of the trust staff up to the time when the coroner directed that a post-mortem was to be carried out. Mrs McGinley was admitted to Altnagelvin Hospital after suffering a fall at home, and she sadly died on the evening of 3 January 2007 in the hospital. Following her death, care of her body was provided by hospital staff in accordance with the trust's guidelines for dealing with death certification and the care that is required immediately following death. Investigations into the matter by Altnagelvin Hospital and the Coroners Office have indicated that the staff involved followed those protocols and treated Mrs McGinley's body with the care and respect that would be expected.

On the morning of 4 January 2007, the hospital reported Mrs McGinley's death to the coroner, who advised that a post-mortem was required. On 5 January 2007, Mrs McGinley's body was taken to Belfast City Mortuary for the post-mortem by undertakers acting for the Coroners Service for Northern Ireland. On 19 March 2007, the results of the post-mortem were notified to the family and the hospital. To clear up the point that Mr Doherty raised, post-mortem reports often take many weeks for completion. The time taken in this case was not unusual, and there is no question of the report being held up for any particular reason.

The deputy state pathologist, Dr Bentley, who carried out the post-mortem, noted the following points in his report to Altnagelvin Hospital: the autopsy revealed a total of 34 fractures, the vast majority of which were sustained after death; the patient had marked osteoporosis; a large number of post-mortem fractures are extremely

unusual, even in the presence of marked osteoporosis; it does not necessarily mean that the body was subjected to rough handling; often undertakers transport a body on a stretcher with the body secured by means of adjustable straps; and it is possible that, if the strap across the chest had been applied tightly, it could cause those injuries.

The trust's chief executive immediately conducted an internal investigation into the handling of Mrs McGinley's body in Altnagelvin Hospital, and that investigation concluded that all handling and transfers of the body were carried out in accordance with hospital protocols. On 23 March 2007, senior officials from Altnagelvin Hospital met members of the McGinley family, their legal representatives and Pat Doherty MP MLA to discuss the findings from the trust's investigation.

In response to the family's continuing concerns, the trust wrote to the coroner to ask whether he would undertake an independent review of practices in the organisations that had responsibility for the body from the time of Mrs McGinley's death until it was returned to the family. The coroner agreed to undertake such an investigation and to report its findings to the trust.

Under direction from the coroner, PSNI officers conducted the necessary inquiries, and I am advised that all those who came into contact with Mrs McGinley's body were identified and interviewed, and statements were taken from them. I am also advised that, having reviewed that evidence, the coroner concluded that it was not possible to establish how Mrs McGinley's fractures had been sustained. The Coroners Service made no recommendations to the trust about its procedures for handling and moving bodies in the hospital after her death.

In February 2008, when I met the McGinley family, I undertook to establish with the trust the train of events up to and after Mrs McGinley's death. The trust's chief executive supplied me with a detailed account of the care that was provided to Mrs McGinley and, specifically, clarification on the care of her body after death. In response to a key question that Mrs McGinley's family raised, the chief executive confirmed that Mrs McGinley's body had not been washed. However, before being moved to the mortuary until it could be released to the undertakers, the body was checked by a member of the nursing staff to ensure that it was clean. Having received that information, I confirm that I am satisfied that the trust acted appropriately in this case.

It is important that the Assembly understand that the circumstances of the matter extend beyond my Department's remit. The Coroners Service for Northern Ireland operates within the Northern Ireland Court Service, which is the Lord Chancellor's responsibility in Northern

Ireland. The administration of the Coroners Service is not a devolved matter. The coroner, who is an independent judicial officer, is responsible for directing that a body be brought to a suitable place for post-mortem, and for making the necessary arrangements for the body's transportation.

I am advised that the coroner directed Mrs McGinley's body to be held for post-mortem on the morning of 4 January 2007, and I emphasise that, from the point at which the coroner took charge of the body, responsibility for its handling and transport became a matter for the coroner. Therefore, I am not in a position to comment on events that occurred after that. For example, I can comment neither on the body's handling by the undertakers who were acting for the coroner nor on the body's transfer from Altnagelvin to Belfast for post-mortem.

There have been two thorough investigations into this tragic case, and, in both instances, no definitive answer has been found as to how those fractures occurred. Moreover, the coroner's review — conducted at the trust's request — was an independent investigation that police officers conducted, acting under the coroner's direction.

As I said, each member of the hospital staff who came into contact with Mrs McGinley's body was identified and interviewed, and a statement was taken. That investigation's independence should help to provide the necessary assurances that the trust's role has been scrutinised effectively.

The motion calls for a "time-bound public inquiry". Some people who are calling for a public inquiry into this case, and into other cases, assert that such an inquiry can be time bound. That is not possible — no one can put a time limit on justice — and any public inquiry must be free to investigate and examine matters fully and appropriately. It is a well-established principle here and in the rest of the UK that public inquiries should be called only in exceptional circumstances — circumstances in which no other investigatory mechanism would be sufficient.

In that respect, we must consider whether a public inquiry would be justified on the grounds that the matter in question gives rise to a nationwide crisis of confidence or involves the loss of many lives. In my opinion, this matter would not meet those criteria.

If I thought that a public inquiry was appropriate and would help provide the answer as to why Mrs McGinley's body sustained so many fractures following —

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

The Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Will the Minister give way?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Yes, I will. Allow me to finish this sentence, and I will happily give way.

If I thought that a public inquiry was appropriate and would help to provide the answer as to why Mrs McGinley's body sustained so many fractures following her death, I would not hesitate to hold one.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety: First, if the fact that a body sustained 34 fractures to the ribs after death is not of the greatest importance, what circumstance would allow for the holding of a public inquiry? Secondly, how can the Minister accept that what happened was an accident when we appear not to know how the accident happened? On what does he base that comment?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I do not remember talking about an accident; I did not use the word "accident". I follow the guidance on whether a public inquiry should be held, which states that a public inquiry should be held if the matter in question gives rise to a nationwide crisis of confidence and/or involves the loss of many lives. If there is no overwhelming reason to hold the inquiry in public, the next step is to consider whether a departmental review inquiry or an independent private inquiry with a full published report would be appropriate. The coroner effectively conducted an independent inquiry, with a full published report. Therefore, I have followed the guidelines in that respect — *[Interruption.]* A Member is talking at me from a sedentary position. This is a very serious matter. I never mentioned the word "accident". If I could find a way to determine how those injuries occurred, I would take steps to do so.

The family have asked an independent expert, Professor Christopher Milroy, to conduct an inquiry on their behalf. The trust will co-operate fully with the professor, as, I understand, will the coroner. I am aware that the coroner has asked the family to share the outcome of Professor Milroy's investigation with him. If that investigation reaches a different conclusion from that of the coroner, I expect to be advised should any further actions be considered regarding the role of Health Service staff in this matter.

I understand and sympathise fully with the family's situation and their desire to establish the circumstances that led to their mother's body sustaining those fractures. I have been assured that there have been rigorous efforts to investigate the matter fully. I have already set out that there has been a trust investigation and that the coroner has conducted an independent investigation. In addition, I have received a detailed account from the trust of the events surrounding Mrs McGinley's death, following my meeting with the family and Pat Doherty.

Rev Dr Ian Paisley: This matter is very serious. Perhaps I have taken the Minister up wrong, but he seems to suggest that if the inquiry that the family members have asked to be conducted on their behalf — as is their prerogative — is successful, there might be a public inquiry. Surely the onus is on the state to investigate, not the individual?

The Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Hear, hear.

Rev Dr Ian Paisley: Mrs McGinley was, to all intents and purposes, in the care of the state. Surely we cannot say to a family that an inquiry will be held if they can prove that there is a reason to hold one? Surely the time has come for the Government and those responsible to say that allowing that situation to arise sets a very dangerous precedent for others?

Mr Speaker: I ask the Member to bring his remarks to a close, because his time is almost up.

Rev Dr Ian Paisley: I will, Mr Speaker. The Minister should consider the point that I have put to him.

Mr Speaker: I will allow the Minister a quick response.

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: As I said, none of the investigations found evidence that Health Service staff had acted inappropriately.

4.30 pm

However, I have taken account of the mood of the House, and I have listened to Dr Paisley and others. As I said to Pat Doherty and to the family, I will leave no stone unturned. I will, of course, keep the matter under review and consideration. I am not saying that there will never be a public inquiry or that I am ruling out such an inquiry. The point that Dr Paisley just made is a telling one.

The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Mrs O'Neill): Go raibh maith agat. I extend my personal condolences to the family of Maureen McGinley and welcome the members of the family who have come today to listen to the debate.

I commend my colleagues on the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety for tabling the motion, and I thank everyone who has contributed to the debate. Dr Kieran Deeny, who is a member of the Committee and who has been very supportive of calls for an inquiry, apologises for not being able to take part in the debate.

The Rev Dr Robert Coulter said that it was regrettable that it was necessary to bring the issue before the House in the first place. I fully agree with him. The fact that this lady sustained so many fractures after she died is a matter that cries out for investigation, answers and justice.

If there had been only one or two fractures, there may have been a straightforward explanation as to how they had been sustained. However, such a large number of fractures to a specific part of the body — the ribcage — could not have happened without someone knowing. The pathologist's report states that it is extremely unusual to see so many post-mortem fractures, even in the presence of marked osteoporosis. That would strongly suggest that, at some point during the handling or moving of the body, considerable force was applied to the chest. The family are entitled to an explanation, and I fully support them in their campaign for answers.

The McGinley family have been unable to grieve properly because of a lack of openness and transparency about how their mother received those fractures. There are several serious concerns about the case. Many of those concerns were raised during the debate, and I will draw attention to a number of them.

There is the question of delay. Mrs McGinley died in Altnagelvin Hospital on 3 January 2007. Her post-mortem examination was carried out two days later on 5 January. However, despite the discovery during the autopsy that this lady had suffered 34 unexplained rib fractures after her death, it was more than 10 weeks later before that news was communicated to the family and, apparently, to the hospital. The question must be asked: when was the pathologist's report produced, and to whom was it sent? That delay was highlighted by a number of Members today. We are all very aware of it, and we need answers.

Papers that the family have shared with me indicate that the chief executive of the Western Health and Social Care Trust was made aware of the matter on 19 March 2007. The trust states that there was no record of the post-mortem examination report having been received before that date. A letter from the deputy state pathologist to the hospital, dated 22 March, confirmed the autopsy findings. The delay in starting that investigation could have proved crucial in getting to the bottom of this affair and getting more of the answers that the McGinley family deserve.

As a result, the in-house investigation by the trust began only in March, and subsequent statements by the PSNI were not taken until April and May 2007. Those statements show that many of the people who were interviewed claimed to have only a limited recollection of the events surrounding the aftermath of Mrs McGinley's death.

A number of Members raised the issue of the washing of the body. There is conflicting evidence about whether Mrs McGinley's body was washed before being moved to the mortuary. The critical incident report that was prepared by the hospital shows that at approximately 8.00 pm on 3 January, a nursing auxiliary, among other procedures, washed the body and prepared it for the

mortuary. However, the investigating police officer was subsequently advised that the body was not washed after death. Will the Minister tell the family which version is correct? The Minister said today that checks were made to see whether the body was cleaned. However, there is conflicting evidence that a statement was made saying that the body was cleaned. Which is correct?

Although we are discussing something that happened in less than 48 hours — that is, between the time of Mrs McGinley's death and the beginning of the autopsy — responsibility for the care of her body during that time moved between two different legal entities. In the Chairperson's opening remarks, she drew attention to that fact, as did other Members. At the time of the incident, however, we were under direct rule. As Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Paul Goggins MP was responsible for justice matters, including the Coroners Service, and he was also the Minister with responsibility for health, social services and public safety, so he had responsibility for the body when it was in the charge of the hospital.

That situation changed only with the restoration of devolution. The subsequent split of responsibilities cannot be used as an excuse for refusing to hold an inquiry, and the Committee does not accept it as an excuse.

The devastating news of the unexplained fractures to Mrs McGinley's body shocked the family and caused untold additional trauma to them as they were beginning to come to terms with her death. It also caused widespread public shock and concern, so much so that 18,500 people signed a petition calling for an inquiry to be held to establish the truth.

Ms Ní Chuilín: The fact that 18,500 people signed a petition cannot be ignored. So far, every political party has supported the call for a public inquiry for social justice for the McGinley family. Surely that should be sufficient criteria on which to initiate a time-bound inquiry.

The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I thank the Member for her intervention, and I could not agree more. The fact that 18,500 people signed a petition speaks for itself. The petition was presented to members of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety in February 2008. As other Members stated, the Minister initially refused to meet the family but subsequently did so on 25 February. At that meeting, the Minister assured the family that he would do everything in his power to establish what happened to their mother. Since then, the family have been deeply disappointed by the Minister's refusal to set up an inquiry. That disappointment is shared by the Committee and by most Members of the House, including Thomas Buchanan, Pat Doherty and others.

Some Members also referred to the fact that the family recently appointed an independent expert — Professor Milroy — to examine the case. I welcome the indication from the Coroners Service that it will co-operate fully with Professor Milroy. Furthermore, I welcome the indication from the Minister that the trust will also co-operate with him.

As Dr Paisley said, it is a poor indictment on everyone involved that the family must wait on the result of Professor Milroy's inquiry before anyone else will take notice of their plight.

The Minister referred to the hospital staff, but the family are not interested in conducting a witch-hunt, and nor do they want any member of staff to feel intimidated. In fact, they have said that the standard of care that their mother received at the hospital was excellent prior to her death. However, the family need answers to the situation that occurred after her death. As Claire McGill stated in her contribution, the healthcare staff also need answers to what happened. They also need the confusion to be cleared up.

It is disappointing that the Minister has come here today and simply reiterated what we already knew. We are all aware of the facts, but we have heard nothing new today. The Minister said that no definitive answers have been found after two thorough examinations. Is that acceptable to the McGinley family? Would any Member here accept that if the same thing were to happen to a member of their family?

The Minister also said that the rules for conducting a public inquiry mean that it is not appropriate in this case. However, the fact that 18,500 people signed a petition makes it clear that this is a cause of widespread public concern, as has been highlighted by many Members today. It is an issue of great public concern and answers must be provided.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Does the Member agree that people will not have confidence in a trust carrying out its own investigation? Policing oneself always raises question marks, which is why an independent inquiry should be conducted.

The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Absolutely, I could not agree more. The only answer to the situation is to conduct a full public inquiry that is time bound.

In conclusion, the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety believes that the matter can be resolved satisfactorily only through a full public inquiry, when everyone who is involved can be questioned under oath. Everyone who spoke during the debate supported the call for an inquiry, and I hope that that has given some support and encouragement to the members of the McGinley family who are in the Public Gallery today.

The reasons offered by the Minister today are not sufficient to refuse a public inquiry. The Committee still firmly believes that an inquiry is the only way that the McGinley family will get the answers that they deserve and that will allow them to get on with grieving for their mother. We will continue to do all that we can to assist the family in their quest for answers. Go raibh maith agat.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly expresses concern that investigations by the Western Health and Social Care Trust and the Coroners Service have failed to provide a satisfactory explanation of the circumstances in which the late Mrs Maureen McGinley received a number of fractures following her death; commends the family of Mrs Maureen McGinley for their campaign in highlighting the issue; and calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to initiate, as a matter of urgency, a full, independent and time-bound public inquiry.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Irish-Medium Primary School

Mr Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 30 minutes for the debate. The proposer of the motion will have 10 minutes to propose and 10 minutes to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who wish to speak will have five minutes. I wish to inform Members that a valid petition of concern about the motion was presented on Monday 23 June. I therefore remind Members that the effect of the petition is that the vote on the motion will be on a cross-community basis.

Miss McIlveen: I beg to move

That this Assembly expresses concern at the refusal by the Minister of Education to consider proposals for new Controlled, Maintained and Integrated schools, whilst approving a plan for a new Irish-Medium Primary School in Derry/Londonderry, despite advice from officials in the Department that there was already adequate capacity in this sector.

Mr Poots: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I notice that the Minister of Education is not in the House for the debate. Is it appropriate for the debate to begin while the Minister is not here to listen to the case being made? Has the Minister given you notice that she was not going to be in the Chamber or given a reason why she was not going to be here?

Mr Speaker: I thank the Member for his point of order. I have had no notification that the Minister will be late. Nevertheless, we shall carry on with the debate.

Miss McIlveen: I will begin by expressing my disappointment that the SDLP has signed a petition of concern about the motion. I hope that after hearing the reasoning behind the motion, the Members of that party will reconsider their position and support it. I expect no less of the Sinn Féin Members than to blindly follow the lead of their Minister, even though it is a case of the blind leading the blind.

The first, and largest, Irish-medium school in the city which, in the absence of any talent in Irish, I will call the Shantallow school, initially operated as an Irish-medium unit in the adjoining Steelstown Primary School for 10 years, before moving to its present site in 1993. At its peak, it had 228 pupils enrolled. However, since the second Irish-medium school opened in 1998, which I will refer to as the Brandywell school, enrolments have fallen dramatically. A total of 159 pupils were enrolled in the 2007-08 academic year. The Brandywell school currently has 135 pupils enrolled. There has been a general increase in numbers since 1998, but the school has never reached full capacity. In 2006-07, however, only 14 pupils enrolled in year 1.

According to the Department of Education's own figures in August 2007, the two existing schools had

an estimated 135 surplus places. One hundred and six of those places were in the Shantallow school. In August 2007, the Minister of Education decided to approve a new Irish-language school, situated less than three miles from the other two schools. I will call that third school the Springtown school. That approval overturned the decision of the direct rule Minister who had decided against funding only a year before, claiming that there was:

“significant surplus capacity at the nearest Irish-medium primary school”.

That, of course, was true then, and remains true today.

For the benefit of the Assembly I will read out the Department's policy on Irish-medium education. Its general policy is to support such provision: where it is satisfied that there is significant demand from parents, which means minimum intakes of 15 pupils in an urban area and 12 pupils in a rural area; where there is no suitable alternative provision within reasonable travelling distance; where it would be educationally sound and viable to provide it; where there would be no unreasonable outlay of public funds; where the new school should have no adverse impact on any other existing school in the area; where the new school should be located on a suitable site and in suitable accommodation; and, where there have been no serious objections to the proposal.

I stressed the word “and” because it is an extremely important word in the Department's policy. It means that all the points of the policy must be satisfied. It does not mean that the Minister can pick and choose which points she can follow and which she can choose to ignore.

In her press release of 8 August 2007, when she announced funding for three Irish-medium schools, including the third school in Londonderry, the Minister said:

“In recent years we have seen increasing demand from parents to have their children educated through the medium of Irish. This is significant at a time when we see an overall fall in the numbers of children in our schools.”

Apparently, that fall in numbers included enrolments at the Irish-medium school in Shantallow. In fact, the Department's figures state that there has been a fall of 35% in year-1 enrolments, taking the Shantallow and Brandywell schools together. Even taking into account the 16 year-1 pupils in the Springtown school, there would still be a 20% fall in year-1 enrolments. Yet the Minister persists in telling us that the sector is thriving.

4.45 pm

The Minister has imposed the restriction that 15 pupils must be enrolled in year 1 at the Springtown school. However, she has clearly ignored many of the criteria in her Department's policy. The Shantallow school, with its 106 spare places, is only 2.5 miles from the Springtown site, and the Brandywell school is

only 2.9 miles from it. Two undersubscribed Irish-medium schools within three miles make for suitable alternative provision within reasonable travelling distance. In addition, given the negative impact that the opening of the Brandywell school in 1998 had on the Shantallow school, and the continuing decline since then in that school's enrolments, it is more than reasonable to conclude that either, or both, of those existing schools would be adversely affected by grant-funding the Springtown school.

Those two reasons alone should mean that any outlay of public funds on the project would be unreasonable. However, we must also consider the fact that there were serious objections to the proposal. The Shantallow school and the Holy Family Primary School lodged objections to the proposal to grant-fund the Springtown school. I wish that I had time to read out in full the well-reasoned arguments that were made by the board of governors and staff of the Shantallow school. I suggest that Members read that document, which is dated 5 April 2007.

Not only does the document raise grave concerns about the procedure adopted by the governing body of Irish-medium education in recommending that the third school be opened — in particular, its total failure to consult with the Shantallow school regarding the proposal — it also asks extremely pertinent questions about the total lack of strategic planning for Irish-medium education in Londonderry. The governors and staff point out that there have not been enough significant changes in Irish-medium education in Londonderry since the proposal for the Springtown school was rejected only a year before.

Part of the Minister's decision-making process included the consideration of a planning application for 5,000 homes in the nearby Ballymagroarty area. In her notes on the proposal she stated:

“there will be 5,000 new homes”.

However, at that time, planning permission for the development had not been approved. All we know is that those homes are to be built over the next 10 years. The Minister can have no notion of how many of the residents of those houses would wish to send their children to an Irish-medium school, let alone how many children might move into the area.

The Minister also referred to the pupils at Irish-medium preschools. However, the Department pointed out that not all of those children will go on to attend Irish-medium primary schools. It is also foreseeable that the school population will fall by 23%. Even the most loyal advocates of Irish-medium education must agree that opening a further Irish-medium school in Londonderry is a gross waste of public money.

Furthermore, in March 2008, the Minister decided not to allow Conlig Primary School to adopt integrated

status on the grounds that adequate provision existed in the area. Does she use the guidelines only when it suits her? At that time she said:

“I must consider all the implications for the entire schools’ estate in the area.”

However, she does not seem to have done that in Londonderry.

If we examine the impact on maintained primary schools in the area, there are 842 surplus capacity places, 244 of which are in Holy Family Primary School, which is less than one mile from the Springtown school. It has been recognised that Holy Family Primary School will potentially be affected by the grant-funding of the Springtown school.

The Education and Training Inspectorate did not support the Springtown proposal, as it believed that Irish-medium provision in the city had reached saturation point. The Western Education and Library Board was concerned that a further school was being proposed, given that there were already surplus places at the other two schools, and given the effect of additional costs on a stretched education budget. That board also pointed out that there needed to be a coherent approach to primary-school provision and area-based planning.

I know that the Minister will attempt to claim that the motion is another DUP attack on the Irish-medium sector. It is not. In turning down the proposal, the Minister not only ignored her Department’s criteria on grant funding of Irish-medium schools, but she ignored the recommendation of the head of development and infrastructure in her Department. Not only did she ignore the concise and well thought-out arguments of the governors and staff of the Shantallow school, she ignored the principles of area-based planning.

The situation is another example of the Minister attempting to run her Department as though it were her personal fiefdom. However, she must realise that she is accountable. I urge all Members to join us in condemning her actions. Furthermore, I ask Members to question the rationale of the decisions — or the lack of decisions — that are being made on the schools that are in their respective constituencies.

The motion is not an example of political point-scoring, nor is it an attack on Irish-medium education. It is a recognition by this legislature that the Minister has acted illogically, unreasonably and contrary to her Department’s policy and guidelines.

Mr Brolly: Go raibh míle maith agat. That was an interesting presentation by the lady on the opposite Benches. I am glad that she is not attacking the Irish language.

The name of the Irish-medium school in question, Gaelscoil na Daróige, charms me greatly. Indeed, it is so fitting that, if I were the Minister of Education, I

would approve the school even if it had no pupils at all. “Dair” is the Irish word for an oak tree, which gives its name to the county of Derry, or Doire. “Daróg” is the Irish term for a young oak tree. The school’s name is fitting, and I am very taken by it. Gaelscoil, of course, refers to a school where the Irish language is used.

Any community that wants a school and that can assure the Department that it has 15 primary-1 pupils is entitled to funding for that school. That is education policy — the school does not have to be an Irish-medium, or any other medium, school. Funding has not been granted to Gaelscoil na Daróige, but it has been approved, in principle, as a Gaelscoil. It is hoped that the school will fulfil the relevant criteria. Indeed, demographic information that has been gathered by Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta and others who work on behalf of the Irish language indicates clearly that the school will fulfil the relevant criteria eventually.

The school is already operational and has been financed by fundraising and voluntary subscription. The school already exists, so the Minister is not creating it. Furthermore, it is not the Minister who drives the creation of Irish-medium schools. I know that that drive comes from parents and communities. I hope that very soon there will be a new Gaelscoil in Léim an Mhadaidh, which is in my own constituency. We already have a naiscoil and a Gaelscoil in Dungiven, which are both very successful.

Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta has created a framework for the future development of Irish-medium provision throughout the North. That framework is based on meticulous analysis of the demographics and information from the most recent census. Those statistics prove the viability of the future creation of Irish-medium schools.

The building of more than one Irish-medium primary school in a particular area is aimed at creating a catchment area of Irish-medium pupils who will be fundamental to the creation of an Irish-medium post-primary school in that area.

We are building up from naiscoil to bunscoil and on to post-primary, and it is to be hoped that some day, somewhere, we will have an Irish-medium university.

A third Gaelscoil in Derry is viable and required. It is a big city, and the demographics of areas smaller than Derry suggest that it could accommodate several Irish-medium schools.

Mr Weir: Why does the Member think that a third school is viable, when the two existing primary schools have spare capacity and cannot fill their places?

Mr Brolly: I hope that the Member does not think that I am being too smart when I say that one could say that of almost any school, in any medium, in the North of Ireland. I am sure that the Minister is tired listening

to the statistics about the number of empty desks that there is.

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Mr Brolly: Is my time up already, Mr Speaker?

Some Members: He has an extra minute.

Mr Brolly: I have an extra minute. Go raibh míle maith agat. I cannot accept that the Member who proposed the motion is not opposed to the Irish language. We are used to that now, and I wish that the Members opposite would take a more mature look at the beautiful language that is part of all that we have. The lady opposite was reluctant to use the Irish names for places, but she said Shantallow, which means "old land" — just as Shankill means "old church".

Mr B McCrea: I hope that it is not inappropriate for me to say that I always enjoy Mr Brolly's speeches. They remind me of gentler times, when we did not have problems with extended schools, numeracy and literacy, a lack of qualifications, migrant workers and teacher training, as well as 50,000 empty school spaces. Unfortunately, however, we have to deal with those issues and find a way in which to resolve them.

I notice that I have not yet engaged the attention of the Minister who, some time ago, asked me to work with her. I am trying to work with her now.

It is not surprising that the House is compelled to debate another divisive act by the Minister of Education. It is regrettable that, once again, the Minister of Education seems intent on sectarianising the education debate. Once again, she has acted against the advice of her Department and put partisan, sectoral interests above the need for good government.

It is worth noting that of the five petitions of concern that have come before the House, three originated from the Minister of Education's party. Its objective is to shield her from the majority opinion in the Assembly. That demonstrates the Minister's refusal to work with the House and the lack of confidence that the House has in her.

In recent times, I have heard a change in the mood music about reaching consensus. If we are genuine in our desire to reach consensus, people will have to take responsibility for their actions. We will work with people who are genuine in their attempts to achieve good for all.

I thank the honourable Members who tabled the motion. The debate will only emphasise the lack of confidence that exists, and it is to be hoped that it will suggest to the Minister of Education that we must begin to consider what the debate is about. It must be stated that the debate is not about the Irish language. As a unionist who is committed to pluralism and the diversity of the United Kingdom, and one who is

mindful of the protections granted in the Belfast Agreement, I have no hesitation in affirming the freedom of those who wish to use the Irish language to do so. Nor do I hesitate in affirming that Irish-medium units in schools can play a role in a pluralist education system, and I am open to persuasion on the relative merits of exclusively Irish-medium schools.

Mr Speaker, I am even using a green highlighter on my notes. None of that matters for today's debate.

5.00 pm

What is being debated is the specific action taken by the Minister to approve a new Irish-medium school in Londonderry against the advice of her Department's head of development and infrastructure who stated:

"there are already sufficient IM primary school places."

He noted — and I summarise — that the nearest alternative Irish-medium school and the nearest maintained school had expressed concerns about the proposals. He stated that in two Irish-medium schools the numbers of pupils enrolling in year one had fallen by approximately 35% in the past two years.

It should be a matter of concern that the Education Minister so blatantly disregarded the advice of her officials. Although it is the case that a democratically elected representative can — in compelling circumstances — disagree with the advice of officials, let it be remembered that this is the same Education Minister who is forever telling us that there are 50,000 empty desks and that we have to constrain the school estates to manage that process.

The Minister's unnecessary and unco-ordinated actions have led to today's debate as, once again, she has sought the path of confrontation. That is not good and fair government; it is partisan and sectional and does not deliver for the common good of our society. I repeat: this is not a debate about the Irish language and it is not a debate about parents choosing Irish-medium education. As someone who believes firmly in the principles of pluralism, I have no hesitation in accepting the role of both sectors.

However, the Minister's actions have shamefully privileged one section of the education system in Londonderry at the expense of the controlled, maintained and integrated sectors — we cannot support that; that does not represent a shared future. It is nothing less than an Executive Minister refusing to serve the whole community, and I urge her to reconsider. I support the motion.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh míle maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Fáiltim roimh an deis an t-ábhar iontach tábhachtach seo a phlé inniu, ach caithfidh mé a rá go bhfuil mé glan in éadan an rúin atá os ár gcomhair.

I welcome the opportunity to debate the issue; however, I oppose the motion. Mr Brolly mentioned that Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta, the body charged with the develop-

ment of Irish-medium education, has created a framework for its future development throughout the North. That body is made up of highly professional educationalists who know what they are doing. The framework that Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta has developed — and I have examined it — is based on a detailed analysis of future demographic trends and information from the recent census. The purpose of that framework is to co-ordinate with parents and communities and to provide a guide for the development of Irish-medium education.

The framework aims to guide parents by creating new provision in a strategic manner whereby children who have attended Irish-medium primary schools will, in the future, have the realistic option and opportunity of post-primary Irish-medium education. The guidance ensures that access to Irish-medium education is optimised and that new provision does not undermine existing provision — that is a very important point.

The analysis information indicates that there is sufficient demand for Irish-medium education in Derry City and demand for at least a third Gaelscoil. Furthermore, that extra provision is required to broaden access to Irish-medium education throughout all those communities in Derry City in which it does not currently exist. Other smaller areas in the North, as Mr Brolly pointed out, have equal provision.

It is also important to ensure that more than one or two primary schools exist in a region in order to sustain a viable post-primary facility there. It is important to note that funding has not yet been granted to Gaelscoil na Daróige as it has not yet met the Department of Education's funding criteria. Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta has told me that it supports the development of the new pre-school and primary-school provision in Derry on the condition that the school meets those criteria. The development is consistent with the Irish-medium sector framework for development devised by Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta.

The majority of children attending Gaelscoil na Daróige — and those who will attend it in the future — would not otherwise avail themselves of Irish-medium provision because of where they live. The existing Irish-medium schools in Derry will not be adversely affected by the Department's approval for Gaelscoil na Daróige for two reasons: first, the existing schools do not draw large numbers of pupils from that particular area; and secondly, the interested children already attend a non-funded school.

It is important to note that the number of children entering Irish-medium education in Derry has risen since 2000. Currently, 66 pupils are entering Irish-medium provision across the city each year. That figure is expected to continue to grow as the number of children in pre-school provision increases. There are two funded Irish-medium primary schools in the city

— Bunscoil Cholmcille and Gaelscoil Éadain Mhóir. Gaelscoil na Daróige is unfunded. There are 303 pupils in Irish-medium primary provision in the three schools, which is an increase of 27 on 2006.

I fully support Gaelscoil na Daróige and reject the motion. If the process of area-based planning centred on the sustainable schools policy were still in place, we would probably not be having this debate today.

Mr Lunn: The Alliance Party agrees with the concern expressed in the motion and with the criticism of the Minister's decision to allow the establishment of another Irish-medium primary school in Londonderry. However, we do not think that the wording of the motion, accusing the Minister of refusing to consider proposals for schools in other sectors, is accurate. My party also has concerns about the treatment of Irish-medium applications as opposed to those from the integrated sector. We agree with the broad thrust of the motion.

All the arguments that I have heard about the situation in Derry indicate that the decision to allow Gaelscoil na Daróige flies in the face of the Department's guidelines for the establishment of a new school. The general policy — as outlined by Michelle McIlveen — is to support new provision where there is no suitable alternative provision within reasonable travelling distance, and where it would be educationally sound and viable to provide it. Evidence of parental demand and a minimum intake are also factors, as is the fact that there should not be any serious objections to the proposal in general.

The board of governors of Bunscoil Cholmcille have expressed an unequivocal view that the proposal does not represent an effective addition to Irish-medium provision. The statement made by the board of governors, which Miss McIlveen quoted from, states:

"It is neither sustainable nor prudent to propose the establishment of a third Irish Medium primary school at this time whilst current providers have considerable spare capacity and particularly in the light of the fact that the roll number of Bunscoil Cholmcille has been in significant decline since the establishment of a second primary level provider."

The pupil enrolment in that school has fallen 39% since the establishment of the Gaelscoil Éadain Mhóir nine years ago.

Has there been a sufficient increase in demand for Irish-language education in Londonderry to make up for the effect of spreading the existing enrolment over three sites instead of two? It does not seem like it. The existing schools have a large number of surplus places, and they are objecting to the proposal.

Is it beneficial or detrimental to the cause of Irish-language provision to have three half-empty schools in

the city? It seems detrimental. I quote a line from the statement by the other school:

“The actual effect of establishing a second provider ... nine years ago has been to distract from the work and development of Irish Medium...”

The Education and Training Inspectorate is also against the proposal; it considers Bunscoil Cholmcille and Gaelscoil Éadain Mhóir to be more than adequate for present and foreseeable needs. Therefore, it is hard to escape the conclusion that the reason that the proposal has received ministerial approval is that it is for Irish-medium education and that the Minister has a special affection for that movement. I look forward to her response at the close of the debate.

I reiterate my party's support for both the Irish-medium and integrated sectors — one of which is prioritised in the Programme for Government and the other is not mentioned. I could point to situations — for example, in Ballycastle and the Clogher Valley, where funding for integrated schools was refused, even though, on the face of it, both cases were strong — and compare them to the situation that we are now considering, which appears to fail almost all the tests that the Department has set. I doubt that this school can be viable except at the expense of the existing providers, and I look forward to hearing the Minister's reasons for her decision.

As Members know, the education budget is stretched, and we are having difficulty in finding money for very worthy projects. There is no scope for funding anything that is unnecessary, and a third Irish-medium school appears to be unnecessary. If there is an explanation for this, I look forward to hearing it; for now, however, the Alliance Party supports the motion.

Mr Storey: I like to ensure clarity and that people know exactly where I stand on an issue. I do not now speak as Chairperson of the Education Committee but as a Member for the greatest constituency in the world — North Antrim.

I welcome the fact that the Minister is at last in the House. Although if we are to believe media speculation, it may be one of the last debates in which she will occupy the post of Education Minister. I wonder which of her colleagues will finally wield the knife against her. Whoever that may be, we may be sure that that individual will either bin McGuinness's proposals or oversee the employment of academic admissions criteria in defiance of the present Education Minister and with the full backing of the law. Those are the realities; those are the facts.

Regrettably, the Education Minister has come to be known, and rightly so, as the minister of delay and confusion. In recent days, she has tried to change that — with remarkable success: she is now known as the minister for embarrassing climbdowns. We saw the

most recent in today's 'Newsletter'. Under close questioning by my friend and colleague Mr Stephen Moutray, one of her officials conceded that if there is no agreement on a new transfer system:

“The department will be able to issue guidance, but it will not have the force of law. In this situation, schools will be able to set their own admissions criteria, including the use of ability as a criterion...”

Where are the Minister's denials? Where are her threats? They are lying face down in the sand.

Why should I say all that in a debate about Irish-medium schools? This Minister has pursued a narrow, sectarian, ideological approach to the future of our children. In her major policy on post-primary transfer, she has been thwarted and is powerless, as is admitted publicly by her own officials in today's press. What does she do in those circumstances? She tries to advance her sectarianism in smaller, bite-sized chunks in Irish-medium schools: little sectarian niblets for the Minister. That is why she made this decision, which is in defiance of her Department's policy on Irish-medium education.

I commend the opening remarks of my colleague —

Mr D Bradley: Will the Member give way?

Mr Storey: To get an extra minute, I certainly will.

5.15 pm

Mr D Bradley: Why does the Member use the word “sectarian” in reference to Irish-medium schools? Is he not aware that Irish-medium schools develop pupils spiritually, emotionally, physically, intellectually and linguistically? In fact, pupils educated in Irish-medium schools have the added value of being competent in two languages. Indeed, members of my family who are not Catholics attend Irish-medium schools, and they do not find them to be sectarian. In fact, they find those schools to be open and welcoming.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

Mr Storey: It is sad that I must educate the Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Education. If he had listened and was interested in the arguments expressed from this side of the Chamber, he would have realised that I was referring to the Minister as being sectarian — not the Irish-medium sector.

Mr McCausland: Will the Member not agree that there are other forms of sectarianism, such as cultural sectarianism and political sectarianism, in addition to religious sectarianism, and that those are the types of sectarianism espoused by the Minister of Education?

Mr Storey: I thank the Member for that, and I agree entirely with what he has said. *[Interruption.]*

Why did the Minister take the decision to provide further Irish-medium places in Londonderry? Did the Minister make the decision based on the best possible information available to her? Did she make the

decision in the best interests of those parents who chose an Irish-medium education for their children? She did not. She made the decision purely to feed her own particular ideology and to feed the ideology of the backwoodsmen in Sinn Féin. Those backwoodsmen need something, because it is clear that they have received little from the process to date, and that they are concerned about the process being undertaken in this House.

Dominic Bradley, in his press release, accused my party of waging war on the Irish language. That is not so. It is the Minister of Education who is seeking to wage war with the Irish language, and, in the process, has ensured that it is more divisive to the unionist community, and more negatively viewed and regarded with a greater aversion by it. Dominic Bradley and the SDLP know that and that is why they know that members of Sinn Féin are, by their behaviour, the biggest enemies to Irish-speaking schools in Northern Ireland. Mr Bradley must realise that he cannot pick and choose when he decides to oppose the Minister of Education —

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Mr Storey: I will return to this at a later stage.

Mr Adams: Go raibh míle maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. There are three reasons for the debate today. The debate is entirely bogus and is part of the ongoing attack by some in this Chamber on the work of the Minister of Education. First of all, this is simply another crude reaction by those who are against the crucial reform of our outdated education system. The concern on the Benches opposite is not for the thousands of mainly working-class children who are failed every year by that system.

Secondly, this motion reflects the degree of irrational hostility that there is amongst some on the Benches opposite to the Irish language, to Irish-language speakers and to children who are taught through the medium of the Irish language.

Thirdly, some Members — and I include the Member for Strangford in this — feel that they need to pretend that they are in charge of those Irish-medium institutions and that they can stop a Sinn Féin Minister from fulfilling her duties. They have chosen the education of our children —

Mr Weir: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I wonder whether you could rule whether it is appropriate — in the context of the dress code for this House — for the Member to be delivering a speech without wearing a tie. I believe that that is in contravention of the dress code.

Mr Speaker: It is perfectly all right for the Member to do so, and that is not really a point of order.

Mr Adams: It is interesting that Members opposite —

Mr Speaker: The issue of dress code relates to jackets, not so much to ties. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Adams: I did not think that dress codes, men, and the party opposite mixed, but there you go. *[Laughter.]*

They have chosen the education of children as an issue on which to contest this matter and, consequently, they are bringing these institutions into disrepute. They are making, i mo bharúil féin, a huge mistake.

The future of these institutions is based on the ability of all parties to work together for the common good — to make necessary compromises and agreements based on equality and inclusivity. That is the only way these institutions will survive. Therefore, the Members opposite have a choice — march backwards into meltdown and failure, or forwards to deliver for citizens on pressing problems in the areas of health, education, the environment, the economy and planning.

A chairde, this is the fourth debate in a year about the education of a relatively small number of children — 3,000 out of a school population of 350,000. Parents, teachers and others deserve credit for there being so many in what is the fastest-growing sector in our education system.

However, the education of children through Irish is not a threat. The Irish language is not a threat to unionism or to anyone else. Caitriona Ruane is working very hard to ensure that no child is placed at a disadvantage, that no child is abandoned or denied — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order, the Member has the floor.

Mr Adams: The Minister is ensuring that no child is denied the education opportunity to meet his or her full potential.

She is effectively defending all sections of the education system, including the controlled, maintained, integrated and Irish-language sectors. She is also bringing forward necessary reforms of the education system.

All of us understand the concerns that exist, particularly among parents who are worried about decisions that they will have to take in an education environment that is undergoing a long-overdue overhaul. Those concerns are being exploited by those who are against education reform and the Irish language, and, in particular, by those who have their own narrow supremacist agenda in this institution.

Mr D Bradley: Does the Member agree that the lack of a sustainable schools policy, as part of area-based planning, means that there is a lack of guidance on the future of the schools estate? Does the absence of such a policy not give others, like the Members

opposite, the opportunity to attack the development of sectors, including the Irish-medium sector?

Mr Adams: Ní aontaím leatsa. I do not agree.

Sinn Féin's commitment is to every child. We are about making every school a good school, and providing the best possible education for every child. The Education Minister is showing great leadership in charting a difficult course towards that objective. Her detractors and the other begrudgers and naysayers would do well to follow her example. They can do that best by putting first the interest of all our children, including those who are being educated through the Irish language. Go raibh míle maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle.

Mr Poots: Perhaps Mr Adams is not wearing a tie today because he has got a new job as a runner and he needs to keep the air moving around him.

It is good to take part in this debate. We are debating a subject relating to a Minister who has ignored her Department's advice in reaching a decision. This is a Minister who often talks about equality, but here we see demonstrated once again that equality is not applied when it comes to her office. She clearly puts Irish-language schools first, the maintained and integrated sector next, and controlled schools bottom of the pile. Once and for all, the Education Minister must put her house in order and start to treat all children fairly and equally. Rather than pay lip service to equality, she should actually apply it.

Let us look at the policy on this. It states that there should be no suitable alternative provision within a reasonable travelling distance. Well, there is, because Bunscoil Cholmcille is only 2.5 miles away and has 106 surplus places. The policy states that it should be "educationally sound and viable" to provide funding — it is not — and that there should be:

"no unreasonable outlay of public funds".

There will be an unreasonable outlay of public funds.

It is claimed that the new school should have no adverse impact on any other existing school in the area; however, it will have, because there are already two Irish-medium schools with 135 surplus places. It is also claimed that there should be no serious objections to the proposals, but serious objections have come from schools in the Irish-medium, controlled and maintained sectors. Therefore, the Minister is flying in the face of six of the eight policies.

I was interested to hear Mr Dominic Bradley say that the Irish-language sector is growing in Londonderry and the wider council area. That is strange, because the document that is provided to the Minister does not say that. That document says that, over the past two years, there has been a 35% fall in the intake of the two Irish-medium schools in the area, schools that the Department of Education funds.

I know the consequences of ignoring that type of advice, because, in my constituency, Rowandale Integrated Primary School was opened last year, despite the fact that it had been turned down the previous year and that three brand new schools with a significant capacity had been built in that area. It also faced competition from an integrated school some miles away. This year, it is proposed to close that integrated school because another integrated school is to open a few miles up the road.

We face a situation in which another Irish-language school is to open, which will affect the enrolment figures of the two existing Irish-language schools. The consequence of that will be that those schools will come under further pressure, and more demand will be placed on the Northern Ireland Budget and the Northern Ireland taxpayer to support those schools, because they will not have enough pupils to sustain them.

The Minister must put her house in order and start to make decisions that are based on what is best for children.

Mrs I Robinson: Does the Member agree that the best thing that could be done for the children of Northern Ireland would be to remove the current Minister of Education and replace her with someone who is competent and unbiased? *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member has the Floor.

Mr Poots: That may seem a good idea, but I am sure that the SDLP would strenuously oppose Sinn Féin's removing the most unpopular Minister in the Government and the most unpopular Minister that the party has. Minister Ruane is a vehicle for passing votes from Sinn Féin to the SDLP. If Sinn Féin is content to keep her, that is Sinn Féin's problem. Unfortunately, she brings a bad name to the entire Northern Ireland Government, because of the inequality that she practises when carrying out her job. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member has the Floor.

Mr Poots: I fully understand the problem that Mr Adams has in replacing the Minister, because of the lack of talent on the Bench opposite. Perhaps that is why he is stuck with Minister Ruane, who has repeatedly failed to deliver in her Department. Ms Ruane must now take decisions that are in the best interests of schools and children, and stop making decisions that are neither based on equality and fairness nor on the wider interests of education.

Mr K Robinson: I will state at the outset, lest we be accused of being bullies or bigots, that neither I nor my colleagues have any wish to deny parents their right to educate their children in the manner that they wish, through the medium that they choose, providing that no other child is disadvantaged as a result, given the finite nature of the education budget. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. Members should not try to debate across the Chamber. Continue, Mr Robinson.

Mr K Robinson: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Do I get an extra minute for that interjection?

During the first mandate of the Assembly, the Irish-language lobby group held a meeting in this Building — if I remember correctly, it was held in room 135 — to explain its *raison d'être*. I recall clearly that two members of the Ulster Unionist Party attended that meeting — Mr Alan McFarland and I. We listened carefully, and we outlined how education in the Irish language was viewed by our community.

5.30 pm

Over the past 10 years, much progress has been made in the Irish-medium sector. However, it is regrettable that instead of building on the excellent Irish-speaking units in the schools that are under Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) control, greater emphasis has been given to the establishment of separate schools and a separate sector. Building on the existing units would have brought lasting benefits to the provision of education through the medium of Irish. It would also have reduced the sense of exclusion and separateness and supported the Irish-language units in an existing and vibrant education sector. It would have nullified the widely held perception that the Irish language had been hijacked for political reasons, rather than linguistic and cultural ones, and it would have negated the need to establish another specific sector in the education world, with its associated administrative costs and inevitable bureaucracy.

The emergence of the current Minister of Education, with her pointed use of the Irish language in the House, despite time restraints, and her use of restrictive English terminology, such as “the North”, has simply reinforced the perception here and in wider society that the Irish language has been wrested from those who love and cherish it and has been transformed into the entity that has led to today’s divisive debate. The current situation with the existing 11 Irish-medium units in the Catholic-maintained schools and the emerging 25 Irish-medium schools represents a lost opportunity.

However, if other sectors in the education world are examined, the situation is different. Controlled schools — such as Knockbreda Primary School and Conlig Primary School — that sought to transform to grant-maintained integrated status, at the request of parents, were refused permission.

In my constituency, parents in Islandmagee were persuaded to amalgamate three controlled schools in exchange for a new school on a new identified site to cater for the island. However, the Minister has not given that school-building programme the go ahead. Meanwhile, despite the advice of her departmental officials and the concerns of neighbouring maintained

and Irish-medium schools, the Minister sanctioned a new Irish-medium school in Londonderry.

On the one hand, we are lectured about the 50,000 empty desks in our schools and the financial implications of that, and on the other hand, the Minister presses ahead with a new school, despite her advisors and inspectors highlighting the damage that it will cause existing schools. In the absence of any rational argument for her actions, it is little wonder that many in the Chamber, and beyond, question the safety of their children’s education in the Minister’s hands. Due in no small part to her approach, I must support the motion.

Mr B McCrea: Does the Member agree that for any group in a four-party mandatory coalition, the key word is not “four” or “mandatory” but “coalition”? Coalitions depend upon building consensus, which is what the Minister of Education should try to achieve.

Mr K Robinson: I agree with my colleague Mr Basil McCrea’s comments.

The Member for West Belfast Mr Gerry Adams lectured Members on this side of the Chamber about lacking concern for children, particularly those from working-class backgrounds. As someone who spent part of his educational life in west and north Belfast, I take grave exception to that comment. One reason for my opposition to the new Irish-medium school in Londonderry is that, despite us having a small education budget and always crying out for more investment in the core educational services, the Minister is going on a crusade of her own.

Mrs M Bradley: As someone who comes from Derry, I would say that the three schools that Michelle McIlveen mentioned when proposing the motion — in Shantallow, Springtown and Brandywell — would not be considered to be beside one another. As people in Derry would say, they would not be “handy”, if you were getting a child to school. In other words, the Member does not know the area. Otherwise, she would not have used it to make a comparison.

It seems that the DUP is planning to table a motion objecting to every new Irish-medium school in the North. Today, on spurious grounds, they are attacking a proposal for a Gaelscoil in Derry. Last month, they tried to block an Irish-medium school in Dungannon.

The DUP motion is not about a concern for local schools in Derry. In fact, no DUP MLAs from the north-west bothered to put their names to the motion. It is part of the same strategy that saw it blocking the Irish language Act, complaining about the Irish Language Broadcast Fund and generally seeking to block the whole equality agenda at every turn.

Were I to make a case for the protection of a local school, I would seek cross-party support. That is not what the DUP motion is about. It is an old-fashioned

sectarian knockabout, and it should be treated with the contempt that it deserves.

The DUP's strategies and motions are purely negative and destructive. That is why I signed the petition of concern, which is an important protection in the Assembly regulations that enables Members to demand a cross-community vote on the issue. If the DUP really wants its motion to be successful, its Members will have to convince at least a few nationalists, which they have failed to do.

Mr O'Dowd: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I apologise for not being present for the whole debate. I have no doubt that I have heard many similar speeches in the previous four or five debates on the Irish-medium sector, and therefore I doubt that I have missed any original thinking on any of the issues.

The issue is about parents who want their children to be educated in the Irish-medium sector, as was provided for in the Good Friday Agreement. Therefore, they are perfectly and legally entitled to do so.

I have heard DUP and Ulster Unionist Members say that they have no difficulty with anyone learning or speaking Irish. It appears that their difficulty is with young children being educated in the Irish-medium sector. Why is that? No one is being forced to be educated in the Irish-medium sector and no parents are being forced to send their children to Irish-medium schools. Why object to a perfectly legitimate education system?

Mr B McCrea: The Member may not have been present during my speech, but I said that we are open to persuasion on the relative merits of exclusively Irish-medium schools; we are not objecting to that. However, we believe that the situation should be fair to all. Our problem is that the school in question will receive disproportionate amounts of resources compared to schools in the controlled and integrated sectors. That is why we are debating the issue; it is not simply about Irish.

Mr O'Dowd: Perhaps Mr McCrea should have outlined what resources have been spent on the school. It is my understanding that the Department of Education has spent no money on the school and that it has not agreed to fund the school. Therefore, why have the debate? It appears that it is based on misinformation. My understanding is that the only money that is being spent on the school is the money that transfers with the pupils. Therefore, if those pupils were being taught in the controlled or maintained sector, the same amount of money would be spent. The only difference is that the children will receive an Irish-medium education.

During a previous debate about the Irish language — I forget which one — I referred to a recent visit to Wales during which a Welsh Conservative told me that 10 years ago, speaking Welsh at a Welsh Conservative Party conference was frowned upon, but that it is now

encouraged. Given the political allegiances between Welsh conservatism and unionism in this part of the world, perhaps unionists should start to examine the broader concept of native languages.

The Welsh-medium sector is thriving. People who had no involvement with the Welsh language in the past now send their children to Welsh-medium schools, not as a political or any other statement, but because they want them to learn the language.

Mr K Robinson: Does the Member agree with the Department's head of development and infrastructure who said that there are already sufficient Irish-medium primary school places in Derry within reasonable travelling distance of the Branch and Springtown area and that there is no evidence that the potential demand for places is likely to exceed the present level of provision for the foreseeable future?

Mr O'Dowd: That well may be the case. Is there — *[Laughter.]*

Some Members are missing the point about this debate. Taxpayers' money is not being spent on that school.

Mr Storey: Twenty million pounds is being spent.

Mr O'Dowd: Where did the Member get that figure? *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member has the Floor.

Mr O'Dowd: In a legislative Chamber, let us base debates on facts. No taxpayers' money is being spent on that school, so why is this being debated in the Chamber? Why are Members opposite getting so frustrated? There can be only one reason: the Irish language. Why are they so frightened of it? There is no other reason, because taxpayers' money is not being spent on that school. The Minister — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr O'Dowd: The Minister of Education has said that unless —

Mr Adams: It is strange that no Members from the parties opposite, who say that they are interested in education, took the position of Minister of Education when they had the opportunity.

Mr O'Dowd: At times, it is easier to criticise than to implement. The Members opposite had every opportunity to take the education brief; perhaps they were scared of the mammoth task that lay before them.

The Minister of Education stated that that school falls under the same criteria as any other school; if it does not meet the funding criteria, it will not be funded.

In relation to the last intervention, it does not matter whether departmental officials — who do not run our Departments, we do — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order, order.

Mr O'Dowd: I know that former Ministers were concerned about officials running their Departments, but they do not run our Departments; we work together and Ministers make the final decisions.

The departmental official's advice was in relation to numbers —

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

Lord Morrow: Today, we listened to some interesting gobbledegook. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Lord Morrow: I did not interrupt the Members opposite, so they should show me the same courtesy. I listened to various Members. John O'Dowd came out with the usual claptrap, which we get from him now and again on this issue. He said that we, as unionists, are afraid of the Irish language. That is incorrect; I say to Mr O'Dowd and the rest of his colleagues that we are concerned about the wanton waste in the Department of Education. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Lord Morrow: The Minister has set out on a political journey and she has — as best she possibly can — sectarianised the Irish language. Nobody has done more to damage any hope that those of us on this side of the House would have a greater respect for the Irish language than the present Minister. Indeed, she has ensured that such respect will never get off the ground.

The Minister accepts that she will not win the argument. She has no confidence in her argument so she ensures that the blunt instrument — the petition of concern — is brought into play. That is her only refuge; of course, she could not get that without the support of the SDLP, which consistently jumps to her aid to shore her up.

I listened with interest to Mr Bradley, because he frequently speaks in Irish dialect. I suspect by looking at him — and I do not want to belittle him — that there were few Irish-medium schools in existence when he was being educated.

5.45 pm

However, he seems to be quite fluent in that language and can speak it adequately. My point is that whatever provision was in place then, it was sufficient to enable Mr Bradley to achieve what he has in the Irish language.

The point that we are trying to make, and that we have repeated, is that you may try to ram the language down the throats of unionists and people like me, and you may feel that this is a great triumph — because there is a degree of triumphalism in what the Minister is trying to do — but you are not winning hearts and minds. As a matter of fact, you are simply alienating people for whom you claim to have some respect.

The Minister, of course, does not set out to endear herself to anybody, never mind to unionists; indeed, I know that she despises the very ground that we stand on. She does not even set out to endear herself to those who are involved in the Irish language. The Minister was told that the new school would cause damage — whatever that big word means. Perhaps you may be able to understand that big word. That was not written by a unionist; it was in a headline in 'The Irish News'.

Another news story stated that Ruane ignored the warning from the Irish-speaking schools. The Minister does not take anything that anybody says on board, even those who respect the Irish language. She disrespects them and says that she will not listen to them.

Never one to be outpaced on anything, Mr Brolly said that not only are three Irish-speaking schools needed in Londonderry, but that seven could be justified. He then said that we do not even need pupils any more to have schools. Who will be taught — Timothy Timber? That is a wonderful concept — pupils are not needed in order for Irish to be taught; the only thing that is needed is money, because the pupils will pop up all over the place. Indeed, some of the schools are now closing.

The Minister has a responsibility, although I suspect that she does not believe that she does. The big acid test for the Minister is that this proposal will have to be equality tested. Where is all this equality testing happening? The Minister must convince us that there is a need for this school. She cannot do that, and we have only to lift the newspapers to see that it cannot be justified in any way.

Ms Ní Chuilín: On a point of order, a Cheann Comhairle. Is it appropriate for a Member to wave a newspaper about as a prop during a debate? I do not think so.

Mr Speaker: If a Member refers to the paper or document that is in front of them, it is appropriate.

Ms Ní Chuilín: On a point of order, a Cheann Comhairle. It was not clear that the Member was referring to the newspaper; he was just waving papers about.

Mr Speaker: Order. I assure the Member that I was watching the Member in question very carefully to see whether he was quoting from the papers that he had in front of him. My understanding is that he was.

Lord Morrow: I was quoting from the papers. There was one word that I could not make out in the headline, and I asked some Members what it was.

A Member: Was it a big word?

Lord Morrow: Yes, it was a big word.

Ms Ní Chuilín: Was it an Irish word?

Lord Morrow: It must have been something like that, but I have no knowledge —

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Lord Morrow: I respect that, Mr Speaker. However, Ms Ruane authorised the funding for the school in Derry — I think that is Londonderry — despite having been given warnings from advisers and inspectors that it would cause damage —

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member should take his seat.

The Minister of Education (Ms Ruane): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. First, I apologise for being late; I was caught up with something.

The motion is based on the false premise that I have not considered proposals for new schools in the controlled, maintained and integrated sectors. The fact is that there have been no proposals for new schools in the controlled or maintained sectors. Since becoming Education Minister, I have had to consider only two proposals for transformation to controlled integrated status and one proposal for a new grant-maintained integrated school.

Beidh a fhios ag Comhaltaí gurb é seo an ceathrú díospóireacht dá cineál le bliain maidir le hoideachas trí mheán na Gaeilge — earnáil nach bhfuil inti ach 3,000 páiste i 23 scoil a fhaigheann deontas agus in 11 Ghaelaonad.

Members should also be aware that this is the fourth debate in a year relating to Irish-medium education, a sector of 3,000 children in 23 grant-aided schools and 11 Irish-medium units. It is perfectly clear that some people from the unionist tradition do not want rights for those in the Irish-medium sector. They ignore the fact that, in a school population that is declining overall, there are a few bright sparks of growth, and the Irish-medium sector is one. Against the odds, many committed parents and advocates for the Irish language have struggled to build an education sector that is strong, dynamic, vibrant and achieving for our children, and that nourishes and supports our language.

It is, therefore, a logical consequence that proposals to support a growing sector will come to me for approval: I will support some proposals, but I may not support others. However, I will always take an objective view of the hard facts before me.

The Assembly — and, indeed, my colleagues from all sides of the House — should already be familiar with the statutory development proposal process required when a school is being newly established, closed or is undergoing a significant change that alters its character or size. Proposals for new schools are initiated by the local education and library board, the trustees, the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools, the Council for Integrated Education, Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta, an individual school or other interested parties. I do not initiate the development proposals.

The publication of a development proposal initiates a two-month period during which interested parties and individuals may send comments or objections to my Department. As soon as possible after that, officials assemble all the relevant material so that I can decide on the proposals.

Déanaim breithniú cúramach ar gach togra forbartha ar a thuillteanas, agus déantar measúnú ar gach scoil nua i gcoinne critéir inmharthanachta coiteann atá oiriúnach do gach earnáil. Agus deirim arís é — gach earnáil.

I consider all development proposals carefully on their individual merits, and proposals for all new schools are assessed against a common set of viability criteria that are relevant to all sectors. There is no facility in those processes to allow for the deferment of a decision on a proposal, and nor can the Department place a moratorium on educational bodies and others bringing forward new proposals. In short, my responsibility is to make decisions on development proposals that are brought forward by others.

Since I became Minister of Education, I have taken decisions on 37 proposals. None of them were for new controlled or maintained schools. There has been only one such proposal for a new integrated school in the past year — *[Interruption.]* — the establishment of Blackwater Integrated College —

Mr Speaker: Order. The Minister has the Floor. Every Member who wanted to speak in the debate has had that opportunity. Please allow the Minister to respond.

The Minister of Education: There has been only one such proposal for a new integrated school in the past year — the establishment of Blackwater Integrated College, which I approved.

I have approved proposals for the closure of 10 schools or units from a variety of educational sectors: one special school; one nursery unit at a controlled primary school; five controlled primary schools; one Irish-medium unit at a maintained primary school; and one maintained secondary school.

Cheadaigh mé freisin moltaí le naí-aonaid a bhunú i scoileanna rialaithe i mBaile na hInse agus i Magh Ratha, i mBunscoil Imeachta na Milaoise agus i Scoil an Droichid.

I have also approved proposals to establish nursery units at controlled schools in Ballynahinch and Moira, at the Millennium Integrated Primary School and at Scoil an Droichid.

I have turned down two proposals for integrated status for controlled schools at Knockbreda and Conlig, and we all know why I did that. I carefully examined the numbers, and I explained to the House the numbers in primary 1 and primary 2 — or the lack of them — and the entire numbers overall in the school.

In examining proposals to transform to integrated status, I need to be confident that a school is sustainable, that it will attract viable intakes from across the community and that transformation is not being pursued simply to avoid rationalisation. That has been the position on transformation proposals for many years. As I explained at the time of the decisions on both those cases, I was not convinced that a transformation would be successful. We have all seen the reports about Balmoral High School. Members have been jumping up and down in the House about decisions being taken and money being wasted, and about how important those matters are, yet here we are having an unnecessary debate. I am very disappointed with what is happening here. We are sending out the wrong message. I want to send out a message — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order, order. Members should not try to speak from a sedentary position. The Minister has the Floor.

The Minister of Education: I want to send out a message. First, everything that you have said about my not caring about equality or about the children in every one of our sectors —

Dr W McCrea: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. The Minister has just said “everything that you have said”. That is a reference to the Chair. I do not believe that you, Mr Speaker, have made any speech about the Minister.

Mr Speaker: Order. It is clear to both sides of the House that I have not made any speech.

The Minister of Education: For the record, I want to say two things about everything that Members on the opposite Benches have said. First, I care about every child that the Department — *[Interruption.]*. You may laugh, but I am telling you that that is the truth. I respectfully suggest that many of Members' contributions are made in order to hide the fact that you are unwilling to embrace change in education. I will not stand — *[Interruption.]*. The Chairperson of the Committee for Education — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order, order. Every other Member who asked to speak has been allowed to speak. Allow the Minister to respond to the debate without interruption.

The Minister of Education: The Chairperson of the Committee for Education said that change will not happen. Change will happen. I am not prepared to stand idly by and watch as our children — because they are all our children — are failed. The education system fails 47% of our children — 12,000. I will not stand by and watch that happen. Nor will I stand by and watch people criticise a sector, and treat a sector in the way in which the Irish-medium sector has been treated. The message that I wish to send to the Irish-medium and integrated sectors is that they should not listen to many of the comments that have been made. I

understand that many children and parents in those sectors will view today's debate with bewilderment, but my message to them is that they should keep up the good work. They are doing tremendous work.

It is not the case to contend that I have refused to consider proposals for new controlled, maintained and integrated schools. Indeed, it is to be expected that, in a period of demographic decline, proposals for new schools will generally come from the integrated and Irish-medium sectors, which are relatively new and growing. More and more children are seeking the benefits of an Irish-medium education. The Irish-medium sector is the fastest growing education sector, and the number of children receiving an Irish-medium education has increased by more than 10% in the past three years.

An tseachtain seo caite, rinne mé an oscarlta oifigiúil d'fhoirgneamh nua Bhunscoil an Traonaigh i Lios na Sceiche; is í an t-aon Ghael-bhunscoil i gContae Fhear Manach í, agus tá mé cinnte nach mbeidh sí ar an cheann deireannach.

6.00 pm

Just last week, I performed the official opening of the new premises of Bunscoil an Traonaigh in Lisnaskea, the only Irish-medium school in County Fermanagh. The previous week, I officiated at the opening of two Irish-medium schools, where people set aside their political and religious differences to celebrate the important role that the Irish language can play in education. At Gaelscoil Éanna in Glengormley, I was joined by the newly elected DUP major. The opening of Gaelscoil Ghleann Darach in Crumlin was attended by local clergy, including a Presbyterian minister, who presented the school with the New Testament as Gaeilge — in Irish. The minister also highlighted the important contribution that Presbyterians have made throughout the years to:

“advance, preserve and even revive the Irish language.”

I have been to many different schools, including some in the controlled sector, and have been welcomed with words of Irish. Those gestures were generous in more ways than one, and could act as an example to other people.

In May, I presented schools with awards in recognition of their outstanding commitment to spoken Irish, both inside and outside the classroom. The GLEO awards are organised annually by Foras na Gaeilge, one of the North/South implementation bodies, to recognise the work that is done in English-medium schools to support and develop spoken Irish. A total of 21 schools received awards, and four of those are in the North: Holy Cross Boys' Primary School, Ardoyne; Edmund Rice Primary School, Glengormley; St Mary's Grammar School, Magherafelt; and Abbey Christian Brothers' Grammar School, Newry. It was a joy to share in the enthusiasm of those young people.

The increase in the number of parents who want their children to be educated through the medium of Irish is a sign of the pent-up demand of recent years that can now be satisfied as the community settles down to enjoy political stability, celebration of diversity and a new confidence in people's choice to express their national identity.

In 2008, I introduced a new programme in primary schools to expose children to a second language. Schools can opt their children into the programme to receive lessons in Irish or Spanish. A second language is a valuable skill for children to develop when they are young. When that language is the child's native tongue, all the better.

As regards my decision in 2007 to approve a proposal to establish Gaelscoil na Daróige as a grant-aided Irish-medium primary school, I remind Members that, due to a commitment in the Good Friday Agreement, there is a statutory duty on the Department of Education to encourage and facilitate Irish-medium education. Furthermore, the British Government has signed the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, which came into force in July 2001. The charter includes a commitment to education in the Irish language where numbers are considered sufficient. I intend to ensure that both of those obligations are fulfilled.

Mr Poots: Will the Minister give way?

The Minister of Education: People who are in public office —

Mr Poots: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member should not persist.

The Minister of Education: People who are in public office, at every level, must be aware of their responsibilities to ensure that there is equality of respect and treatment for all sectors in society. Language must be tempered to ensure that it is not offensive to other people, whose legitimate demands should have our full support.

I also draw the Assembly's attention to the fact that the Department of Education considers demands for all forms of education, including Irish-medium and integrated education, under the general framework that is set out in the Education and Libraries Order (NI) 1986, which states:

"so far as is compatible with the provision of efficient instruction and training and the avoidance of unreasonable public expenditure, pupils shall be educated in accordance with the wishes of their parents".

In the particular case of Gaelscoil na Daróige, I was impressed by the arguments of parents of children who attend Náiscoil Mhaol Íosa. Furthermore, I was impressed by, and listened carefully to, what Comhairle Na Gaelscolaíochta had to say. I thank Dominic Bradley for his comments on Comhairle Na Gaelscolaíochta and the strategic approach that it takes on Irish-medium

education, for which it was established. I always listen carefully to what that body says. I congratulate it for its work.

Of course, I considered all of the advice on the proposal that was provided by my officials.

Mr Speaker: The Minister must draw her remarks to a close.

The Minister of Education: I also considered the objections, but, as Minister, I have to weigh up all the arguments for and against a proposal before making a decision. I made the decision.

Go raibh maith agat.

Mr McCausland: The debate started with the presentation by Miss McIlveen, who expressed her disappointment at the fact that the SDLP supported the petition of concern. She set out the facts and the figures clearly about the situation regarding the school and Irish-medium education in Londonderry. She pointed out that the proposal clearly breaches the Department of Education's policy in several ways and that the Minister seems to totally ignore her Department's policies.

Miss McIlveen also indicated the lack of strategic planning and raised questions about the governance of the Irish-medium sector. She pointed out the need for a coherent approach, that the Education and Training Inspectorate did not support the proposal, and that the Western Education and Library Board had expressed concerns about it. She also explained that the motion was not an attack on the Irish-medium sector, but on bad governance and the fact that the Minister acted in an illogical and unreasonable manner.

That was followed by a speech from Francie Brolly, which can best be described as vague and vacuous because there was nothing much in it. He said that the criteria may eventually be fulfilled, and that it is hoped that they will be met. In this case, it is probably more likely that there will be no hope and Bob Hope. Mr Brolly kept on saying what a good thing the Irish-medium sector was, but he totally ignored the core issue, which is that the Minister consistently ignores policies and procedures in her Department. He also said that he was tired listening to statistics. Statistics are at the heart of good government, but perhaps Francie Brolly has not yet learned that fact.

Basil McCrea spoke about the problems with the extended schools programme and all the other issues in education. He said that the Minister was ignoring real problems and was acting in a way that was divisive; that she was sectarianising education, was acting against advice, and was being partisan. He said that the debate is not about the Irish language, and he noted that nearby schools in Londonderry had real concerns and that the Minister was acting against the advice of officials. The Minister said that there were 50,000

empty places, but she seems to be intent on creating more. Mr McCrea also said that the Irish language was being given shamefully preferential treatment, and that that is not the way to have a shared future.

Dominic Bradley reminded us of the value of Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta — and that is the best pronunciation that I will manage of that. I was interested in that contribution because I want to comment on that organisation shortly, particularly on its record in the city of Londonderry. Trevor Lunn asked whether there was enough demand to spread across three schools the number of children that there are in two schools. That is the key question.

Mervyn Storey reminded us that the Minister is now known as the Minister of delay and confusion and the Minister for embarrassing climbdowns and that she follows a narrow and sectarian approach. Dominic Bradley objected to the word “sectarian”, and he was reminded that it is possible to be culturally sectarian and politically sectarian as well as religiously sectarian. In this context, the cultural sectarianism of Sinn Féin in relation to the Irish language is the real problem.

Gerry Adams, minus his tie, said that the DUP was opposed to reform, that we have an irrational hostility to Irish and that there is a need to work together. He told us that there was a need for equality. That is the very point — the Minister does not deliver equality: she delivers discrimination and preferential treatment in favour of the Irish sector and against others. The fact that she does not deliver equality is the real problem.

Gerry Adams said that the Irish language is not a threat to anyone, which reminded me of the visit that Conor Murphy made to an Irish-medium school somewhere in County Down. He handed the children a copy of the biography of the IRA terrorist Bobby Sands. Is there not a problem with a sector in which a convicted terrorist is held up as a role model for children?

I thought that we should have been making progress, not, as the Irish-medium sector is doing, setting up such people as role models. That happened in places other than County Down, including a school in West Belfast that is named in honour of Bobby Sands, who is now held up to children as a role model. Is the Irish language a threat? Yes, indeed; if that is the information that is being provided, it is a threat to the good education of children.

Edwin Poots reminded us that the Minister ignored her Department's advice and that the Irish-medium sector gets special, preferential treatment. He said that intakes to Irish-medium schools in Londonderry have fallen. At that point, Mrs Robinson suggested that the removal of the Minister due to incompetence and ineptitude might be the best course of action — a view that many of us would support.

Ken Robinson reminded Members that the Minister's use — and, I might say, abuse — of Irish simply reinforces unionists' perceptions that she does more damage to the Irish language every time she speaks than almost anyone else. He said that, rather than the separate, or separatist, approach, he was in favour of Irish-medium units in CCMS schools.

That reminded me of the situation in Londonderry in which three individuals — Gearóid Ó hÉara, Donncha Mac Niallais and Réamaí Mathers, all republicans of various vintages — appeared to be working together to kill off the Irish-medium unit in a maintained school in order to get their own, separate Irish-medium school. I note that the republican — and he was a republican — who reported that used the headline:

“Derry Provos campaign to control Irish medium schools”.

It is interesting that, on the website in which that article appeared, some members of the SDLP in Londonderry posted comments that are worthy of consideration, because they may not be fully in line with what Dominic Bradley said.

Actions such as handing out books about IRA terrorists to children and the Derry Provos seeking to take control of Irish-medium schools are a cause for concern. The article about the Derry Provos contains details of the steps involved in their campaign, and it includes many questions that people from the republican community were asking. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member has the Floor.

Mr McCausland: Sometimes it is helpful to read from such documents.

Members also heard from Mary Bradley, who pointed out that none of the Londonderry DUP MLAs had signed the motion. Of course, one of the Members for that area is the Speaker, who is unable to sign a motion, and the other is Gregory Campbell, who is a Minister and therefore does not sign motions. Consequently, there is no significance to that point. The Members who signed the motion are the DUP members of the Committee for Education at the time.

John O'Dowd spoke about the thriving nature of the Welsh language. Possibly, that is because it has not been politicised in the same way that Sinn Féin has politicised Irish. In an intervention, Ken Robinson said that there are already enough places, and John O'Dowd replied that that may well be the case. Therefore, he agreed —

Mr O'Dowd: Will the Member give way?

Mr McCausland: No, I have little time left, and we are coming to the best bits.

Lord Morrow told us that there has been wanton waste, and, quoting from ‘The Irish News’ to support

his additional points, he said that the Minister had sectarianised the Irish language.

In the Minister's contribution, she told us that this was the fourth debate on Irish-medium education and the Irish language. Clearly, she had not listened to what anyone said, because she told us that we do not want equality — and there is that point again — but we do. She is the Minister of discrimination and of preferential treatment for the Irish-language sector. She is the one who is guilty of discrimination against others, and, in such circumstances, she and others would do well to take note of that fact. We are the people who believe in equality and fairness — not the sort of discrimination of which the Minister has been guilty. For that reason, I fully support the motion — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member has the Floor. He is making the winding-up speech; allow him to do so.

Mr McCausland: For that reason, I am most happy to support the motion that my colleague Michelle McIlveen proposed. Francie Brolly began by commending Michelle's speech. I thought that that was remarkable — perhaps he also did not understand what she was saying. *[Interruption.]* We have had very good contributions today, and I am confident that we have demonstrated that the Minister is giving the Irish-medium sector preferential treatment, and that she is indeed the Minister for discrimination and inequality. *[Interruption.]*

6.15 pm

Mr Speaker: Order. I remind Members that the vote on the motion will be on a cross-community basis.

Question put.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 37; Noes 33.

AYES

UNIONIST:

Mr Armstrong, Mr Beggs, Mr Bresland, Lord Browne, Mr Buchanan, Mr T Clarke, Rev Dr Robert Coulter, Mr Craig, Mr Donaldson, Mr Easton, Mrs Foster, Mr Hamilton, Mr Irwin, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Dr W McCrea, Miss McIlveen, Mr McNarry, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Newton, Mr Paisley Jnr, Rev Dr Ian Paisley, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mrs I Robinson, Mr K Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Savage, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

OTHER:

Dr Farry, Mrs Long, Mr Lunn, Mr Neeson.

Tellers for the Ayes: Miss McIlveen and Mr Storey.

NOES

NATIONALIST:

Mr Adams, Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Mr D Bradley, Mrs M Bradley, Mr P J Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Brolly, Mr Burns, Mr Butler, Mr W Clarke, Mr Doherty, Mr Gallagher, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Mr A Maginness, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Dr McDonnell, Mr McElduff, Mrs McGill, Mr McKay, Mr McLaughlin, Mr Murphy, Ms Ni Chuilín, Mr O'Dowd, Mr O'Loan, Mrs O'Neill, Mr P Ramsey, Ms S Ramsey, Ms Ruane.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr D Bradley and Ms S Ramsey.

Total votes 70 Total Ayes 37[52.9%]

Nationalist Votes 33 Nationalist Ayes 0 [0.0%]

Unionist Votes 33 Unionist Ayes 33[100.0%]

Other Votes 4 Other Ayes 4 [100.0%]

Question accordingly negatived (cross-community vote).

Motion made:

That the Assembly do now adjourn. — [*Mr Speaker.*]

ADJOURNMENT

Funding for School-Age Childcare Services in Lurgan

Mr Speaker: I remind Members that the proposer of the topic will have 15 minutes in which to speak, and all other Members who wish to speak will have 10 minutes.

Order. I ask Members to leave the Chamber in an orderly fashion.

Mr Savage: I wish to speak on behalf of Drumellan Community Association and Zero-8-Teen, which is based in the Brownlow area of Craigavon. [*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member has the Floor. For the second time, I ask Members to leave the Chamber in an orderly fashion.

Mr Savage: The group does an excellent job in the community, and I pay tribute to its staff for the vital work that they do every day. In January 2008, I received correspondence from the group when its funding crisis first came to light, and I have been working with the group ever since to help it to secure yearly funding to allow it to continue to provide flexible, quality, affordable and accessible services for parents, especially at a time when the cost of living seems to be rising almost daily.

We are here today because of the inability of the Minister of Education, who, yet again, has failed to discharge her duties properly and to provide for those who not only need but deserve support from her Department.

I will take this opportunity to thank the junior Minister for filling the void this evening to respond to the debate. We appreciate the fact that he has given up his time to do so. I trust that the junior Minister will be able to provide reasons why the Minister of Education ran away from the debate. On behalf of community groups throughout the length and breadth of the Province, I thank the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, Michael McGimpsey, for showing excellent leadership and stepping into the gap and making funding available to allow after-school groups to continue their good work.

Drumellan Community Association and Zero-8-Teen are not asking for huge sums of money every year. Sadly, their management spend their time applying for funding rather than investing their time

and efforts in supporting their staff and buildings. That cannot be allowed to continue.

Drumellan Community Association needs approximately £20,000 a year to continue to provide services at its current levels. That £20,000 pays for 20,000 childcare hours in the TSN designated area of Brownlow. All sections of the community live in that area, and they attend many different Churches. In a recent answer to an Assembly question, I found out that the Minister of Education will imminently be employing an Irish-language official in her Department. Surely resources could be better spent in areas such as Brownlow rather than on employing an Irish-language official.

I ask the junior Minister to comment on that matter, and to comment on whether he and his Department believe that it is appropriate for the Department of Education to spend taxpayers' money employing an Irish-language official while childcare services across Northern Ireland are in dire straits. Here is a simple fact for the Minister of Education: responsibility for early-years services transferred to the Department of Education from the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety on 1 November 2006.

Those responsibilities included the policy areas and practical support for private day care, home childminding and youth services. It is clear that the responsibility for school-age childcare services lies with the Department of Education.

6.30 pm

A letter dated 8 November 2006 to the chief executives of the health and social services policy boards from Department of Education officials about the transfer of funding for early-years development and Sure Start said:

“You will be aware that it has been decided to transfer Early Years policy responsibility from the Department of Health to the Department of Education. The rationale of undertaking the transfer is to ensure that early years policy is more coherent, provides better outcomes for children and is more cost effective.

It had originally been planned that this would take place in April of next year; however, Minister Eagle has expressed a strong desire to have this transfer completed sooner and as such the transfer took place on 1 November 2006.

The associated Early Years funding has been agreed between the two Departments and transferred to the Department of Education with effect from 1st November 2006. This will mean that the Department of Education will become the accountable department for Early Years activities and your funding arrangements have been transferred to it.”

The issue will not go away. The leadership and foresight shown by the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety will, fortunately, resolve the short-term difficulties that several groups were facing. However, it is now time for the Minister of Education to stop hiding behind issues of language and equality. Practical action is required to get to grips with

the issues and provide outcomes that will more than satisfactorily meet the needs of parents and children from all parts of our community who need those facilities daily.

On 4 February 2008, junior Minister Kelly told the House:

“it is for individual Ministers to determine spending priorities now that the Budget allocations have been finalised.” — [*Official Report, Bound Volume 27, p178, col 1*].

It is abundantly clear that the Minister of Education has not given this issue the priority that it deserves. Drumellan Community Association’s aims are identical to those of Peter Hain, the then Secretary of State, who launched the children and young people’s funding package, the aim of which was:

“to reduce underachievement and improve the life chances of children and young people by enhancing their educational development and fostering their health, well-being and social inclusion”.

Judging by her actions, we must assume that the Minister of Education is not interested in improving the life chances and educational development of children in this Province.

Long-term sustainable and mainstreamed funding should be made available. In-year monitoring may work, but it is only a short-term solution. Core funding must be sought in order to allow groups to plan their activities based on guaranteed year-on-year funding. In the meantime, will the junior Minister comment on whether his Department or the Department of Education will use the in-year monitoring rounds to obtain more funding for critical and valued services such as those provided by Drumellan Community Association?

School-age childcare schemes, which are targeted at areas of social deprivation in order to help parents to get off benefits and back into work, provide a vital service that adds value to the local service economy every year. Parents pay for the services provided by the Drumellan Community Association, but in that TSN area it is not viable — nor is it fair — that parents should pick up the entire bill for childcare, especially when the cost of living, food and fuel is rising daily. Without funding from the Department of Education, the Drumellan project and many like it are at serious risk. If long-term funding is not secured, children may have to be left at home alone over the summer or their parents may be forced to give up work. Neither of those options is acceptable.

We ought to be working to support families in our communities and to enhance their quality of life, rather than adopting the head-in-the-sand approach that has been taken by some of the people who are in a position to make a difference. We must make decisions that better respond to the needs of our communities.

Mr O’Dowd: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. It is unfortunate that Mr Savage has used a

worthwhile debate to indulge in a swipe at the Education Minister and avoid talking about the actual issue, which is worthy of debate. He has adopted the premise of not letting the facts get in the way of a good argument.

The transfer of powers between the Departments of Health and Education took place in 2006, during a period of direct rule. However, the memorandum of understanding between the Departments does not include the provision for which Mr Savage seeks funding today, and that is the difficulty.

The Department of Education does not have funding responsibility for school-age childcare. Sinn Féin is not negating its responsibility to ensure that funding is found for projects, such as the Drumellan project to which Mr Savage referred. The Health Minister continued to fund projects that he was already funding, but for only six months. We, as politicians, must get together and ensure that funding is secured to make certain that such services can continue.

The debate must extend beyond health and education. Mr Savage said that some parents might have to give up their jobs to ensure that their children are looked after. Therefore, let us examine the roles of DEL or DETI in ensuring that people can access affordable childcare to enable them to go to work.

Drumellan Community Association is long established, and it is one of the most successful in the Brownlow area. It secured a future for its estate, while other estates fell prey to the social problems that affected the Brownlow area at that time. In that sense, it is a success story. It has several funding streams, including DSD, which has responsibility for funding the community and voluntary sector, and Craigavon Borough Council, which gives it a limited amount of money.

I support Mr Savage’s call for funding. However, I regret the fact that he has used the debate to sideswipe the Education Minister because he thinks that it is a handy way to grab headlines. A dig at the Education Minister is bound to get a headline somewhere.

I also regret the fact that he brought the Irish language into the debate, because I too know the Drumellan Community Association and the wider Drumellan community, and no one there would seek to discriminate against any sector in order to secure funding. That community is seeking funding by right, and it deserves it by right.

Let us not seek other sections of society to discriminate against in order to secure funding for Drumellan. Let us ensure that, in the short time that we have, we introduce a funding formula that will secure the future of Drumellan Community Association and other community groups in Craigavon, Lurgan, Portadown and elsewhere in the North, because such groups are a valuable resource for the broader community.

I support the broad thrust of this debate, and I hope that we can find a solution in the coming months.

Mr Moutray: I welcome the opportunity to take part in the Adjournment debate this evening, and I appreciate the fact that my colleague Mr George Savage proposed the topic. I also welcome the attendance of junior Minister Donaldson.

This debate can raise awareness of the current shortfall in funding for school-age childcare services, particularly in the Lurgan area. That is an important issue that has affected many people and will continue to affect countless people for many years to come. I concur with the Members who have spoken already, and I welcome the opportunity to raise an issue that is paramount to many parents and children in Lurgan. As an elected representative, I feel strongly about the issue. The problem requires a strategic, coherent long-term solution.

The Northern Ireland Childminding Association says:

“Childminding provides care and learning for children ages between 0-14 years.”

It is well known that — along with rich learning environments such as the home and the local community — childminding supports children’s effective learning by providing opportunities for individual attention. That demonstrates the importance of the provision of childcare services. Childminding advocates note that such services not only benefit children by improving their life skills and social skills, but generate economic benefits by supporting parents in moving into work, education and training.

That would certainly be the case in Lurgan. For many years, Lurgan has been economically deprived, and it has often been polarised with regard to economic growth and innovation. An improvement in childcare funding would improve Lurgan’s economy, because it would encourage parents back into employment and learning.

Childcare, whether it takes the form of childminders, nannies, out-of-school clubs, day nurseries, playschools, preschools, toddler groups or crèches, is an essential part of today’s society. Childcare services are needed to ensure that parents have an opportunity to enhance their skills and continue in a working capacity.

The Government continue to promote lifelong learning and endeavour to reduce unemployment rates. Therefore, a high standard of local childcare facilities is essential. The Employers for Childcare charity has said that no single Department is accountable for the provision of funding. That reinforces the need for the Executive to adopt a multifaceted approach to the matter.

Employers for Childcare — which is a reputable organisation — also raised a valid point about the lack of childcare information services in Northern Ireland.

It is the only organisation that provides such information, and it attempts to serve the whole of Northern Ireland. Since the implementation of the Childcare Act 2006, many local authorities in England have set up childcare information service points, which are well-manned and serve their communities well. That system would benefit Northern Ireland, and I ask the Minister to consider its introduction.

From experience, I realise that childminders are an important part of any family unit, particularly for people who are intent on working. Childminders are often classified as being as important as family and teachers in a child’s life. A child sees their childminder as a mirror; the childminder’s response will determine the self-image that that young person forms.

Adequate funding is essential to ensure that high-quality childcare facilities are available in Lurgan and, indeed, throughout Northern Ireland. I welcome the Department of Health’s assistance in securing six months’ further funding for 54 school-age projects that were at risk of closure this month. That has ensured that those projects remain open and that they are readily available to parents across Northern Ireland. Those projects provide an important service for local communities at a time when the various costs facing working families continue to rise. It is of the utmost importance that such school-age projects continue to operate.

I call on the Executive to take an all-encompassing approach in an all-inclusive advancement that will, in principle, secure a long-term strategy for school-age childcare funding in Lurgan and across Northern Ireland. Over the past months, many good childcare-funding schemes in Lurgan have been left in limbo regarding their existence and feasibility. That situation must not be allowed to continue. I call on the Minister of Education and the Minister of Health to take the relevant issues on board and to address them in the short term.

Mrs D Kelly: I, too, congratulate my colleague Mr Savage for raising this important subject in the Chamber this evening. In the last few days, we have seen the report of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister’s inquiry into child poverty. All the people who gave evidence in that process referred time and time again to the importance of play, not only in the development of children and young people but in assisting their parents in climbing out of poverty by providing childcare that allowed them to look for employment or take further training.

6.45 pm

Members who have spoken referred to the departmental responsibilities of the Health and Education Ministers. However, it is the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, within which the junior Ministers are the designated champions of children, that has a

particular responsibility in ensuring that funding is set aside for children and young people. It is for that reason that the Administration removed the ring-fencing of funding for children and young people in their Programme for Government and Budget and transferred it across different Departments.

The downturn in today's market, and the consequential devaluation of land and property, means that Ministers who had to rely heavily on income from those sources now have to look to their departmental budgets to fund some of their core activities and responsibilities. There is, therefore, little confidence that children and play will be among the main priorities of the Departments.

In the previous Administration, the SDLP and the Ulster Unionist Party ring-fenced funding for children and young people, and we still believe that that was the right way to go. That was one reason why the SDLP did not support the Programme for Government and the Budget. We knew that childcare services would not be the only sector that would suffer; this is only the start of the cry from the community and voluntary sector.

Mr Savage highlighted the importance of the Drumellan Community Association and its work in the Zero-8-Teen project. I recall the establishment of that project in the 1990s for which the association was able to draw on European funding. The project has been sustained by European funding over the years, but Members will be aware that there are challenges ahead in respect of Peace III funding. That stream of funding will no longer be available. The people who established the group believed that the funding would be mainstreamed by now.

As many Members will know — and as Mr O'Dowd said — the area in which Drumellan is situated turned itself around from a region that suffered from high deprivation and a lot of criminal activity. I am sure that Mr Donaldson is no stranger to the challenges that face the Brownlow area in particular.

Although Mr Savage singled out the Drumellan Community Association, the debate is also about the wider Lurgan area. I ask the junior Minister to look at the population statistics for the Craigavon area, because Lurgan has more children under the age of 16 than most other council areas across the North. Therefore there should be a particular onus on Ministers to skew some of the funding to children and young people in that area. A number of wards in the Craigavon Borough Council area, including the Court ward and the Brownlow sector area in Drumgask, remain high on the Noble indicators of deprivation levels.

I support the motion and ask those with the relevant responsibility to champion the cause of children and young people. Too often, we hear the glib words "children are our future", but that is true: children are our future, and greater emphasis must be put on their

needs, and more support is required for their parents. Such requirements are all too vital in today's society, where parents face many challenges in bringing up their children and trying to give them a steer in the right direction.

The junior Minister (Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister) (Mr Donaldson): I commend the Member for Upper Bann George Savage for securing the Adjournment debate and highlighting the relevant issues. I am sure that the groups that he is representing will appreciate that. I also thank Mr O'Dowd, my colleague Mr Moutray and Mrs Kelly for their contributions to the debate.

I commend the work of the Drumellan Community Association — as mentioned by Mr Savage at the beginning of the debate and commented on by other Members subsequently — for its Zero-8-Teen childcare initiative, which is a valued project in the Brownlow area. I want to put on record our appreciation of the work in which the Drumellan Community Association is engaged in Brownlow, particularly the childcare services that it has provided thus far.

I am thankful for the opportunity to respond to today's Adjournment debate. The issue affects not only the Lurgan area but all areas across Northern Ireland.

The Office of the First Minister and the deputy First Minister has received considerable correspondence in support of similar after-schools schemes; that demonstrates the important role that such schemes have and the high regard in which they are held by those whom they benefit most.

I want to make it clear from the outset that although junior Minister Kelly and I have particular responsibility for the co-ordination of policy and the promotion of children and young people's rights and needs, we do not have responsibility for funding those schemes or policy responsibility for childcare. Our role is to drive forward the 10-year cross-departmental strategy for children and young people. We want to ensure that issues concerning children and young people are central to Government policy making and are not forgotten. We have been working hard over the past 12 months to ensure that those issues are given the priority that they deserve in every Department, including the Departments mentioned by Members.

Undoubtedly, today's debate has shown that we are all united in the view that there needs to be clarification as to which Department holds the policy responsibility for childcare and which has responsibility for funding childcare projects. Junior Minister Kelly and I have been working on clarifying that issue and will continue to do so as a matter of urgency. We were involved in the decision of the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to fund projects for a further six

months; that will give us extra time in which to identify alternative funding streams.

We recognised the need to create a space within which departmental responsibility can be clarified and resolved. We will then consider the long-term funding of projects — and we want long-term solutions and not quick fixes. A long-term perspective will ensure longevity for the valuable services — and communities are in desperate need of those services — that are provided by the Drumellan Community Association and by community groups up and down the country.

Although the provision of school-age childcare is not a specific area of responsibility for the Office of the First Minister and the deputy First Minister, we recognise that it can benefit children, young people and their families, and that a lack of affordable childcare can be a significant barrier to employment. After-schools schemes are essential to many families. I was aware of the concern around funding for school-age childcare before today's debate and I have been liaising with my ministerial colleagues on that topic.

I want to pick up on Mrs Kelly's comments about the high levels of deprivation in the Brownlow area. We are trying to identify areas where there is a particular need for after-schools childcare and this afternoon we had a meeting with Barnardo's on that subject. If any MLAs would like to write to us and contribute more detailed information to that discussion, we will consider their representations.

Families were mentioned in the debate, and I would like to draw attention to two things. First, it is important that parents have information on the availability of childcare in their area and that is the responsibility of the health and social care trusts. If there is a deficit in that information being made available to families, we would like to know about it so that we can rectify the situation. I am sure that the Southern Health and Social Care Trust is being proactive in ensuring that that information is available.

Secondly, there is a need to encourage parents to access working tax credit, which can be a valuable resource in helping families to pay for up to 80% of their childcare costs. Families must be made aware of their entitlements, and DSD is the lead Department on the issue. If Members have concerns about the availability of the credit, require any information, or wish to know about the availability of information, please let us know, and we will follow that up.

I appreciate the opportunity to participate in the debate, and careful note will be taken of what my four colleagues have said about the Lurgan area — in particular about the Zero-8-Teen project and Drumellan community association. That problem is replicated in many other parts of Northern Ireland, including my own constituency. I have encountered the same problem

among groups that are worried about future provision. I am thinking, in particular, about the work of the Cloona Oasis Centre in west Belfast, which borders the Lagan Valley constituency. Some excellent work is being done there and there are concerns about the longevity of funding.

Those issues must be addressed, and we have a little time to do that. We can bring clarity about policy and funding and look at the long term implications of identifying alternative funding streams to keep those valuable and valued services going.

Families throughout Northern Ireland who rely on schemes do not care which Department is responsible for policy or funding: they care about the continued existence and delivery of the schemes. I hope that the Member for Upper Bann Mr Savage will take the message back to Drumellan and to the community workers, parents, families and children who benefit from that very important scheme that we are trying to bring a satisfactory resolution to the matter.

I assure the Member — and the Assembly — that junior Minister Kelly and I will continue to work hard on the issue to bring solutions that deliver continuity of services. I appreciate the opportunity to participate in the debate, and look forward to working with colleagues to deliver favourable outcomes.

Adjourned at 6.57 pm.

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Monday 30 June 2008

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

ASSEMBLY BUSINESS

Mr D Bradley: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. At the conclusion of last week's debate on Irish-medium education, Mr McCausland gave the winding-up speech. He implied that a Dr Réamaí Mathers was, or had been, associated with a paramilitary organisation. In the meantime, Dr Mathers has contacted me and asked me to raise the issue with you. He asks that you investigate the matter, with a view to correcting the Official Report.

I ask that you give the matter your urgent attention, as Dr Mathers considers that the remark could be detrimental to his personal security and to that of his family.

Mr Speaker: Mr Bradley has raised two issues. First, Members do have privilege in the House. That privilege goes only so far in certain issues; however, in this issue, the Member concerned does have privilege.

Secondly, Mr Bradley does not have a right of reply on that particular issue. I will look into the issue further and report to the House or by letter to Mr Bradley.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

North/South Ministerial Council — Trade and Business Development Sectoral Meeting

Mr Speaker: I have received notice from the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development that she wishes to make a statement regarding the North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) trade and business development sectoral meeting. Before proceeding, I advise Members that I understand that neither this statement, nor the next that the Minister will deliver today, relates to agricultural or rural development matters. I remind Members again that the questions that follow the statement must relate to its subject matter.

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. In compliance with section 52 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, I wish to give the following report on the meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council in the trade and business development sectoral format, which was held in Enniskillen on 29 May 2008.

The Executive were represented by Minister Nigel Dodds in his capacity as Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, and by myself, as an accompanying Minister. The Irish Government were represented by Micheál Martin TD, Minister for Foreign Affairs, and by Dr Jimmy Devins TD, Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment and the Department of Education and Science. The statement has been agreed by Minister Dodds, and I am making it on behalf of us both.

The Council welcomed the appointment of the new board of InterTradeIreland, including its chairperson, Dr David Dobbin. Dr Dobbin and the chief executive of InterTradeIreland presented a progress report on the work that has been carried out by the body since the previous NSMC trade and business development sectoral meeting, which was held in June 2002.

Examples of InterTradeIreland's work include the recent launch of the entrepreneurship network and masterclass programme, and in the area of design, the organisation is scoping the potential for co-operative initiatives that will deliver competitiveness benefits. It is also examining co-operation with other industries and the private sector in order to explore the potential for initiatives on environmental goods and services.

Furthermore, the body is working with Enterprise Ireland and Invest NI to identify suitable projects for submission under the EU seventh framework programme for research. It also published recently a report mapping research and technological development centres on the island of Ireland, and it is exploring new opportunities for the aerospace sector.

The Ministers welcomed InterTradeIreland's creation of 39 North/South business networks and the provision of information, advice and services to more than 14,500 companies. The direct participation of more than 1,300 companies in its programmes resulted in the generation of £134 million — or €171 million — in trade and business development, with an additional £260 million — or €331 million — forecasted from ongoing programmes.

The Council noted the increase in cross-border trade of 19.6% between 2003 and 2006. Indeed, recent figures show that cross-border trade increased to €3.1 billion in 2007. The Council also noted InterTradeIreland's annual review of activities and its annual report, prior to their being placed before the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Oireachtas.

The Council approved InterTradeIreland's 2008-2010 corporate plan and noted its two core strategic goals. Those are: first, to generate business values by enhancing company competitiveness and capability through co-operative North/South initiatives; and secondly, to improve the competitive environment for mutual benefit through co-operative policy research, reports and networks.

The Council supported the priority that InterTradeIreland will give to science, technology and innovation in its corporate plan and noted the targets that were identified in the 2008 business plan. First, a total of £47 million — or €69 million — in reported trade and business development activity will be generated by the North/South business networks of InterTradeIreland and by firms that are engaged in its projects. Secondly, 400 firms will become actively involved in developing the competitiveness of their businesses through the utilisation of the resources of InterTradeIreland, which are offered through its co-operative North/South initiatives. Thirdly, 2,000 firms will develop their business capabilities through the utilisation both of InterTradeIreland's information and knowledge services resources and 25 North/South co-operative business and economic networks.

The Council agreed that the next meeting in trade and business development sectoral format would take place in September or October 2008. Go raibh míle miath agat.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mr Durkan): There is something of a presentational oddness about the accompanying Minister making a statement in this manner. I, as Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment, have not been given any reason or briefing as to why the statement was made in such a way.

I am not in any way criticising the Minister who made the statement. I want my concern recorded in order that

that oddness does not pass without comment, which would enable the practice to be cited as a precedent.

I thank the Minister and her ministerial colleagues for their work in the meeting. On behalf of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment, I join her in complimenting the new board and new chairperson of InterTradeIreland for their work. The Committee also appreciates and commends the previous board's work.

Will the Minister elaborate on the potential for initiatives on environmental goods and services, and how far those will complement InterTradeIreland's work to improve co-operative policy research North and South? Issues such as climate change, renewable energy and waste management present business opportunities as well as challenges for public-sector expenditure.

Lord Morrow: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Will you confirm whether this is the first time that a Minister who has not headed up a particular Department has made a statement to the Assembly on behalf of that Department?

Mr Speaker: I am not sure, Lord Morrow. However, it is in order for the Minister to make the statement. The Executive may select whom they wish to make a statement on their behalf to the House.

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: I am relieved that Mr Durkan was not being personal when he commented on the presentational oddness of my making the statement.

As accompanying Minister at the NSMC meeting, I did not expect to deliver the statement either. The subsequent ministerial reshuffle means that the lead Minister is no longer in post. Therefore, it was considered appropriate that a Minister who attended the meeting deliver the statement.

It was the first sectoral meeting on InterTradeIreland since 2002, so much of it was taken up with discussing the progress report in detail and work that had been done to date. That a great deal of other business had to be conducted meant that no detailed discussion on environmental issues took place. With the Member's permission, I will forward his question to officials in the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) and ask the Minister to respond to it in writing.

Mr Hamilton: I am almost dumbstruck by your initial ruling that the statement does not deal with an agricultural matter, which means that I am unable to ask questions about Comber potatoes or other local produce.

I noted with interest the positive section in the Minister's statement about an increase of almost 20% in cross-border trade between 2003 and 2006. The Minister may not have the figures to hand, but will she provide a breakdown of that increase, including how much of it benefits Northern Ireland companies that

sell to the Irish Republic? Furthermore, has any assessment been made of the proportion of that increase that is directly attributable to InterTradeIreland's work, rather than to organic growth, which would have happened anyway?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: I thank the Member for his question. I do not have the figures that he requested. However, since 2002, InterTradeIreland has developed and rolled out a series of programmes and initiatives in accordance with its corporate and annual business plan.

In particular, between 2003 and 2007, the organisation created 39 new North/South business networks and engaged with more than 14,500 companies, to which it provided information, advice and services. That would not have been the case without InterTradeIreland's hard work and dedication. It has also improved the range and effectiveness of its portfolio of trade and business-development programmes in the areas of science, technology and innovation, sales and marketing, and business capability.

I apologise for being unable to quantify the number from the North, but more than 1,300 companies that participated directly in InterTradeIreland's programmes have generated trade and business worth more than £134.5 million — €171 million — with an additional forecast of £260 million, or €331.2 million. Therefore, that body has done a huge amount of work in the space of four years. That is a significant achievement that gives us great encouragement for those business links being developed for the future.

12.15 pm

Ms J McCann: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I also thank the Minister for her statement. The statement mentions:

“exploring new opportunities for the aerospace sector”.

Will the Minister comment further on that? What potential does the aerospace sector offer for the island of Ireland as a whole?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: As I say, we did not go into a great amount of detail. InterTradeIreland has considered the aerospace sector, but, primarily, Invest NI should deal with that matter. Therefore, I do not have enough detail to be able to respond to the Member's question. At the trade and business sectoral meeting, there was no specific discussion about Enterprise Ireland's role in the aerospace sector or Invest NI's plans and projects. However, we are happy to respond to the Member in writing.

Mr Beggs: Like other Members, I find it very strange to be told that an accompanying Minister will present a report but may not be able to answer Members' questions. Nevertheless, I will proceed with my question.

The statement mentions £134 million of cross-border trade, with a further £260 million anticipated. First, will the Minister clarify the time periods to which those amounts refer? Secondly, does the Minister agree that what is more significant to the economy in Northern Ireland is not cross-border trade but how that trade may help businesses here to improve their efficiency when they export to Great Britain, Europe and the rest of the world? Will the Minister give more detail on that issue?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: The fact that I may be unable to answer Members' questions is less to do with my being the accompanying Minister than the fact that the sectoral meeting was dealing with four years' worth of work, and, therefore, there was not much time to go into the minutiae of the work that had been done over that period of time.

InterTradeIreland's vision is of a globally competitive enterprise environment in which Ireland, North and South, co-operate to ensure the optimal utilisation of economic resources — particularly knowledge resources — to drive additional trade and wealth creation. Its mission is to enhance the global competitiveness of the economics of both jurisdictions for mutual benefit through collaborative business, policy and research programmes as well as partnerships and networks.

From the figures, we can see that InterTradeIreland has been very successful in a short period of time and is continuing with its efforts to ensure that we are punching above our weight and achieving economic development across the island. That body will continue its work on economic and policy research to identify co-operative actions that will lead to mutual benefit. As I have said, the target areas will include science, technology and innovation, infrastructure, enterprise and business development, labour market and skills, trade and investment and the regulatory environment.

There are several key performance indicators for 2008-2010, such as the business value generated through InterTradeIreland's initiatives, the number of firms engaged in InterTradeIreland's initiatives and the number of trade and business development networks supported by InterTradeIreland.

Mr Neeson: I welcome the continued work of InterTradeIreland, an organisation that, at times, did not have the full support of all Members of the Assembly. I also welcome the increase in cross-border trade. Does the Minister agree that, if that aspect is to continue to grow, it is important that infrastructure — that is, roads and rail services, particularly on this side of the border — is improved?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: That is absolutely essential, and

InterTradeIreland has produced research that maps the correlation between the level of job creation and business development in different areas with the location of the major arterial routes across the island of Ireland.

Those pieces of research provide the stark message that where there are roads, there will be business creation and development. The Minister for Regional Development recognises the importance of those arterial routes in the encouragement of business creation and development. InterTradeIreland will work closely with other agencies to develop the support that they can offer.

Roads infrastructure is crucial, as is technology infrastructure. The difficulties with broadband provision in rural areas, for example, are well documented. There are limitations to what InterTradeIreland can do, but it has done excellent work with the resources and time that are available to it.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Will the Minister explain why the meeting that she attended was the only meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council in that sectoral format since the restoration of the Assembly? Go raibh maith agat.

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: I do not understand that question. It was the first meeting of InterTradeIreland since devolution. I do not know why it took so long before the meeting was held, but I was glad to attend it and I recognise the importance of InterTradeIreland's work in the development of business and economic links across the island of Ireland. The meeting in May was welcome and, because another one is scheduled for September or October, the work of the body is progressing and being taken seriously by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment.

Mr O'Loan: The second report by Sir David Varney, 'Review of the Competitiveness of Northern Ireland', refers to 'The comprehensive study on the all-island economy', which is a North/South intergovernmental document that was published in 2006. The Varney II report proposes that the programme of work that is detailed in that document be intensified across eight areas and that that study be updated. That recommendation is very important. Was it discussed at the meeting, and how will that proposal be advanced in the trade and business development sectoral meetings?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: Given that the meeting was a stocktake of the progress that was made in the past four years, it did not go into that level of detail.

Mr P J Bradley: Mr Speaker, you said from the outset that the report makes no reference to agriculture. However, given the importance of agricultural trade on the island of Ireland, why was it omitted from the agenda of the meeting, and will the Minister provide

an assurance that it will be on the agenda of the next meeting in September or October?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: The Member will be disappointed to learn that I have a substantial answer to that question. Several months ago, InterTradeIreland indicated its enthusiasm to fund a study of the agrifood sector throughout the island. In recent years, the agrifood sector has been the subject of intense examination in the North. InterTradeIreland identified a shortage of information about the networking possibilities in the sector and, prompted by the Confederation of British Industry and the Irish Business and Employers Confederation in the South, felt that such a study would be valuable.

Officials are content, and new terms of reference have been accepted. The proposed study offers potential benefits to a very important sector in both jurisdictions. Therefore, I am pleased to say that InterTradeIreland is advancing that study and the group will be supported by an industry advisory panel comprising representatives from the local agrifood industry.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

North/South Ministerial Council — Tourism Sectoral Meeting

Mr Speaker: I have received notice from the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development that she wishes to make a statement regarding the North/South Ministerial Council tourism sectoral meeting.

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I am not sure whether Members want me to proceed, but I will carry on regardless.

I wish to make a statement in compliance with section 52 of the NI Act 1998 regarding the recent meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council in tourism sectoral format. The meeting was held in Enniskillen on 29 May 2008. The Executive were represented by the then Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, Mr Nigel Dodds MP MLA and myself. Martin Cullen TD, Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism, represented the Irish Government. This statement has been agreed with Nigel Dodds, and I make it on behalf of both of us.

The Council welcomed the appointment of the new board of Tourism Ireland, including the chairperson, Mr Hugh Friel. It considered a report from Mr Friel on the work of the Tourism Ireland board since the previous NSMC meeting in tourism sectoral format in November 2007. The Council noted the issues that were raised at the three board meetings that were held in the interim and the views of the board on the key components of competitiveness.

The Council also received an update from Tourism Ireland's chief executive, Paul O'Toole, on the progress in implementing the Tourism Ireland 2008 business plan. An analysis of the visitor and revenue targets, including the more challenging trading environment that has arisen from increased economic uncertainty in some key overseas markets, was also noted.

A paper that proposed the opening of a regional hub to manage new and developing markets, such as China and India, was presented. The Council noted the increasing importance of those markets for the future growth of overseas visitors to the island of Ireland. It welcomed Tourism Ireland's proposals to open a hub office for new and developing markets, which will enable the company to operate more effectively in the face of increasing global competition. The Council approved an increase in Tourism Ireland's staffing complement by four to enable the company to recruit the staff for the proposed new and developing markets hub.

The Council considered a paper on tourism statistics that summarised the core requirements for tourism statistics, identified actual or potential gaps in key statistics and identified areas in which pragmatic cross-border co-operation may play a useful and effective role in filling such gaps. The Council noted the paper and requested that officials engage with the relevant agencies on the issues that were identified in the paper, with a view to reporting to the next appropriate NSMC meeting.

The Council agreed that the next meeting of the NSMC in tourism sectoral format should take place in November 2008. Go raibh mile maith agat.

The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Ms J McCann): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her statement. Does she have any further information about the proposed opening of a regional hub to manage the new and developing markets such as China and India? Does she know exactly where that hub will be located? Furthermore, is there a timescale for its opening? Go raibh maith agat.

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. The work on the hub has not yet been fully completed. Officials from the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism are working together to agree the location of the new hub office and the timing for its opening. I expect that work to be expedited, and more information will be provided at a later date.

Mr Hamilton: A widely recognised weakness in Northern Ireland's tourism industry is the lack of visitors coming to the country from the Republic of Ireland. Indeed, that weakness has been identified and targeted in the Tourist Board's draft corporate plan. Did a discussion take place at the meeting on how we could work better with our counterparts in the Irish Republic to attract more visitors from the South to Northern Ireland?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Some discussion took place on attracting visitors from nearby areas. The South of Ireland market is valuable and one that we would like increasingly to exploit.

The main discussion was about infrastructure and how we can best identify needs in that area. The Irish market is primarily the responsibility of the Northern Ireland Tourist Board, not Tourism Ireland Ltd; therefore, discussion was limited. However, that sector's importance has been recognised.

Mr Savage: I also welcome the Minister's statement, especially where she mentioned managing new and developing markets.

Does the Minister agree that Northern Ireland produces some of the best produce in the world, while, at the same time, adhering to the most stringent of quality standards? With that in mind, does she believe that Northern Ireland's agricultural wares are being marketed to the fullest potential? If not, how does the Minister feel that that can be improved?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: I thank the Member for his question. That issue was discussed at the meeting, and we were shown some of the —

The Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mr Durkan): You were there?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: Of course I was there. I think that the Member regrets not being there. We talked about developing opportunities, the quality of our produce and how it should be marketed.

12.30 pm

During the presentation, I noticed that the first item on a website directed at the French market examines the food and cuisine that we have to offer. Tourism Ireland recognises that we should boast about the quality of our produce, which can be used to attract people to visit. To tell the French about the standards and quality of our cuisine is nearly like selling snow to the Eskimos. It is a recognised and increasing part of the overall package to attract visitors and to enhance their experience while they are here.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an ráiteas a rinne sí. Táimid a coinneáil gnóthach ar maidin.

I thank the Minister for her statement. We are keeping her busy this morning.

Given the effects of the credit crunch, increasing oil prices and the generally worsening economic climate, will the Minister tell the House how Tourism Ireland's business plan intends to ensure that the tourism industry in Ireland remains competitive in the face of those growing pressures? Go raibh maith agat.

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: Tourism Ireland recognises that a more difficult climate exists in which to attract tourists. Although the situation is fairly difficult in 2008, it also accepts that that will become increasingly so in 2009 and 2010.

The business plan has estimated the 2007 visitor and revenue out-turn figures for North and South. A total of 7.739 million people visited the South, while 1.782 million people visited the North. That accounted for £2.643 billion in revenue to the South and £334 million to the North.

Tourism Ireland's business plan for 2008 has set ambitious targets for challenging global trading environments and increased global competitiveness, to which Mr Bradley referred. It acknowledges the considerable challenges that the new market will face in trying to influence a wide range of Asian markets. It is incumbent upon me to congratulate Tourism Ireland on recognising the importance of developing new markets and on the strategic approach that it is taking to achieve that.

Mr Neeson: As the Minister knows, the people of Ireland are an island race, which, over the centuries, has been dependent on the sea. Both the North and the South have a rich maritime heritage, including shipbuilding, emigration, and so forth. Will the Minister agree that an opportunity exists for North/South co-operation to promote maritime heritage as a tourism package?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: I agree that the potential exists. At the meeting we did not go into that level of detail so I do not have any specific information. However, certain aspects, such as the Titanic Quarter, are being examined. That is a strong base on which to attract visitors.

Mr Newton: I also welcome the Minister's statement. She will recognise the huge potential of the many festivals and cultural events that the Loyal Orders organise and the long and proud history of such events. Will the Minister outline the discussions that took place on maximising the potential of those events and confirm how the strategy is being evolved and developed?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: The Executive have set ambitious targets for increased visitor numbers and revenue. To achieve those we must identify all those who might be attracted to visit the region. As we move closer to lasting political and social stability, there should be less reluctance to expose aspects of the recent past that might be considered sensitive or controversial. Indeed, it must be hoped that as community tensions diminish our international image will further improve. That should create an opportunity to promote the diversity of tourism opportunities.

Although there are good reasons to promote cultural and political tourism, it must be done within a framework of principles that enjoy widespread acceptance. The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment is developing proposals for such a policy framework.

The entire issue of cultural tourism should be promoted and used. At the meeting, I made the point that, every day, visitors flock to take photographs of the murals at the bottom of the Falls Road. People come here to see what our past is all about, and we should not try to hide it. We welcome the fact that people come here with an interest in political tourism

because it gets them here in the first place. They can then see what else we have to offer. Political tourism is an important part of the strategy that is being developed by DETI.

Mrs M Bradley: What is the Minister doing to promote agritourism, particularly in the context of the restrictive planning regime in the countryside? Will she guarantee that the revised PPS 14 will support agritourism businesses?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: Although PPS 14 was not discussed at the meeting, the potential development opportunities in my Department's rural development programme were discussed. I talked about some of the projects — such as self-catering cottages — that were funded by my Department. Rural areas have good tourism projects, which we want to be highlighted and promoted.

I also discussed the benefits of natural-resource tourism and the fact that the forestry sector is in my portfolio. There is the potential for us to consider other partnerships that create more natural-resource tourism and attract more visitors here. It dovetails nicely with the work that the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and I are involved in — maximising the potential for tourism right across the Six Counties and in rural areas.

Mr Beggs: The Minister mentioned that the increased economic uncertainty in some key overseas markets was discussed. First, were the effects of fuel surcharges, particularly on long-haul flights, discussed? Secondly, was there any discussion about the importance of our near-at-hand market — that is, tourists from England, Scotland and Wales?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: The answer to both those questions is yes. Tourism Ireland noted the increasing importance of new and developing markets. We are not unique in experiencing fuel surcharges and similar issues; those are global phenomena that affect tourism markets across the world.

The fact that Tourism Ireland plans to open a new hub office indicates that it is considering new markets, because older markets that we relied on in the past — for example, the US market — are no longer as stable and cannot be relied on. The infrastructure must be in place to encourage people from other parts of the world to visit. Tourism Ireland is trying to influence visits to the island of Ireland in a challenging global environment. In such times, we agreed that it is all the more important to adjust the emphasis on target markets while maintaining a substantive presence in our traditional markets.

The Member specifically referred to tourism from Britain. It is recognised that that British market is important for our tourism potential. During the first

half of 2008, Tourism Ireland invested more than £7 million in a wide-ranging marketing programme. The budget for 2008-09 and beyond includes provision for increased effort in the British market. It is recognised that it is important to encourage our nearby neighbours to visit. Numerous significant marketing campaigns have taken place in Britain to attract visitors to the island of Ireland.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE BUSINESS

Diseases of Animals Bill

First Stage

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew): I beg to introduce the Diseases of Animals Bill [NIA 22/07], which is a Bill to amend the Diseases of Animals (Northern Ireland) Order 1981, including provision for preventing the spread of disease; and for connected purposes.

Bill passed First Stage and ordered to be printed.

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

Public Authorities (Reform) Bill

Second Stage

The junior Minister (Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister) (Mr G Kelly): I beg to move

That the Second Stage of the Public Authorities (Reform) Bill [NIA 19/07] be agreed.

Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle, the Bill contains provisions relating to certain public bodies that are the responsibility of several Departments, but it has been co-ordinated and introduced on behalf of the Executive by the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister. The Bill arises, in the main, from proposals for change to several small public bodies as a result of the review of public administration. It abolishes the Fisheries Conservancy Board (FCB) and provides for the transfer of its functions to the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL). It also abolishes the Disability Living Allowance Advisory Board for Northern Ireland, following which arrangements will be made by the Department for Work and Pensions, through separate legislation, to extend the remit of the equivalent board in Britain to cover our interests.

In addition to those provisions, the Bill repeals primary legislation that is no longer required following the dissolution of the Pig Production Development Committee, Enterprise Ulster and Laganside Corporation. The dissolution of those bodies has already been effected by separate subordinate legislation introduced by the relevant Departments.

As we will no doubt hear shortly from its Chairman, the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister was briefed on the contents of the Bill prior to its introduction, and it consulted all the other departmental Committees in view of the cross-cutting nature of the Bill. I am grateful to all the Committees involved for their consideration of the content of the Bill and look forward to further engagement during the formal Committee Stage.

I will explain in more detail the rationale behind the provisions that will effect the abolition of the Fisheries Conservancy Board and the Disability Living Allowance Advisory Board.

The Fisheries Conservancy Board is an executive non-departmental public body of the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure. It is responsible for the conservation and protection of the salmon and inland fisheries, other than those that fall within the responsibility of the Loughs Agency of the Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission. In 2002, a review of the Fisheries Conservancy Board concluded that, while there was a continuing need for the functions of the board, there should be radical change in

the means of delivering them. The report recommended that the functions of the board and those of the inland fisheries branch of the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure should be combined into one unit. That recommendation was confirmed as part of the review of public administration in 2006 and endorsed following the restoration of devolution by the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure.

The Fisheries Conservancy Board was set up to be financially self-sufficient and to derive an income from the sale of fishing licences and agency work. However, now that the board can operate only with substantial Government funding, the Assembly has already considered its future, debating a motion calling on the Executive to abolish the Fisheries Conservancy Board and transfer its responsibilities to the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure as a matter of urgency. Members considered that the board was not fulfilling its main role of fisheries protection and was falling short of its other responsibilities. In response, the then Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure explained that, although his Department had taken steps to support the operational activities of the board, he hoped that Members would facilitate the passage of the Public Authorities (Reform) Bill through the Assembly to allow a timely transfer of the board's functions to the Department.

The Bill will enable the Fisheries Conservancy Board's resources and expertise to be incorporated into the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure. Organisational restructuring has been planned, resource needs have been assessed, and bids have been made to provide for a more integrated and strategic conservation and protection service. The basis for the service will remain the statutory remit outlined in the relevant legislation. In due course, policy and strategy will be reviewed in light of priorities and emerging best practices in fisheries management to ensure that the service is consistent with the needs of the public.

The Disability Living Allowance Advisory Board provides advice to the Department for Social Development (DSD) as required on disability living allowance and attendance allowance matters. The board does not have any staff, assets or executive functions; its members are paid fees and expenses for attendance at board meetings, and the Department for Social Development provides the accommodation and secretarial support.

The total cost to the Department is estimated at approximately £40,000 to £50,000 per annum.

There is a statutory requirement for the board, which meets four times a year, to include members with prescribed medical and professional knowledge, a carer, and people who are themselves disabled. In practice, it has proved very difficult to fill some of the vacancies on the board that require medical and

professional expertise so that the statutory requirements can be met. In addition, the board's functions here correspond to those of the Disability Living Allowance Advisory Board in Britain, which currently advises the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions.

Given the policy of maintaining parity in social security matters, there is merit in consistent advice from a single, authoritative, source being provided to both the Department for Social Development here, and the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions. A single board will also bring the provision of advice in that area into line with the Social Security Advisory Committee, and the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council, which provide advice in both jurisdictions. It has therefore been agreed with the Department for Work and Pensions that the remit of the Disability Living Allowance Advisory Board in Britain may be extended here, thus establishing a single board that will also advise the Department for Social Development. Moreover, it has been agreed that the new board will have at least one member from here, to provide a local perspective, and to ensure that our interests are represented. Again, that will mirror the arrangements of the Social Security Advisory Committee.

The Bill will streamline the delivery of functions currently undertaken by the Fisheries Conservancy Board and the advisory board. Furthermore, it will contribute — albeit in a modest way — to the reduction of the number of public bodies currently in operation here, and I am sure that that will be welcomed by Members. I commend the Bill to the House.

12.45 pm

Mr Molloy: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. With regard to the general theme of the Bill, it is very important to get this statute in place, and it is hoped that it will remove more quangos. However, I have concerns about how we are to ensure that there is some local input to the Disability Living Allowance Advisory Board. Can the Minister reassure the House that there will be local input and accessibility to the advisory board, particularly to deal with issues involving poverty and stress-related illnesses? In England, Scotland and Wales back-up support is in place, whereas that support is not in place here. Decisions in relation to disability living allowance (DLA) therefore may be taken that, although taking circumstances into account, do not take into account that lack of back-up support. Can the Minister reassure the House that that issue will be considered, and that there will be local input to ensure that local circumstances are taken into account when decisions are made regarding DLA? My understanding is that, currently, many such decisions are taken at a distance from local offices.

Mr B McCrea: Members will note my pink tie and pink badge, which, I notice, are sported by other

Members as well. The issue of breast cancer is something that must be addressed, and we must all support the fight against it.

I welcome the Bill, and recognise it as playing a vital role in reforming and streamlining numerous Departments, by transferring the functions of some public bodies, and dissolving others. I strongly welcome the transfer of the functions of the Fisheries Conservancy Board to the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure. That will generate substantial savings to central Government, departmental payments to the board for services received, and grant-in-aid will no longer apply. I am pleased that the Ulster Unionist Party's call for this move has been heeded. Such a shift will benefit not only Government, but anglers and conservation groups alike, who, over the years, have had continued problems with the Fisheries Conservancy Board.

Angling is a major sport in Northern Ireland that, unfortunately, has been repetitively hit by pollution incidents and mismanagement. This move will greatly improve the conservation of our inland fish stocks, and the health of our rivers.

The Bill makes further provision for the dissolution of the Liganside Corporation, and repeals further primary legislation. It is essentially a tidying-up mechanism. Previous provision has been made for the dissolution of the corporation, as it has achieved its statutory duty.

I congratulate all the people who worked for and with the corporation, which carried out excellent work during the past 15 years to transform Belfast's riverside. Sometimes, people take that for granted, but the improvements that have been made during the past 15 years have been nothing short of remarkable.

Belfast's waterfront is now unrecognisable. Its transformation has been a catalyst for the regeneration of the entire city and the new Titanic Quarter development. The Liganside Corporation is an excellent example of what can be achieved. A similar model can and must be introduced for the redevelopment of the Maze site, which is in my constituency. Members are aware that the Maze project currently faces some difficulties. Such a scheme could be introduced for the redevelopment of the entire site, not just for the proposed stadium. It is of paramount importance that, at a time when the Assembly has received criticism from Westminster on its handling of the Maze project, it shows that it can deliver. If the Assembly does not prove that it is competent in handling valuable assets, the Westminster Government will reject any further demand for assets. Unfortunately, they would be right to make such a rejection.

Mr Speaker: Order. It is important that the Member's remarks stick to the Bill's contents and remit. They have gone slightly beyond that.

Mr B McCrea: Thank you, Mr Speaker, for your direction. Of course, I will try to keep to that. I will conclude my remarks by pointing out that the Bill makes further provision for the abolishment of the Disability Living Allowance Advisory Board. That will bring Northern Ireland into line with the rest of the UK. My party supports the Bill's provision for the winding up of the pig production development committee. It also makes further provision for the dissolution of Enterprise Ulster. The Ulster Unionist Party welcomes those moves and supports the Bill.

Mrs M Bradley: Perhaps the Minister will inform the House how much money will be saved to the public purse by the reduction in the number of quangos.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I welcome the transfer of the Fisheries Conservancy Board's functions to the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure. That said, I want simply to put on record concerns that the FCB brought to the attention of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure.

There is concern about the criminal proceedings involving fish kills that will not have reached conclusion, and about whether cases that involve civil claims will be resolved. There is also concern about the potential loss of the considerable expertise in fishing legislation that solicitors' firms have built up when, after a prosecution file has been prepared by FCB, alleged fisheries offences are prosecuted through the court, and the lack of knowledge about whether the Department will continue to undertake functions such as the provision of a bailiffing service and support to angling clubs in the training of private-water bailiffs.

Those are some of the concerns that were raised by the FCB to the Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee. I want to put them on record and to support comments that were made earlier in the debate by my colleague Mr Molloy.

Dr Farry: Although I broadly welcome the Bill, I want to raise a few points and questions from the Alliance Party's perspective. There is concern about the delay in the process. This is yet another Bill that has emerged from decisions that relate to the review of public administration (RPA), which were announced in autumn 2005 with respect to health and education, and in March 2006 with respect to a list of various quangos and boards. Similarly, there is concern about the Bill's breadth as regards that list. I appreciate that, at that time, the Secretary of State indicated that 81 boards and quangos were under consideration. Certain changes, such as those that were made to Land and Property Services (LPS) and the Driver and Vehicle Agency, have already come into effect. There are questions about whether

OFMDFM and, indeed, all of the Executive have been comprehensive in their consideration of the entire list.

It would be useful if the junior Minister were able to set out the work that still needs to be done in following up on that decision or whether the Executive have taken different views from those that were inherited from the Secretary of State.

I cannot resist making the point that, in that statement, the Secretary of State looked forward to the creation of an independent environmental protection agency. He saw that as being the inevitable outcome of the review of environmental governance that was being established. It is worth noting formally that that is not part of the Bill.

The Bill proposes a UK-wide approach to DLA. The Alliance Party supports that, but it is important that the House is clear that to support the Bill will further entrench parity in social security provision on a UK-wide basis. At times, comments have been made from the Floor of the House about trying to do things differently with regard to social security. It is important that, as a body, we talk through and resolve exactly what we want to do on that important issue.

For my part, parity has been an important aspect of social security provision across the United Kingdom since the late 1940s. Social security is formally devolved to the Assembly, but, given our society's relevant dependency and the number of people who receive benefits, it is in the interests of the people of Northern Ireland not only to retain but to further entrench the principle of parity. It is important that the parties, particularly those on the Executive, take a collective view on where we are heading on the issue of parity and that we do not continue to send out mixed messages. I am sure that the Minister for Social Development will concur with that.

Undoubtedly, the Committee will have detailed comments to make, which I look forward to hearing. The Alliance Party is broadly supportive of the legislation, but we note that it is an extremely limited piece of legislation that has been brought forward after considerable delay. We are not sure what the justification for that delay has been.

Mr Dallat: I too welcome the Bill. I am sure that the Minister will accept that angling is a critical part of the developing tourism industry. Has the enormous power that has been held by absentee landlords since 1604 been addressed? Will that be a critical element in the development of tourism and angling in the future?

The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (Mrs Long): As the Chairman of the Committee is unable to be present, I respond to the Second Stage of the Public Authorities (Reform) Bill on behalf of the Committee.

On 12 March 2008, the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister was briefed by OFMDFM on the proposals for the draft Public Authorities (Reform) Bill. The proposals for the Bill had been subject to public consultation in January 2007. It was originally proposed that the Bill would make changes to a small number of public bodies, either through dissolution or a transfer of functions, and that it would remove statutory nomination and consultation rights from several public bodies.

Following public consultation, the scope of the Bill was significantly reduced. In particular, a decision was made to retain the Housing Council and to leave provisions for statutory nominations as they are. The Bill, as introduced, simply seeks to transfer the functions of the Fisheries Conservancy Board to the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure and to abolish the Disability Living Allowance Advisory Board for Northern Ireland, with its functions being delivered by a UK-wide disability living allowance advisory board. The Bill also includes several repeals of primary legislation, which relate to organisations that have already been abolished, such as Enterprise Ulster, the pig production development committee and Laganside Corporation.

At the Committee meeting on 12 March, members raised several issues with officials from OFMDFM. In particular, concern was expressed at the limited progress that has been made to reduce the number of quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisations (quangos) in Northern Ireland. The original RPA proposals indicated that the number of quangos would be reduced from 81 to 53. However, on 31 March 2008, the Committee was advised that a total of eight decisions to abolish quangos had been reversed and that decisions are pending on the abolition of another 10 quangos.

The Committee agreed to write to the other Statutory Committees to seek their views on the draft Bill.

The Committee received a response from the Committee for Social Development about the abolition of the Disability Living Allowance Advisory Board for Northern Ireland. The response advised that the Committee for Social Development was not opposed to the board's abolition; however, the Committee wished to highlight its need to continue to receive quality and timely independent expert advice about disability living allowance and attendance allowance matters under the proposed new arrangements.

1.00 pm

The Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development requested that the Committee for the Office of First Minister and deputy First Minister seek to have provisions included in the Bill to abolish the Agricultural Wages Board.

The Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister considered those responses together with information from OFMDFM on 23 April, 14 May and 18 June 2008. It noted the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development's views and forwarded them to the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister. Furthermore, the Committee sought information about the matters that it intends to explore during the Bill's Committee Stage.

In particular, the Committee is seeking assurances that specific and appropriate mechanisms are in place to ensure that the UK-wide Disability Living Allowance Advisory Board is fully aware of the Northern Ireland perspective when it develops advice. The Committee will work with the Committee for Social Development to ensure that the interests of people in Northern Ireland who are in receipt of disability living allowance are fully protected. Furthermore, in light of the decision to retain the Housing Council, the Committee looks forward to receiving details of the more challenging remit that is to be set for it.

The Committee has ongoing concerns about matters that are relevant to, but not directly addressed by, the Bill, and it will pursue those matters with OFMDFM. We are still some way from delivering the reduced number of quangos that was proposed in the review of public administration. Therefore, the Committee has requested details of the cost-benefit analysis that informed the decision to retain quangos that were previously identified for abolition, and, as part of its role to scrutinise the implementation of the review of public administration, the Committee will continue to monitor progress towards streamlining decision making and improving accountability.

The Bill is relatively short and has limited scope, and the Committee has no objections to it passing Second Stage. However, the Bill contains some contentious areas and does not address others, and I hope that the Committee will be able to resolve those matters during the Committee Stage of the Bill.

The junior Minister (Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister) (Mr G Kelly): Go raibh maith agat arís, a Cheann Comhairle. I am grateful for Members' contributions to the debate. Although the Bill is at an early stage, the opinions expressed have been valuable and informative. I shall now attempt to address the points that were raised in the debate; however, if I miss any, I will write to the relevant Members.

In my introductory comments about the benefits of abolishing the Fisheries Conservancy Board, I referred to concerns about the services that it provides and its financial position. The board's abolition will create opportunities to reorganise the conservation and protection of inland fisheries, which, as I also said, the Assembly previously supported.

After transferring functions, policy responsibility and former Fisheries Conservancy Board enforcement personnel will be under a single management system, which will result in a more integrated and strategic conservation and protection service. Such rationalisation will enable better utilisation of Fisheries Conservancy Board and Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure networks, intelligence and contacts.

Furthermore, transferring functions will provide an opportunity to streamline regulatory and decision-making processes, and utilising, when necessary, core departmental operational staff will offer greater flexibility in the provision of on-the-ground resources. Given that the Department already has regional out-stations and resources, work will also be able to be better organised regionally.

Consideration has been given to stakeholder representation after the transfer of Fisheries Conservancy Board functions to the Department. Following the issue of the public consultation document in December 2007, about establishing a stakeholder forum, a panel has been set up to analyse responses.

In the interim, when required, the Department will continue to assist the Fisheries Conservancy Board both on the ground and in filling key vacancies within the organisation. The Department will monitor the board through monthly meetings and by representation on the board and its executive committee.

Funding has been secured to ensure that the Fisheries Conservancy Board remains operational until it is abolished. In all the circumstances that I outlined, we are confident that the correct course of action is being taken.

As I mentioned earlier, the proposed changes to the delivery of the functions of the Disability Living Allowance Advisory Board will bring that area into line with the other two statutory advisory bodies that exist in the field of social security: the Social Security Advisory Committee and the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council. Those bodies advise both the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions and the Department for Social Development.

The changes will also go some way towards further reducing the number of quangos — and several Members raised that point — while ensuring that the Department for Social Development continues to have access to expert independent advice on disability living allowance and attendance allowance. There is no evidence that the Social Security Advisory Committee or the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council have failed to consider the needs of people here. We believe that there is no reason to suppose that a Disability Living Allowance Advisory Board with a remit to cover our interests will fail to address any particular local needs or circumstances.

Francie Molloy mentioned the loss of local input. As I said, both the Social Security Advisory Committee and the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council operate throughout Britain and Ireland already, and they do so very successfully. Les Allamby, director of the Law Centre (NI), is the Northern Ireland representative on the Social Security Advisory Committee, and he plays a very active role in the committee's work. We are considering how best the North can be represented when DLAAB takes on its new role. The issue of individual cases was mentioned, but board members do not consider individual cases in these circumstances.

Mary Bradley asked about the cost-benefit analysis, which is an issue that the OFMDFM Committee raised recently. The relevant information on that is being gathered from lead Departments, but that process will take time. However, we will endeavour to provide the Committee — and, indeed, Mrs Bradley — with that information by the end of June. John Dallat mentioned absentee landlords, but the Bill, which is a parity piece of legislation, does not address that issue specifically.

The Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure will continue to promote angling through its public angling estate and will work for the improvement and development of angling in general.

Several Members mentioned quangos. Stephen Farry resisted the temptation to say anything about quangos, so I will resist saying anything about quangos and the Alliance Party. However, the OFMDFM Committee's interest in the wider issue of reducing the number of quangos in general is welcome. OFMDFM officials are working to provide the Committee with the information that it has requested in order that it may consider the matter fully. However, I suggest that the purpose of today's debate is to consider the general principles of the Bill, rather than to speculate on what might have been included in it. In any case, most of the bodies for which earlier decisions to abolish or transfer functions were reversed by Ministers would not have been included in the Public Authorities (Reform) Bill. The Bill's scope did not extend to bodies where functions were to be transferred to local councils after devolution. Only the decision to retain the Housing Council affected the provisions of the original Bill.

Naomi Long mentioned the Agricultural Wages Board, and on behalf of the Committee, she also mentioned quangos. I am aware of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development's view that provisions that relate to the Agricultural Wages Board might be included in the Bill.

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development has not requested the inclusion of such provisions. Furthermore, it is not the role of the Office of the First Minister and the deputy First Minister to sponsor the

Bill on behalf of the Executive or to introduce such provisions unilaterally without the Minister's agreement.

In response to Stephen Farry and Naomi Long; each Minister has a responsibility to review, departmentally, the number of quangos. The Department welcomes the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and the deputy First Minister's interest in reducing the number of quangos. We will consider that suggestion.

I think that I have answered all questions; however, if I have overlooked any, I assure Members that I will respond to them later. I thank Members for their contributions to the debate on the Public Authorities (Reform) Bill and for their questions. I am confident that the Bill will provide greater effectiveness in the delivery of salmon and inland fisheries and of disability living allowance and attendance allowance advisory functions. The Executive are conducting the most wide-ranging reform of public services for a generation. A commitment to world-class public services that meet the needs of the economy and wider society is at the heart of that reform programme. The Bill's main provisions are consistent with the Executive's commitment to the delivery of more efficient and effective public services. I commend the Bill.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Second Stage of the Public Authorities (Reform) Bill [NIA 19/07] be agreed.

Charities Bill

Final Stage

The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie): I beg to move

That the Charities Bill [NIA 9/07] do now pass.

I am pleased that this important Bill has reached its Final Stage. I introduced it to the Assembly in December 2007, and although its passage has been lengthy and time-consuming it has been productive. Today, I want to reiterate the main purpose, aims and objectives of the Charities Bill and thank the Committee for Social Development and other Members for their careful and detailed scrutiny. Furthermore, I look forward to future implementation developments.

To date, much of the legislation's focus has been on the establishment of a proper regulatory framework for charities in Northern Ireland. That important step will keep us in line with developments in Great Britain and Ireland and help to ensure public confidence in charitable giving. However, it is equally important that we will be able to give proper recognition to the unique role and voluntary ethos of the charitable sector.

I want to establish a strong, accessible and supportive regulatory body in Northern Ireland. Although its main function will be to regulate and monitor charitable giving, it will also play a key role in the development of effective relationships and partnerships with those who serve the sector. The commission will be required to develop an ethos that promotes confidence in charitable giving, encourages sharing of best practice and, ultimately, helps to raise standards.

I have been pleased with the universal welcome that the Bill has received and for the cross-party support in the Committee for Social Development and in the House. However, despite the widespread acceptance of the principles of the legislation, there has been detailed and thorough scrutiny of the 186 clauses and nine schedules. I thank the former Chairperson and members of the Committee for Social Development for their extensive and considered evidence taking, their useful suggestions for amendments and for their comprehensive report, which was published on 13 May 2008.

I am confident that the process has produced better legislation and that it will lead to appropriate regulation for charities in Northern Ireland. I particularly welcome the engagement with faith-based charities and ethnic minority groups; their input was invaluable, and I did not hesitate to propose amendments to the Bill where that was the right thing to do.

1.15 pm

During the Bill's Consideration Stage on 3 June, I referred to the progress of the Bill as evidence that

local democracy was working. I reiterate that message today. The passage of the Charities Bill and other primary legislation shows that Assembly Members and others can influence the decision-making process. It also shows that politicians listen and take action.

The Bill, as it stands to be voted on by the Assembly, shows how a Minister and a Committee, working together with the joint aim of achieving better legislation, can achieve very positive outcomes. I will continue to work with the Committee as we make proposals for the implementation of the Charities Bill and the consequent regulations.

I will now proceed with the public appointment process for the new charity commissioners. I hope to be in a position to announce the names of the successful candidates by the end of October, and I would like the commission to be up and running by the end of the year. I have given a public commitment to locate the body outside the greater Belfast area. The decentralisation of public-sector jobs can make a significant contribution to improving the regional economic balance across the North. I hope to make a decision on the commission's location in the near future. It will take some time to get the necessary subordinate legislation and other mechanisms in place, but I trust that we can all look forward to better regulation of local charities and improved public confidence in charitable giving. I commend the Charities Bill to the House.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development (Mr Simpson): The Charities Bill comprises 186 clauses and nine schedules. It has been welcomed by everybody, including, most importantly, those in the voluntary and community sector. It creates a modern legal framework to support and encourage a vibrant and diverse third sector, and it provides robust controls around registration, regulation and supervision.

The Bill presents a perfect opportunity for the Assembly to give legislative recognition to the important role that charities play in Northern Ireland. Without the operation of charities, we would have a very different kind of civil society. We are indebted to charities for providing vital services, strengthening communities and representing the marginalised people in our society. On behalf of the Social Development Committee, I support the motion.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. As has been said, the Charities Bill is a long and complex piece of legislation containing 186 clauses and nine schedules. I thank the departmental officials who went through the Bill clause by clause and facilitated the Committee in understanding its complexities.

The Bill will provide a definition of "charity" and "charitable purpose", and it will establish a charity commission and a charity tribunal. It will also create a

register of charities and deal with the regulation of charities and public charitable collections.

Initially, there was a lot of discussion around the issues of designation of religious charities, in relation to the number of years that they have been established and to the number of members. Evidence was received from some smaller Churches, and the amendments made seem to have resolved the situation and satisfied the majority of people.

As has been said, evidence was also taken from members of the voluntary sector. There was a lot of discussion around the make-up of the commission. The voluntary sector felt that the commission should be a small body with a chief and deputy chief commissioner, and possibly a staff of five. That was considered adequate, and the consensus was that if the commission's staff continued to grow unchecked in the future, its effectiveness would be negated.

However, it has been accepted that staffing levels must be adequate in order to deal with the workload. The inclusion of one or two legally qualified persons on the commission is acceptable in the short term because of the need to interpret the complexities of the legislation.

The charities here have recognised that anything that boosts public confidence in them is important; the fact that charities will have to submit accounts for scrutiny will reassure the public. Overall, the Charities Bill can be considered a welcome piece of legislation. Go raibh míle maith agat.

Mr Dallat: Will the Minister tell the House how the charity commission will be staffed?

Ms Lo: I wish to add my thanks to the departmental staff and the Committee staff. In particular, I thank the Minister for Social Development for her open-mindedness and her willingness to listen to representations from rural communities as well as ethnic minority communities on the issue of designated religious status. The staff were very patient with the Committee and helped us to plough through our scrutiny of the 186 clauses of the Bill.

The voluntary sector and the charities certainly welcome this long-awaited legislation, which has been applicable in other parts of the UK. The charities see it as a positive Government intervention. We all now look forward to the establishment of the charity commission, and we hope that the Department will appoint a body of people with the appropriate knowledge and experience of charities in Northern Ireland, and that it will be given the proper resources to meet its objectives and carry out its many functions.

The Committee believes that it is important at the outset to have an awareness-raising campaign to help charitable bodies to obtain the proper advice and

information on becoming established in Northern Ireland. Perhaps the Minister will also comment on the timescale for the establishment of the charity commission.

Mrs M Bradley: I welcome this legislation, and congratulate the Minister on the volume of legislation that she has laid before the House. Has the Minister any thoughts on where the charity commission will be located?

The Minister for Social Development: First, I wish to thank the Chairperson of the Social Development Committee and other Committee members, namely, Mr Brady, Ms Lo, Mr Dallat and Mrs Bradley, for their contributions to the debate. The progress of the Bill has been greatly assisted by constructive input in the House and in the Committee.

I look forward to working with all Members as we introduce the necessary Orders and regulations to enact the legislation. I am also committed to full consultation with the charity sector on important issues, such as the public benefit test and the proposals for the regulation of charity fund-raising. It is only by working together that we can ensure that a system is put in place that meets the requirements of regulators, donors and charities alike.

I wish to take the opportunity to address the issues that have been raised in the debate. Mr Brady and Mr Dallat asked about staffing, and I wish to reassure them about that. The charity commission will have a board comprising one chief charity commissioner, one deputy chief charity commissioner and three to five charity commissioners.

I have already approved the process for those public appointments, which will be regulated by the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments for Northern Ireland. I intend the posts to be publicly advertised in early July and to have commissioners in place by the end of October. The charity commission will have up to 16 staff, including a chief executive, based on comparison with the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator.

Mr Brady raised the issue of staff numbers. Although I have said that there will be 16 staff, I will review staff numbers as and when required. If more staff are required, I will consider further recruitment.

I have already referred to the location of the charity commission, but I shall restate my position. My officials have been examining accommodation options for the commission. They have visited premises throughout Northern Ireland, and I hope to make a decision on the location shortly. I will consider a range of factors, including value for money and accessibility.

Members will be aware that I met Sir George Bain on 12 June, and I put forward my views on the

potential for decentralising public-sector jobs, because that can make a significant contribution to improving the regional economic balance across the North of Ireland. I understand that Sir George will publish the outcome of his review later this year. However, I have stated publicly that I intend to locate the commission's office and its jobs outside the greater Belfast area in order to afford greater accessibility to people, address the current regional economic imbalance and provide the opportunity for other areas to become hubs, as the regional development strategy promised.

The charity commission will be responsible for appointing its own staff, and the legislation provides for staff to be directly recruited or appointed through secondment. As I mentioned, there will be about 16 staff members.

Ms Lo asked about the timescale. I hope to decide quickly on the charity commission's location and, when the Bill receives Royal Assent, to advertise publicly for potential commissioners. I hope to fully implement the appointment process, in accordance with the appropriate guidelines for public appointments, by this autumn and to have the commission up and running by the end of this year.

In conclusion, I thank all Members who debated the Bill, whether in Committee or in the House, for their substantial contributions and for their considered advice on, and attitude towards, this new departure for charities in Northern Ireland. That attitude clearly demonstrates that Government and local democracy are working, and it shows what can be achieved when a Minister and Committee — in this case the Committee for Social Development — work together for the common good of the people of Northern Ireland.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Charities Bill [NIA 9/07] do now pass.

Draft Children and Young Persons (Sale of Tobacco etc.) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2008

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

That the Draft Children and Young Persons (Sale of Tobacco etc.) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2008 be approved.

I seek the Assembly's approval to introduce the aforementioned statutory rule. Subject to the Assembly's approval, that rule will substitute "aged 18" for "aged 16" in the Health and Personal Social Services (Northern Ireland) Order 1978 and in the Children and Young Persons (Protection from Tobacco) (Northern Ireland) Order 1991.

The rule's main purpose is to make it illegal to sell tobacco products to anyone aged under 18, as opposed to under 16, which is the present limit. It will also require the replacement of existing warning statements in retail premises and on tobacco vending machines in order to reflect the change in the law.

1.30 pm

My Department will fund replacement signage. That measure will bring Northern Ireland into line with the rest of the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland on age of sale, with effect from 1 September this year.

Smoking is well recognised as the single greatest cause of premature death and avoidable illness in Northern Ireland, claiming some 2,300 lives here each year. It is a major risk factor in coronary heart disease, strokes, cancer and other diseases of the circulatory system, which kill two in every five men and women here. Those diseases are also leading causes of disability. A lifetime non-smoker is 60% less likely than a current smoker to have coronary heart disease and 30% less likely to suffer a stroke. Smoking is also a major cause of health inequalities and is the principal cause of the gap in life expectancy between rich and poor. For example, instances of lung cancer are 71% higher in deprived areas.

Although much work remains to be done, we are having some success in reducing adult smoking prevalence, which is currently 25% — the lowest figure since the continuous household survey began in 1983. Significantly, 79% of adult smokers in Northern Ireland took up the habit in their teens, and 11% of children aged between 11 and 15 here are regular smokers. If we are to achieve a significant reduction in smoking prevalence, we must deter young people from taking up the habit. That is why I recently agreed the inclusion of Northern Ireland in a Department of Health-led public-consultation exercise on the future of tobacco control. The consultation seeks views on a

range of issues that are likely to impact on children's smoking, including advertising at point of sale and access to tobacco-vending machines. I also intend to introduce proposals in due course that will impose sanctions on retailers who persist in selling tobacco to underage customers. That is important, because research in England found that 57% of children obtain their cigarettes from shops.

I have no doubt that controls already in place, such as smoke-free enclosed public places and workplaces, will have a positive impact on reducing smoking prevalence, especially among young people. My Department provided resources to facilitate the appointment of additional enforcement officers to maximise compliance with smoke-free legislation from April 2007. That funding is continuing and is linked to enhanced enforcement activity on underage sales. Our 'A Five Year Tobacco Action Plan 2003-2008' identifies children and young people as a key target group. That will remain an important element of the plan as my officials begin the review process, with the aim of rolling out the plan for a further five years. In developing the plan, my officials will continue to consult the statutory- and voluntary-sector agencies on how best to discourage young people from adopting the habit.

Members will be aware that I launched a 12-week consultation exercise on 29 October 2007 to help me to assess the public's view on the age of sale. I am pleased to say that the consultation elicited 90% support for increasing the legal age of sale to 18. Members will also recall that the Assembly debated that issue in November last year and strongly supported increasing the age of sale to 18. In that debate, I gave a commitment to bring to the Assembly any proposals to increase the age of sale. The motion fulfils that commitment, and I believe that I have the Assembly's support for increasing the age of sale of tobacco to 18.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Mrs I Robinson): The Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety is grateful to officials from the Department who briefed Members at a meeting on 17 April 2008 on the proposals. The Committee fully recognises that smoking is the greatest preventable cause of death and illness, and welcomes any measures that will help to discourage young people from starting to smoke in the first instance.

The Chief Medical Officer's annual report, which was published just last week, showed that almost 80% of adult smokers started smoking in their teens and that an alarming 11% of children aged 11 to 15 are already regular smokers.

The Committee also supported the introduction of the smoking ban in public places last year. The draft regulations that are before the Assembly, which

propose to increase the age at which cigarettes may be sold legally from 16 to 18, were considered and agreed by the Committee at its meeting on 19 June. As the Minister explained, the aim of the draft regulations is to make it more difficult for young people to obtain cigarettes and to make the sale and availability of cigarettes among young people less culturally acceptable. I support the motion.

Mr B McCrea: I am vehemently anti-smoking — at any age. The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety explained the detrimental effect that smoking has on the lives of young and old people, and the rest of society. I realise that in making such a strong statement, there might be some concern about the 25% of people who do smoke. It is not my intention to criticise those people, but, as the Minister and the Committee Chairperson said, one must consider the age at which people start to smoke. Tobacco smoking is addictive, and many people start to smoke cigarettes when they are young.

Research carried out by the Health Promotion Agency revealed that 50% of children in forms 1 to 5 tried smoking cigarettes before the age of 13. The evidence also confirms that the younger children are when they first try smoking, the more likely they are to become regular tobacco users and the less likely they are to quit.

The Minister also stated that the number of deaths in Northern Ireland that are directly attributable to smoking is somewhere between 2,300 and other higher estimates. The most common age at which people start to smoke is 12 or 13; at that age, young people do not see themselves as real smokers but as social smokers. That is the age at which they should be offered some protection. Retailers also face the difficulty of trying to work out what age young people actually are.

The emphasis that is placed on alcohol consumption and the sale of alcohol to minors is astonishing, because tobacco is the one product that is guaranteed to kill, even if it is used in moderation. That is why the Assembly must be strong in trying to convey a message that zero tolerance will be exhibited against those who sell cigarettes to young folk.

I acknowledge the Minister's initiatives on this issue, but I hope that he will consider further measures. Perhaps, in his winding-up speech, he will comment on the sale of 10-packs of cigarettes — the purchase of which are prevalent among children — and retailers' practice of selling individual cigarettes to children on their way to school. There is a case for secret shoppers or some other initiative to stamp out such practices, because their impact on young people is so severe. I thank the Minister for introducing the proposal, and I support the motion.

Mr McCarthy: I support the motion, as have other Members. The statistics provided to the House by the Minister are horrendous, and they affect every member of society. Smoking is, undoubtedly, a killer, and our Government have come a long way in tackling the scourge. Cancer is a hellish disease, and, if we can prevent our young children from smoking, we will have achieved much.

The motion goes some way to putting tobacco products out of the reach of children, and I am sure that Members will support the Minister's proposal.

I take this opportunity to say that I support the next item on the Order Paper, which is also smoking related.

Mr Speaker: Order. We will deal with one issue at a time.

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I am grateful to the Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety, Iris Robinson, and other Members who participated in the debate for their comments and support. Basil McCrea mentioned the availability of 10-packs of cigarettes and the sale of individual cigarettes, and he asked how the Department intended to stamp out such practices.

We are doing that through a mixture of public information, education and enforcement: I am dealing with enforcement in consultation with colleagues in the rest of the UK, and I am looking to the next phase of the tobacco action plan, which is under review.

I recognise that raising the age of sale will not, by itself, solve the problem of children smoking; rather it will compliment improved enforcement activity and the ongoing prevention work that is being undertaken by agencies, including health boards and trusts, the Health Promotion Agency, the education sector and the Ulster Cancer Foundation. It also represents an important milestone in the construction of what we all hope will be a solid platform to help us to reach our long-term goal of a tobacco-free society in Northern Ireland.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Draft Children and Young Persons (Sale of Tobacco etc.) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2008 be approved.

Draft Smoke-Free (Exemption, Vehicles, Penalties and Discounted Amounts) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2008

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

That the Draft Smoke-Free (Exemption, Vehicles, Penalties and Discounted Amounts) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2008 be approved.

I am seeking the Assembly's approval to introduce the aforementioned statutory rule, which arises as a consequence of the previous motion. Subject to the Assembly's approval, the statutory rule will substitute the words "aged 18 years" for the words "aged 16 years" in the Smoke-Free (Exemptions, Vehicles, Penalties and Discounted Amounts) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2007. That means that under the smoke-free legislation, the existing provision whereby smoking may be permitted in a designated room in specified residential accommodation used by persons aged 16 years or over, will be amended to read "aged 18 years or over". I commend the motion to Members.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Mrs I Robinson): On 19 June, the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety considered the draft regulations and strongly supported the provisions. I support the motion.

Mr B McCrea: I want to bring to the attention of the Minister and Members the positive outcomes that have been achieved since the banning of smoking in public places of work. On Friday 30 May, I attended a meeting at which the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health reported that following the introduction of the smoking ban, there were significant improvements in air quality. Research by the Ulster Cancer Foundation found that the exposure of bar workers to second-hand smoke fell by 94%. In the home, and socially, exposure to second-hand smoke fell by two thirds.

Most importantly, the effects were felt by the people themselves — bar workers reported an astounding improvement in their health, with 33% reporting less eye irritation, runny noses, sore throats, coughs and other significant improvements in their health. I, therefore, commend the Minister for his action.

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I thank Mrs Robinson and Mr McCrea for their positive responses. As Mr McCrea said, there are already positive outcomes flowing from the legislation that we have put through, and I believe that that can be reinforced by the measures that we have agreed today.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Draft Smoke-Free (Exemption, Vehicles, Penalties and Discounted Amounts) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2008 be approved.

COMMITTEE BUSINESS

Statutory Committee Membership

Mr Speaker: As with similar motions, the motion on Statutory Committee membership will be treated as a business motion. Therefore, there will be no debate.

Resolved:

That Mr Ian Paisley Jnr replace Mr Mervyn Storey as a member of the Committee for Finance and Personnel. — [*Mr Weir.*]

1.45 pm

Mr Speaker: It is obvious that business in the House has moved on faster than some Members realise. I ask that Members take their ease for a few minutes.

Rising Energy Costs

Mr Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to two hours for this debate. The proposer of the motion will have 10 minutes to propose and 10 minutes for the winding-up speech. All other Members who wish to speak will have five minutes.

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

That this Assembly notes with concern that rising energy costs are hitting families in Northern Ireland harder than in the rest of the UK; and calls on the Executive to:

- (i) give further priority to measures to promote energy efficiency and combat fuel poverty;
- (ii) drive a coordinated energy policy to diversify our energy supplies, reduce our reliance on fossil fuels, increase competition in our energy market and harness the full potential of renewable energy;
- (iii) cooperate with other Governments, including through the British Irish Council, to develop a longer-term strategy for these islands, and;
- (iv) urge the UK Government to re-direct the windfall VAT revenue from higher energy bills to be used to mitigate the escalation of fuel poverty in Northern Ireland”.

I welcome the opportunity to debate rising energy costs. It is the first motion that the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment has tabled for debate. The Committee has received a substantial amount of evidence from a number of key stakeholders. It is unanimous in its concern that urgent steps must be taken by the Executive to address what is fast becoming a critical situation.

From evidence supplied to the Committee, it is obvious that the increase in energy prices is a complex issue that touches every family and business in Northern Ireland. Today’s debate is timely, given the escalation of energy costs and the news that senior energy industry insiders predict further increases of up to 40% this year. That, according to figures outlined in Westminster last week, could plunge an additional 1.6 million people across the UK into fuel poverty, and the Bank of England has warned consumers to brace themselves for:

“the most difficult economic challenge for two decades.”

As recently as last Thursday, the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) warned that oil prices could soar to as high as \$170 a barrel in the summer, bringing further misery to consumers and additional stress to businesses. In evidence to the Committee, the utility regulator warned that the spike in energy prices is not a temporary blip; the supply-and-demand and political factors that lie behind the crisis will continue in the long run.

Northern Ireland faces sharp increases in the wholesale prices of gas, oil, electricity and carbon.

Coal prices are also at record levels, partly influenced by the cold winter in China. Normally, China is a substantial exporter of coal, but it did not export enough last winter. In the medium to long term, other global factors must be considered, such as the emergence of massive new markets in China and India and the globalisation of gas prices. Liquefied natural gas will become the marginal unit, as it can be transported in a way that pipeline gas cannot. Politically, the EU is tightening its emission limits, and that, coupled with political uncertainty in the Middle East and Russia, is causing energy prices to reach boiling point.

The utility regulator assured the Committee that only genuine costs are passed on to consumers and that he will continue to bear down on monopoly costs. However, he warned that if Northern Ireland is to address the energy crisis and successfully combat fuel poverty, it must change its ways.

I do not wish to pre-empt Members from focusing on the effects of rising energy prices, it is equally important to talk about promoting energy efficiency as a means of combating fuel poverty, which is a bigger problem in Northern Ireland than in other regions of the UK, partly because of relatively low incomes and the higher cost of fuel. In 2006, some 34% of people here were deemed to be living in fuel poverty, and the Consumer Council has warned that the increase in fuel prices will cause that figure to rise sharply to over 40%.

The Committee acknowledges the work of the fuel poverty task force and its progress in identifying the fuel poor. Alarming, however, a recent Audit Office report on the warm homes scheme confirmed that 30% of the grants went to homes that were already energy efficient and to those who were at little risk of fuel poverty. The report went on to state that significant numbers of the fuel poor were being excluded from assistance, including the low paid and those who are eligible for, but do not claim, benefits. The Committee requests that the task force urgently examine the report's recommendations.

Another energy efficiency issue is that the Reconnect scheme that provided grants of up to 50% to householders to install renewable energy systems has ended, and the Committee urges the Executive to undertake an evaluation of that situation as a matter of urgency.

The Committee unanimously supports a co-ordinated energy policy. The challenge faces not only Northern Ireland but all people and Administrations throughout these islands, and a co-ordinated energy policy is required to diversify energy supplies, increase competition in the energy market and harness the full potential of renewable energy.

Northern Ireland's reliance on fossil fuels is of concern: 70% of consumers burn oil as their main source of heat. Northern Ireland uses more carbon-rich

fuels than anywhere else in the UK and its consumers are, therefore, more exposed to carbon costs than elsewhere in the UK or Ireland.

Importing fossil fuels presents its own risk. There is increased competition for energy resources in the face of growing global energy demand. Increasingly, reserves are concentrated in fewer, further away places and in markets that are neither transparent nor truly competitive. To ensure security of supply, a co-ordinated energy strategy is needed to maximise the economic production of our domestic energy sources, which, together with co-ordinated energy-saving measures, will greatly reduce our dependence on energy imports.

Only last week in Westminster, I attended an event that examined fuel poverty throughout the UK. There, a key player in the energy sector, speaking on UK policies, said that the strategy of having no strategy was not working and that the whole emphasis of public policy over the years, which amounted to reliance on market solutions, was not enough. Other, more active interventions and co-ordinating measures are needed. That is why the motion raises issues not just at a regional level but at a British-Irish level.

Increased competition in our energy market is vital. The Committee welcomes the utility regulator's efforts to address monopoly costs and his assurance that substantial costs have been removed from the gas network. However, we urge that measures be taken to encourage greater competition. Such measures are a necessary vehicle for maintaining efficiency incentives and ensuring that consumers benefit from any improvements further up the value chain.

More efficient use of the all-island gas infrastructure is urgently required. The acceleration of gas roll-out will help to drive out use of the most carbon-intensive fuels and reduce dependency on oil. Of all the fossil fuels, natural gas is the cleanest and most environmentally friendly. Compared with oil, it emits over 30% less carbon dioxide, and compared with coal, it emits over 50% less. Given those benefits, the Committee was concerned to hear from Firmus Energy of continued delays in connecting to the gas network in the public-sector estate and delays in releasing funds to complete the Northern Ireland Housing Executive's heating-replacement programme. We urge the Executive to consider that issue, given the significant contribution that gas can make to reducing Northern Ireland's CO₂ emissions.

In the longer term, most important may be the need to harness the full potential of renewable energy. However, great challenges lie ahead. In the west, the grid is weak and is not currently capable of receiving the large expansion of wind generation that is likely to be required. Our planning system is also a worry — it

will make it difficult to respond rapidly to change. There is only one interconnector with Great Britain, and only one other is planned. Even with two interconnectors, it is questionable that that will be sufficient to facilitate the use of Northern Ireland's large wind-energy resource.

To achieve all that, and in order to develop a longer-term energy strategy for these islands, it is crucial that greater co-operation with other Governments takes place. That should include co-operation through the British-Irish Council and North/South structures.

The Committee urges the Executive to challenge the UK Government to use the estimated £10.5 million of extra VAT revenue that is forthcoming as a result of rising fuel prices to help vulnerable households this winter. The Committee identified those moneys because it did not want the motion to demand that the Executive make more money available from their hard-pressed Budget, but to point the Executive in the direction of other revenues for which they could lobby. The word from the Treasury is that it is not interested in making that money available. However, the Treasury also recently insisted that it would not address or revise tax issues but, as a result of political pressure, it had to do so. Therefore, we urge the Executive to bring those issues directly to the Treasury.

Mr Hamilton: As the Chairman said in his opening remarks, this is a big issue. Individual Members take it seriously and the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment took it extremely seriously, as is evidenced by the mammoth amount of evidence that it took over the past few weeks.

Members have only to go to their constituencies and talk to folk to realise how important rising energy costs are to people's everyday lives.

The gravity of the problem is demonstrated by the fact that, in the height of summer — such as it is in Northern Ireland — we are discussing rising fuel costs. Had the debate occurred in a particularly bad, cold winter, we may have been able to see past the massive percentage increases that we have been experiencing. For example, the price of gas has increased by 28%, coal by 25%, electricity by 14%, and that, indeed, may increase further before the end of the year. The price of oil is at a record high. Those increases are bad at any time, but this time of year only accentuates the severity of the problem.

2.00 pm

The motion deals quite properly with the problem and suggests how it could be dealt with in the short and longer term. Similar to any such difficulty that creeps up and hits us like this, there are short-term problems that require short-term solutions. However, we should not be foolish enough not to consider the long-term measures that will be needed to overhaul our whole approach and attitude towards our energy supply.

Fuel poverty will be raised time and again during the debate. I represent Strangford, which most perceive to be a fairly well-off constituency. However, even in a constituency such as that there are, according to the most recent estimates, some 7,000 households living in fuel poverty. That is approximately one quarter of the total households in Strangford. Indeed, that figure can only rise, given what is happening more widely with the price of fuel.

I welcome the existence of an Executive subcommittee on fuel poverty. The Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment mentioned the Audit Office's criticisms of the warm homes scheme. Those criticisms aside, I am thankful that that scheme exists and that it has been able to alleviate some people's problems and take others out of fuel poverty. There is more good than bad in the scheme, and now that difficulties and issues have been identified, they can — and should — be overcome.

Although the motion does not specifically mention the winter fuel allowance, it has not risen in line with the rise in fuel costs. A windfall levy on VAT should be considered. The Government may argue that falling prices in the construction industry have resulted in their losing revenue in areas such as stamp duty. However, it is evident that there is potential to use the massive amount of VAT that is made on fuel of all kinds in order to help alleviate fuel poverty.

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

Longer-term solutions are also required, and we in Northern Ireland must play our part by taking a longer-term approach to rising fuel costs. As the Committee Chairperson said, the utility regulator, in a sobering evidence session before the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment, indicated that price rises will not slide away and return to normal, whatever that means. We will see such price rises time and again unless action is taken.

Opening the Northern Ireland market to competition would be a powerful tool, but in many respects, our energy market is too immature for that. However, the real potential lies with renewable forms of energy.

It is almost the set answer when discussing matters such as this to suggest that renewables are the future and the answer. However, that point is particularly important in Northern Ireland, not because renewables have the potential to ease some of our difficulties, but because of the potentially massive economic advantages that Northern Ireland has in renewables. Indeed, we could be the Saudi Arabia — so to speak — of wind power, and wave energy also has huge potential. I support the investment that is required to bring our electricity grid up to the standard that would allow it to deal with some of those renewables. We are still at a

low level, but it will take massive investment to do that. That investment is certainly required.

The motion calls for intergovernmental co-operation, which I support. We are a very small part of the world, and if we cannot solve the problem on our own, we will need to work with neighbouring Governments, our own Government in Westminster, and the European Union.

Mr McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I speak today in my capacity both as the Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel and as an individual MLA.

I welcome the Committee report and the debate, which is timely in the context of the spiralling energy costs that have exposed our heavy reliance on fossil fuels and highlighted the pressing issue of fuel poverty. The debate also intensifies the focus on climate change and sustainable development.

The issues that are encapsulated in the motion are cross-cutting at governmental and departmental levels. A not-so obvious but important example relates to building regulations, which were studied in detail by the Committee for Finance and Personnel, of which I am Chairperson. As part of its consideration of the Building Regulations (Amendment) Bill, the Committee published a report, which Members received during the past week. That report contains recommendations that apply to the themes of this debate, such as promoting energy efficiency and harnessing the potential of renewable energy.

While scrutinising the Bill, the Committee took evidence from stakeholders, including the Energy Saving Trust, Northern Ireland Environmental Link and the Sustainable Energy Association. Their evidence highlighted the immediate and longer-term challenges to the Executive that are posed by our reliance on fossil fuels. As well as climate change and sustainable development, those challenges include fuel poverty and cost-of-living increases, which all MLAs are addressing at constituency level.

In its evidence, Northern Ireland Environmental Link pointed out that energy use in buildings represented 81% of non-transport-related energy consumption, with oil the primary heating fuel. It emphasised the importance of diversifying sources of energy and of reducing energy consumption, particularly in the face of increased oil prices and issues of security of supply. It is worth noting that only 4% of our electricity comes from renewable sources. Less than 1% comes from indigenous renewables, to which Mr Hamilton referred.

The Committee for Finance and Personnel concluded that building regulations can play an important part in achieving increased renewable-energy targets. The Committee wants building regulations to be used to encourage the take-up of renewable energy technologies.

Incentives must be provided. It is imperative that the relevant industries respond to that demand.

The Committee has made proposals on how to stimulate demand for renewable-energy technologies. Those proposals include developing the capacity of the local renewables industry to support commercialisation.

The evidence also highlighted the critical role of planning policy in promoting renewable energy through, for example, granting development rights for small-scale renewable systems and for micro- and macro-generation schemes, such as community heat networks and larger-scale wind generation for new housing developments.

Economics and environmental concerns are forcing serious consideration of such issues. The Committee also considered evidence about how progress is being made on that matter, south of the border. Committee members welcomed the fact that local planning services were seriously considering those issues.

Bearing in mind how important it is to stimulate demand for renewables and to support the early-adopter market, the Committee called on the Finance Minister to work with his Executive colleagues to ensure that priority be given to funding in order to encourage the uptake and development of renewable-energy technologies.

In highlighting the relevance of the work of the Committee for Finance and Personnel to the matters under debate, I support the call for windfall VAT revenues from higher energy bills to be returned to the Assembly and Executive in order to mitigate fuel poverty. The Committee recently raised a range of measures that the Executive might consider in an effort to help to ease increases in the costs of living and the hardship imposed on many households by rising energy and fuel prices.

I support the motion and I look forward to hearing other contributions to the debate.

Mr Cree: It is not an exaggeration to say that Northern Ireland — indeed, the entire United Kingdom — is heading towards an energy crisis that will mean extreme hardship for the most vulnerable people and families this winter.

However, increasing energy prices, coupled with increases in the cost of food and consumer goods, is having a serious impact on all hard-working families, many of whom will be facing fuel poverty.

It has been estimated that average bills will have increased by 61% by the end of this year. That is an unprecedented increase that will have a crippling effect on many households, who will face stark and tough choices. Businesses, and even Government services, are also struggling with the increased costs. The problem is greater in Northern Ireland as we have

lower wages and higher energy costs than the rest of the United Kingdom.

It is vital that we take steps to reduce the outlay of the thousands of families and businesses that are struggling with energy costs. Historically, Northern Ireland has had a non-competitive energy market, so I applaud the steps taken towards creating a single electricity market by the previous Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and that Department. Equally, steps that have been taken to open up the natural-gas market should be applauded.

Although much of the groundwork for producing a competitive electricity market in Northern Ireland has been done, we must ensure that that work results in genuinely open competition that will give consumers more choice and make prices more economical. Currently, such competition does not exist. It is, therefore, vital that we continue to work with our British and Irish counterparts to ensure the long-term success of our fledgling energy market and our future energy policies.

The more energy efficient that people's homes and businesses become, the less energy they will have to use, which will therefore reduce their energy bills. It is thought that, in the UK, a typical house is using five times the energy that it should. The warm homes scheme should be commended; however, the delivery of that scheme could be improved. We must guarantee that those who are most in need benefit from the scheme, especially in the run-up to winter.

It is crucial that all households and businesses do what they can to conserve energy. We must instil an ethos of improving energy efficiency throughout society. As an Assembly and an Executive, we must set an example and provide all the necessary information and help to those families and businesses seeking to improve their energy efficiency. Building regulations and the planning review have crucial strategic roles, as do sustainable development strategies, which must ensure that we have the most energy-efficient and environmentally friendly development.

In Northern Ireland, we are overwhelmingly reliant on fossil fuels for our energy needs. As the price of a barrel of oil has now reached \$140, we are all feeling the pain of such reliance. In the long term, it is crucial that we become less dependent on fuel imports. We must increase the security of our energy supply. By diversifying into renewable energy sources, we can simultaneously meet our EU climate change and renewable energy obligations.

As we all know, climate change is one of the most pressing problems facing the world today and, regardless of anyone's opinion on it, renewable energy is the direction in which Europe is looking for a large proportion of its energy supply. Northern Ireland now has an immense opportunity for the development of that sector;

however, to date, we have been sleepwalking behind the Labour Government on the issue. The launch of a consultation on the UK renewable energy strategy is a great opportunity to place Northern Ireland at the forefront of renewable technology and development in the UK and Europe. The Executive must ensure that we are represented in any future renewable strategy and policy. In 10 years' time, for example, we do not want a situation in which the British renewable markets have developed while we in Northern Ireland are as reliant as ever on fossil-fuel energy production.

We cannot simply assume, however, that all our energy needs can be met by renewable technology and production, because they will not. In order to reach the EU target of 15% energy production from renewable sources, we must increase our renewable production tenfold. That is a highly ambitious target.

The final point in the motion causes some difficulties for the Ulster Unionist Party. We are currently facing a severe downturn in the economy, which is affecting Government revenue intake in many areas. It is estimated that Westminster is facing a £5 billion annual shortfall on stamp duty alone. Fiscal responsibility must be shown, and calling for narrow redistribution on a fuel windfall is, perhaps, not the best way forward.

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

Mr Cree: I will, certainly.

However, if such a move were to be made, any redirection of funds must be made to pensioners. With that reservation, I support the motion.

2.15 pm

Mr Neeson: I support the motion. The recent establishment of the all-party group on energy, which meets tomorrow, shows the importance of the issue.

I have a vested interest in the issue of energy, because the Kilroot and Ballylumford power stations and the electricity and natural-gas interconnectors are in my East Antrim constituency. No issue has caught the imagination of the public as much as the rising cost of energy — I hear concerns about the rising cost of energy, petrol and diesel on a daily basis. Therefore, this is a big issue — it is not a local issue, it is a global one and must be tackled as such. A report in 'The Independent' today states that every household in the country will face a £213 rise in its annual energy bill if the UK is to meet EU emissions targets. That is just one example of the problem.

Recently, the Kilroot power station has been installing a flue gas desulphurisation plant, which costs millions of pounds. However, it is not widely known that that is funded by the Government rather than the profits of AES, which is the company that owns the

power station. That arrangement was agreed when the electricity industry was privatised.

The Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment has heard a considerable amount of evidence from a wide range of sources. Energy has dominated much of the Committee's time since the return of devolution, and rightly so. In the last mandate, I suggested a six- to eight-week inquiry into energy, which in fact lasted 10 months. That shows the complexities involved in the issue. Much of the evidence that the Committee received focused on the need for a co-ordinated energy policy that promotes energy efficiency, diversifies our energy supplies and harnesses the full potential of renewable energy.

The Consumer Council has provided helpful information to the Committee on a range of issues: for example, half of the fuel poor in Northern Ireland are under 60, and 23% of those people have children. Fuel poverty in Northern Ireland is double the average in GB and triple the average in England. Those statistics show the enormity of the problem. However, there are ways to deal with that. For example, I commend the warm homes schemes to Members, because they have been active throughout Northern Ireland and made a major contribution towards better energy efficiency in our homes.

Energywatch states that rising prices between 2003 and 2006 resulted in a 94% increase in average domestic gas bills and a 60% increase in electricity bills. The Energy Saving Trust, which makes a major contribution to the attempts to educate the population of Northern Ireland about energy efficiency, states that the most effective way to ensure affordable warmth in a household is to reduce the amount that is spent on heating, hot water and supplying electrical appliances. Obviously, there is a big education process in progress.

Members have already referred to the development of the single electricity market, which I welcome. However, the generators have encountered problems, which will — hopefully — be addressed when we return from recess.

There is no shortage of coal throughout the world. Speaking as someone with experience of working in the solid-fuel market, I believe that coal distributors have taken advantage of the current situation.

Mr Newton: I support the motion and I thank the Chairman of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment for tabling it.

The background to the debate is that Phoenix Natural Gas announced a price increase of 28% in April 2008 and NIE announced a price increase of 14% in May 2008. It is anticipated that an additional increase will be confirmed shortly and will be implemented in the autumn, which will take the NIE price increase to around 33% within approximately six months. There may be further increases.

Over many years, the cost of energy in Northern Ireland has been high and has remained above that paid by our neighbours in the rest of the UK. That has been the case for both the business community and householders, and, in many ways, the high cost of energy to manufacturers and the business community in general has driven up normal living costs for individuals and families. It costs more, in energy terms, to produce a loaf of bread in Northern Ireland than in any other part of the UK.

There is no doubt that we are now in a global situation in which oil and gas are being traded on the high seas, and prices have significantly increased for end-users over the past 12 months.

Oil has not yet peaked in price, and, when combined with increasing demand from developing countries, there seems to be no prospect of a reduction in cost. Local oil users have experienced cost increases of approximately 75% during the past 12 months.

Gas is tracking the oil price, and, with self-sufficiency of supply in doubt, there will be a growing dependency on imported gas in the coming years, with all the potential implications that that may mean.

Mr Neeson was right to say that there is no shortage of coal in respect of world supply. However, high shipping costs have resulted in increased prices and there is a high demand from other countries, leading to uncompetitive prices.

The motion calls on the Executive to drive a co-ordinated energy policy to diversify energy supplies. I agree that something must be urgently done. Difficulties are being experienced by the people of Northern Ireland now, and they are looking for some action to alleviate their current levels of hardship. Fuel poverty is a greater problem in this part of the UK than in any other region. Approximately 144,000 homes have been identified as experiencing fuel poverty, which is much higher as a percentage than in England, Scotland, Wales and the Irish Republic.

The answer lies — I take a different view to that of Mr Cree — in the windfall VAT revenue that is derived from increased revenue due to higher energy prices, which could be used to mitigate increasing fuel poverty.

Statistics confirm the seriousness of the situation, with 24% of Northern Ireland households — including 40% of senior citizens — in 2004 being identified as being in fuel poverty. In 2006, 34% of Northern Ireland householders had been identified as being in the same situation. The increased cost of energy equates to an increase in domestic energy bills of approximately 94% from 2003 to 2006.

The Government are doing nicely out of the increased taxation that has been raked in as a result of escalating prices, and they hold the answer by reducing taxation

or redistributing the excessive amounts that they have already clawed in. I ask for that point to be taken on board and followed up by the Executive, because that is the only prospect that I can think of to attempt to address the issues within a reasonable timescale.

There is a growing need for proper consideration of nuclear energy. French consumers benefit from the right mix of energy generation, and nuclear energy is part of that. The Prime Minister indicated that he will upgrade and replace GB nuclear power plants. It is probable that we are already getting electricity from a nuclear source. The nuclear debate is controversial, but it is inevitable that that debate that will have to occur.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Questions to the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety will commence at 2.30 pm, so I propose that Members take their ease until that time. This debate will resume at 4.00 pm, when the first Member to be called to speak will be Mrs Claire McGill.

The debate stood suspended.

2.30 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

HEALTH, SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC SAFETY

Containing Infection: Staffing Levels

1. **Mr O'Loan** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans he has to address problems with staffing levels of microbiologists, antibiotic pharmacists and infection control nurses as highlighted by the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority review. (AQO 4219/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Mr McGimpsey): In recognition of the growing need for medical microbiologists and infection-control nurses, my Department has already invested in increasing the number of specialists in those fields. The package of measures to tackle healthcare-associated infections that I announced in January 2008 included recurrent funding for five antibiotic pharmacists — one for each trust.

My Department is considering the recommendations in the interim report of the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) and preparing an action plan. That work will include consideration of the workforce issues and any resource implications. The review team aims to produce its final report by the end of July 2008. Before finalising the action plan, the Department will wish to consider any further recommendations that the RQIA makes.

Mr O'Loan: Will the Minister tell us what the contribution of the three specialisms is to the solution of the current clostridium difficile outbreak in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust area? Will he provide a progress report on the outbreak?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: As I reported to the House recently, the incidence of clostridium difficile in the Northern Trust area and in Antrim Area Hospital has reduced greatly. It is anticipated that we will shortly be able to declare that the outbreak is over.

The three disciplines concerned are antibiotic pharmacists, infection-control nurses and medical microbiologists. If an elderly, frail person presents with a severe chest infection that is liable to cause a fatality, the standard treatment is antibiotics. Unfortunately, clostridium difficile is a side effect in some cases, which can be just as deadly as the original infection. Therefore,

antibiotics must be targeted. Pharmacists are needed in each trust area to provide advice to the doctors who treat the patients. Infection-control nurses must ensure that infections are contained and that best practice is followed in wards.

Mr McLaughlin: I thank the Minister for his statement. He anticipated one of my questions. I welcome the announcement that he expects the final report by the end of July 2008.

Will the Minister indicate how many of the 30-plus interim report recommendations are being implemented?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I presume that the Member refers to the work that was carried out as part of the RQIA review. As he said, I anticipate that that will be finalised by the end of July 2008. We are drawing up an action plan to ensure that good practice is achieved in all the trusts.

Mr McCallister: My colleague Basil McCrea and I are not wearing pink ties to wind up Mrs Iris Robinson. We are wearing them for a much more serious reason — to highlight the breast cancer campaign. It was great that the Minister visited the group this morning.

I congratulate the Minister on his policy of unannounced hospital inspections. It has led to the recent RQIA report into cleanliness at Craigavon Area Hospital. Following the publication of the report, will the Minister indicate what measures have been put in place to swiftly address the shortcomings that were identified? Will he continue to give high priority to hospital cleanliness so that confidence is maintained in the Health Service?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: As far as Craigavon Area Hospital is concerned, an action plan was immediately put in place by the trust. That is being followed through as we speak. The RQIA also inspected a number of other hospitals, and reports will issue in due course.

As far as continuing work is concerned, I refer to the previous measures that I announced, which included the changing the culture action plan, the ward sisters' charter and, primarily, the £9 million package of measures that I announced in January. Those included restrictions on hospital visiting; dress code; the hand hygiene campaign that I launched last week; rapid-response units; cleaning teams; and unannounced hospital inspections.

Loch Cuan House, Newtownards

2. **Mr Shannon** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to provide a timescale for the newbuild of Loch Cuan House in Newtownards and explain what is being done to accommodate the remaining 12 residents. (AQO 4213/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: It is not possible to provide a timetable for the development of the newbuild at the Loch Cuan site at this stage. The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust has indicated that an equality impact assessment and full public consultation are necessary before any final decision on the future of Loch Cuan House can be taken. The trust will then have to develop a business case outlining its proposals for the site and submit it to my Department for scrutiny and approval. Once the business case has been approved, it will become clear what the expected timescale for the newbuild at Loch Cuan will be. Consequently, there are no formal plans or an associated timescale to move residents out of Loch Cuan House at present.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind Members to ensure that their mobile phones are switched off, as there is interference with the transmission.

Mr Shannon: I am concerned that there is no timescale for the newbuild. However, I am sure that that is not the Minister's intention, as he will want to reply quickly. Nevertheless, 12 elderly, frail and disabled residents remain in Loch Cuan House, and they and their families are concerned and need to know what is happening. I am aware of the health and well-being of some of the residents. Will the Minister confirm the date for the business plan and the commencement of building?

I have another supplementary question, Mr Deputy Speaker. Will part of the building be knocked down and the newbuild erected on site? Will the 12 residents move into the newbuild, and work then continue on knocking down the old building? I apologise for being long-winded.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Minister can select any one of those questions. [*Laughter.*]

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I refer Mr Shannon to the answer that I have given. The trust has said that an equality impact assessment and full public consultation are necessary and, as he is aware, that has not happened or begun. After that, a business case will have to be developed, and clearly that has not happened either. The matter is in the hands of the trust. However, I assure the Member that immediately formal plans or associated timescales are decided, I will let him, the residents of Loch Cuan House and their families know.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question 3 has been withdrawn; Mr McGlone is not in his place for question 4; question 5 has been withdrawn; and Mr Dominic Bradley is not in his place for question 6.

LGBT Groups: Mental-Health Needs

7. **Dr Farry** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the

mental-health needs of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender groups. (AQO 4240/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Everyone is valued equally and is entitled to have his or her mental-health needs assessed and treated in the most appropriate way. I am aware that anyone who has a lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender sexual orientation often has specific and heightened mental-health needs arising from rejection or hostility from his or her family, the workplace and the wider community. That stigmatisation and discrimination can make them reluctant to engage with mainstream mental-health services. I expect any treatment or support by health and social care staff to be offered in a way that is sensitive to the issues arising from a patient's sexual orientation, and to be delivered in a way that leads to the best outcome.

Dr Farry: I thank the Minister for his positive answer. Will he confirm that sexuality is biological and that it is not accepted practice in either psychiatry or psychotherapy to try to cure homosexuality? Furthermore, will he confirm that there is no direct correlation between sexuality and the prevalence of mental disorders, but that it is environmental stresses, such as the intolerance of society, that create problems?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I confirm the first part of Mr Farry's remarks. In 1973, the American Psychiatric Association concluded that there was no scientific evidence that homosexuality was a disorder and removed it from its diagnostic glossary of mental disorders.

The World Health Organization followed suit, as did the British Government. As far as treatments are concerned, the issue is that although sexual orientations are not mental illnesses, members of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender groups do have specific mental-health needs. They experience discrimination, homophobic bullying, harassment, family rejection, and so on, often leading to suicidal behaviour and self-harm.

The evidence suggests that there are higher than average levels of suicide and substance abuse among those groups. Therefore, their mental-health needs are commensurate, and they are entitled to be treated equally, and in a way that best deals with the problems that they encounter, and their reaction to those problems. In fact, one of the key principles of treatment is that taking a non-judgemental attitude lies at the heart of much of the therapeutic activity. Indeed, the Bamford Review made strong recommendations along those lines.

Mrs I Robinson: Over the past few weeks, some people have attempted to suggest that I indicated that homosexuality is a mental-health issue, and they have twisted everything that was said on Stephen Nolan's radio show. I have got broad shoulders, and can take the brickbats that followed from that. However,

nothing could be further from the truth. What I did say was that homosexuality —

Some Members: Ask a question.

Mrs I Robinson: I am getting to it. Homosexuality, like all sin, is an abomination. That is what I said. My point, however, is that there are some people —

Some Members: Ask a question.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Will the Member ask the question?

Mrs I Robinson: I am getting to the question.

Dr Farry: You are reading a statement.

Mrs I Robinson: No, I am not.

Dr Farry: Yes, you are.

Mrs I Robinson: Who is the Speaker here?

Mr Deputy Speaker: Will the Member come to the question?

Mrs I Robinson: I certainly will. Does the Minister agree that there are some people who, in their teenage years, are sexually confused, and that they could do with help from practitioners to assist them with talking therapies, to help them to realise exactly what they are — whether they are heterosexual or homosexual?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I am not in a position to talk about sexual confusion. What I am in a position to do is to reflect what the American Psychiatric Association concluded. There are cognitive-behaviour therapies available, and one of the thrusts of the Bamford Review concerned the need for provision to deal with depression, panic disorder, social phobia, bulimia, obsessive and compulsive disorders, and so on. That is very much the thrust of the work that my Department is undertaking, and of the budget allocation that I am making for the provision of mental-health services.

Ms J McCann: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. To a degree, the Minister has already answered my question. Does he agree that there is a high incidence of mental-health problems, including suicide and self-harm, among young gay people particularly, who are only becoming aware of their sexuality, and does he agree that there is a need for people to be very sensitive and tolerant in their use of language — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order.

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: A key issue is that those providing therapies in the health and mental-health services take a non-judgemental attitude. That lies at the very heart of therapeutic activity and interventions designed to support people. The Member is right, and I have made the point that lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender

groups experience high levels of discrimination, harassment and social isolation, and that leads on to — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order.

2.45 pm

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: That leads to a higher-than-average incidence of suicidal behaviour and self-harm, which must be dealt with. I intend to continue to deal with that issue, not least, for example, because the UK-wide mental-health group Mind is concerned that such prejudice and discrimination may even extend among health and social care staff. I take that issue extremely seriously.

Glenside Adult Training Centre, Strabane

8. **Mr Bresland** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what funding has been provided to Glenside Adult Training Centre in Strabane in each of the last three financial years. (AQO 4196/08)

The Minister for Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Western Health and Social Care Trust provided Glenside Adult Training Centre in Strabane with the following funding during the past three financial years: £432,204 in 2008-09; £404,097 in 2007-08; and £371,001 in 2006-07.

Mr Bresland: I thank the Minister for his response. Glenside Adult Training Centre provides day-care support to profoundly disabled adults. At present, it has places for a maximum of 10 adults and a waiting list of six adults who require special-needs support. The current special-needs facility is a 23-year-old Portakabin. What action will the Minister take to ensure that adults who have multiple disabilities in the Strabane area will be provided with a facility that meets their needs?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Glenside Adult Training Centre receives funding from the Western Health and Social Care Trust. The amount of money that is paid to the centre increases each year. The centre uses those resources to provide valuable support to people in the area. It facilitates 50 people who are aged between 19 and 70. Capital provision is a matter for the trust, and I have created a capital priorities group that works with it. The trust must come forward with capital projects and an ongoing review to indicate its priorities in each trust area and criteria.

Mrs M Bradley: Adult training centres are the only respite available to many carers. Can the Minister assure the House that those centres will remain in place and will all be funded?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I agree entirely with Mrs Bradley that respite care is absolutely essential in the areas of learning disability and mental health. The Caring for Carers strategy operates to that end and is kept under review. That is an important piece of work. Members will recall my struggle to obtain funding for mental health and learning disability in the Budget allocations. The provision of respite-care packages is a key part of that. The packages that the Department has been able to add to its allocation will provide respite for around 800 people.

NHS Surgery Targets: Private Procedures

9. **Mr Buchanan** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many patients referred through the NHS are having their surgical procedures carried out in private hospitals to meet departmental targets, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust area. (AQO 4191/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: A breakdown of health and social care patients who are treated in private hospitals is not available in the form that the Member requests. In 2006-07, 5,353 inpatient day-case patients were managed by the independent sector. A significant proportion of those patients were managed in health and social care facilities as part of waiting-list initiatives to improve access to outpatient, diagnostic and surgical procedures. The use of the independent sector has been essential to allow the Health Service to tackle the significant backlog of patients who must wait for prolonged periods for treatment.

Mr Buchanan: I thank the Minister for his response. What good follow-up practices are in place for patients should any complications occur following surgery? How much does it cost the Department each year to carry out that surgery in private hospitals and clinics?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: In the summer of 2005, 47,000 patients were waiting for surgical procedures, and some of those patients had been waiting for several years. In April 2006, 110,000 people had been waiting for more than three months for an outpatient appointment, and some people had been waiting for more than five years. That position was totally unacceptable, and a wide range of measures was put in place, including the involvement of the independent sector.

In April 2006, 110,000 outpatients were waiting for more than 13 weeks for a first appointment. That waiting list has now completely disappeared, and no one is waiting for an appointment. Ten thousand people were waiting for over 21 weeks for inpatient or day-case treatment, but no one now waits for over 21 weeks.

Tremendous progress has been made on what was a burning issue for all of Northern Ireland, which is to the credit of the service. The Health Service is providing backup and support.

Mr McClarty: I commend the Minister for ensuring that waiting lists have continued to drop over the past 12 months since he became Minister. That is a sure sign that the Ulster Unionist Party is delivering for all the people of Northern Ireland. Does the Minister agree that, if he had listened to, and taken the advice of, the whingers on some of the Benches during the Budget discussions in the autumn of 2007, he would not now be in a position to continue to fund those decreasing waiting lists? Therefore, I praise him for ignoring such advice and for his determination in continuing to put patients first through renewed investment in the Health Service.

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I can answer yes, yes and yes to the Member's question.

We obtained a significant increase in allocation as a result of the arguments and consultations that I took to the people of Northern Ireland. I received a huge response and enormous support for those consultations. I am aware that I have the support of the general public in Northern Ireland in finding resources for the Health Service. It is the number one priority for people. Progress on waiting times has been significant, and tens of thousands of patients have gained from the massive improvements in waiting times over the past three years. I will continue to work to achieve further improvements.

After-School Projects

10. **Mr B McCrea** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of funding for after-school projects after June 2008.
(AQO 4269/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: In November 2006, responsibility for childcare transferred to the Department of Education, leaving my Department only with statutory responsibility for children in need, as defined under the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 and the regulation of certain childcare settings.

My Department's involvement in the support of after-school provision has been solely to act as a funding mechanism for centrally earmarked resources. However, rather than abandoning the schemes at the end of this month, I have committed over £400,000 from the health budget until the end of this year to allow time for departmental responsibility to be clarified and to give the after-school projects time to

find other sources of funding or to put in place a planned timetable for closure.

After-school projects are not, and have never been, the policy function of my Department. Therefore, I am not in a position to help any further after the end of this year. My own view is that they sit inside the definition of extended schools, but that is for others to decide.

Mr B McCrea: I thank the Minister for his answer, and I assure him that Mr McCallister's decision to wear a pink tie is not an attempt to upstage Gerry Adams, but to raise the important matter of breast cancer.

I also thank the Minister for putting his hand in his pocket on two occasions in order to ensure that there was funding for after-school clubs. Does he agree that it is a disgrace for the Sinn Féin Minister of Education to wilfully abandon children in need by refusing to fund projects that play such a valuable role in local communities?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Of course, Mr McCrea and the House would not expect me to comment on an Executive colleague; however, I can restate the position in which I found myself when I was faced by the closure of, for example, 55 after-school projects.

Having worked in inner South Belfast, I know how small groups that work on small amounts of money are affected, and, therefore, I stepped forward. I also supported part of the now-defunct children's fund, on the understanding that I would have to bid for those moneys.

Historically, the Health Department did not provide such funds, but merely acted as a facilitator for the provision of funds — it acted as a conduit, or go-between, between the Executive and various applicants. The Health Department administered applications, but it did not provide money. Therefore, other Departments must consider how to meet that need. Having worked on the ground, I concur with the view of many Members that such projects — some of which are run on sums as small as £3,000 to £5,000 — play a vital role in disadvantaged communities.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question 11 has been withdrawn.

Craigavon Area Hospital: Unannounced Inspections

12. **Mr Simpson** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail all unannounced inspections that have been carried out at Craigavon Area Hospital.
(AQO 4256/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: In March 2008, the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority carried out an unannounced

inspection of hygiene standards, and, in 2006-07, two unannounced audits of environmental cleanliness standards were carried out by consultants KPMG. In addition, trust managements undertake regular unannounced audits, as required by the Cleanliness Matters strategy, and the Southern Health and Social Services Council conducts Bugwatch surveys.

Mr Simpson: I wish to place on record the commitment of everyone at Craigavon Area Hospital to ensure that it leads the Province in that and other areas of understandable public concern. Will the Minister give favourable consideration to the trust's funding bids for initiatives such as rapid-response cleaning teams?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I announced response packages to hospital-acquired infections, and rapid-response cleaning is included in one of those. Craigavon and other hospitals are working on that. As a result of the RQIA audit and report, Craigavon Area Hospital has put in place, and is working through, an action plan.

Sharing best practices amongst hospitals and trusts is another key matter on which we are working. With regard to resources, in January this year, I made £9 million available for such measures. That was not the first amount of money that I made available, and I am prepared to provide whatever funds are necessary to drive hospital-acquired infection rates to as low a level as possible.

Clostridium difficile and MRSA are in the population, and it is not possible to eradicate them; however, through the prudent use of antibiotics, hand hygiene, environment cleaning, isolation nursing, and personal protection by staff, we intend to maintain infection rates at low levels.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Time is up for questions to the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety.

3.00 pm

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Review of Regional Development Strategy

2. **Mr W Clarke** asked the Minister for Regional Development how he intends to proceed with the fundamental review of the regional development strategy; and what involvement those working outside government will have in terms of shaping the new framework. (AQO 4296/08)

The Minister for Regional Development (Mr Murphy): In my statement to the Assembly on 9 June, I said that I want the review to be inclusive and that I

want to hear, and benefit from, a wide range of views and opinions. I have set up an external working group, which includes individuals representing business, trade unions, the voluntary and community sector and councils, and its first meeting was held on 4 June. I am also considering how to engage with local groups as the review develops to ensure that the process is fully inclusive. External involvement and maximum public participation are central to the fundamental review of the regional development strategy, and I will continue to keep mechanisms for maximising that potential under consideration.

Mr W Clarke: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I congratulate the Minister on Armagh's win over Down in yesterday's Gaelic football game. I thank the Minister for his response to my question. What is the role of the external working group?

The Minister for Regional Development: Unfortunately, I had no role to play in Armagh's win over Down, other than to turn up and cheer them on. Nevertheless, I am sure that the people in the county of Armagh are happy to hear such an acknowledgement from a Down supporter.

The purpose of the external working group is to act as a sounding board as the policy on the 2010 review of the strategy is developed. That group comprises individuals who represent business; trade unions; the voluntary and community sector; the environmental sector; rural communities; house builders; academia; planning professions; social and equality groups; language organisations; cross-border networks; and local government. A very constructive first meeting took place on Wednesday 4 June, and the intention is for subgroups to be set up to consider particular aspects of the review, which will meet in the early autumn.

Mr Shannon: I thank the Minister for the second part of his response — I am not so sure about the first part, but that is by the by.

Will the Minister confirm that sanctions are in place to ensure that developers deliver on their commitments to provide new finished roads and street lighting? Such matters are clearly an essential part of any new framework and regional development strategy for the Province.

The Minister for Regional Development: Developers who undertake housing developments, in particular, have contractual arrangements with Roads Service. Until those arrangements are fulfilled, Roads Service will not adopt roads, footpaths or street lighting. In other words, it will not adopt roads if they are not up to a certain standard. Roads Service can either introduce sanctions to ensure that the builder delivers to that standard, or withhold the bonds that are paid with respect to the developing of roads before a project is started.

The regional development strategy is a much broader strategy that deals with development across the Six

Counties and beyond — there is a very advanced level of development across the island, and further co-operation is needed. Rather than deal with individual concerns, the strategy will operate at a much higher level. We are working to address issues such as compliance with the regional development strategy. The review will involve an external working group, a group of very senior civil servants and a ministerial subcommittee. I will work with ministerial colleagues, particularly the Minister of the Environment, to ensure that planning and enforcement processes fit in with what the Executive will eventually conclude to be the regional development strategy.

Mr O’Loan: Ahead of the production of any revised regional development strategy, will the Minister confirm that the Narrow Water Bridge project and the proposed motorway to Derry will proceed as priority projects, irrespective of any future discussions?

The Minister for Regional Development: It might help to point out that the regional development strategy is not about specific projects, so it will not have a bearing on the two projects that the Member mentions. I can confirm that it is not in my gift to deliver on the Narrow Water Bridge project, as the Member will know from my previous responses to questions on that subject. Louth County Council has undertaken that project, under the direction of the Dublin Government. The regional development strategy is about overall regional policy. It will involve the fundamental rewriting of the original ‘Shaping our Future’ document to develop a strategy that takes us up to 2025, and that takes into account the rapid rate of change over the past years.

It is not about specific projects. However, I can confirm that the roads project between Belfast and Derry — for which I am responsible — will progress according to plan and schedule.

Urban Regeneration: Co-operation

3. **Mr B McCrea** asked the Minister for Regional Development what co-operation takes place among Translink, Roads Service and the Department for Social Development in relation to urban regeneration. (AQO 4307/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: Roads Service has worked closely with the Department for Social Development officials and other interested parties on a number of projects associated with urban regeneration. For example, Roads Service was recently involved with the Department for Social Development and Translink in implementing environmental improvements in lower Chichester Street, Belfast.

Roads Service also contributed professional and technical expertise to the selection process and negotiations with prospective developers on proposed development schemes in Coleraine, Enniskillen and

Hollywood. In addition, Roads Service manages the implementation of a significant proportion of the environmental improvement and public-realm schemes, which the Department for Social Development (DSD) funds in towns in the North. Roads Service is currently a consultee in the Belfast public-realm Streets Ahead project, on which it is represented at different levels to ensure that the project is designed and implemented to conform to the required specifications for road safety, street-lighting materials, drainage and construction. Translink is also involved in that project, because the proposals have significant implications for city-centre bus operations.

Members may be aware that the Belfast metropolitan transport plan identifies several key projects for the city centre. Moreover, a working-group structure is operating with representation from all key stakeholders, including Roads Service, DSD, Translink and Belfast City Council, to co-ordinate the proposals and ensure best practice. That is an ongoing process, and I assure Members that Roads Service will continue to work with all parties to ensure that the best service is provided to the public, with minimal disruption during the delivery of public-realm improvements.

Mr B McCrea: I thank the Minister for his explanation of best practice. Will he undertake to raise with his Executive colleagues how valuable the Laganside Corporation is as a role model for the Maze regeneration project in an attempt to break Ministers’ inaction, which is currently preventing the development of that important site?

The Minister for Regional Development: That area is not my responsibility. The Department for Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) and the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) are responsible for those projects. However, I assure the Member that, if and when that important project is brought to the Executive for discussion, Roads Service will play its part in its development.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question 4 has been withdrawn.

Gortcorbies Climbing Lane

5. **Mr G Robinson** asked the Minister for Regional Development what progress has been made on the Gortcorbies climbing lane. (AQO 4194/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: The Gortcorbies climbing-lane scheme, on the A37 Limavady to Coleraine road, is part of the Northern Ireland road safety strategy, which allocates £374 million to deliver local road improvements and road safety schemes between 2002 and 2012. The scheme will improve overtaking opportunities for Coleraine-bound traffic.

However, Roads Service has advised that it has encountered substantial environmental issues around the disposal of 100,000 cu m of surplus material from the construction scheme. As a result, Roads Service is examining an alternative design — widening the embankment parts of the scheme — to reduce the amount of surplus material that is used. It is also examining the best method to connect a local road to the new design. Therefore, I am currently unable to provide a date for the commencement of the scheme.

Mr G Robinson: Given that it is a major transport corridor for the north-west, will the Minister give assurances that the scheme, and the Dungiven bypass, will progress with haste, unlike the traffic in those areas?

The Minister for Regional Development: The amount of surplus material requiring disposal from the climbing-lane scheme presented Roads Service with a particular problem, which it is working hard to overcome in order to get the scheme back on track. On several occasions, I have said in the House that Roads Service recognises the congestion and pollution that the through traffic from Belfast to Derry causes in Dungiven. We intend to deal with that issue through the construction of a bypass as soon as possible.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Will the Minister provide an update on the bypass at Ballykelly?

The Minister for Regional Development: Several possible corridors are being examined, and, this summer, I hope to announce the selection of a preferred corridor. Subsequently, Roads Service will examine a range of possible routes in the preferred corridor in order to select a preferred route for the new road.

Mr Armstrong: Has the Minister conducted any investigations across the Province on how improvements to the configuration of roads could reduce accidents and road deaths? Furthermore, will he comment further on the Frosses Road near Ballymoney?

The Minister for Regional Development: The Member's original question referred to a road which is part of a road safety scheme. A key element of investing in roads is to improve road safety and to reduce the all-too-frequent deaths on our roads. Roads Service has responsibility for that issue; however, it cuts across the Department of the Environment and the Department of Education. Enforcement issues are also a key part of the issue.

In relation to the Frosses Road, not so long ago I had a meeting with some Members from North Antrim and told them that we were moving towards the idea of a preferred route option. I hope to make an announcement on that in the near future.

Emerald Fund: Motorway Infrastructure

6. **Mr Burnside** asked the Minister for Regional Development if he is making any bids for additional moneys from the Emerald Fund to construct motorway infrastructural links at key economic locations.

(AQO 4199/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: I will not make any bids for additional resources from the Emerald Fund to construct motorway infrastructural links at key economic locations.

Mr Burnside: That is a very disappointing response. I am not clear how much money has been invested in the Emerald Fund, but the Minister could bid for some moneys as a way of dealing with his Department's problems. He comes to the House time and time again and says that his budget allocation is not sufficient. For instance, we are way behind spending in comparable terms with England. Surely the Minister and his Department should take the initiative and request millions of pounds from the Emerald Fund for cross-border strategic motorway dualling or simply for improving the roads between the North and South. I find it amazing that he is not participating in bidding for those available moneys.

The Minister for Regional Development: I welcome the Emerald Fund's commitment to invest in the development of public and private infrastructure across Ireland. The Emerald Fund will provide further financing options for the private sector to develop infrastructure, and that may include public sector infrastructure projects, such as contracts to construct motorway infrastructural links at key economic locations.

In relation to the Department's ability to tap into the Emerald Fund, the provisions of the budgeting framework mean that borrowing from the fund will result in a reduction in the capital funding that the Executive receive from the Treasury. Therefore, the overall net spending power will not be enhanced. Borrowing from organisations such as the Emerald Fund and the European Investment Bank are not free, as the loans must be repaid with interest. Therefore, even if the borrowing did not result in a reduction of funding received from the Treasury, the Executive still need to consider the longer-term implications for public finances.

Mr Newton: The Minister will be aware of the successful economic hub that is being generated around Tesco and IKEA at the Holywood Exchange, where planning permission has just been granted. What plans does the Minister have to alleviate the traffic congestion that occurs as a result of the successful trading in that area?

The Minister for Regional Development: There are plans to try to improve the flow of traffic around

the Sydenham bypass to take account of the significant developments in the area, including the expansion of the airport. There is a significant developer-led element to those plans. We have considered the early plans, and we hope to implement some of them in the near future.

Mrs M Bradley: Could an application be made to any fund, other than the Emerald Fund, to help the development of the Dungiven bypass, as the problem seem to be worsening every day?

The Minister for Regional Development: As I said in an earlier reply to George Robinson, it is our intention to start work on that scheme as soon as possible using our own resources. The problem is not that there are no funds to carry out the work — it is that one must go through the relevant statutory processes to design a major roads project. The people who live in and around Dungiven have rights, as do the people whose land will be acquired to construct the bypass. Furthermore, the environment must be considered. Those issues take time to go through the relevant statutory processes, but work will begin as soon as possible.

3.15 pm

Mr McCarthy: On the subject of the Emerald Fund, what is the Minister's assessment of the impact that the Republic's unfortunate decreasing tax receipts will have on the Irish Government's intention to fund road projects in Northern Ireland? I had hoped that Southern funding would make its way into the road network in the Strangford constituency.

The Minister for Regional Development: I suppose that one way of pursuing that is to bring about constitutional change so that we can have one budget for all our roads. I welcome any support that the Member might give me in that regard.

The Dublin Government have committed funds to two roads projects — the A5 Derry to Aughnacloy road and the A8 Belfast to Larne road. That commitment still stands, and there has been no reduction in that commitment. We have not discussed support for any further roads projects with the Dublin Government, but I assure the Member that if there is any possibility of such support, we will certainly avail of it.

School Buses: Road Safety Features

7. **Mr Dallat** asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the revised plans in place to allocate £3.4 million to Translink to enhance road safety features on school buses. (AQO 4230/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department was allocated £3.4 million to enable Translink to introduce signage and lighting in school buses in 2007-08 on the understanding that new legislation for signage and lighting on buses would be

in place. However, the regulations, which fall within the remit of the Department of the Environment, have not yet been introduced. In accordance with the guidelines, the money was surrendered to DFP for reallocation. My Department will bid for the required funding to be available for use in 2009-10, when the regulations will come into effect.

Mr Dallat: Without blaming the Minister, does he agree that it is an absolute disgrace that £3.4 million for signage on school buses was lost at a time when there have been so many fatal accidents involving school buses? Will he assure the House that, in future, he will insist that the Department of the Environment has the legislation and the technical data in place to ensure that when money is available to improve road safety for schoolchildren, it will be used for that purpose?

The Minister for Regional Development: I assure the Member that, having made a bid for the money, we are keen to carry out the project. The Minister of the Environment has advised me that the regulations are novel and technically complex, and, as a result, drafting has taken longer than anticipated. Under the guidelines, we had to surrender the money to the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP). However, we will make a bid for that money in order to carry out the project in 2009-10.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Will the Minister give details of what Translink is doing in the meantime to increase safety features on school buses? Is he able to give the House a sense of the degree of co-operation between his Department and the Department of Education on safety measures for the fleet of buses that are used by the Department of Education?

The Minister for Regional Development: Translink has introduced measures to improve safety on buses used for school transport. Those include the fitting of large yellow warning signs to the rear of buses, and the installation of bumper cameras, which allow the driver to view the front of the vehicle on his monitor for up to 30 seconds after the door of the bus has closed. Furthermore, all buses recently purchased by Translink have been fitted with a reflective rear strip. A retrofit programme for that strip has also been put in place.

The Member is correct when he says that co-operation is required, not just between my Department and Translink, but with the Department of Education, and, in this case, as the original question suggested, with the Department of the Environment on the subject of regulations. Safety on school buses, and on buses in general, is an issue that cuts across several Departments. There is a good degree of co-operation with other Departments in order to ensure that we achieve the highest standards of safety on buses, and particularly on buses that carry schoolchildren.

Mr I McCrea: Has the Minister given any consideration to reducing speed limits on roads outside schools? Furthermore, does he agree that not only the work that has been done with Translink, but the installation of flashing signs at schools by Roads Service, has improved safety for schoolchildren?

The Minister for Regional Development: Road safety outside schools is a key issue, and several pilot projects are in place to examine reductions in speed limits outside schools for that purpose. The current thinking on such matters is that permanent speed limits outside schools tend to be disregarded in the summer months when the schools are closed, and that that becomes a pattern of behaviour. Pilot projects are under way at several schools; I believe that there is one in rural Antrim and one in rural Derry, in Articlave. In those pilots, the traffic is limited to a speed of 20 mph at peak times outside the school, but is not a permanent speed reduction.

We will examine closely the results of that pilot scheme to establish whether it will provide an additional safety measure that we can roll out for other schools. As the Member rightly said, there are other ways of enhancing the safety of children outside schools.

Mr Savage: I thank the Minister for his answers to questions on road safety and buses. Will he introduce a traffic regulation that forbids vehicles from overtaking school buses that are temporarily stationary at bus stops?

The Minister for Regional Development: We will consider any measures that will improve road safety, particularly those that concern buses. Bus safety is a sensitive issue, particularly as Members will recall the fatal accident that happened on the A4 several months ago, in which a young girl was killed. Some measures stray into areas that are the responsibility of the Department of the Environment. We wish to improve safety progressively, not only on buses and outside schools but also when children are being transported to and from school.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question 8 has been withdrawn.

Water Charges

9. **Mr Gallagher** asked the Minister for Regional Development what sectors and groups have been liable for water charges since April 2008. (AQO 4303/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that, from 1 April 2008, all non-domestic customers have been subject to water and sewerage charges and to trade-effluent charges, where applicable. Non-domestic customers include farms; small, medium and large businesses; industrial users; voluntary organisations;

charities; public bodies; places of worship; and any property that is not intended for permanent household use.

Mr Gallagher: Does the Minister accept that although churches and church properties are exempt from rates, there is much concern that they have to pay water charges? Does he agree that there is a much better system in Scotland, where such properties do not pay water charges? As the Minister knows, water charges will be passed on to parishioners by parish and church committees. Will he look again at water charges with a view to introducing exemptions for church properties?

The Minister for Regional Development: The Executive accepted the independent water review panel's recommendation that billing for water and sewerage services should be extended to all non-domestic properties from 1 April 2008, and they decided that that should be phased in over two years, with customers paying 50% of the full amount in 2008-09 and 100% of it from 2009-10. Accordingly, all non-domestic premises have been billed for water and sewerage services since April 2008.

Places of worship are classed as non-domestic, and many have been paying metered water charges for many years. Before the extension of non-domestic payments, Northern Ireland Water was already billing some 1,200 church properties. It remains company policy to extend metering for billing purposes throughout the non-domestic sector.

To answer the Member's question, the Executive considered the independent water review panel's recommendations. I note that when the panel's report was published, his party colleague said that it represented the central plank of SDLP policy on the issue. Therefore, I am surprised that members of that party have difficulty with it. Nonetheless, the Executive considered —

Mr Dallat: That is absolutely wrong.

The Minister for Regional Development: The comment was made that it was the central plank of SDLP policy. I am afraid that it is a matter of public record. Either the party did not read — or did not understand — the independent panel's report, or else, as seems to be the case, it is trying to distance itself from decisions that it has already signed up to.

The independent panel's report was carefully scrutinised by the Committee for Regional Development, and the church issue was not raised at the time, nor was it raised at the Executive when the matter was voted on and agreed last October.

I say again that the Executive decided the policy; it has been through all the processes. I saw a press release that was issued by the Member's colleague Mr Dallat in which he complained that the issue was not debated. I made a statement to the Assembly on the implications

of the panel's report, and we had a full debate on the matter; again, the church issue was not raised.

As I said, either people have not read or understood the report, or perhaps it is more likely that they are being disingenuous and trying to distance themselves from decisions to which they signed up earlier.

Mr Moutray: The word of God tells us that we should:

“Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s”.

If the Minister continues down the path that he is on, it is most likely that he will become known as the Minister who put a tax on baptism, whether by sprinkling or total immersion.

Given that many small rural congregations work within very tight budgets and that their facilities are used for community activities such as mother-and-toddler groups, does the Minister agree that the negative impact of the imposition of water charges on such communities will be greater than any direct positive benefit that might be accrued by the additional revenue?

The Minister for Regional Development: I appreciate the Member's concerns. I would not dare try to specify how much water should be used in baptism — that is not my field at all.

When the Executive unanimously signed up to the introduction of billing to all non-domestic properties, we were aware that the decision would create hardship for some sectors. Nonetheless — as I said to Mr Gallagher — 1,200 church properties were already being billed and had been for many years. If, as Mr Gallagher argued should happen, one particular sector is exempted from the charge, the rest of the non-domestic sector will carry the cost. The panel recommended, and the Executive concluded, that the fairest way forward was to charge all non-domestic customers.

Mr Cree: What is the Department's position on charging country churches for mains drainage even when they do not have any sewerage facilities?

The Minister for Regional Development: If a property is not connected to the mains sewerage system, it should not be billed for sewerage services. I do not doubt that mistakes will be made in the first run of this process. People will, perhaps, receive bills that they have no requirement to pay. We have provided a hotline that MLAs can use if people have been in contact to say that they have got a bill that does not reflect the services that they receive. If people receive incorrect bills — and I am aware of one or two such cases — they can challenge them, and the water company will move to correct the problem.

European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages

10. **Mr Brolly** asked the Minister for Regional Development what action his Department, non-departmental public bodies and agencies are taking under the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. (AQO 4316/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: I have recently reviewed compliance by my Department and its agency, Roads Service, with the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. I have implemented the following changes to promote the use of the Irish language: the translation into Irish of all ministerial forewords to plans, reports and consultation documents; a translation of all new or revised information leaflets into Irish; the development of a multilingual website for the Department; the publication of significant announcements in an appropriate Irish-language newspaper; the use of bilingual headings in the advertising of all public notices; the identification of Irish speakers in DRD to help handle telephone calls in Irish; and a revised code of courtesy on Irish and Ulster Scots for all staff.

In addition, my Department has prepared a draft policy for the introduction of a range of bilingual road signs in response to the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. NITHCo, Translink, the Port of Belfast, Derry Port and Harbour Commissioners, Warrenpoint Harbour Authority and Northern Ireland Water all fulfil their requirements under the charter. Those organisations allow users of regional or minority languages to submit requests in those languages and provide translation or interpretation as may be required. They also allow the use or adoption of family names in the regional or minority languages at the request of those concerned. Translink is reviewing what information may be most usefully provided in Irish, including educational material for schoolchildren.

Mr Brolly: What Irish-language groups has the Minister met, and what was the nature of that engagement? What is his assessment of Armagh's chances in its future encounter with Fermanagh?

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Minister may answer any of those questions.

The Minister for Regional Development: I will deal with the questions that I know something about. I have met representatives from Irish-language groups Pobal, Conradh na Gaeilge and Comhaltas Uladh in February and June to discuss issues relating to the charter. Their views helped to inform the review. As the Member will know, we have an obligation under the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages to make provision for those languages and to ascertain where such provision can be made within

the Department. In my discussions with those groups, it was useful to see where we provide good support and where we can do better. I am more than willing to improve our service wherever we can.

Regarding the latter part of the Member's question, all that we can do is hope.

3.30 pm

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Social Housing: Community Heating Projects

1. **Mr Gardiner** asked the Minister for Social Development whether she will review the provision of community heating projects in all new social housing schemes, particularly those based on willow burning technology. (AQO 4205/08)

The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie): Recent increases in fuel costs, together with our desire to promote more environmentally friendly and sustainable forms of energy, mean that it is imperative that we keep the issue of renewable energy under constant review. Although no community heating scheme using willow burning is planned, I am aware of the work that is ongoing on that technology in the private sector, and I will monitor developments closely to identify the potential for the social-housing rented sector.

Mr Gardiner: I thank the Minister for her reply. Given the recent rise in oil and gas prices, which are likely to escalate further, has the Minister assessed the potential for developing such community heating schemes on existing housing estates?

The Minister for Social Development: As recently as last Saturday, I visited an established housing estate in Ballynahinch — in my constituency of South Down — in which wood-pellet boilers were installed recently. I talked to some local residents and to the person who installed the boilers on behalf of the Housing Executive. Those people were content with the heating system; they said that the boilers were cost-effective, and they found the heat that flowed from them to be beneficial.

Mr Gardiner raised another important issue — fuel poverty — and I welcome the opportunity to address it, although several Departments have cross-cutting responsibility for the matter. The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment has responsibility for energy policy and prices; the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister has responsibility for poverty; and my Department has responsibility for energy efficiency in the home. I was so concerned about the

effect of fuel costs on vulnerable households that I took the lead and established a task force on fuel poverty to find short-term measures to keep people warm this winter. That work falls into four main areas, and I want the four groups that are dealing with each area to report to me soon. That will enable me to present a paper to the Executive, and it is hoped that they will support me in my request for further financial resources.

Mr Bresland: What action is the Minister taking to encourage the Northern Ireland Housing Executive to introduce renewable energy — particularly wood-burning technology — in its properties?

The Minister for Social Development: I assure the Member that the Northern Ireland Housing Executive has been encouraged and supported by myself and the Department to implement renewable technologies. As I explained, I saw a good example on Saturday of its implementation through the installation of wood-pellet boilers.

Mr Ford: I thank the Minister for her comments; I am sure that her constituents in Ballynahinch feel that they have done well — despite the fuel poverty that others are suffering. She mentioned the task force that has been established to find measures that will assist the vulnerable in the short term. Are the Executive doing anything to look at the longer term? The Minister listed the Departments that have short-term responsibilities, but to what extent is the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development involved in the growing of biomass, which could be developed for the good of areas beyond Ballynahinch?

The Minister for Social Development: Several Departments have responsibilities. The fuel poverty task force has representatives from various Departments — including DETI and DARD — the industry regulator, and representatives from the Consumer Council and the industry. I want them to propose short-term measures that will deal with the problems that will confront everyone this winter, but especially those in the low- to medium-income groups and the elderly and disabled. That is our most immediate challenge.

I hope that the task force's findings will benefit people across Northern Ireland, and I want to ensure that it has the full support of everybody. However, I think that it does have the support of all, because the Executive and Members recognise how important it is to have schemes that will enable people to keep warm in the short term. Long-term measures will be considered in the next three years.

It is worth noting that I have invested £35 million over the next three years in the warm homes scheme to deal specifically with that. Taking on board the Audit Office report, I have already refocused the warm homes scheme to look at the issue of need and to target resources at it.

Social and Affordable Housing: West Tyrone

2. **Mr McElduff** asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the additional social and affordable housing projects she has planned for the West Tyrone constituency, given the acute need for social and affordable housing in both the Omagh and Strabane districts. (AQO 4312/08)

The Minister for Social Development: Having visited Omagh last year after the flooding that affected the area, I am aware of the housing need in the Member's constituency. I also visited Lisanelly and St Lucia, and, after the summer break, I plan to launch our next shared-future housing development in Sion Mills. West Tyrone's housing problems are well known to me.

We will build 160 new homes in West Tyrone in response to that need, and those homes are planned over the next five years. Those homes will complement the re-letting of the area's existing homes, which last year alone resulted in 305 families being allocated houses.

I could have told Mr McElduff about that when I met him at the epic Down v Tyrone game on 14 June at Páirc Esler. As the Member will recall, that game resulted in a magnificent victory for Down. Given yesterday's events in Clones, however, I do not wish to labour that point.

Mr McElduff: Will the Minister withdraw that remark, please? [*Laughter.*]

My question will not be derailed.

Mr McLaughlin: You have no railway either.

Mr McElduff: That is a very good point from Mitchel McLaughlin.

Will the Minister detail how much additional money for social- and affordable-housing projects the Executive Budget has allocated her Department? Is it the case that all that money has been, or is being, used to provide additional social and affordable housing? I appreciate the Minister's visits to West Tyrone, but, nonetheless, that figure of 160 houses is a mere drop in the ocean.

The Minister for Social Development: As Mr McElduff will be aware, when the draft Budget was originally presented, the Department for Social Development received a very light budget from the then Minister of Finance and Personnel. In spite of barbed comments from across the House that I should accept the budget that I had been allocated, I was unwilling to do so. After research, analysis and a considerable weight of negotiations, very strong representations were made, and the Department received an additional £203 million.

I am determined to deliver the new housing agenda and see its impact across the North, irrespective of geographical or constituency location.

Mr Buchanan: I thank the Minister for her answer to the previous question. Building 160 houses in West Tyrone over five years is around 32 houses a year, which is not an exorbitant number of houses for those in need. What plans does the Minister have to bring the vacant housing stock in West Tyrone into circulation? If she did that, the acute social- and affordable-housing need in the Omagh and Strabane council areas would be quickly addressed.

The Minister for Social Development: As the Member will be aware, on assuming my ministerial post in May 2007, I established an empty-homes unit. At that stage, the survey that the Housing Executive undertook on my behalf, and that of my Department, identified around 39,000 vacant homes. Further in-depth drilling-down and analysis identified that around 5,000 of those houses could be allocated.

We have worked with Land and Property Services over a considerable period to identify the ownership of those particular houses, some of which are in West Tyrone. I will continue to pursue that issue, and I will ensure that those available houses in West Tyrone and in other constituencies can be used for the purpose that the Member suggests.

Mr Cobain: Everyone in the House appreciates how hard the Minister has worked to secure social housing. I am sure that she is as disappointed as the rest of us to see that housing receipts are down almost 95%.

Will the Minister provide an update on the progress of the rehabilitation of empty homes in the Province, and how many of them she expects to bring into service during this financial year?

The Minister for Social Development: I refer the Member to my previous answer. Originally, 39,000 empty homes were identified by the survey that was undertaken by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. Further analysis has identified that 5,000 of those are capable of being restored. Land and Property Services has been working with the Housing Executive to identify the ownership of those properties. The first pilot exercise on that matter was undertaken in Banbridge, and further pilot exercises are under way. That has taken a little longer than expected.

I hope that we will be able to utilise some of those houses, particularly at interface areas in north Belfast. Last year, I had an opportunity to visit houses at interface areas, and saw some that were around 10 years old. I saw some houses that could be restored when visiting Tiger's Bay with Mr Cobain several weeks ago. This matter should be finalised shortly.

Programme for Government Commitments: Update

3. **Ms Lo** asked the Minister for Social Development to provide an update on her Department's commitments under the Programme for Government. (AQO 4290/08)

The Minister for Social Development: I am committed to ensuring that my Department meets its obligations as set out in the Programme for Government. Procedures are in place to monitor quarterly how we are progressing against the targets that have been published in our corporate plan. The Programme for Government reporting period started only in April, so monitoring information has not yet been collated. That information will not be available until the end of August. I assure the Member that I will be happy to provide her with a more detailed update at that time.

Ms Lo: I thank the Minister for her reply. Under public service agreement 12, objective 2, the Department for Social Development holds lead responsibility for delivering the neighbourhood renewal strategy, in co-operation with other Departments. The Minister recently announced that she intends to transfer that responsibility to local councils. How will the Minister ensure that councils have overall responsibility across departmental bodies to enable the delivery of all of the actions in the neighbourhood renewal plans?

The Minister for Social Development: Neighbourhood renewal is the Executive's flagship strategy for addressing deprivation in local communities. If that strategy is supported across Departments, there is a chance of success. If it is not adequately supported by other Departments, it has a poor chance of delivering on its objectives.

As for transferring neighbourhood renewal to local government, community development and local economic regeneration are being transferred to local government under the review of public administration. That makes perfect sense — decisions about targeting responses at local level should be taken locally, not centrally. The equivalent scheme in the South of Ireland is firmly entrusted to local government, through Revitalising Areas by Planning, Investment and Development (RAPID).

There is no suggestion that the aim is to pass a problem to local government. The policy lead will still remain with the Department for Social Development, but the money — along with some staff resources and local decision-making — will pass to the councils. I am aware that there are some Members who are opposed to transferring neighbourhood renewal to local government. Frankly, that is a nonsensical position.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

Mr Poots: Will the Minister clarify that there is nothing in the Programme for Government that precludes spending on urban regeneration outside the cities of Belfast and Londonderry, and that there is nothing in the Programme for Government that states that every other town and city will receive only crumbs?

The Minister for Social Development: The Member is referring specifically to Lisburn, which is in his constituency.

As the Member will recall, I visited Lisburn in August or early September 2007, and I saw the need and opportunities for vital regeneration there. Regeneration proposals are already being implemented not only in Belfast and Derry but in other urban towns throughout Northern Ireland. If the Member wants me to revisit Lisburn to consider specific examples of where environmental improvement and public realm schemes could act as a lever for investment, I would be happy to do so.

3.45 pm

Mr Beggs: The warm homes scheme has been a useful method of alleviating fuel poverty, which is one of the targets in the Programme for Government. However, the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) recently criticised the scheme and highlighted room for improvement. Will the Minister update the House on her plans for, and the timescale involved in, a possible review of the scheme to ensure that additional assistance can be provided to vulnerable families and individuals?

The Minister for Social Development: Some months ago, I recognised how successful the warm homes scheme had been in tackling fuel poverty throughout Northern Ireland by insulating properties, and I decided, therefore, to refocus the scheme on the fuel poor who are in most need. I also took the opportunity to establish the fuel poverty task force. It comprises not only cross-departmental officials, but representatives from the industry regulator, the General Consumer Council and the fuel industry.

It is tasked with four specific areas of work: dealing with the Government in London to increase and refocus winter fuel payments; to ensure that my Department and others make the best use of money; to secure a greater contribution from the energy sector, and to ensure that the households that need help the most are identified and targeted. The task force will report to me shortly, after which I will take a paper to the Executive to ensure the buy-in of other Departments that have a direct responsibility for energy tariffs.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question 4 has been withdrawn.

Social and Affordable Housing: North Belfast

5. **Ms Ní Chuilín** asked the Minister for Social Development what action she was taking to ensure equality of approach when addressing difficulties in the provision of social and affordable housing in North Belfast. (AQO 4309/08)

The Minister for Social Development: In considering the provision of housing, not only in north Belfast but throughout the North of Ireland, the level of need is my highest priority. The Housing Executive is responsible for implementing the social housing development programme and ensuring that investment is targeted at areas of greatest need. I assure the Member that, in recent years, there has been more investment in housing in North Belfast than in any other constituency. However, I am conscious that there is more to be done.

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Minister for her response. I know that she is aware of the housing stress in North Belfast. However, having met several housing associations and residents' groups, I am concerned that the only response to the housing problem in North Belfast seems to be the construction of high-rise flats or apartments. Surely the Minister accepts the need for mixed-tenure housing. I am concerned that more housing inequality may be created in North Belfast. Will the Minister respond to my concern?

The Minister for Social Development: I am aware of the many housing issues in North Belfast because I have met various groups in the area. I met the "seven towers" group, which has specific concerns about high-rise housing and maintenance problems, and I met groups from St Patrick's and St Joseph's, the "long streets", Fortwilliam and Parkmount. I am conscious of the need to address housing inequalities, and I want to ensure that everyone in the House also rises to that challenge.

The Girdwood site on the Crumlin Road has the potential to have a major, positive impact on North Belfast, and my Department's objective is to maximise the benefits for the people of that constituency.

I hope that all community, business, political and religious leaders in the area will work together to help achieve that objective. I will not allow those who oppose much-needed new housing on the Girdwood site for sectarian or territorial reasons to stand in the way.

Mr G Robinson: Will the Minister update the House on the situation regarding former Ministry of Defence accommodation and its transfer to her Department?

The Minister for Social Development: That question would be better directed to the Member's party colleague, the First Minister. The Member may not be aware that

following my visit to the St Lucia and Lisanelly sites last year, I made strong representations to the then First Minister and deputy First Minister and to the Minister of Finance and Personnel and met with them to discuss the gift-aiding of military sites to the Executive. Various representations were made by those individuals to the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer. I presume that those representations formed a part of the discussions held by the Member's own party, and by the First Minister and deputy First Minister, with the UK Government prior to the vote at Westminster on detention of terrorist suspects for 42 days.

Mrs Hanna: The Minister has spoken of her approach to equality considerations. In the context of the regeneration of the Crumlin Road Gaol and Girdwood sites in North Belfast, does she believe that all the political interests are working together to that end?

The Minister for Social Development: I thank Mrs Hanna for her question. I am conscious of the need to address all the equality issues to which the proposals for the regeneration of the site give rise. I recently re-opened the Crumlin Road Gaol to visitors on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays from 13 June to 12 September and I urge all Members to avail of the opportunity to visit the site.

In relation to the Girdwood Barracks site, an equality impact assessment is being carried out. My Department has written to 530 organisations and has embarked on a series of meetings with a range of groups across North Belfast and further afield. On foot of Mrs Hanna's question, I take the opportunity to encourage the elected representatives of North Belfast — the MP, the MLAs and city councillors — to work with us to achieve an outcome that benefits all the people of the constituency. Again, I stress that I will not allow those who oppose much-needed housing on the Girdwood site for sectarian or territorial reasons to stand in the way. The issue is crucial to the people of North Belfast, and it must be speedily resolved.

Community and Voluntary Sector Code of Governance: Funding

6. **Mr Burnside** asked the Minister for Social Development if funding allocated by her Department will be linked to adherence by voluntary and community organizations to her Department's code of governance for the voluntary and community sector.

(AQO 4210/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The funding procedures applied by my Department incorporate the principles and practice of good governance, espoused in my Department's manual, 'Setting Standards, Improving Performance; Best Practice in Finance and Governance in the Voluntary

and Community Sector'. My Department seeks evidence of good governance from organisations throughout the funding process. All funding proposals are subject to economic appraisal and evaluation of their effectiveness and impact.

Mr Burnside: The Minister will agree that the vast majority of voluntary and community groups are doing a good job in difficult circumstances. She will also agree that many groups have been, and still are, fronts for former republican and loyalist terrorist organisations that are still heavily involved in criminality.

Does she believe that her Department's code of governance and standards on the funding of local community groups is strong enough, strict enough and can be sufficiently policed to prevent criminal organisations from extracting money through such groups?

The Minister for Social Development: I assure Mr Burnside that all voluntary and community groups that receive funding from the Department for Social Development must sign up to the terms and conditions of the grant. Naturally, however, I share Mr Burnside's concerns about the matter. If he wishes to provide me with specific details about a particular voluntary or community group in his constituency or further afield, I would be very happy to consider them.

Mr Shannon: As always, I thank the Minister for her response. Will she confirm that the community and voluntary sectors are essential ingredients in social development? Will she also confirm that a community charter and its aims need not necessarily be those of DSD? Rather, the sector should be entitled to do what is best for the community that it represents, and DSD should subsequently evaluate each case individually to ascertain the merit of any plans and the depth of the Department's involvement in that community aim, as opposed to each community group simply being an extension of DSD, which is not their function.

I apologise to the Minister for asking a long-winded question.

The Minister for Social Development: There are 4,500 groups in the community and voluntary sector in Northern Ireland. Some of those groups receive funding via neighbourhood renewal, which probably requires buy-in from other Departments, or through the local community fund, which comes directly from the Department for Social Development. However, some groups also receive funding from local councils, and in Mr Shannon's case, that is Ards Borough Council.

The community and voluntary sector is a large industry in Northern Ireland, and I emphasise that it is very important that we focus resources where there is most need.

Mr Durkan: Will the Minister address the wider question of the overall financial outlook for the

community and voluntary sector for the next three years? We are in the midst of an economic downturn, groups are experiencing decreases in European funding, and efficiency savings mean that other Departments are not stepping up to the plate when it comes to neighbourhood renewal and making commitments to the community and voluntary sector.

Therefore, what can the Minister do to ensure that DSD funding has maximum impact on the ground? Additionally, what can be done to gain more commitment and support from other Departments for the community and voluntary sectors?

The Minister for Social Development: My Department has the lead responsibility for the voluntary and community sector. However, as the Member rightly points out, funding to that sector is an issue for all Departments, which must work within the terms of the Budget that the Executive set in the recent Programme for Government.

Mr Durkan is also correct to say that, after many years of growth, we are entering a period of change and uncertainty for both sectors. Sources of short-term funding, such as EU funding, on which the voluntary and community sector in Northern Ireland have come to rely, are decreasing. It is difficult for all Ministers to strike the correct balance between finding the funds that can be made available, to meet the requirements of the 4,500 voluntary and community groups in Northern Ireland, and to ascertain the services that should be retained and developed. However, I assure my colleague Mr Durkan that whatever refocusing may occur in neighbourhood renewal in Derry, overall levels of DSD funding there will be maintained or increased.

I know that some groups have lost out as a result of other Departments' choosing not to mainstream their projects. However, I can say only that DSD will make every effort to support good work where it meets the criteria for DSD-funded programmes. I will ensure — and I assure all Members of this — that I will refocus the limited DSD funds that are available so that our interventions and support have the maximum impact on the ground. Alongside refocusing funding, I also hope to promote the spirit of volunteering and build a stronger sense of self-reliance and social responsibility.

4.00 pm

COMMITTEE BUSINESS

Rising Energy Costs

Debate resumed on motion:

That this Assembly notes with concern that rising energy costs are hitting families in Northern Ireland harder than in the rest of the UK; and calls on the Executive to:

(i) give further priority to measures to promote energy efficiency and combat fuel poverty;

(ii) drive a coordinated energy policy to diversify our energy supplies, reduce our reliance on fossil fuels, increase competition in our energy market and harness the full potential of renewable energy;

(iii) cooperate with other Governments, including through the British Irish Council, to develop a longer-term strategy for these islands, and;

(iv) urge the UK Government to re-direct the windfall VAT revenue from higher energy bills to be used to mitigate the escalation of fuel poverty in Northern Ireland. — [*The Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mr Durkan).*]

Mrs McGill: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the motion and commend the Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment for tabling it. The motion provides Members with an opportunity to reiterate their concerns about rising energy costs and other issues, such as renewable energy and fossil fuels.

Earlier in the debate, Simon Hamilton said that Members must examine long-term and short-term solutions. I will focus on short-term measures that the Executive and the Assembly must introduce.

The motion raises a number of points. First, it states that, compared with elsewhere, in the North:

“rising energy costs are hitting families ... harder”.

That is the starting point.

The motion calls on the Executive to do certain things, one of which, in point iv, urges:

“the UK Government to re-direct the windfall VAT revenue from higher energy bills to be used to mitigate the escalation of fuel poverty”

in the North of Ireland. The media have reported that rising energy costs have led to the collection of an additional £10 million in VAT. I want to make a connection between that extra £10 million in VAT revenue and the fact that, for all sorts of reasons, low-income families here are hit harder, and are worse off, than those elsewhere.

I want rising energy prices and the issues raised in point iv of the motion to be put on the agenda for the

Executive’s next meeting — and every meeting thereafter — until a result is achieved. The Executive must inform the Assembly about the nature of their discussions on the motion. I hope that they yield something positive.

I also want to raise the situation regarding oil companies, which, I assume, the Executive will discuss. What is the situation with the oil companies? Are they suffering now, or will they suffer in the future? We have no control over what is happening globally, but we must question whether oil companies’ profits will continue to soar while low-income families continue to suffer. Will the disadvantaged become more disadvantaged?

I thank the Assembly Research and Library Service, and the Committee, for providing Members with briefing papers, which state that the trade union UNISON:

“condemned the blatant profiteering within the energy industry”.

That issue must be explored, even if we have no control over the global situation.

Finally, we must also consider the regulator’s role. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr G Robinson: My contribution to the debate is hopefully more of a housekeeping issue because of the severe rising costs of energy. Recently, we debated child poverty, and I observed then that rising bills have meant that every family now has less disposable income. I also highlighted the fact that energy costs in Northern Ireland are greater than those in the rest of the United Kingdom.

I was struck by two important points when reading the motion. The first is the need to promote energy efficiency. I am sure that, in our daily constituency work, many Members pass houses that have lights on in every room. I often ponder whether all those rooms are occupied. A simple message to pass on to our constituents is to switch off the lights when they leave a room. Given the present circumstances, that message — and other similar ideas — must be conveyed to every household in Northern Ireland.

It is time for a co-ordinated campaign urging households to be energy sensible and to help themselves to reduce their bills. Such an approach would not only be a cost-effective means by which the Assembly could promote and advise on careful energy use, but would have a real impact on those people who are in fuel poverty or are at risk of it, by showing them how to reduce their fuel bills. On 13 May, in the Assembly, my colleague from Strangford Mr Shannon said:

“Those who most need that information are not getting it, and it must be made available to help people to save money and to eradicate fuel poverty, which is the aim of the Assembly.” — [*Official Report, Bound Volume 30, p303, col 1*].

I am sure that Mr Shannon will be pleased to know that I agree with those sentiments wholeheartedly.

I was also struck by the need to develop alternative and renewable sources of energy. The Executive are in no doubt of the challenges that they face, and are rising to those challenges:

“Securing our future energy supply is high on the Government’s agenda as we seek to reduce our dependence on fossil fuels.” — [Official Report, Bound Volume 30, p309, col 2].

Those were the words of another colleague, the then Minister of the Environment — it is ironic that, on that occasion, she was filling in for the then Enterprise, Trade and Investment Minister, Mr Dodds. I believe that the Executive are working positively towards achieving the target of having 15% of energy production from renewable sources, and Minister Foster’s comments are proof of that.

I will save my energy and say nothing more than that I support the motion.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I now call Dr Alasdair McDonnell.

Dr McDonnell: Thank you very much indeed, Mr Deputy Speaker — it is always a pleasure to be invited to speak by your good self. I want to use the time allocated to me to make a few points and to welcome the Minister to what I believe is the first debate of this nature in the Chamber — I wish her well as Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, and hope that we Back-Benchers can be helpful and supportive to her in her new role.

I welcome this debate, because rising energy costs are, literally — if Members will excuse the pun — a burning issue for every household in Northern Ireland and beyond. It is an issue for people across the island of Ireland and across the UK. We are facing an energy crisis, which is being felt by every single business, household, school, church and organisation in our society, because they all consume energy.

As well as that, we are in the grip of a credit crunch, so households are being hit in every direction. The cost of gas has risen by 28% and the average bill is now close to £600, which means an extra £130 or £140 being squeezed out of people’s already tight budgets. The cost of electricity has risen by 14% and we are told that, before the winter, it will increase again by a further 15%. Diesel and petrol are at record high prices at the pumps, and the price of home heating oil is scary — it is now 65% to 70% more expensive than it was a year ago. On top of all that, people are facing a credit crisis, rising rate bills, and the potential for water charges.

It is against that backdrop that I warmly welcome the motion. The Executive must take every possible action to address the energy crisis, because all people are dealing with the same problems. I meet people in

my constituency every day — in my constituency office and on the streets — who can no longer afford to fill their oil tanks. Some people, particularly the elderly, are concerned, because usually they have a cushion — for example, a half a tank of oil left over — but that will not happen next year. Instead, many people let their tanks go empty in May and will try to leave them empty for as long as possible so that they do not have to fork out £600 or £700 to fill them. If we have a bad winter, the consequences will be horrific: people will die because they will not be able to afford to heat their homes. Fuel poverty, which is a nice cliché, will rise, and we will be faced with misery on all fronts.

Although the current problems are happening when oil is \$140 and \$150 a barrel, we must be prepared for the price of oil to hit \$250 a barrel. It is unacceptable that major oil companies are making massive profits at a time when people are being forced into misery and have to make a choice between buying food and heating their homes. The oil market must be regulated.

In evidence from Phoenix Natural Gas, the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment heard that gas in the British market — which we feed off — is traded six times before it is consumed. Therefore, four people get a slice of profit before the gas reaches the consumer — there are four people between the producer and the consumer. On the Continent, gas is traded 0.6 times, because the process has been reduced to the point where there is no trading in between the producer and the consumer. Regulation is essential — there must be state control over, if not full state ownership of, the gas market.

Although there is some control over the gas market, a barrel of oil is traded 12 times before it is used, which means that there are 10 speculators. In the past few months, oil has become the favourite commodity for traders, because the price keeps increasing — many people know that, if they trade in oil, the price will continue to rise. My party leader, Mark Durkan, and I, among others, have tabled an early-day motion at Westminster to highlight that problem and to call for action at the G8 summit.

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

Dr McDonnell: There are many other points that I want to make. The Assembly and the Executive must do all that they can to develop the use of renewables and other alternative sources of energy.

Mr Bresland: I support the motion. My constituency, like those of other Members of the House, has suffered because of the increase in fuel costs. That has been brought home to me by several constituents, many of whom cannot afford to buy oil for their central heating. I am extremely concerned about the impact that rising fuel costs will have on elderly people this winter. All fuel prices — including those for oil, electricity and

gas — are increasing, which is imposing considerable strain on families, particularly those on lower incomes.

As a member of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development, I am aware of the impact that the increase in fuel costs is having on the farming community. Higher oil prices have resulted in fertiliser prices increasing by over 100%, and fuel costs have increased by over 50% in the same period. Such rises in the cost of inputs explains why food prices are rising and putting further pressure on people with low incomes. Increases in food prices are having a serious impact on the household budget, especially for families on low incomes and pensioners — the same people who face fuel poverty.

At a later date, the Assembly will debate renewable energy, alternative land use and the impact that renewable energy will have on our energy policy.

4.15 pm

I believe firmly that oil prices will remain high, and, regrettably, they will almost certainly increase further. It is vital that we explore a way of developing an effective energy policy. That will require a change in attitude across Departments, including in the Planning Service.

In order to establish renewable energy projects, planning policy must be changed significantly. Many farmers who have sought to develop renewable energy projects have found the system to be fraught with difficulties. Change in planning policy is required, but that need not have a negative impact on the countryside.

The motion calls for an effective energy policy, and it is vital that we explore every opportunity to assist families during what are challenging times. The Northern Ireland energy market is almost totally dependent on imported energy, and it is vital that a clear strategy is developed — especially in the promotion of renewable energies — to enable us to address our dependence on oil.

We must also continue our pursuit of energy efficiency, which could commence with the introduction of energy-efficiency certificates. Although I am opposed to further red tape, I hope that the introduction of such certificates would have a positive impact. I support the motion.

Mr Poots: Given the increase in the price of oil and the impact that that is having across the community, the motion is certainly topical. In conjunction with the credit crunch and falling house prices, that increase is having a dramatic effect on the economy, and it is being felt particularly badly in rural areas. There is real decline in rural businesses, which are suffering, and, as a consequence, people have been laid off. Given current levels of business, there will be more layoffs in the near future because those employers cannot sustain keeping all their employees.

Energy prices have an impact across the economy and on all commodities. Unfortunately, that is demonstrated

adequately by food prices in supermarkets. As a consequence of high energy costs, more crops are being diverted into energy crops as opposed to food crops, which then drives up the price of food. Increases in the price of haulage also drive up the price of food, given the number of vehicles that haul up and down the length and breadth of the United Kingdom to move food from a to b. As a consequence, consumers pay more for groceries, energy costs, keeping a warm home and travelling to work, school, and so on. In all those areas, increasing fuel costs have negative consequences on the average person on the street.

What can the Government and the Assembly do about that? A policy can be set here and another at Westminster, but other issues are outside the control of any Government. Dr McDonnell referred to market-makers, and much of the increases in energy prices are to do with market-making, as opposed to the regular bases of supply and demand.

We do not know when energy prices will stop rising. The housing market has been in a similar situation: prices rose phenomenally over the past three years, but they are now coming back down. I believe that the same will happen with energy, but no one knows when the turning point will be. In the meantime, the average punter on the street suffers.

What can Government do to ease the situation? Reference has been made to the VAT issue. For every 10p increase in energy prices, the Government receive 1.75p, which gives them approximately 6p more for each litre of fuel than was the case just over one year ago. Clearly, without taking any hit whatever, the Government could take 6p a litre off the price of fuel, which would reduce the cost of haulage and travel, and, in a small way, would help to alleviate some of the problems that consumers face. I lay that on the line: we should press the Westminster Government to act immediately on the matter.

In the longer term, we must look at how we produce energy, and there have been some innovative ideas. We must look at how the agriculture industry uses willow biomass, not only for the production of electricity but for heat and power exchange plants, the benefits of which — the supply of hot water to hospitals, schools and leisure facilities or a newbuild town or village — are clear. Recently, the first eco-village was opened in the Brokerstown area of Lisburn. Houses in that development are bucking the trend by selling well, which demonstrates that people recognise that energy issues will continue to be a problem.

As a Government, we must act to encourage the production of more sustainable forms of energy. The island of Ireland could produce enough coastal wind power to serve all the United Kingdom. We must address that. We should seek to ensure that the United

Kingdom has a more reliable source of energy — one that does not rely on areas where there can be political turmoil or other problems — that will benefit our children.

Mr McFarland: The causes of fuel poverty and rising energy costs are complex, multilayered and interrelated. A downturn in the economy, which threatens to turn into recession; the growing insecurity associated with the reliance on oil and fossil fuels and their long-term sustainability; and environmental goals for reducing climate change and changing greenhouse gas initiatives, are aspects that must be considered in the debate.

Thousands of people in Northern Ireland are suffering from the effects of rising energy costs. In the last year alone, oil customers have paid £532 more on average; Phoenix Natural Gas customers have paid £132 more; and NIE customers have paid £69 more. One in three households is now suffering fuel poverty, which means that families and individuals are either unable to heat their homes or are forced to divert money for necessary items, such as food and clothing, to pay for heating. The elderly and low-income families are affected most. In a modern, democratic society, that is not acceptable.

The Governor of the Bank of England recently warned that those price hikes are not temporary and that customers should brace themselves for the most difficult economic conditions in two decades. Although this is a complex issue, I welcome today's debate and hope that it produces the needed momentum to stimulate action to address those issues.

The Department for Social Development is developing strategies and taking steps to alleviate fuel poverty. Through the warm homes scheme, the measures to increase heat retention and energy efficiency in homes are extremely welcome. We should encourage people across society to implement energy saving methods, including changing their behaviour. Society needs to learn the necessity of conserving and retaining energy, and many people need support to achieve that. We must ensure that the Executive give all the assistance and information possible to those who wish to improve the efficiency of their homes and businesses. It is crucial that as energy prices rise, we enable and encourage people to use less energy for the same benefit. That will have economic and environmental benefits.

I want to develop some of the issues that Dr McDonnell raised to try to understand what has caused the present situation. There is a world demand for fuels; India and China are rapidly expanding and, therefore, demand more of the fuels that used to come to us. However, speculation is an issue that we must understand. Dr McDonnell talked about gas being traded six times and oil 12 times, from the time that it leaves the gas or oil field until it gets to our homes. The present situation is not being caused by the speculators who normally

operate in that market; from evidence to the Committee, we understand that 50% to 60% of the speculation is being done by banks after they were hammered by the American sub-prime mortgage market.

That has an effect in Europe and in the UK. As far as I understand it, the banks are trying to make their money back through speculation. All of that is in serious danger of wrecking our economy. In Great Britain, 83% of homes have access to natural gas. In Northern Ireland, the figure is 25% in the greater Belfast area, and — lo and behold — 1% outside greater Belfast. The rest of Northern Ireland is reliant on oil that is 12-times-traded by the time it gets here.

We are further confused by the fact that the energy industry in the UK is privatised. The rest of Europe and America have had much more sense and have kept their energy industries in Government control in order to have some control over them.

We have a major problem because fuel prices are rising, which causes the costs of transport and food to rise. The biofuel issue has further exacerbated the rise in the cost of food. In America, great swathes of the maize crop have gone towards biofuel, which has caused a shortage for raising animals. That also causes the price of food to rise.

There is also the issue of climate change. We are encouraging people to make their homes more efficient. Wind power is an option, but — as I have said previously in the House — our tourist trade will falter if we cover Northern Ireland with windmills. My guess is that wave power is a good option. As Mr Newton mentioned earlier, we must consider the nuclear option. We cannot close our eyes and ears to something that everyone else is doing.

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

Mr McFarland: I commend the motion.

Mrs I Robinson: Although the Assembly has limited scope to address such issues, rising fuel costs are causing a considerable degree of anxiety for families and businesses across the United Kingdom, the repercussions of which are being felt in all aspects of our lives. There is tangible panic in the public domain, as well as real despair, because, everywhere we turn, prices are rising faster than one can say "Jack Robinson".

The price of oil recently hit a new record of more than \$142 a barrel, after stock markets across the globe fell as a result of fears regarding food and fuel costs. London Brent crude has now reached a record high of \$142.13 a barrel, while US light crude for August delivery has reached \$142.26 a barrel.

As a result, petrol prices have surged in the past year. Diesel is 35% more expensive than one year ago, at 131.94p a litre — nearly £6 a gallon. Unleaded petrol has increased by 22%, at an average of 118.57p

a litre. Each day at the pump, motorists are spending a colossal £14.3 million more than they were one year ago. I am sure that everyone will agree that that is a staggering increase.

Transport is an integral part of the delivery of goods and services, so costs have inevitably filtered down to the high street, where each and every family now feels the pinch. Farming food production is a major contributor to the Northern Ireland economy, more so than in any other region of the United Kingdom. Where agriculture contributes 0.5% towards the total GVA across the UK, the figure is 1.3% for Northern Ireland. It, therefore, follows that pressures in agriculture are felt twice as much in Northern Ireland as they are across the United Kingdom as a whole.

Northern Ireland farmers also experience twice the degree of hardship when it comes to the costs of feeds and grain. Across the United Kingdom, 28% of gross output is down to the cattle, sheep, pig and poultry industries, while the same figure for Northern Ireland is 43%. As a result, Northern Ireland farmers have to purchase over twice the amount of feedstuff as their mainland counterparts and must, therefore, bear the costs of grain prices, which have exploded in recent months.

The prospects for Northern Ireland's fishing industry are also very bleak. Successive Administrations have failed, on a colossal level, to provide that industry with effective representation. It has now declined to the point of collapse. Those are not empty words of woe but a starkly honest picture of where the fishing industry currently stands.

4.30 pm

As Northern Ireland fishermen observe their industry's decline, they must also witness the stark contrast with which the Governments of France, Spain and the Republic of Ireland treat their fishing industries. The cost of fuel and other overheads for some boats is as much as £2,700 a week, and that is before any wages are paid — in fact, I am aware of owners who have to subsidise their vessels. Although that issue is not specifically related to this debate; if the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development continues to fail to devote sufficient time to the matter, there will not be a fishing industry to speak of come the next election.

Over the past year, Northern Ireland has seen price increases of 19% for electricity, 28% for natural gas and coal and 75% for oil and, combined with other increases to household bills, that gives rise to greater urgency to tackle fuel poverty. Ultimately, as long as the UK continues to depend on fossil fuels, we will be at the mercy of Russia and the Middle East. Northern Ireland imports 96% of its energy needs — the highest in the European Union — and yet the EU has said that no other country has more potential to produce alternative energy on its farms.

Although the Government may not have any control over the level of oil production by OPEC, they do have control over the amount of taxation levied on fuel. The United Kingdom has the greatest tax burden on fuel of any of the EU countries. The tax on a litre of petrol in Britain is around 57p, compared to 31p in Spain, 45p in Italy, 48p in France and 52p in Germany. The Exchequer has the power to reduce the cost of fuel. I support the motion.

Mr Shannon: I support the motion. Despite the attempted spin of the Labour Government, no-one is in any doubt that times are hard and that the average person is finding it difficult to make ends meet. First-time buyers and families with young children are finding it particularly difficult to cope with housing issues, and single-parent families are finding it hard to make ends meet. The elderly are trying out retirement careers as contortionists — twisting and stretching themselves to meet the ever-rising cost of living with small, and seemingly shrinking, state pensions.

Every day, headlines scream of rising bills and price hikes. People have to tighten their belts a little bit more; and it is becoming clear that there are no more notches on the belts of many people in the Province. Bread has risen from 69p to £1.29, and diesel is at an all-time high of 131.99p a litre, which comes on top of bigger taxes on all incoming and outgoing money. The hikes would be understandable if wages and incomes were increasing at the same rate, but that is not the case. Older people are faced with the choice of eating or heating — as has been said already — and that will include more people who will put on extra blankets and jumpers to enable them to spend money on meat.

Northern Ireland has the highest rate of fuel poverty in the United Kingdom. The most up-to-date figures show that in 2006, 34% of the population here was living in fuel poverty. How much higher is that figure today? The mind boggles. The definition of fuel poverty is not being able to keep a home adequately warm at reasonable cost and that as a result more than 10% of household income is being spent on fuel.

Alleviating fuel poverty has been identified by Government as an important issue in tackling disadvantage in communities, and it is a priority for the Assembly. 'Ending Fuel Poverty: A Strategy for Northern Ireland' published by the Department for Social Development in 2004, stated that the Government intends:

"to eliminate fuel poverty in vulnerable households by 2010, and in non-vulnerable households by 2016."

Is that possible today?

As Members have said already, in the past year Northern Ireland has seen price increases of 19% for electricity, 28% for natural gas and coal, and 75% for oil. Moreover, we have been told that electricity and

gas will increase by another 15% before the end of the year. God forbid that Alasdair McDonnell is right and that oil prices will rise to \$250 a barrel — that would be horrendous.

There should be a greater urgency to tackle fuel poverty, because of other increases in household bills. Margaret Ritchie has set up a task force to examine fuel poverty and report to her by the end of the summer. However, a strategy should be put in place as soon as is humanly possible. It is admirable that our Ministers are playing their parts, but it is clear that something must happen at the next level as a matter of urgency.

We have reached the stage at which only action by the Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, and the Labour Party can bring about a great enough change to make a difference to the every-day lives of the people of the Province, and the United Kingdom as a whole.

I shall focus on the last point of the motion, which reflects my own contribution to a possible way forward, namely that the best option is to charge the oil companies with windfall taxes. Those companies increase the price of fuel every day, and yet, during the first three months of this year, their profits rose by record amounts. To cite examples, in the first three months of this year, Shell posted a profit of £3.9 billion; and British Petroleum profits rose by 48% to £3.31 billion during the same period.

A 40% increase in profits for vital service provision is nothing less than extortion, and price-gouging tactics should not be used against the United Kingdom, which is what is happening at the moment. The large oil companies need to be penalised, and Gordon Brown could do more by hitting those companies with a windfall tax, which could then be used to reduce the price of fuel by 12p or 15p a litre.

I am all for free enterprise, but it is wrong that companies are affecting the health and well-being of entire nations. It would not be the first time that Gordon Brown has introduced a windfall tax. When the Labour Party came to power in 1997, it imposed a one-off windfall tax on utilities, and raised £5 billion to fund the New Deal programme to get the unemployed into work.

Surely, 11 years later, the large oil companies, which are boasting unbelievable profit margins, can be taxed in the same way. That could make a difference to the constituents whom I represent, and to the constituents of all Members. It is absurd that families with two incomes can no longer get by comfortably, and I urge Gordon Brown to make it clear that the interests and health of the people of the United Kingdom are of the utmost importance. That step is the first of many that must be taken. I support the motion.

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mrs Foster): I thank the Committee for bringing its first sponsored motion before the House. The motion

deals with a critical matter for the entire community. Members' contributions to the debate demonstrate just how wide-ranging this issue is. We have heard about transport costs, the effects on fishermen, rural enterprises and the agricultural industry, and, obviously, those suffering from fuel poverty. A number of statistics have been provided that illustrate how rising fuel prices have a disproportionate effect on those with lower incomes.

The increase in wholesale fuel costs are driving up the costs of power generation and, therefore, the retail price of electricity to consumers is also rising. Generation costs amount to over 50% of the final cost of electricity, and around 60% of the final price of gas to consumers. Rising energy costs are obviously of particular concern for the less well off, whether they are pensioners, those on benefits or people on low incomes.

The interdepartmental group on fuel poverty, which has been mentioned during the debate — chaired by my Executive colleague Margaret Ritchie — is charged with ensuring effective co-ordination of policies and action to address fuel poverty. My Department is represented on that group, which has been meeting representatives from other key Departments, and which examines ways in which Departments can make a priority of addressing poverty, income and health. I understand that the Minister for Social Development is expecting to report to the Executive in the autumn with an action plan to address fuel poverty.

As the House will know, my Department has no direct role in setting energy prices, but attempts, in co-operation with the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation and the energy industry, to create market conditions that will exert a downward pressure on prices. It is important to recognise that we have our own regulator, and I am sure that the House will acknowledge that that is important. We are fortunate to have such a regulator.

Mrs McGill made a comment about regulation of the oil industry, but I am sure that she will agree with me that, to have any effect, regulation would have to be worldwide, and that is certainly not within the power of a devolved region such as our own. However, that does not detract from the work that the Department is doing.

Throughout the years, the Department has supported several initiatives. There has been much discussion during the debate about the establishment of the single electricity market. That is a positive step forward, upon which progress can be built. As Members are aware, the single electricity market was introduced in November 2007. Although it will be some time before people see the benefits of that in their bills, those benefits will come eventually.

The Department has been involved in the mutualisation of key energy assets, and lobbied for Northern Ireland's exemption from the climate change levy until 2011. The Department was also able to offer a grant to help

to defray the cost to the industry of the energy efficiency levy.

The Department continues to support Invest NI's delivery of energy-efficiency programmes to industry. Those programmes provide valuable support to industry and the wider business community. They are targeted at the reduction of energy usage and, therefore, energy costs for business. Although the Assembly is right to discuss the fuel poor in the House, it must also, as several Members have reflected, support indigenous industries. That must be kept in mind.

Invest NI has also funded the Carbon Trust programme, which promotes more efficient energy use and uptake of renewable technologies. Since 2002, potential energy savings of some £84 million have been identified, and annually recurring savings of £23.9 million have been achieved in Northern Ireland. Those are not insignificant sums.

Northern Ireland also contributes to the UK's member state energy-saving targets under the EU directive on energy end-use efficiency and energy services, which is a natty little directive. DETI currently works with energy suppliers to develop agreements to promote energy efficiency, as required under that directive. That work continues.

There has been much discussion about the Reconnect scheme. Certainly, many people have lobbied their Members because they were not able to avail of the scheme. Ultimately, not enough money was available to deal with the applications that were before the Department. The scheme is currently being evaluated. The Committee Chairperson said that he hoped that the evaluation would happen quickly. I hope so too. A targeted programme to encourage the use of renewable sources of energy must be examined. I hope that that will happen in the near future.

A co-ordinated energy policy that includes diversification of energy supplies is important, not only to provide fuel choice, but for security of supply. In recent years, power generation in Northern Ireland has been provided by two gas-fired power stations and a coal-fired generator. Since November 2007, the single electricity market has enhanced the security of the electricity power supply for Northern Ireland consumers. The natural gas network has been extended to 10 main urban areas outside greater Belfast. I accept Members' comments that the network is not wide enough throughout Northern Ireland. Coming from County Fermanagh, I certainly agree. However, both business and domestic consumers in Northern Ireland, albeit not enough of them, are being provided with a choice of energy supply.

Significant work is ongoing to establish how renewable energy can contribute further to power generation in order to improve diversity and security of supply and

to help to shelter Northern Ireland from global oil price fluctuations.

Northern Ireland can become a leader in the use of renewable energies. I believe that Mr Poots commented on wind power. Mr McFarland discussed tidal energy. Tremendous, world-class engineering work has been undertaken on the marine-current turbine in Strangford Lough. Much can be learned from that work. I hope that other offshore areas can also become involved.

Mr Cree mentioned that the UK consultation should be used to place Northern Ireland at the heart of renewable energy. I strongly welcome his comments. My Department is actively involved with its UK counterpart on the renewable-energy consultation because it believes that it can play a significant role, particularly on renewable-energy schemes, such as the marine-current turbine project in Strangford Lough, which are at the cutting edge of technology.

4.45 pm

The electricity grid was mentioned, and, as Members will be aware, a study was carried out towards the end of last year on how much the grid could absorb because of higher levels of renewable electricity generation and a movement away from the dependence on fossil fuels. There is some capacity for doing that, but Members will also acknowledge the need to strengthen the grid, which will have cost and environmental implications. Members commented on the Planning Service's role, and work is under way on permitted developments. Mr McLaughlin talked about micro-renewables. Under planning policy statement 18, the policy context is being developed for renewable energy.

The increasing competition in energy supply markets elsewhere has generally resulted in lower prices and higher levels of customer service; however, Northern Ireland is a small energy market, with only 790,000 electricity consumers. It is important to recognise that, because links are needed, and the third part of the motion refers to that. North/South and east-west links are needed; however, I would also like to see regional linkages — perhaps as far as France. That may be far in the future, but there are already links between the British Isles and France, and that could bring about the competition that does not yet exist.

Little can be done about the global pressures that affect energy costs worldwide. However, I hear the call for a co-ordinated policy, and I take into account the work that has been done in the Department since 2004. This year, my Department will bring forward for consultation a revised framework, which will reflect on the changing European Union, United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland policy context. It is important to reflect on the changes — not least the global changes — from the point of view of the British Isles and to produce a new policy in that context.

I am not sure how much time I have left, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr Deputy Speaker: You have 20 minutes in total.

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: In that case I should slow down. I should be finished before my time is up.

I will continue to speak about co-operation with other Governments. My Department continues to co-operate on energy matters with the Department for Business, Enterprise & Regulatory Reform in London, the other UK regional Assemblies and Parliaments, particularly the Scottish Parliament and the Irish Government. Evidence of that can be seen in the single electricity market, which provides a single market for wholesale electricity. It combines markets North and South into a much larger market, providing for economies of scale. The benefits of that will be seen in future, but, as Mr Newton pointed out, people want to see benefits now. It will take some time before the benefits of the single electricity market are felt, but I will talk more about immediate plans later.

I am also considering common arrangements for natural gas between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. The aim of such a project would be to harmonise gas transmission arrangements, particularly between North and South to minimise transaction charges and reduce final gas prices for consumers. The costs and benefits of any future arrangement are being considered by regulators in both jurisdictions. A decision on whether to progress the work further will be taken by the Department when the details of the full economic assessment become available in the autumn of this year.

The Department is also in discussions with Scottish Executive officials on the development of an offshore electricity grid, which could absorb renewable energy such as wind and marine energy, which were mentioned earlier.

I am committed to working to advance regional co-operation on energy matters with the British-Irish Council, which is keen to develop an energy work stream. A strategic review is under way in the British-Irish Council, and it will bring forward a proposed work programme in September 2008. I hope that, for our benefit, energy is one of those work streams because Northern Ireland has good news to tell, and I hope that we can be leaders in the field of renewable energy. Energy infrastructure links, particularly through Scotland's under-sea gas and electricity connectors, are strategically vital to us.

Since 2006, we have also had gas interconnection with the Republic of Ireland, and we are co-operating on plans to build a second cross-border electricity interconnector.

Northern Ireland may be small; however, it has great connections with the Republic of Ireland and the

rest of the British Isles, and there is potential to consider connections with other regions, such as France.

Many Members spoke about redirecting windfall VAT revenue in order to mitigate fuel poverty. That is a reserved matter, to be determined by the Chancellor of the Exchequer; however, I note that, on the 25 June, at the Joint Ministerial Committee meeting, my colleagues the First Minister and the deputy First Minister raised the matter of escalating fuel costs with the Prime Minister. My colleague the First Minister said:

“The deputy First Minister and I recently raised the issue of rising fuel prices and the impact they are having here directly with the Prime Minister.”

Therefore, that matter has been raised at the highest level.

In addition, the Minister for Social Development confirmed that she and the fuel poverty task force will lobby the Chancellor of the Exchequer to increase the winter fuel payment. A comment was made that it is not rising at the desired rate. Furthermore, the Minister for Social Development will make representations about VAT.

Nevertheless, Mr Cree and Mr Hamilton pointed out that, although the Treasury will benefit from higher-than-planned receipts from fuel-related VAT, it will face shortfalls in other VAT and indirect tax receipts as consumers rein in their spending. The level of stamp-duty receipts will also deteriorate as the housing market contracts.

Northern Ireland has little scope to be sheltered from the significant rise in global energy costs. We recently moved to a new energy-cost platform, with impacts on domestic and business consumers throughout Northern Ireland, and, although we will do what we can within our limits to alleviate that, the House is fully aware of the impact of such increases and will wish to ensure that there is no negative impact on industry.

I fully support my Department's input to the interdepartmental group on fuel poverty, which is considering how best to alleviate the burden of rising energy costs on the most vulnerable in society, and I am keen to identify the best energy solutions for Northern Ireland to enhance security of supply, reduce our dependence on imported fossil fuels, help reduce our carbon footprint and, importantly, minimise consumer costs.

As I said when I spoke about industry versus households, that is not an easy balancing act, and concerted efforts with key stakeholders — especially the Utility Regulator — will be necessary, particularly to minimise the effects of rising energy prices on the most vulnerable. That will require the engagement of all Northern Ireland Departments and their Ministers.

Members commented about social tariffs, and, we must discuss such matters with the Utility Regulator to

gauge their impact on Northern Ireland industry and society. Frankly, there is not much point in giving a social tariff to people with low incomes if we then put those people out of jobs by penalising industry in Northern Ireland. Those are the sort of matters that we must discuss with the regulator, and we stand ready to do so. Furthermore, I can assure the House about my Department's willingness to play its part in attempts to alleviate the burden faced by the fuel poor.

Ms J McCann: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The debate was informative, and many Members contributed. Therefore, if I fail to mention anything, it will be because I have not been able to write everything down. The fact that so many Members wished to speak — and that all Members who did spoke in favour of the motion — is good.

Having proposed the motion, the Chairman of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment, Mark Durkan, highlighted the real problems facing an ever-increasing number of businesses and people in our communities. He emphasised the timeliness of the debate, given the recent news that energy-industry insiders are predicting even further price rises this year of up to 40%, which could plunge an extra 1.6 million people into fuel poverty.

Robin Newton warned that oil prices have not yet peaked. Like other Members, he highlighted the fact that consumers are facing higher energy bills but that wages are not increasing to reflect those higher costs — rather they are staying the same.

Alan McFarland said that we must understand energy-market speculation, particularly the role of banks; we heard that oil, for instance, is being traded 12 times before it reaches the consumer. People should not try to make money from those who face financial difficulties. Speculators are in danger of wrecking the whole economy.

Some members of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment recently visited credit unions in the Waterside in Derry. The staff there said that oil has become so expensive that some people are applying for loans to fill up their tank at home, which is worrying. Some people say that households need to switch on their heating in summer; whether or not people switch on their heating now, come autumn the crisis will worsen. Members agree that we must take action now. Longer-term measures must be put in place, but something must be done in the short term as well.

As several Members said, there is substantial evidence of the effects of rising energy prices. Jim Shannon defined fuel poverty as being when people have to spend more than 10% of their household income on fuel; many people have already reached that point. Simon Hamilton described the evidence as sobering; he pointed out that even in Strangford, which many might describe as an affluent area, some 7,000

households are living in fuel poverty. We are most concerned about elderly, disabled and disadvantaged people, but many families are finding it difficult to make ends meet, even when two family members are working. Thus the rise in fuel costs affects everybody.

Leslie Cree said that stark choices will have to be made by hardworking consumers and businesses in the months ahead. The prediction was that at the end of 2008, household bills will have increased by 61%. We again heard the slogan, "Eat or heat", and that will be the choice for many people in the months to come.

Alasdair McDonnell warned that people will die if there is a hard winter. That is a great concern, particularly for the elderly. All the members of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment welcomed the warm homes schemes, and Sean Neeson noted that it had made a major contribution to greater energy efficiency. Many Members mentioned the need to make homes more energy-efficient. Those efforts cannot be made in isolation; a package of measures is needed. We must encourage people to think about how they can use energy more efficiently. George Robinson said that leaving lights on in rooms when they are not being used can add to fuel bills.

Mitchel McLaughlin quoted some interesting figures from Environment Link, which claims that 80% of the energy consumption in buildings is for heating, generally oil heating. He highlighted the important role that building regulations and planning policy play in encouraging energy efficiency. Leslie Cree said that the typical household uses five times more energy than it should and that greater energy efficiency could reduce household bills by almost a fifth.

The Committee Chairperson and others highlighted the complexity of energy issues. Sean Neeson noted that those issues have rightly dominated the Enterprise, Trade and Investment Committee's proceedings. Several Members called for a co-ordinated energy strategy. As Sean Neeson said, much of the evidence to the Committee has focused on the need to introduce a co-ordinated policy.

The Minister said that several matters, including action plans, would be presented to the Executive for their consideration in an effort to adopt a more joined-up approach to energy issues.

She mentioned the single electricity market and acknowledged that although we encounter problems with regulation, the fact that we have a regulator is positive. However, we must consider a more strategic approach to the development of energy programmes.

Several Members supported the use of renewable sources, such as wind and waves, to generate electricity. Claire McGill mentioned oil companies' profiteering, while disadvantaged people remain disadvantaged.

The Minister outlined her concerns about the social tariff, which have been mentioned in the House

previously. However, we must work with energy companies to develop that social-tariff system for the benefit of industry and local consumers.

5.00 pm

Many contributors discussed renewable energy. Alan McFarland and Robin Newton mentioned nuclear energy, and, although that debate is in its infancy, it is a matter that is worth discussing. Some Members — perhaps most — have difficulties with that issue.

I have tried to cover most of the points that were raised during the debate, and I apologise if I have missed anything. The motion outlines four proposals with a view to establishing a co-ordinated energy policy. Short- and long-term measures are available. The Minister mentioned the North/South and east-west connections and stated her desire to establish links further afield in countries such as France. That is positive, and we must consider extending those linkages. All Members called for a co-ordinated energy policy. As the Minister said, we must construct a revised energy framework and work together to reap the benefits.

It is important to remember that this debate concerns real people. As MLAs, we all bear responsibility. However, energy companies must ensure that people can heat their homes and put food on their tables. No one should be forced to choose between heating their home and buying food.

In low-income families who live in disadvantaged areas, young children will, perhaps, go to school hungry in September, wake up in the morning in a cold home or do their homework in the cold. They will not have the same opportunities as children who do their homework in warm homes and, therefore, this is a social issue. All Members outlined their concerns about that matter. Go raibh maith agat.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly notes with concern, that rising energy costs are hitting families in Northern Ireland harder than in the rest of the UK; and calls on the Executive to:

- (i) give further priority to measures to promote energy efficiency and combat fuel poverty;
- (ii) drive a coordinated energy policy to diversify our energy supplies, reduce our reliance on fossil fuels, increase competition in our energy market and harness the full potential of renewable energy;
- (iii) cooperate with other Governments, including through the British Irish Council, to develop a longer-term strategy for these islands, and;
- (iv) urge the UK Government to re-direct the windfall VAT revenue from higher energy bills to be used to mitigate the escalation of fuel poverty in Northern Ireland.

Authority to Amend the Assembly Members' Pension Scheme (Northern Ireland) 2000

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour for the debate. The proposer of the motion will have 10 minutes to propose and 10 minutes to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who wish to speak will have five minutes. Bearing in mind the subject matter of the motion, I expect every Member who speaks during the debate to declare an interest.

Mr Neeson: I beg to move

That this Assembly resolves that, in accordance with section 48 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, the Assembly Commission may make provision for the payment of pensions, gratuities or allowances to, or in respect of, any person who (a) has ceased to be a Member of the Assembly, or (b) has ceased to hold such an office as is mentioned in section 47(3)(a) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 but continues to be a Member of the Assembly.

I rise on behalf of the Assembly Commission to support the motion, and I declare an interest as a member of the Assembly Members' pension scheme. Section 48 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 granted the Assembly the power to make provision for the payment of pensions in respect of Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly. Due to the suspension of the Assembly in 1999, the draft Assembly Members' Pensions Bill did not progress further than Second Stage. Following a request by the then Speaker, Lord Alderdice, the Assembly Members' pension scheme was introduced by determination of the Secretary of State on 13 November 2000, by virtue of powers granted to him under the Northern Ireland Act 2000.

The Finance Act 2004 and the Pensions Act 2004, effective from 6 April 2006, have since transformed the tax and legal environment in which pension schemes operate in the UK, necessitating changes to the scheme rules. Those changes, which were deemed compulsory, have been applied to the scheme by determination of the Secretary of State on 3 April 2006 and 2 March 2007.

In addition to the compulsory changes, the 2004 Acts have simplified the tax regime, allowing schemes to introduce more flexibility for their members. The trustees of the Assembly Members' Pension Scheme (NI) 2000, appointed by resolution of the Assembly under article B2 of the pension scheme rules are responsible for administering the scheme and the fund. The trustees, in consultation with their actuary, that is, the Government Actuary's Department, considered the optional changes possible under the new tax regime and recommended that the following amendments should be applied to the scheme in relation to the following areas: earnings cap; retained benefits; scope for commutation; trivial commutation; added years; voluntary early retirement; and additional voluntary contributions.

The Assembly Commission copied details of the proposed amended scheme to all Members on 18 June 2008, together with a question and answer brief, which provided further details on the proposed changes.

By adopting the motion today, Members will provide the Assembly Commission with the necessary authority to amend the existing scheme, taking on board the changes that I outlined earlier. That will also allow for further changes in future years. I would expect that the Assembly Commission would not make any further changes without consultation with Members in advance.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I call Mr Neeson to make his winding-up speech.

Mr Neeson: The amendments will streamline the Assembly Members' pension scheme and bring it into line with other devolved institutions in Scotland and Wales.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Given that the motion for debate is the authority to amend the Assembly Members' Pension Scheme (NI) 2000, one would have expected the Chamber to be full, but it is not. Therefore, no one can accuse this Assembly of being self-interested.

Notice taken that 10 Members were not present.

House counted, and there being fewer than 10 Members present, the Speaker ordered the Division Bells to be rung.

Upon 10 Members being present —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Now that we have a quorum, I will put the question.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly resolves that, in accordance with section 48 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, the Assembly Commission may make provision for the payment of pensions, gratuities or allowances to, or in respect of, any person who (a) has ceased to be a Member of the Assembly, or (b) has ceased to hold such an office as is mentioned in section 47(3)(a) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 but continues to be a Member of the Assembly.

Adjourned at 5.12 pm.

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Civil Registration Bill

Second Stage

Tuesday 1 July 2008

The Assembly met at 10.30 am (Mr Deputy Speaker [Mr McClarty] in the Chair).

Members observed two minutes' silence.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE BUSINESS

Presumption of Death Bill

First Stage

The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr Dodds): I beg to introduce the Presumption of Death Bill [NIA 23/07], which is a Bill to make provision in relation to the presumed deaths of missing persons; and for connected purposes.

Bill passed First Stage and ordered to be printed.

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

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind Members that the debate at Second Stage should be confined to the Bill's general principles.

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

That the Second Stage of the Civil Registration Bill [NIA 20/07] be agreed.

The Bill proposes several amendments to Northern Ireland civil registration legislation, in particular the Births and Deaths Registration (Northern Ireland) Order 1976. It also introduces new free-standing provisions on civil-registration records and the notification of vital events.

The Bill expands on the existing legislative framework to enable reform and modernisation that will provide a service to suit today's society's needs and expectations. The legislation will provide greater choice and more flexibility in registering vital events, including where such events may be registered, improved service delivery via much wider use of information technology, additional types of certificates to meet public demand and greater access to historical civil-registration records to facilitate genealogical enquiry.

Civil registration, which has existed since the 1840s, plays a vital role in securing and protecting basic human rights.

The records provide an individual with a name and identity in society; a facility for marriage; evidence of parentage; and evidence of entitlement to inheritance. The information gathered can also be analysed to provide valuable statistical information for medical and social research — for example, birth and death rates — as well as general information about the health and well-being of people in the community.

The General Register Office (GRO) has been involved in a process of continuous development of the civil registration framework, including legislative reforms such as the Marriage (Northern Ireland) Order 2003. The Civil Registration Bill is now being introduced to deal mainly with reform to the registration of births and deaths. The previous piece of civil legislation to cover births and deaths, the Births and Deaths Registration (Northern Ireland) Order, was made in 1976. The Bill introduces new procedures to reflect changes in society, address some issues of existing concern, and maximise the use of technology for the benefit of both the registration service and the customer.

Allied to that, advances in information technology have already allowed the GRO to deliver an improved service to users. Since 1997, the actual registration of

vital events has been computerised, allowing the more efficient production of certificates by local offices. The GRO's own computer system has been overhauled and updated to provide a certificate-production process with direct electronic communication to all local district registrars' offices. The updated system links the GRO to all 26 district council areas and provides both a secure system for the registration of life events and a reliable mechanism for the exchange of data between the GRO and the 26 district registrars' offices. The data that are held on a central database in the GRO now give local registration staff access to all Northern Ireland indexes from 1845 and full registration records from 1997.

The effort that has been put into updating and developing significantly the computer system has resulted in a more efficient, outward-facing and easier system for citizens to use. That success has been recognised in the receipt of Charter Mark awards on four occasions since 2000. A trained, committed and competent workforce was also essential and, indeed, the General Register Office has won several Investors in People awards.

The current system thus provides the GRO with the infrastructure that is required for future development that will improve, yet further, the service that is provided to the public. The associated legislative change that is required to achieve that, which comes before the Assembly today, represents the last, but essential, part of the process. The Bill has been subject to detailed consultation during its development, having undergone two full consultation exercises. The Bill does not impose a financial burden on any party, nor does it have an adverse impact on any section 75 groups. There are a variety of detailed measures in the Bill, but rather than addressing each of those separately, I will group them in several areas and refer briefly to each one.

First, there are several proposed service improvements for customers, some of which are worth noting in more detail. One of those will allow the registration of any birth or death at any register office in Northern Ireland. For example, a birth can currently be registered only in the district of the birth or in the district in which the mother lives. Removing that restriction will facilitate a more customer-orientated approach.

Another proposal will allow the General Register Office to introduce regulations — at an appropriate point in the future — that will allow registration using electronic links without an individual having to physically attend a register office. Of course, controls of any such technical solution that may be implemented will comply with Government guidelines and standards on the security and transfer of electronic information. The systems will have industry-standard security features built in. There will also be stringent online validation checks to ensure the validity of the registration and the subsequent integrity of the records. However, I stress

that face-to-face registration with a registrar will always remain an option.

A further measure will encourage the inclusion of unmarried fathers on birth certificates. Currently, when a child is born to named parents, the husband's details are included on the certificate unless he is shown not to be the father of the child. If a couple are unmarried, joint registration is required to ensure mutual consent, particularly as registration of the father's details confers automatic parental responsibility rights.

To encourage details to be included on the child's birth entry in the future, it is proposed that fathers — if they so choose — will be able to attend the register office separately. If, however, the father registers the birth of a child before the mother does, the mother's position will be safeguarded by delaying the finalisation of the registration until she verifies the information provided.

Changes are also being introduced in relation to the correction of registration records and the facility for changing a name or surname. The system for the correction of errors and omissions in registration records is complicated and can often lead to the implementation of complex formal procedures to correct even minor typographical errors or omissions. All amendments are made via an annotation to the entry, and the annotation is shown on any certificate that is produced subsequently.

The proposed changes will allow for a more efficient and less complicated method of amending straightforward errors — such as the incorrect spelling of a child's name — and will enable the GRO to carry out the amendment by computer. Copies that are produced after the amendment is completed will contain only the correct information. A clean certificate will be provided for the customer, but the GRO will maintain a full audit trail of all amendments to registration entries.

Individuals who wish to change the name on their birth register entry must produce documentary evidence to show that they have used their new name for at least two years. At a time when more comprehensive steps are being put in place to combat fraud, it is difficult to get banks, schools, etc, to register the new name in their records. Under the new proposals, the requirement to produce documentary evidence will be dispensed with and a universal name-change procedure will be put in place from birth onwards. Departments will also be able to check the GRO's database, which will contain a full audit trail of name and/or surname changes, when the digitisation of GRO records is complete.

Additionally, the legislation includes plans to introduce commemorative certificates for occasions when people want a special certificate to mark a special event, such as a wedding anniversary or a particular birthday.

The legislation will also introduce a second range of proposals which, although important, will not affect many people. It is proposed to extend the period in which a stillbirth can be registered from three months to 12 months, and to enable an unmarried father to register a stillbirth without the mother being present.

A stillbirth is always a sad and traumatic event, and the three-month registration period is, sometimes, not sufficiently long for parents. The inability of the unmarried father to enter his details as the father on the stillbirth register is also a source of distress, particularly if the mother of the stillborn child is ill.

Some individuals are concerned about the inclusion of the cause of death on a death certificate. Such information, which is not required for certain purposes, such as closing a bank account, can create sensitivities for relatives. To address that concern, the legislation will provide for the purchase of an alternative form of death certificate that excludes the cause of death. As I said, such matters may affect only a small number of people, but, in those circumstances, they are important.

A range of efficiency measures will also provide customer service improvements. I have already said that the digitisation of records is being progressed — not least because the GRO is still working with paper records that stretch back to the mid-nineteenth century. Digitisation will allow the GRO to preserve the paper records under proper conditions, and result in a fully computerised system. Legislation is required to facilitate the optimum use of such computerised records, and the Bill provides for that by allowing information from other mainly Government sources to be checked against the GRO database.

As a result, customers will find it easier to engage in a range of transactions with Departments. For instance, someone who wants a passport will no longer be required to go to the GRO for a birth certificate and submit it to the Passport Office for processing. Instead, that person will be able to provide all the necessary details on his or her passport application form to allow the Passport Office to provide information for checking against GRO records, thereby streamlining the process. Such electronic checks against registration information by other Departments will also reduce the number of certificates in circulation and, perhaps, remove them completely in the future.

To assist the public further, the legislation will enable customers to ask the General Register Office to notify certain organisations of an event such as a death or a name change; that will save the customer having to supply individual paper certificates to each organisation. The GRO envisages supplying such information to Departments, banks, building societies, pension companies and so on.

10.45 am

One of the General Register Office's most valuable resources is its repository of about eight million records dating from 1845, which are a unique genealogical resource. The use of that resource has been encouraged and the service is becoming increasingly popular with family historians and with the general public. At present, only the indexes are available for inspection, and anyone wishing to avail themselves of information from the register must purchase a certified copy of the entry. The legislation will allow certain records to be made available on the Internet, albeit with suitable safeguards.

The GRO proposes to restrict Internet access to what are termed historic records; in other words, a period must elapse before those records are made available — 100 years for a birth record, 75 years for a marriage record and 50 years for a death record. There will be a search facility for those indexes, but the system will not allow for casual browsing of the register entries; secure firewalls and authentication will be built into the system to prevent misuse. A similar system to that which we are proposing has been operating successfully in Scotland for some time.

To assist genealogical enquiries further, the legislation will provide for the creation of a record of Northern Ireland connections. That will enable individuals who have a connection with Northern Ireland, for example a parent or grandparent born in Northern Ireland, to register life events that occur outside Northern Ireland. Although such registrations will not have any legal standing, they will be a valuable additional resource for family histories.

Similar provisions in Scotland have generated considerable interest. There are plans to launch that system in Scotland at the beginning of 2009, and I trust that we can follow suit. In all those cases the costs will be paid for by users — there will not be an additional demand on the public purse.

The legislation contains technical provisions, including the delegation that the Registrar General can give to other GRO staff and some matters of general legislative clarification. Consequential changes will result from the facility to allow registration in any registrar's office, or for any registrar to be able eventually to issue certificates from local offices that cover all of Northern Ireland.

I trust that I have provided Members with sufficient detail of the principles that underline the legislation and what will be achieved by its introduction. Some of its benefits will be widespread; others — while no less important — will focus on the needs of a small number of people. Together, those changes will allow the General Register Office to make best use of technological advances while ensuring that suitable

safeguards are maintained. The legislation will create a more efficient and effective General Register Office service that will reduce the opportunity for fraud.

Finally, the Bill will provide easier access to historic records, which will further facilitate those with an interest in genealogical enquiry and family history. I commend the Bill to the Assembly.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel (Mr McLaughlin): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for explaining the general principles of the Bill and I welcome today's debate. On 24 October 2007, the Committee for Finance and Personnel received an oral and written briefing from departmental officials on the background to the Bill, including the proposals to reform registration services.

The Committee recognises the vital role that civil registration plays in securing and protecting basic human rights and entitlements. The Committee is aware that a more flexible legislative framework for civil registration is required and that the purpose of the Bill — as outlined by the Minister — is to provide improved service delivery, better access to services and information, and new and more responsive services.

Committee members were briefed on a range of issues, including the outcome of the consultations undertaken by the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) in 2003 and 2006.

As set out by the Minister this morning, the key provisions in the Bill include: the removal of geographic restrictions to provide greater choice and more flexibility in registering vital events; changes to procedures for altering registration records; the introduction of an abbreviated form of death certificate; the provision of commemorative certificates for memorable life events; the provision of electronic sharing of registration information on births, deaths, marriages, and civil partnerships, with all relevant Departments and nominated organisations; and the provision for greater public access to civil registration records.

Members of the Committee for Finance and Personnel received an update on the progress of the Civil Registration Bill on 28 May. Committee members raised a number of issues with the departmental officials at the briefing session. Those included the potential threat to data security arising from increased public access and the increased risk of the fraudulent use of personal identity information — and I am pleased to note the assurances given by the Minister this morning.

Other issues raised included the security capabilities of the bespoke computer system, given the risk of system hackers etc — and, again, the Minister has provided assurance about that. There are also the potential risks involved in the removal of the need for

reproduction or replacement registers to be authenticated by the signature of the Registrar General; some potential problems with the alteration of existing legal records and abbreviating death certificates; the potential resource implications for the registration service's having to cope with higher volumes of work as a possible result of the reforms; the potential range of subject areas for commemorative certificates; the possible use of electronic signatures to permit remote registration; and the potential for sharing registration data in applications for Irish as well as UK passports.

The Committee recognises that the public will welcome the changes introduced by the Bill. Sharp focus must be given to data security and fraud detection, given the current climate of concern around those significant issues. As part of the scrutiny of the Bill, the Committee will carefully consider the various measures and safeguards which will need to be taken to ensure that a robust system is in place to protect the public from the risks of data disclosure and fraud. The Committee will be greatly reassured by the response from the Minister and the Department to the issues that have already been identified. Overall, the Committee was satisfied with the briefing and clarification provided by the Department, and members will continue to engage with DFP officials and other stakeholders on the details of the provisions in the Bill during the Committee Stage. On behalf of the Committee for Finance and Personnel, and on behalf of Sinn Féin, I support the motion.

The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel (Mr Hamilton): I support the Bill. In this part of the world, civil registration is a 160-year-old service. Therefore, it is an opportune moment in which to recognise the service that the General Register Office provides, and has provided — not just by collecting information about the society in which we live, but by offering protections in respect of names, identities, parentage and inheritance rights as the Minister has outlined.

The service may be over a century and a half old, but the system is not as archaic as that. It is important that the system is updated on an ongoing basis, and the Bill seeks to do that by reflecting changes in family circumstances and by adapting the system to take account of technological advances. Most importantly, the Bill recognises the need for civil registration to provide an improved service to its customers, the people of Northern Ireland. That can be seen in the greater choice of places in which a birth or death can be registered, and in the prospect of electronic registration, which is extremely user-friendly. An improved service is also reflected in simple, straightforward aspects of the Bill, such as the commemorative certificates for significant life events, as well as improved access to the register.

Much mention has been made of genealogy, and that is something that has a wider impact than in Northern Ireland — people from around the world want to trace their roots here.

However, the importance of the Bill extends beyond technological changes and improvements to customer service. The sensible changes that it introduces to highly sensitive situations should be warmly welcomed. I refer to the abbreviated form of the death certificate that omits the cause of death. That is a useful option in some circumstances, such as when people wish to close a bank account. In such circumstances, the details of the death are not required on the certificate, and the ability to purchase an abbreviated death certificate will be appreciated.

Also, as the Minister mentioned, the Bill proposes significant changes to the registration of stillbirths, whereby they can be registered anywhere, and the period of registration is extended from three months to 12 months. Everyone can appreciate and understand the need for an extension in such circumstances. Another important change is that the father is able to register a stillbirth without the mother having to be present. Everyone understands the sensitivities of such a situation and, therefore, why that is a good and useful change.

All will warmly welcome the wider sharing of registration information throughout Departments. Everyone is, at times, frustrated by the inability of Departments or Government agencies to share or swap information that would be useful or facilitate better customer service. The impact on passport applications is particularly welcome, and I hope that that will speed up and transform the service and make customers feel more valued.

Only one area of the legislation gives rise to caution that all Members will share. The Minister touched on the issue, and I echo what the Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel said about sensitive information. All information that is held by the General Register Office is sensitive, in some cases extremely so. Robust measures must prevent that sensitive information from falling into the wrong hands through any means.

I welcome the Bill, and I join all Members in looking forward to its passing the further legislative Stages.

Mr Beggs: I also generally welcome the Bill that updates the Births and Deaths Registration (Northern Ireland) Order 1976. Much has changed in the world since 1976. People did not even have PCs then, but now, PCs, the Internet and the intranet mean that it is possible to link the registration system in the way that the Bill proposes. In addition, there have been many changes to people's lifestyles and movement since 1976. People tend to travel further to work and have access to cars. The proposed arrangements mean that

people will not necessarily have to take a day off work to register a birth or death; they can go to a register office that is close to their workplace rather than to the office that is closest to where they live.

The Bill proposes greater flexibility in the registration of births and deaths, and I welcome that general improvement in service access for citizens. The Bill mentions the consideration of the registration of deaths by electronic means rather than by attending a register office. I sound a note of caution there, particularly given the increase in electronic and identity theft. At Committee Stage, Members will have to examine carefully how that system will be protected. No Member wishes someone to suffer through others' inappropriate acquisition of information. I look forward to discussions on the subject at Committee Stage.

The Bill proposes considerably greater access to dated information that will be of great interest to families who wish to trace their genealogy. The proposed limits protect personal information from being released at an inappropriate time: information on births will be released after 100 years; on marriages and civil partnerships, after 75 years; and on deaths, after 50 years.

I welcome the release of that useful information. Its availability may encourage additional tourism, as people are increasingly interested in their family histories. I hope that, after having traced family roots online, people might travel to Northern Ireland and make connections with members of their extended families who live here.

11.00 am

I also welcome the proposals for the abbreviated death certificate, which will ease the difficulties of families at times of tragedy. The Bill allows greater flexibility for those families who have suffered as a result of a stillbirth. That is an important area, and the Bill will allow parents to record information that is important to them and to the family in a flexible manner at such a sensitive time.

I welcome the Bill generally, and look forward to considering it in further detail in Committee.

Mr O'Loan: I also strongly support the general principles of the Bill.

The Committee for Finance and Personnel received a briefing on the Bill from the Registrar General. The Committee's questions were answered in a way that gave confidence to the members that the measure was sound and would improve this important service. I wish to put on record that, given the importance of this service, the general satisfaction of the public speaks for itself.

The Bill deals with vital events in people's lives: births, marriages, deaths and civil partnerships. They are important events, and they can be distressing and

require sensitivity. The Minister made reference to stillbirths, and all Members have come across cases of sudden or accidental death and suicide. All those matters are dealt with by the General Register Office, and it is important that a system is in place that deals well with such important and sensitive events.

I will make one brief comment on a matter that is, strictly speaking, outside of the Bill and on the general system: in co-operation with the General Register Office, district councils do a good job in providing this service. It is very important that the physical premises that are used for this purpose provide for the proper level of sensitivity. It would be useful for the General Register Office to have regard to that.

The Minister gave reasons why the Bill was necessary to meet the needs of contemporary society. It provides for more choice and flexibility, and that will lead to an improved service and take advantage of modern communication technologies. I support all of that wholeheartedly.

Family relationships and social circumstances have changed greatly, and the Minister referred to the need that can arise for father and mother to register separately. People are not always as fixed in their situations as they have been; it is advantageous for them to be able to register from other places. The ability to alter records retrospectively is also an advantage.

Clearly, the General Register Office has taken account of points that were made and has identified necessary changes. Like other Members, I welcome the abbreviated form of the death certificate, which omits the cause of death. In providing commemorative certificates, the service has listened to the demands of the public and responded. I also welcome — with the caveats expressed by other Members — the electronic sharing of registration information. People have legitimate concerns about the growing accumulation of information held by Government. Data security is one such concern; however, there is also the feeling that the Government know too much about the affairs of individuals and that it is too easy to share information.

Those things must be examined very closely in the future. In principle, the sharing of information is a good idea, as it will enable better government and will provide a better service to the public; however, I endorse the remarks made previously in relation to data security.

I repeat, I offer my full support to the principles of the Bill.

Dr Farry: I support the Bill and endorse its broad principles. At the outset, I pay tribute to the work of the Department, in the particular the Registrar General and staff, for their work in preparation of the legislation. The process of preparation was extremely thorough, and we in the Committee for Finance and Personnel

were impressed by the detail of the information presented and the breadth of the knowledge of those staff members.

The Bill is a modernisation of the law and reflects the changing circumstances of society. It introduces a greater degree of flexibility, taking into account the changing nature of family units and the move away from the standard, nuclear family. Furthermore, it recognises our present working and living patterns. When registration was introduced in Ireland, over 160 years ago, most people were born, lived and died in a smaller radius. Now our lives take place across a much wider geographical spread, in and beyond Northern Ireland. The Bill provides more flexibility and choice, which should be welcomed.

Also embodied in the Bill is an acknowledgement of the need to handle information in a more sensitive manner, particularly in relation to the tragic circumstances that can surround birth and death. There is a further acknowledgement that information should be provided only on a need-to-know basis, and that unnecessary information is not made known to bodies that do not require access to it.

I welcome, too, the envisaged co-operation among different agencies in the Bill. However, given our particular circumstances, we must look at that co-operation in the context of the all-island dimension in which we operate, and in which many of our residents lead their lives. It is relatively easy for agencies based in Northern Ireland to co-operate, and co-operation currently exists between Northern Ireland and UK-wide agencies such as the Passport Office.

The most obvious need for that co-operation between agencies North and South is in relation to the obtaining of Irish passports — a common occurrence for residents in Northern Ireland. We must decide whether we can enter into protocols with the Irish Government that will dictate how we handle information. That will make the process of applying for an Irish passport easier and more straightforward, not least in relation to the verification of identity.

The main issue that must be discussed as the Bill enters the Committee Stage will be its impact on information security and the avoidance of fraud. That should not, however, detract from the broad welcome that has been afforded to the legislation. More detailed work must be carried out in that area, but, in the broad sweep, the Bill is sound.

It is a sad reality of the world that people seek to commit identity fraud. Added to that, we have the ongoing threat of domestic and international terrorism, and the impersonation of individuals is a tool that is often used to perpetrate such wicked acts.

It is important to avoid a situation that enables false birth certificates to be used as “breeder” documents for

other forms of ID. In welcoming the legislation, the Alliance Party looks forward to the Committee Stage, and to the Bill becoming law.

Mr McQuillan: I welcome the Second Stage of the Civil Registration Bill.

Many people believe that an overhaul of the present system is long overdue, and that is exactly what the Bill is intended to provide. Members of the public and some staff find the existing system cumbersome and will welcome modernisation. The Bill will ensure more flexibility and wider choice of registration. For those who have to deal with business following someone's death, the planned abbreviated death certificate will be a welcome and practical alternative to the full version.

On a more cheerful note, the provision of a commemorative certificate will serve as an added memento of events in people's lives.

One welcome change is the greater access afforded to the public that is envisaged under the Bill. That should reduce the hassle and expense of accessing information, and go some way towards meeting the needs of today's society.

However, will the Minister clarify how registrars will know whether a birth or death that occurs in their area has been registered in another district, and what the current arrangements for public access to information on registration records are?

Mr Weir: I, too, welcome the Bill, not least for the advantages that it confers on Members. There are many in this House who, from time to time, have their parental legitimacy questioned by irate members of the public. We will be in a position — and I do not want to stray into unparliamentary language — to disprove allegations of illegitimacy more efficiently and effectively.

I welcome the flexibility provided by the Bill. Mr Farry said that the pattern of lives in Northern Ireland has changed greatly in the past 160 years. My own grandfather comes to mind; he spent virtually his entire life in Northern Ireland, apart from a day-trip to Castle Kennedy in Scotland, which he sometimes referred to as his "foreign service". There may be Members sitting on the opposite Benches who would also regard that as foreign service. Indeed, my grandfather never set foot inside the Irish Republic.

There may be much to commend that older, traditional lifestyle, but the changing and more flexible pattern of life must be recognised. Consequently, much of the Bill mirrors what is happening in modern life.

It is rare, but useful, to debate a piece of legislation that is inherently designed to be sensitive towards people's lives. That is reflected in two proposals. The shortened death certificate, which can be used for official purposes, will avoid unnecessary distress to

families, who may not want to carry around a certificate highlighting a cause of death. The Bill's provision on stillbirths shows sensitivity, particularly with regard to unmarried fathers and to the extension of the time period for registration. There can be no greater heartbreak than for a parent to lose a child, particularly as a result of a stillbirth. Many parents take a long time to come to terms with the trauma of a stillbirth. Therefore, I welcome the additional breathing space provided for in the Bill.

The sharing of information between Departments will be beneficial. I agree with Mr Farry that the sharing of that data must be maintained in the widest possible context. The opening of genealogical records will benefit the growing number of people interested in the subject as a family hobby.

As some Members have already mentioned, there could be tie-ins with tourism and the international market, thus maximising the opportunities presented by interest in the roots of people from Northern Ireland.

11.15 am

I believe, as other Members do, that the general provisions of the Bill are to be welcomed. We must ensure that the information that is held is secure and is not susceptible to electronic fraud. Those of us who have seen the film 'The Day of the Jackal' will know that one of its premises involves the theft of a birth certificate and the system being used to obtain passports. Although that film was set 40 or 50 years ago and involved a relatively crude device, the current situation with international crime and fraud is such that we must be particularly careful.

One of the areas that we must explore relates to registration being done "in the prescribed manner", as stated in clause 1 of the Bill. During the consultations, a strong desire was expressed to retain face-to-face registration, and we must ensure that, if we are moving towards a more flexible position, that desire is addressed. The problem of identity fraud has been highlighted in relation to bank cards and a range of other devices and is, unfortunately, on the rise. For example, if, in an attempt to create a false identity, someone with a similar appearance to me, such as Mr Farry, were to try to steal my identity — which has happened on several occasions to both of us in North Down — we would have to ensure that the potential fraudsters — whose intentions, I am sure, are a million miles away from those of Mr Farry — did not succeed in their nefarious activities.

The detailed scrutiny of the Bill in the weeks and months ahead will prove invaluable. Fortunately, we have a couple of months to prepare ourselves for the task ahead. However, overall, the Bill meets modern conditions, applies flexibility, shows sensitivity above all, and is a much-needed modernisation of the registration system. I welcome the thrust of the Bill.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I thank, very sincerely, all the Members who have commented on the Bill during the Second Stage debate, and I welcome all the remarks that have been made and the support that the Bill has received. Some general issues, and several specific points, have been raised, and I am happy to deal with some of those.

During his very supportive remarks, the Chairperson of the Finance and Personnel Committee raised the issues of identity fraud and security, which other Members, on all sides, have also raised. Given recent events elsewhere, as well as those that have occurred locally, we must ensure that as much protection as possible is built into the system to prevent hacking, identity fraud and the misuse of data. The operating systems of the General Register Office are internal and do not have a public interface. Nevertheless, as bespoke operating systems, they have industry-standard protection procedures in place that are kept under continuous review.

Some Members discussed the Bill in the context of electronic registration — Mr Beggs and Mr Weir mentioned that, in particular. That will only be introduced when the appropriate safeguards are in place, which will include procedures for authenticating electronic registration, ensuring the transmission of data over a secure network and the subsequent verification of that data using independent sources before registration is confirmed. Other public-facing systems — for example, those facilitating family-history tracing and genealogical enquiry — will consist of static images that cannot be altered.

Associated web-based transaction payment facilities that allow the downloading of such static images will be subject to industry standard protocols.

I am aware of the issues that Members raised and am grateful for their comments on the briefing that was given to Committee members before the introduction of the Bill. I hope that Members are reassured that, as the Bill proceeds through its Committee Stage, the issues that they raised can be explored in detail. The understandable concerns about the holding and storage of data can be addressed.

Several Members, including the Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel, Mr Hamilton, spoke about the improved service for customers that will result from a better sharing of information. For example, applying for a passport will be made easier as people will no longer have to obtain their original birth certificate. The Bill introduces a longer period in which to register stillbirths, as well as short-form death certificates. As I said, those measures affect a limited number of people, but the circumstances for those people can be very difficult. It is important to take on board what was said in the consultation, and

those amendments to the Bill will be widely welcomed.

Mr O'Loan mentioned the partnership between the civil registration service and district councils, which act as district registration authorities in their respective areas. I support the excellent job that they do and trust that that partnership will go from strength to strength.

The Bill relates to births and deaths. As several Members said, the Bill is the first piece of legislation in that area since 1976. As the system dates back to the 1840s, it is important to update, modernise and make the system as user-friendly as possible. In doing so, we must acknowledge the tremendous work that has been done by the General Register Office and the Registrar General and all his staff.

Dr Farry mentioned the authorities in Northern Ireland sharing information with those in the rest of the UK and the Irish Republic. He used the example of applications for Irish passports, but the Bill does not address that, because it is a matter for the passport authorities in the Irish Republic to determine the desirability and feasibility of such an initiative. Significant policy, legislative and technical issues will have to be explored in Northern Ireland and the Republic.

I welcome the remarks from Mr McQuillan, who asked a couple of questions about registrars. In answer to his question about how registrars will know whether a birth or death in their area has been registered in another district, registrars throughout Northern Ireland are networked to the General Register Office's computer systems, which gives them access to all information about births and deaths that are registered anywhere in Northern Ireland. Therefore, such problems can be dealt with in a straightforward manner. Members of the public who want to buy certificates must provide sufficient information for staff in the General Register Office to identify the record. Alternatively, the public can search the computerised indexes held at the General Register Office and, quoting details from the index, apply for certificates. However, no public access is permitted to the original records.

The Bill addresses important matters, has been widely welcomed by Members and will be welcomed by people throughout Northern Ireland. It provides the legislative framework for a more flexible and modern registration service that will meet the needs of today's society.

I look forward to my and my departmental officials' continued engagement with the Committee and with Members as the Bill proceeds through its various Stages.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Second Stage of the Civil Registration Bill [NIA 20/07] be agreed.

Health and Social Care (Reform) Bill

Second Stage

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind Members that the debate at Second Stage should be confined to the general principles of the Bill.

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

That the Second Stage of the Health and Social Care (Reform) Bill [NIA 21/07] be agreed.

When I assumed responsibility for the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety in May 2007, I said that one of the greatest challenges that I faced was how to reform and modernise the health and social care system so that it is truly fit for the twenty-first century.

The organisational structure for health and social care has its roots in the early 1970s, and, over the years, various adaptations have been made to it. In order to address seriously the challenge of improving health and social care for everyone in Northern Ireland, the time has arrived for major surgery.

The health and social care system is changing; it faces ever-increasing demands and expectations. Now, in the year of the sixtieth anniversary of the introduction of the National Health Service, the time is right to set a new course for the future.

I want to see a modern, responsive and forward-looking service with more collaborative working and less bureaucracy. Reducing the number of trusts is a start towards a more streamlined way of working. However, we must go further, by redirecting measures to front-line services; eliminating duplication; enhancing accountability; and improving safety and quality. Furthermore, the service must become more patient-centred and client-centred, more focused on prevention and primary care and less focused on institution-based care. That is what the legislation intends to achieve.

Health and social care services are improving, and there is strong evidence to support that statement. For example, people no longer have to wait years for an operation — waiting times have been reduced to a few months. Furthermore, trolley waits have been all but eliminated. Changes have also been made to how services are delivered, with the focus now on prevention, which means that people often do not end up in hospital, but have access to the services that they need in their local communities.

When I announced my initial proposals to the Assembly on 18 February on the way forward for the reform of health and social care, I stated that a full public consultation would be undertaken. That was

because I felt that it was vital that people throughout Northern Ireland had their say about such important reforms. That consultation has been conducted, and the proposals are now before the Assembly. More than 200 responses were received, which clearly demonstrates the high level of interest that people have in the health and social care system.

During the consultation period, my officials and I attended a series of meetings and workshops, which gave us an invaluable opportunity to meet as many interested parties as possible in order to discuss the proposals in more detail and to hear the views of a wide range of stakeholders.

The provisions in the Bill reflect the issues and points raised during that consultation. It will allow people to have more of a say about their treatment and care, and it will enable us to deliver the services that people expect and deserve. The Bill will also provide for improved accountability for performance; it will enable us to make the best possible use of limited resources; it will ensure the achievement of agreed targets in areas such as waiting times; and it will improve the quality of services that patients experience on a daily basis. Furthermore, it will help to create more focused commissioning that is strongly rooted in local communities, which will drive towards continuous improvement, and it will introduce new care processes that are more responsive to people's local needs, with less reliance on institution-based care.

11.30 am

The Bill will allow a stronger user voice in the commissioning of services through membership of local commissioning groups, which will help to revitalise consumer representation and a stakeholder network. It paves the way for a more cohesive and co-ordinated approach to health and social care with improved partnership with local government and other key stakeholders in the planning and delivery of health and social care.

The Health and Social Care (Reform) Bill is a substantial piece of legislation that will create the structure that will deliver true reform for the benefit of all the people that we serve.

The key elements of the legislation are as follows. Clause 2 deals with the Department. Its provisions reflect my desire to see a smaller Department with a much sharper focus on its core responsibilities, which include developing legislation and policies to improve the physical and mental health and social well-being of people in Northern Ireland, as well as determining and reviewing policy, standards and targets.

Clause 5 deals with the framework document. In the new system there needs to be total clarity about the roles and functions — at regional and local level — of the new health and social care organisations and the

Department. Those arrangements will be specified in the overarching framework document that the legislation provides, which will set out the roles, responsibilities and accountabilities of each of the new organisations.

I will also take steps to ensure that the top management structures of the new bodies are lean and avoid unnecessary duplication by sharing resources, expertise and accommodation where appropriate.

Clause 7 relates to the regional health and social care board. The existing four health and social services boards will be replaced by a single regional health and social care board, which, including local commissioning groups, will focus on the commissioning of health and social care, performance management and improvement, and resource management.

That body will have the authority to act on my behalf in leading the drive for significant improvements in efficiency and performance to make services more efficient, accessible and patient- and client-centred.

To ensure co-ordinated commissioning at all levels in the new health and social care system, I have also included in the Bill an obligation on the regional board, when drawing up its commissioning plan, to consult with and have due regard to any advice or information provided by the new regional agency for public health and social well-being.

Clause 9 deals with local commissioning groups. I am on record as saying that effective commissioning is the link between policy and delivery. The creation of local commissioning groups in the regional board will involve local health and social care professionals and local government and lay representatives bringing together their innovation and expertise in identifying and addressing the needs of their communities and planning services in partnership with the voluntary and community sectors and with other key stakeholders.

For the present, I have decided to proceed with the existing degree of coterminosity offered by five local commissioning groups aligned with five trusts and the proposed local offices of the patient and client council. I will, however, give that matter further consideration when the local government boundaries are finalised. In the meantime, I expect a high degree of engagement and partnership among the new health and social care bodies and district councils within the present local government arrangements and in line with agreed transitional arrangements.

Clause 12 deals with the regional agency for public health and social well-being. The litmus test for the success of the health and social care system will be a renewed focus on prevention, improved public health and social well-being, and reduced health inequalities. I want to see an enhanced and sustained focus on public health and social well-being, and the creation of a dedicated agency is the best way of achieving that.

The regional agency for public health and social well-being will drive the public-health agenda in a way that is not possible under current arrangements, and it will put public health and social well-being at the core of the health and social care system.

The new agency will not only incorporate the Health Promotion Agency but undertake a much wider range of functions, including health improvement and development, and health protection. Moreover, it will have a particular responsibility for promoting improved partnership working with local government and other public-sector organisations to bring about real improvement in public health and well-being. The agency will also be responsible for anticipating the new opportunities that community planning offers.

As well as preventing disease, the focus on working upstream to tackle the underlying causes of ill health and health inequalities will help to realise the shared goal of a better and healthier future for all our people by adding years to life and life to years.

The new regional support services organisation (RSSO) that is detailed in clause 14 will incorporate the majority of services that the Central Services Agency currently provides. It will also provide a broader range of support functions for the entire health and social care service. A further RSSO objective will be to ensure that all users are provided with an efficient, effective and economic service that is consistent in its response to changing customer needs and local priorities.

Moreover, I want the RSSO to operate to clearly defined standards, with measurable performance indicators, and to be equitable when dealing with smaller health and social care organisations. The Bill will, therefore, place a duty on the new organisation to put arrangements in place to that end that the Department will approve.

Clause 16 details the patient and client council. It is important that a strong and independent voice be provided to represent the views of patients, clients and carers. I am, therefore, replacing the four existing health and social services councils with a single, independent regional body, the patient and client council, which will have five committees operating in the same geographical areas as the five integrated trusts. I want that new body to build on the work of the health and social services councils by combining a powerful, regional voice with a strong, local focus and by engaging effectively with the patients, clients, carers and communities.

At this juncture, I will make a general point about the constitution of the various new organisations. Members will note that, in each instance, the Bill states that the details of the make-up of each organisation will be provided for through subordinate legislation. I will take a little more time to fine-tune my thinking on

that. In any event, providing that level of detail by means of subordinate legislation gives the degree of flexibility that I consider necessary to enable me to amend those constitutions without further recourse to primary legislation. However, I assure Members that the subordinate legislation in question will be subject to full scrutiny by the Assembly.

I plan to begin the process of appointing designate chairpersons to the boards of each of the main organisations as quickly as possible so that, from April 2009, work can begin on establishing them in an orderly fashion. Any such appointments will obviously be subject to confirmation that the Bill has received Royal Assent. In turn, that will allow the newly appointed chairpersons to play their part in selecting chief officers for the new organisations.

Under clause 25, I have decided to transfer the Mental Health Commission for Northern Ireland's functions to the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA). I gave a great deal of thought to that decision, and I am convinced that the regulatory functions for mental health, and the protection of some of the most vulnerable in society, can be undertaken more effectively as part of the multi-sectoral RQIA, which has the resources and infrastructure to ensure that quality improvements can be achieved.

The reform of health and social care is not about changing structures for the sake of doing so. I acknowledge that better outcomes for patients, clients and carers cannot be produced simply by changing the structure of the health and social care system. However, better structures are vital in ensuring continuing improvement not only in health and social care services but in the health and social well-being of the population.

As a result of the new organisational arrangements set out in the Bill, I am convinced that we will be able to deliver more effective, responsive and integrated services that will bring real decision-making to the heart of local communities and deliver a world-class health and social care system for the people of Northern Ireland.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Mrs I Robinson): On behalf of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety I welcome the introduction of the Bill. As its title indicates — and as the Minister has explained — the Bill will put in place a new structural framework for the delivery of health and social care in Northern Ireland. Direct rule proposals to reform and modernise the health and social care system were due to come into operation earlier this year, but the Minister put those proposals on hold when he came into office.

Over the past year, the Committee has been pressing the Minister to reach an early decision on the new structures. I am aware that the delay in setting out the

proposals has been the cause of much uncertainty and concern, particularly among staff who may be affected by the changes. That is particularly the case for those working for the health and social services boards, who have been aware for some time that those boards will cease to exist in their present form, but with no indication of what will replace them. The publication of definitive proposals is, therefore, welcome.

At the beginning of March when the proposals were first published for consultation, the Minister told the Committee that his target date for the introduction of the new structures was 1 April 2009. He described that as a tight, but achievable, target. I believe that it will be an extremely tight timetable, and I am conscious that a lot of work must take place in the meantime to ensure that that happens.

The Committee is grateful to the Minister and his officials for briefing Committee members on 6 March about the proposals when they were first published, and for coming to the Committee on 29 May to brief it on the outcome of the consultation exercise.

The Health and Social Care (Reform) Bill is an important piece of legislation. It will certainly be the most substantial shake-up of health and social care arrangements for many years, and it will result in new structures that are likely to be with us for some time. It is a once-in-a-generation opportunity and it is important that we get those structures right.

Following today's debate, the Bill will come to the Committee for detailed scrutiny. In preparation for that scrutiny, the Committee has taken evidence over recent weeks from several organisations that will be directly affected by the provisions; for example, we heard the views of the Health Promotion Agency and the Institute of Public Health on the proposals for a new public health agency. We also heard the views of the Northern Ireland Local Government Association on the overall proposals, particularly the key role that local government can play in delivering services.

Later this week, the Committee will hear from the Mental Health Commission — one of the bodies due to be dissolved under the proposals and whose functions will transfer to the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority. We will also be inviting any interested organisations and individuals to write to the Committee over the next two months with their views on the provisions in the Bill.

As the Minister has explained, the Bill will create several new organisations, including a single regional health and social care board to replace the existing four health and social services boards. The new regional board will have a vital role in commissioning, resource management and performance management, and it will be required to set up several local commissioning groups, although the exact number is not set out in the

legislation. The Committee is well aware that there are concerns about the number and make-up of those local commissioning groups and will wish to examine the proposals in detail. The Committee will also be keen to examine how the new board will affect functions currently carried out by the Department and how that might affect the size of the Department.

11.45 am

The establishment of a regional agency for public health and social well-being is an important development; it will replace and build on the role of the Health Promotion Agency but will have wider responsibility for health protection and health improvement.

The Health Promotion Agency told the Committee that it views the restructuring proposals as a major opportunity for change. The agency also stressed that health improvement or health promotion tends to lose out when decisions are made on pressures on hospital or acute services. That cannot be allowed to continue. The new agency will provide an opportunity to bring together different aspects of public health and will give public health a much stronger voice. As the Institute of Public Health pointed out to the Committee, there need to be strong links between the new board and the new public health agency. The Committee will want to examine how those links will operate in practice.

Stronger links will also need to be developed between the new health and social care structures and local government. That will take place, as the Minister has stressed, through the greater involvement of local government representatives on the new bodies. Local government must also be involved in the delivery of services; and the good working relationships that already exist between local communities and local authorities need to be developed and built upon to tackle issues such as health inequalities.

Another issue that I wish to mention is the establishment of the new patient and client council, which will replace the health and social services councils; its aim is to provide a stronger voice for patients, clients and carers. The Minister stressed that he wants to see health and social care services become more patient- and client-centred. The Committee will wish to hear views from individuals and organisations on whether the new structures can deliver on that aim.

Finally, as set out in the Budget, the Minister is required to make significant efficiency savings over the next three years, and the Committee will be keen to examine the implications of the proposed changes from that perspective. The question is whether the new structures will result in less bureaucracy and the more efficient use of resources. A major part of the reorganisation of health and social care was implemented last year, with the reduction in the number

of trusts. However, the Committee will want to study the proposals of the Bill in detail. We look forward to hearing the views of interested organisations. I support the general provisions of the Bill.

Mrs McGill: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the Minister and his statement; I do not have it before me, but I was listening carefully. I apologise for the absence of the Deputy Chairperson of the Committee; she cannot be here but sends her apologies.

My party welcomes the general principles of the Bill. The Chairperson referred to the uncertainty that existed when the details of the proposed new structures were not available, as there were some delays. However, things are moving forward and the Bill has reached its Second Stage, and its provisions will be scrutinised at Committee Stage.

I welcome the proposed patient and client council, particularly given some recent debates in the Chamber. The Minister said throughout his speech that the Bill is aimed at improving healthcare and the management of healthcare, as well as improving what happens to the patient, the client and the carer. I hope that the patient and client council will be an appropriate mechanism for dealing with the issues that need to be addressed.

In his speech, the Minister mentioned various organisations. It is possible that some of the documentation that the Committee received prior to the debate contained gaps in information on how all those organisations will work together and individually. As I said earlier, that issue must be examined when the Bill reaches its Committee Stage.

I also welcome the commissioning groups' potential for local delivery. I come from west Tyrone, where, clearly, there have been long-standing health inequalities. I do not want to go into that discussion in the debate; however, it is important that I flag it up.

Although I welcome the Bill's general principles, they must undergo scrutiny by the Committee. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr McCallister: I am delighted that the Health and Social Care (Reform) Bill has reached its Second Stage in the House. I congratulate the Minister on that significant achievement.

The sixtieth anniversary of the NHS has made everyone aware of the changes that it has undergone during its lifetime. It is right and proper that that process continues. Today, the challenges that face health and social care services are different to what they were even 20 years ago. The Bill will equip the Health Service with the necessary structures to tackle the challenges of the twenty-first century. Those include the need for a more patient- and community-based Health Service that must be increasingly focused

on preventative action, as well as on excellent care. I am delighted that the Bill caters for those challenges and that public healthcare is at the core of the Minister's proposals.

I am extremely pleased with the way that the Minister has handled the complex Bill. By reviewing the direct rule proposals, he has guaranteed the outcome that is best suited to Northern Ireland. Mrs Robinson and Mrs McGill mentioned uncertainty. It is vital that the direct rule proposals were tailored to suit Northern Ireland. Bearing in mind that devolution has been restored for almost 14 months only, to get such a result so quickly is a remarkable achievement by the Minister. I am also particularly pleased that the Minister's main proposals are maintained in the Bill, which provides the correct amount of rationalisation, while maintaining local accountability, patient representation and access.

I welcome the single regional health and social care board that will focus on commissioning, resource management and performance management. The improvements in delivery that the board will bring about must not be underestimated. A regional agency for public health and social well-being will have much wider responsibility for health protection and improvement, and provision to deal with existing health inequalities. The Health Service now has an obligation not only to treat people, but to give them the greatest opportunity to improve and to maintain their own health. The regional agency will provide that function. A regional support services organisation will improve efficiency of support functions to the entire Health Service. A single patient and client council, with five local committees that operate in the same locations as existing trusts, will provide a strong voice for patients, clients and carers at existing local level, while introducing necessary central co-ordination and management. The Bill will also create a smaller, leaner and much more effective Department.

I thank the Minister for his personal input and investment in the Bill. He should be commended for meeting personally a wide range of stakeholders, including health and social care organisations and the voluntary and community sector. I understand that those first-hand accounts helped the Minister to make his final decisions.

Although I recognise that detailed scrutiny of the Bill should remain for another time, I ask that the Minister consider the relationship between the regional health and social care board and the regional agency for public health and social well-being. Currently, the Bill requires that the board must consult, and have due regard for, the agency in any decisions.

However, I urge the Minister to examine the benefit of a joint signing-off procedure on major decisions to

ensure that close co-operation and a strategic direction for health and social services are maintained. I strongly welcome the Bill, and I look forward to working with the Committee and the Minister on its Committee Stage and further legislative Stages.

Mrs Hanna: I welcome the Minister's statement on the Second Stage of the Health and Social Care (Reform) Bill, and the SDLP supports the general thrust of the proposals. However, there are many new proposals, and only time and the outworkings of the various groups will demonstrate positive improvement.

Although we will have to wait to see some of the benefits, I particularly welcome the Minister's reference to partnerships, because that is important to the success of the proposals. Formal partnerships and meaningful communication are essential to ensuring that all decisions are best informed, particularly between the new single authority and the regional public health agency; the representatives of the health professionals, including allied health professionals; the local councils; and the community health organisations such as the health action zones and the healthy living centres. That clear connection between bottom-up policy and delivery in the community is required to tackle health inequalities and to focus on the prevention of illness through early intervention.

Mr McCarthy: I give a guarded welcome to the Bill. I welcome the reduction of bureaucracy, and I hope and expect that any savings will go to front-line patient care. I oppose any enforced redundancies in the Health Service. Efficiencies can be made, but not at the expense of the loss of human resources, which would perhaps create more risk to patients, particularly to those patients in hospital. There has already been an increase in hospital-acquired infections, which has, in my opinion, been caused by cutting corners. That must be prevented and not repeated in the future.

I want maximum representation from health professionals on local commissioning groups. That must include the dental profession, which had been excluded, and local council representatives. I am not happy with the proposed abolition of the four health councils, because that will give less input from a local perspective, which will be detrimental to the community, especially isolated communities. From day one, this exercise was intended to save millions of pounds. I still have my doubts about whether that will be achieved, but any savings must be seen to go back into hospitals and healthcare provision for the benefit of everyone in Northern Ireland.

Mr Buchanan: I also welcome the Second Stage of the Bill. The Bill is of great importance to the structure, provision and delivery of the Health Service in Northern Ireland for years to come. That delivery must be done

in a way that is effective, efficient and puts the patient first.

No one can be in any doubt that, over the past 30 years and especially in more recent years under direct rule, the Health Service has been inefficient, cumbersome, overly bureaucratic and greatly lacking in productivity. Therefore, it is essential that the delivery of reforms of the health system and structures under the watch of Minister McGimpsey, closely scrutinised by the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety, will result in a professionally led and patient-centred service and, as the Minister said, that it produces a world-class Health Service for our people.

The reconfiguration of the health structures through the review of public administration means that the focus on prevention and community-based care is essential. Following on from the Programme for Government, the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and the other Departments decided that they must deliver improvement and modernisation. As we all know, the cost of providing health services is rising rapidly, so innovation and cost-effectiveness are essential to improving outcomes and overall performances.

12.00 noon

In order to ensure greater practical input into service development, it is important to devolve more responsibility to professionals. That, in conjunction with strong local-level commissioning and the development of local commissioning groups to provide people with the opportunity to influence and improve services in their area, is essential. As we examine structures, there is no doubt that we must establish a more streamlined service in order to improve efficiency and performance.

Although public health is crucial, I am far from convinced that another body — the proposed regional public health agency — represents the best way forward. Some Members said that the public health agency and the new board must establish strong links; however, there is no need for two bodies — they should be amalgamated into a single regional health and social care board. The Minister's proposal that the chief executive of the public health agency also sit on the regional health and social care board emphasises the fact that the two bodies should be combined, and I ask the Minister to reconsider his position on establishing a public health authority, because that level of bureaucracy is unnecessary.

The Minister is aware that much good work is already being done by Investing for Health partnerships. A separate regional body could, in effect, reduce cross-sector working. Equally, the proposed body for support functions, such as shared finance, recruitment, and information and communication technology could

also form part of the regional board, and I urge the Minister to reconsider that matter.

The focus on strategic policy, long-term targets and smaller Departments, combined with a regional board that will be responsible for commissioning, performance management and the five fully integrated trusts cannot help but strengthen linkages between hospitals and community-based services. However, the Minister should ensure that the services that local commissioning groups commission are coterminous with the relevant council, or cluster of councils, and that the single independent regional patient and client council, as a watchdog with a subregional presence, is also based on local government boundaries.

Members are aware that Derek Wanless's report, 'Securing Our Future Health: Taking a Long-Term View', confirms that funding alone is far from the answer for the Health Service. Massive year-on-year investment has not solved the problems in Great Britain; productivity is crucial. As Wanless suggested, we must do more with each healthcare pound. In the long term, it is unrealistic to expect high-percentage increases in health budget allocations. The key question is not about how much money is allocated at the top, but, ultimately, what results are achieved at the bottom.

During the past decade, the number of administrators here increased by 36%. I welcome the Minister's announcement that administration will be much leaner under the new system. Hospital activity and overall productivity here has been proven to be much lower than across the water, and there are significant variations in unit costs in various trust areas. Moreover, hospital throughputs and lengths of stay are less efficient here than in GB. Those factors must be tackled in order to provide a quality service for Northern Ireland patients.

In 2005, the Appleby Report demonstrated that productivity could be improved, and it emphasised the need to eradicate waste. Notably, the report identified the distinct absence of an explicit performance-management system, which is regarded as pivotal to achieving improvements in efficiency, effectiveness and responsiveness. Professor Appleby was critical of the Northern Ireland Health Service, which he said lacked urgency and suffered from "general drift". Consequently, he identified constant frustration at all levels and a relative lack of improvement in performance.

Appleby argued that it remains to be seen how providers are to be held to account for their performance. He also felt that although partnerships and integration can generate good outcomes for patients and users, there is a distinct danger that structural reform could fail to provide the necessary incentive and sanctions — the "bite", so to speak — to encourage service providers to seek continually new ways of improving

their performance. We must take note of those comments at this time of reform.

The structural reforms are important, but what is more important is how the Health Service conducts its work and how it is managed. Productivity must increase. Performance management is critical, and the successful reduction in waiting times — as a result of an initiative that was introduced under direct rule — shows what can be achieved. Incentives must be introduced, with greater management freedoms and sanctions, where necessary, to discourage complacency in the system. The assumption must be challenged that an organisation should always be entitled to provide services to a specific population purely on the basis of geographical boundaries, regardless of performance or efficiency. The pioneering of projects and incentives should be encouraged — if they are successful and cost-effective, they can be extended to offer a better service in other areas. Staff and management must continually strive to make improvements, and quality and standards must constantly be driven up, with appropriate incentives to enable improvements. The reform of the health system and structures is a challenge for us all, but I look forward to working with the Health Committee and the Minister in bringing those reforms to fruition to create what I hope will be a world-class service for our people.

Mr Beggs: I, too, am pleased that the Health and Social Care (Reform) Bill has reached its Second Stage. Reform is needed in our health and social services, and I am confident that the Minister's proposals will bring about improvements and deliver a Health Service that is fit for the twenty-first century, yet moulded to the needs of the people of Northern Ireland.

I am extremely pleased that most of the proposals that the Minister previously outlined have found their way into the Bill. I congratulate the Minister on his handling of the Bill and in particular for his personal interest and attendance at consultation meetings. I know that the Minister has been greatly helped by meeting representatives of health and social care organisations and of the voluntary and community sector. That engagement has helped to create a Bill that reflects the needs of patients and professionals alike.

The Bill will create a smaller Department that will be more robust, leaner and easier to administer. That will result in a greater proportion of health funding being available for front-line services and a better Health Service for patients, with reduced funding being absorbed by Health Service bureaucracy. The Bill contains an appropriate mix of rationalisation and local accountability, representation and access.

I welcome the creation of a regional health and social care board that focuses primarily on resource management, performance management and

commissioning. That should enable better geographical use of resources — certainly better than was possible under the previous boards system that operated in Northern Ireland.

The regional agency for public health and social well-being will have a much wider responsibility for health protection, health improvement and development to address health inequalities than the Health Promotion Agency had, and I welcome the establishment of that new agency. Prevention and health education is an increasingly crucial part of the Health Service, and I strongly welcome the measures that have been introduced to address health inequalities.

The creation of a single patient and client council must also be welcomed. I have heard criticism of this measure from some quarters, but I ask this question: where are we to achieve efficiencies so that we can direct funds to patients? The proposals will enable local offices to remain in each of the five areas in which the health and social care councils are situated. That will strike a balance between creating more efficient central management and strategies, yet maintain local access and accountability for patients, clients and carers alike.

Mr McCarthy: How can the Member honestly say that doing away with the four local health and social services councils will help isolated communities? As one who represents a largely rural area, how will I find my way to the headquarters of a large organisation? How will any of my constituents with a health problem find their way there?

Mr Beggs: The ability to speak to a local group does not necessarily mean an improved service. What is important is that areas of genuine concern be taken into consideration, and an efficient Health Service delivered. If improved local services are required, those improvements will be more easily dealt with through having a regional body than through the facade of a local health council. I talked to a member of a local health council who has a degree of concern about their being effective. Rather than give the impression that they can engage strategically and deliver the necessary service improvements, they should be capable of doing so.

Support services are, perhaps, the unsung heroes of the Health Service. I therefore welcome the creation of the regional support services organisation, which will improve support to the front line of health and social care.

The Ulster Unionist Party believes in strong local democratic representation. I declare an interest as a Carrickfergus borough councillor, and I am pleased that local government will be involved in Health Service structures and delivery. Local democratic involvement can improve the delivery of services and functions. It

also gives people greater representation in the delivery of their Health Service, and that must be welcomed.

I am looking forward to the Bill's passage through the Assembly, and I hope that the Health Committee will work with the Minister to make any necessary improvements that may be identified. After all, a Committee's role is to scrutinise the legislation and to work with the Minister to improve it.

The Bill is one of the first examples of how devolution is working for the people of Northern Ireland. Its proposals will reduce health bureaucracy and provide improved accountability. They should also result in an increased percentage of funding being directed at front-line services and in improved patient care. That must be welcomed.

I congratulate the Minister for his personal involvement in delivering the proposed improved Health Service structures, which are designed to meet our citizens' needs.

Mr Easton: The Bill's objectives are clear and well defined, and everyone will welcome the focus on prevention and community-based care. Any changes must be cost-effective and increase productivity, and they must not affect front-line services. We will, therefore, be watching out for that as the Bill progresses.

Times of structural change, such as this period of reform of public administration, provide important opportunities for all involved to review performance and to develop a refined vision in many areas of life in general, and in public organisations in particular.

We must keep at the forefront of our thinking the need to improve and modernise in all areas of Health Service delivery. The Programme for Government asks for that improvement and modernisation across all Departments. Health Service costs are rising rapidly, and, in order to improve outcomes and overall performance, we must emphasise the importance of innovation and cost-effectiveness in every part of the system. Much can be gained from devolving responsibility to professionals in order to ensure greater practical input into service developments.

Nobody knows better the problems facing an organisation than those who work in it daily. They know the problems and are often able to provide solutions quickly from the available resources.

12.15 pm

A strong local commissioning role is essential if we are to provide local people with influence over outcomes and give them the opportunity to improve services in their areas. Any increase in efficiency and performance will have to be achieved in the context of leaner and more streamlined services. That will be assisted greatly by the integration process, which will strengthen hospital- and community-based services. In that context,

we can drive forward the vision of reducing and eventually eliminating waste and costly duplication.

We are all aware from our experiences in many areas of employment that throwing cash at a problem is a poor way to solve it. In a drive for increased productivity, we must make sound strategic decisions before spending public funds.

The health budget is huge — the largest by far — and a small percentage increase will absorb a large amount of money. Where do we seek improvements? We must acknowledge the increase in the number of administrators in the system. That area will require careful examination. Furthermore, there are large variations in unit costs in different trusts, and we must consider carefully the reason for that and the reasons behind our performance, which is relatively poor compared with other parts of the United Kingdom.

The Appleby Report of 2005 emphasised the need to eradicate waste and to develop an explicit performance-management system that would secure the required improvement in efficiency, effectiveness and responsiveness. The report also stressed the need to use incentives in the form of clearly defined rewards or sanctions to encourage the innovation and change process. However, although structural reforms are important and necessary, it is people and their ideas that will drive an increase in productivity in any organisation. The quality of people's performance, especially management performance, will characterise an organisation that is seeking continuous improvements. The ideas, attitudes, enthusiasm and skills of the people in the system are the critical factors. Although we recognise the dedication of people who provide health services, we must demand more in qualitative terms from every individual and from every part of the system in order to create a culture of continuous improvement. That is the goal towards which everyone in the Assembly is striving.

Mr Gallagher: I welcome the debate, which follows the Minister's announcement, and I acknowledge the fact that he has moved on with the very important matter of introducing new structures for our Health Service. Other Members who spoke recognise that there are too many levels of bureaucracy in the Health Service and that the Department must be trimmed down. Indeed, the Minister also referred to a more trimmed-down Department. In that regard, it is important to consider opportunities for the relocation of public-service jobs in the reform of the Health Service structures. It would be a major disappointment if the new structures were put in place at the end of the process but the public found that all the authorities were based in the greater Belfast area and were still far removed from the majority of the population.

I welcome the measures that are being taken to develop the local commissioning groups. Members have referred to their membership, which comprises professionals and elected representatives. They are capable of dealing with more treatments and procedures than is the case at present. If such activity is concentrated more in the local commissioning groups, the burden on our hospital services will, in turn, be reduced.

The establishment of a regional public health agency is a welcome development. The current situation is unsatisfactory as there are too many levels of bureaucracy. Public health is handled by several authorities, including the Department, the trusts and the public health authority. That results in a diluted message about the importance of public health. Just as the local commissioning groups will reduce the referrals and burdens on our hospitals, a good public health agency, through its messages, will act in the same way and have a similar impact.

Although the Minister mentioned consultations between the single health authority and the new public health agency, the latter should have its own executive powers. Public health functions, which are the responsibility of the trusts, should transfer to the new public health agency during the development of the new structures. That is the best way to send out a strong message about public health.

I listened to the views of the Minister and Members about the patient council, and I sympathise with Kieran McCarthy's comments. The development process must outline clearly the type of local committees that will be established, because such committees are crucial in reflecting local needs and circumstances, which will be overlooked if all authority is vested in a single body. That is particularly relevant to people in the west, if that single body is located in greater Belfast.

New local committees for the patient council must be developed properly. They should have a recognised status, earmarked budgets, administrative staff and a local chief to act as a watchdog for his or her area. If we follow that route, local councils will have some teeth, because, ultimately, they undertake important functions. The Minister has introduced many Health Service initiatives; however, some needs remain unmet and must be reflected by strong, local voices.

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I thank Members for their contributions. The health and social care system is of immense importance to everyone in Northern Ireland. At some time or another, everyone will use those services, and, when they do, they expect them to be available, easily accessible and effective. Members will agree that we need to improve our ability to address the major public-health and social well-being challenges that face Northern Ireland. The Health and Social Care

(Reform) Bill provides us with a unique opportunity to improve the health and social well-being of people in Northern Ireland and the health and social care services for which we are all responsible. Although much progress has been made, we must redouble our efforts and effect this change in order to prevent and reduce illness and disability, save lives, support the increasing number of people who need our help in the future and maintain our Health Service.

I am grateful to all Members for their comments and their universal welcome, in principle, of the Bill, which will now proceed to Committee Stage. I make no apology for the delay; I understand Members' concerns, but, at this time last year, I was faced with a giant Health Service authority. That model suited a direct rule Minister but did not reflect the needs of the Assembly, the Executive or a devolved Minister, regardless of who that may be in the future.

One of the stipulations under the Hain model, for example, was that no elected representatives would form part of the system. That was a missed opportunity. Therefore, I have taken the time to get things right. As Iris Robinson said — and as I have said on several occasions — this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to rebuild the Health Service and we must get it right. The changes that we make must stand the test of time; however, they should be made in a way that allows the Health Service to evolve. We should not have to break it to fix it.

Mrs Robinson talked about making efficiency savings over three years, but I am not sure whether she was talking about the review of public administration (RPA) period or the comprehensive spending review (CSR) period. A great deal has been said about over-bureaucracy. Seventeen hundred administrative jobs will be shed in this exercise, producing a saving of £53 million per annum over the period of the CSR, which began this time last year, when the direct rule Administration anticipated having its model in place. In effect, we have lost nothing as far as those efficiencies are concerned.

Claire McGill spoke about delays. It is important to repeat that I make no apology for those delays, which happened because we wanted to arrive at the right model for a devolved Administration rather than for a direct rule Administration. I accept John McCallister's points about reviewing the direct rule model and about commissioning.

Some Members may have missed an important point, which is that the management and performance of the system is a key element of the construction of the regional health and social care board. Although the board deals with local commissioning, it also deals with the key issues of performance management and improvement. Furthermore, John McCallister made a

point about a smaller Department, which is just as important.

I welcome Mr McCallister's support for a single regional public health agency. It is important to have a new focus on public health. The direct rule model for the public health authority would have abolished the Health Promotion Agency. I felt profoundly that that was a missed opportunity, very much in line with the need to engage local populations on the matter of their health. We had to have a renewed focus on public health in order to tackle health inequalities. That is why there is a proposal for a regional public health agency. It will not exist simply to offer advice or make the right noises. It will have an important part to play. I listened to what John McCallister had to say about the joint sign-off option. He said that the Bill requires the health and social care board to have due regard for the public health agency. That may not be enough, and I will actively consider the joint sign-off option.

I welcome Carmel Hanna's remarks about health inequalities, about which she has spoken on many occasions. She recognised the important role that the public health agency will play in addressing those inequalities. I anticipate that the agency will have its own budget, which will be substantial, and which will allow it to pursue that agenda.

Kieran McCarthy's guarded welcome of the Bill centred around the proposed patient and client council. I had a debate about this issue. We have five trusts in place, and four patient and client councils. The direct rule model would have abolished those councils in favour of one. I took the view that we needed one council in each trust area. That meant that there would be five patient and client councils. Questions were asked about how to provide a regional voice, and do what Roy Beggs said had to be done, which was to make it effective. The overwhelming response from the consultations was that there should be one patient and client council with four committees — effectively patient and client councils, each in a local format. Rather than going in the direction that Mr McCarthy thinks I am going, I am going in the opposite direction to provide more local input, which was always my objective. The five bodies will provide an effective local voice in the five trust areas and will mirror and shadow the work of the commissioning groups, but providing effectiveness at a local level.

That is the model. Of course, it is really a matter of how all the practicalities work out. However, the model will provide a much stronger focus on, and will give a strong voice to, local areas.

12.30 pm

Tom Buchanan talked about the need for efficiency and effectiveness. He is not convinced about the new

agency. The new agency will play a huge role in addressing health inequalities, for example.

Mr Buchanan also talked about the Appleby Report, and he said that investment is not the answer, but that productivity is the key. He ought to take a walk through the Ulster Hospital's ward block or the Royal Victoria Hospital's maternity unit. He should look at Craigavon, Altnagelvin or Daisy Hill Hospitals. Those hospitals were all built in the 1950s or early 1960s. They all failed to get the investment that they required, and they now need huge infrastructure investment. There are nine acute hospitals in Northern Ireland, most of which require major work. We cannot run an efficient service in inefficient buildings.

Mr Buchanan is fond of talking about the Appleby Report, but I refer him and the House to the Wanless Report. That report was commissioned by Tony Blair and Gordon Brown when they took office 10 years ago. They asked whether Britain could afford a Health Service that would provide healthcare from the cradle to the grave, as envisaged by Nye Bevin 60 years ago. The Wanless Report said that that was possible, provided that the Health Service had investment, was efficient and engaged the local population in looking after their own health. Those requirements are very much at the core of my proposals.

I constantly argue that the Health Service requires investment. I argued that at the time of the Budget consultations, and I will continue to do so. I make no apology for doing so, either. We must also be efficient. That is why the new board will focus on performance management and improvement and on engaging the local population in dealing with issues such as health inequalities. Engagement with the public will be the driving force behind the new public health agency. This will all produce a much better Health Service.

As Appleby has been mentioned several times, I remind Members that Appleby said, in 2005, that the Health Service in Northern Ireland was around 9% less efficient than that in England, although he later modified and reduced that figure. He also gave an account of the fact that we do not benefit from economies of scale.

I have already indicated the way in which we will go during the RPA period. Although major efficiencies have been found, some under efficiency drives have happened since the RPA. Therefore, I must find £700 million in efficiency savings over the next three years — 3% per annum. I look forward to having Tom Buchanan's support for the proposals that the trusts are working on at the minute.

I am grateful for the remarks of Alex Easton and Tommy Gallagher, particularly Mr Gallagher's expression of support for the public health agency. My Department will carefully examine the relocation of public-sector jobs. All the structures that we envisage

require a strong local presence. Therefore, they cannot be based simply in Belfast.

When Members have the opportunity to reflect on the Bill's proposals, they will agree that it represents a positive route towards creating a health and social care system that the people of Northern Ireland truly need and deserve.

Once again, I am grateful to everyone who contributed to a very productive debate on an extremely important piece of legislation.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Second Stage of the Health and Social Care (Reform) Bill [NIA 21/07] be agreed.

Pensions Bill: Legislative Consent Motion

The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie): I beg to move

That, further to the Legislative Consent Motion passed on 26 February 2008, this Assembly endorses the principle of the extension to Northern Ireland of additional amendments to the Pensions Bill dealing with the Pensions Regulator, persons working on vessels and persons in offshore employment and pre-consolidation modifications to pensions legislation.

Before explaining the purpose and need for the motion, I express gratitude to my Executive colleagues and to the Chairperson and members of the Committee for Social Development for the expeditious manner in which they considered my proposal to bring the motion before the Assembly.

The motion deals with the extension to Northern Ireland of proposed amendments to the Westminster Pensions Bill, which is at Committee Stage in the House of Lords. We have spoken many times about parity and about the requirement to seek to maintain single systems of social security, child support and pensions across Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Pensions provide a very good example of the highly integrated nature of the systems in Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Most statutory bodies in the field — such as the Pensions Regulator, the Pensions Ombudsman and the Financial Services Authority — operate on a UK-wide basis. Similarly, the pension protection fund, the fraud compensation fund, the financial assistance scheme and the Personal Accounts Delivery Authority were all established on a UK-wide basis. As a result, a considerable amount of the relevant legislation is, by necessity, of UK extent.

As the wording of the motion highlights, this is the second time that the Assembly has debated the extension to Northern Ireland of provisions of the Bill. On 26 February, the Assembly approved the extension to Northern Ireland of a number of provisions of the Bill, such as the setting up of the personal accounts scheme; the extension of the remit of the Personal Accounts Delivery Authority; and amendments relating to the financial assistance scheme. This motion is necessary because further amendments are being made to the Westminster Bill. Those amendments deal with the Pensions Regulator, seafarers, offshore workers and pre-consolidated modifications to pensions legislation.

The Pensions Regulator was established on a United Kingdom-wide basis under the Pensions Act 2004. The regulator promotes high standards of scheme administration and works to ensure that those involved in running pension schemes have the skills and knowledge that they need. Under the Pensions Bill, the regulator will have powers to ensure that employers comply with their duties, including auto-enrolling

employees and paying employer contributions. The Bill will enable the issuing of penalty notices to employers who fail to comply with those requirements.

Current legislation that extends to Northern Ireland allows for certain functions of the regulator to be contracted out, provided that suppliers of services are listed in regulations made by the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions. The proposed amendment removes the need to identify specific suppliers of services to the regulator in legislation. That approach ensures that the regulator has the flexibility to identify a best-value-for-money approach to delivering compliance. Furthermore, the regulator will be given wider scope to incur expenditure in relation to contracting out.

The second proposed amendment relates to seafarers and offshore workers. At present, the Pensions Bill could be interpreted to include seafarers of any nationality working on any ship in Great Britain and Northern Ireland waters. Those may include non-UK nationals or non-UK-registered ships. Although the broad intention is to extend the reforms to seafarers and offshore workers in appropriate cases, it is recognised that this is a complex area that raises issues relating to international, maritime and European law. Several of those issues remain to be resolved. The proposed amendment will, therefore, take all seafarers outside the scope of the Bill until those issues can be resolved.

The Bill will confer a power on the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions to make regulations to enable the provisions of the Bill, and any corresponding Northern Ireland legislation, to be applied to seafarers at a later date, but before the introduction of personal accounts in 2012.

Similar provision will be made for offshore workers, such as those working on the continental shelf, by way of an Order in Council. That is necessary, because provisions in the Bill will be extended beyond the UK's normal jurisdiction. The intention is to ensure that seafarers and offshore workers receive equal treatment with land-based workers as far as is possible under international, maritime and European law.

I am anxious to ensure that seafarers and offshore workers from Northern Ireland benefit from the new pension arrangements in the same way as those in Great Britain. Until the outstanding issues are resolved, it is difficult to say with certainty whether some of the matters to be addressed will be within the legislative competence of the Assembly. It is, therefore, imperative that the regulations extend to Great Britain and Northern Ireland to ensure that there will be no gaps in coverage.

The final proposed amendment relates to the power of the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions to make an Order to amend specified Westminster pensions legislation to facilitate a further consolidation of that

legislation. There are strict rules on consolidation, which means that changes that alter the effect of the legislation that is being consolidated or that change policy cannot be made. A pre-consolidation Order will allow for errors in existing legislation to be corrected. Furthermore, it can clarify doubts and remove anomalies in existing legislation prior to its consolidation.

However, that power is limited to amending legislation that was in place when the Pensions Act 2004 was passed. The proposed amendment will update that power to include the Pensions Act 2007 and the current Bill in the list of legislation that can be amended by a pre-consolidation Order.

A considerable amount of the legislation on pensions covers Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and, therefore, the powers must also cover that geographical remit. Given that pension matters are transferred under the Northern Ireland Act 1998, the approval of the Assembly is required for the proposed amendments and their extension to Northern Ireland.

The Executive considered urgently and endorsed the proposals for the motion at our meeting on 19 June, and the Committee for Social Development considered the proposals and expressed its support for them at its meeting on the same day. I am grateful for the support of Executive colleagues and of the Committee. I trust that Members will agree that it is necessary for the proposed amendments to extend to Northern Ireland.

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

The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development (Mr Hilditch): I thank the Minister for her detailed explanation. As she said, on 19 June, the Committee for Social Development considered correspondence from the Department in which it notified the Committee of the Minister's intentions to table the legislative consent motion on the Westminster Pensions Bill.

As the Minister said, the motion relates to amendments that were made to the Bill during its passage through Westminster. The Committee has considered the amendments and agreed that they should extend to Northern Ireland. The Committee supports the motion.

12.45 pm

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her statement. It is apparent from that statement that the legislation in respect of pensions is complex. Mr Hilditch and the Minister have said that the Committee considered the amendments and were in agreement. The issue of seafarers and offshore workers has been explained by the Minister, and anything that protects their rights has to be positive. I endorse the motion.

Mr Durkan: The Minister referred to an earlier legislative consent motion that came before the Assembly.

At that time, I submitted an amendment that was not accepted by the Speaker, and I took that to mean that there was a convention of discouraging amendments to legislative consent motions — I can understand why that would be the case. The amendment that I tried to submit highlighted an issue that was addressed during a subsequent debate. However, it is important that that issue be raised again, given that the legislative consent motion deals with amendments that have been agreed or that might be made in respect of the Pensions Bill.

There is an acute anomaly that affects a number of pensioners who belong to a few pension schemes, the most significant of which involves quite a number of people in Northern Ireland. I refer specifically to the Desmond and Sons Ltd pension scheme, with just short of 300 members. Pensioners who are members of that scheme are suffering a significant reduction in the pension that they receive. Those pensioners are receiving only around 53% of their pension entitlement, which they have earned, bought and paid for. That is happening because they are caught in a calendar warp with existing schemes.

When Parliament passed the previous pensions legislation, everyone assumed that people who belong to pension schemes would be covered by either the pension protection fund or the financial assistance scheme. The Desmond and Sons pension scheme and two other smaller schemes in England demonstrate that that is not the case. Insolvency occurred in those cases before 5 April 2005, but the wind-up occurred after that date. Therefore, they are disqualified from benefiting from either the pension protection fund or the financial assistance scheme.

At Westminster, I have been pressing for amendments, and I tried, during the previous debate, to urge the Assembly to ensure that amendments are pursued by the Government to ensure that that anomaly is rectified. I have held a number of meetings and engagements with Ministers responsible for pensions, including the current Minister of State for Pension Reform, Mike O'Brien, who has been very sympathetic. I have relied on members of the House of Commons Standing Committee to table an amendment, and I have tabled a new clause, all the while receiving assurances from Ministers that the Government will table an appropriate amendment in the Lords.

Last week, an amendment was tabled in the Lords that would have the effect of allowing secondary legislation to deal with some of those anomalies. I would prefer a more upfront and categorical amendment that would directly deal with, and dispose of, the issue. I hope that, throughout the passage of the legislation, the Minister will undertake to use her office and the representative channels of the Executive to ensure that further amendments can be made to the Pensions Bill. Those amendments are necessary to provide more

upfront assurances to the workers from Desmond and Sons that they can be accommodated immediately. If those amendments cannot go that far, strong assurances must be given that the secondary legislation that will remedy the problem will follow immediately. We do not want to be left in long pursuit of that secondary legislation.

I welcome the wider comments that the Minister has made about the importance of the Pensions Bill.

Pensions legislation, by its nature, is more complicated than any of us would like, but if we are to provide the cover that people require, it needs to be — and it must apply on a UK-wide basis.

A particular anomaly affects the Desmonds' pension scheme in Northern Ireland, more so than anywhere else. I hope that the Minister representing the Assembly and the Executive will not be behind the door in pressing the case. These people need to see justice — they are carrying a grave injustice. A legal remedy to the calendar warp would help the financial assistance scheme to be made available, if this corrective legislation is passed. Those pensioners who have experienced a serious reduction in benefits would have their situation made good, and people whose pensions have been deferred would have more comfort and confidence about the future that they face.

Ms Lo: The Alliance Party supports the legislative consent motion. We welcome the amendment to make the office of the Pensions Regulator more flexible and able to contract out some functions to ensure better value for money. If that helps with efficiency savings, it will be better for the public purse.

In the case of seafarers and offshore workers, I appreciate that theirs is a complicated issue, involving other legislation. I realise that there has been an assurance that the case will be looked at before 2012, but I still have some reservations — perhaps the Minister can elaborate on the issue. There will be a gap of some years before the matter of the protection of seafarers and offshore workers is resolved, and they will not be entitled to treatment equal to that offered to land-based workers. What sort of protection will these workers have in the meantime?

The Minister for Social Development: I thank Members for their contributions to the debate. I am particularly grateful for the support of the Committee's Deputy Chairperson, Mr Hilditch, as well as that of other members of the Committee for Social Development, namely Mr Brady and Ms Lo. I will return to the comments made by my colleague Mr Durkan.

It is right that the proposed amendments outlined earlier should extend to Northern Ireland. Seafarers and offshore workers from Northern Ireland should benefit from the new pension rights in the same way as their counterparts in Great Britain. Equally, it is vital to

maintain the current integrated system by agreeing to the amendments to Westminster legislation that already extend to Northern Ireland.

I am conscious of the fact that Mr Durkan raised the issue of the Desmonds' pension scheme during the first debate on the legislative consent motion on 26 February 2008. I assure him that I have been in consultation with the Minister for Pension Reform in the Department for Work and Pensions about the position of people affected by the Desmonds' pension scheme. Work is ongoing, but I have been assured that a successful conclusion will be reached in the near future to extend the financial assistance scheme to cover schemes such as that in Desmonds'. I am conscious that many of the people involved in the scheme are quite advanced in years and that they need concrete and categorical assurances that this is going to happen. I will be making direct contact with the Minister for Pension Reform. I hope to visit London in the next few weeks to meet various GB Ministers, and that will be one of the issues that I will be discussing.

I agree with my colleague Mark Durkan that people who worked in Desmond and Sons have a right to natural justice, and they should receive a proper and adequate pension. I am happy to re-examine the matter and pursue it to the bitter end.

I hope that I have answered all the questions that were put and addressed all the issues that were raised. I agree with Members that the legislation is technical, complex and difficult to understand. If I omitted to address any particular point, I assure Members that I will respond to them in writing.

I commend the motion to the Assembly, and I thank all Members who contributed to the debate.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That, further to the Legislative Consent Motion passed on 26 February 2008, this Assembly endorses the principle of the extension to Northern Ireland of additional amendments to the Pensions Bill dealing with the Pensions Regulator, persons working on vessels and persons in offshore employment and pre-consolidation modifications to pensions legislation.

COMMITTEE BUSINESS

Primary-School Funding

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

I remind Members to consider whether they have any relevant interests to declare before speaking in the debate.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Education (Mr Storey): I beg to move

That this Assembly calls on the Minister of Education to urgently examine measures and bring forward proposals which would significantly increase funding to primary schools.

I declare an interest, as I sit on the boards of governors of Ballymoney Model Primary School and Ballymoney High School.

As Chairperson of the Committee for Education, I wish to highlight some important points in support of the motion. The Committee heard considerable evidence on the underfunding of primary schools. To reflect how seriously the Committee regards the issue, I wrote to every Member of the House on 26 June 2008 and included copies of the most recent evidence to the Committee from the Northern Ireland Primary Principals' Action Group (NIPPAG) and the briefing paper from senior officials in the Department of Education.

The full record of all the key evidence to date is available on the Committee's website. I say "to date" because the matter will not end with today's debate. I notice that the Minister of Education made a pre-emptive strike when she took time to issue a press release prior to evidence being presented to the House. I use the term "pre-emptive" but, in light of her previous career and the week that we are in, it may be better described as a weak-wristed volley that did not climb halfway up the net.

The Committee has agreed to continue its scrutiny of the issue until, as the motion demands, the Minister introduces proposals to:

"significantly increase funding to primary schools."

Any attempt to lob the ball into someone else's court will not do. The Minister has moved from playing singles to partnering her colleague John O'Dowd in a mixed-doubles team — I wonder how good he will be when he comes to the net.

I welcome representatives from NIPPAG to the Assembly today. I, and other Members, had the pleasure of addressing the entire group of 130 principals in the Long Gallery on 11 June 2008. The

evidence from NIPPAG and other groups, such as the East Belfast Primary and Nursery Principals' Group and the North Belfast Principals' Group, is compelling on several fronts. Information from various sources reflects a significant differential between primary and post-primary funding in Northern Ireland and in how primary funding here compares with other parts of the UK and beyond.

Officials caution that some statistics do not reflect like-with-like comparisons. However, the serious funding differential between primary and post-primary funding is clear, and that is one issue that I want to highlight to Members today. The Department made the following statement that includes its own figures:

“After taking account of all funding factors, a difference, on average, of £1,375 per pupil exists.”

Is that acceptable to the House?

The Department of Education told the Committee:

“In developing and introducing the common funding formula in April 2005, a key focus was to make progress in narrowing the funding differential between primary and post-primary phases.”

1.00 pm

The Committee accepts that the formula has been revised and changed regularly to increase the proportion of available resources to primary schools, without having an adverse impact on other phases of education. However, that has produced too little, and, to date, it has had virtually no impact. It is argued that the Minister's efforts to reduce the differential have resulted in a widening, not a narrowing, of the gap.

In her statement on the distribution of the education budget on 12 February, the Minister provided an increase in the primary age-weighted pupil unit from 1.02 to 1.04 in the 2008-09 budget. That is equivalent to an average of 4% per primary-school pupil and amounts to £102. Members who have read the evidence of the Northern Ireland Primary Principals' Action Group, which was presented to the Committee on 6 June, will know:

“4% of nothing or very little is not very much”.

That £102 is immediately absorbed by inflationary price rises, such as the cost of cleaners' pay, heating and other running costs, leaving the staggering amount of £14 per pupil. NIPPAG said that that sum would buy 20 minutes per day of a classroom assistant's time. Given that there is clearly a need to produce good results from the revised curriculum and improve literacy and numeracy standards, is that the Department's best effort to deal with primary-school underfunding?

As evidenced in the debate on early-years education in June 2007, an abundance of research proves that investment in a child's early education pays back, some suggest, sevenfold. Sir George Bain's review points out that substantial international research

demonstrates that levels of pupil attainment, particularly at the foundation stages of education, and particularly among low-achieving groups, increase when high pupil:teacher ratios decrease. The post-primary sector obviously benefits when the primary sector has the resources to do its job right.

In her press statement, the Minister has pointed out that her budget allocated an additional £32 million, specifically to support primary schools in the delivery of the foundation stage of the revised curriculum over the three-year budget period. Furthermore, over the next three years, the Department has allocated funding of £12 million specifically to help primary-school principals who teach. That is particularly welcome.

However, the Committee heard about other funding that is intended to benefit primary schools in such areas as ICT support. That brings me to a fundamental point about the structure of the education budget, which the Committee raised with departmental officials on 6 June. Some £190 million, which is more than 10% of the overall education budget, is being channelled to schools through earmarked initiative funding. The Committee eagerly awaits a paper from the Department on that matter; we understand that there are 57 initiatives, although I have heard that the number being funded in that way may be as high as 70. They are often one-off, short-term initiatives, perhaps cut off before they have any real impact.

Last week, I visited the greater Shankill area of the city. Sadly, and to the shame of the Department of Education, I witnessed children saying farewell to their special-needs teacher because funding for that teacher had come to an end. In an area where people are two and a half times more likely than average to suffer deprivation the only and best thing that the Department of Education could do is to say to a special-needs teacher: thank you very much, your services are no longer required; goodbye, and close the door after you. That is a shame and a disgrace, and it is something that needs to be addressed urgently. How short-term, how short-sighted, how short-changed is our education system?

The Committee has heard much criticism from school principals about initiatives that often involve a complicated and lengthy application process and follow-up bureaucracy. Those initiatives also generate extra administration for the Department and for the education and library boards.

The Committee will continue to scrutinise the matter and will press the Department to mainstream much of the funding. Ideally, some of it should go directly into core funding for primary schools, where school principals and boards of governors would have the flexibility and discretion to prioritise the scarce resources to meet their needs.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Education:

On a similar theme, the Committee has asked for urgent information about bringing the funding that is outside the common funding formula into the formula and transferring it into core funding for primary schools. The Committee understands that the Department is examining the foundation stage and is making a good start on funding in the area. The Committee will press for urgent action to explore other areas.

The local management of schools steering group is responsible for the continuous review of the formula. The Committee will require assurances that any mainstreaming of funding — or adjustments to the formula — are factored in so as to benefit primary schools directly.

Finally, the Committee plans to closely scrutinise the fundamental review of the formula that is about to begin. We will look at the scope for taking action to address the underfunding of primary schools.

The Committee is looking for immediate, urgent action. The Committee will be pressing the Minister and her officials to be proactive and imaginative in delivering real changes to address the underfunding of primary schools. Long-term solutions — such as recycling savings from the creation of the proposed education and skills authority (ESA) — remain an ideology that has yet to see its fulfilment.

Mr O'Dowd: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I support the motion, and I welcome the fact that we are having the debate today. The debate is the beginning of a process that will ensure that we, collectively, garner more finances for primary-school children, principals and teachers.

I will have to examine the Hansard report and unpick the Chairperson of the Committee for Education's speech to see where the DUP started and where the Chairperson ended, because it is unfortunate that he used his first opportunity to table a Committee motion to make a political speech.

The underfunding of primary schools is one issue that garners all-party political support, and it is one that the primary-school principals have been at pains to ensure does not become a party-political football to be used by one party against another.

Mr McElduff: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Will you rule on the appropriateness of a Committee Chairperson delivering a party-political statement? It is my understanding that when one speaks as the Chairperson of a Committee, one must emphasise the Committee role and not the party-political role.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The point has been made. It is up to the Committee to deal with that situation.

Mr O'Dowd: The motion refers to the need for urgent examination of the funding available to primary schools. The Chairperson mentioned one sector of that funding in the main part of his speech, which is the age-weighted pupil unit. Should the unit be increased? Yes, it should be increased. However, how do we increase it in a way that ensures the continuation of small rural primary schools in particular? Are we proposing that the only funding source for schools should be based on that method, or does the entire funding formula need to be re-examined?

I believe that the formula needs to be re-examined to ensure that funding going into primary schools suits the needs of individual schools. Under the current system, there is funding support for small, rural primary schools that ensures that they will survive in rural communities.

When comparing figures from here, England, Scotland, Wales or across the border, those figures must be on a like-for-like basis. To ensure that primary schools here receive more funding, requirements must be identified using an evidence-based formula. Furthermore, Members must do more than simply table a motion in the House. We must ensure that the Minister proposes, as quickly as possible, a funding formula that satisfies the needs and demands of the current lobby.

The secondary-school sector is also observing this debate with concern, and wondering whether the extra funding for primary schools is going to come from it. We must consider primary-school funding in terms of the whole education system in order to ensure that whatever formula is arrived at is well-tested and meets the needs of primary schools. In the meantime, if money is available, it should be injected into primary schools.

I listened intently to the earlier debate during which the DUP demanded the more efficient running of the Health Service and the removal of back-room services. I support the primary-school principals' demands, and their areas of concern must be noted.

They want more funding to help with administration, and to give them time out of the classroom so that they can run the schools. Therefore, the DUP and others must be careful how they make their demands for an end to administration. It runs counter to the argument made by primary schools. It is also counter to the argument over health, but that is another debate. It is correct for primary-school principals to want more time out of the classroom, because they have become managers as much as teachers. They need time away from the classroom in order to ensure that their schools are run correctly.

The Chairperson of the Committee stated that the failure to move ESA on meant that the savings that it was to generate had not entered the system. ESA has

not moved on because the DUP has not let it move on. Therefore, the funding that was to have been available through ESA can be delivered to primary schools.

The Chairperson referred to his visit to a Shankill Road primary school that has lost a special-needs teacher. I, too, regard that as a disgrace. In the past financial year, the education boards handed back £27 million in resources — that would have paid for a lot of special-needs teachers in Shankill Road primary schools.

I support the motion —

The Chairperson of the Committee for Education: Will the Member give way?

Mr O'Dowd: I am almost finished. I support the motion, and I hope that we are at the start of a process that quickly brings more funding to primary schools.

Mr B McCrea: Academic selection dominates the debate on education. Those who argue for its removal cite the long tail of educational underachievement. They imply that academic selection is the major cause of such underachievement, and that its removal would end many education problems. That is the stuff of nonsense, propagated by people who see the debate on education as an ideological battle, a cause célèbre, and an opportunity to flex political muscles. As such, it diverts attention away from the real issues.

Underachievement in education does not begin at the age of 11, inequality does not begin at the age of 11, and a sense of failure does not begin at the age of 11. The challenges faced by society emerge at a much earlier age. It falls to primary schools to respond to that challenge. Our primary schools are in the front line of this battle, and they have been asked to take on more responsibilities with little or no resources.

The Department of Education tries to address challenges facing society in the only way it knows how; it launches one initiative after another, with ring-fenced finances and centralised control. I am not attacking the Civil Service for doing what it can to alleviate problems. However, there is a better way forward. Primary-school leaders must be empowered and resourced. They need fewer initiatives and more core funding.

I have had the privilege of talking to many primary-school leaders — at their conference in Cookstown, in the Long Gallery at Stormont, at Committee, in schools and in their groups. They speak more eloquently than I do. Members may have read some interesting statements in the newspapers. In explaining the difficulty of ring-fenced finance, Martin Short, principal of Holy Trinity Primary School in Andersonstown, told me that the Department of Education provided funding for a new laptop computer for each of his teachers, at a cost of £14,000, and foundation money, which was also ring-fenced. At the same time, he employed one

classroom assistant for three P2 classes, while having to make two teachers redundant. That is counter-intuitive — it does not make sense.

1.15 pm

The Northern Ireland Primary Principals' Action Group has raised the issue of inequality in funding between primary and secondary schools. Government reports indicate that such a disparity is for historical reasons. Those who, during other debates, argue about antiquated, outmoded, 40-year-old education systems might take note of that point and deal with funding inequality.

The Minister accepts the case, as does the Department, but the Department says that more cannot be done without increasing the overall fund. That is not a trivial sum. The estimates of £125 million per annum represent a very significant increase on the budget of £1,000 million. To quote Mr Short again:

“Every political party represented here recognises that primary-school funding is insufficient. Nobody ... disagrees with that.”

As Mr Short argued, if we do not do something about it, the status quo will remain. School principals are asking us, their elected representatives, to do something about that.

However, it is not simply a question of funding. Teachers, as Mr Greer told the committee, complain more about a shortage of time than a shortage of money. They struggle desperately and are under enormous pressure, as are all primary-school principals. There has been a massive increase in expectations, yet very little increase in funding. It could be argued, as Mr Jess told the Committee, that we have a potentially very good curriculum, but underfunding means that we cannot deliver it. That leads to one stark conclusion, and I look forward to the Minister's response.

If we are to deal with the legacy of the past, with educational underperformance, with the inability of some of our young people to read and write when they leave school, with the health of our school leaders and with preparing our young people for a future, a step change in funding for primary schools is needed, as is a change of attitude. That cannot be done incrementally — that would take too long and is too little, too late. I sincerely hope that the Minister will introduce radical proposals that enjoy the support of all her Executive colleagues so that the situation in the Province can progress.

Mrs M Bradley: I talked to all my local schools in preparation for this debate. The effects of the funding inadequacy are shocking, to say the least. The extent of the differential is £1,258 a pupil. That is a vast sum of money for any school to have to make up, but is particularly so for schools situated in an area that ranks highly on the Noble index.

If there were no difference in funding, one primary school in my area would have an additional £484,330. That would have a massive impact on that school, and — oh, boy — what it could achieve with that. The school has 440 pupils, there is 53% uptake of free school meals and approximately 20% of its pupils are on the special educational needs (SEN) register. However, due to the funding imbalance, it now faces several major difficulties.

No additional classroom-assistant support is available for the most vulnerable children in that school. Children with significant learning difficulties are moving from nursery into primary 1 but do not meet current statementing criteria, despite recognition from all the professionals involved that those pupils are in urgent need of significant support. No funding is available for emergency situations. Such funding would support pupils who experience a traumatic and sudden change in circumstances. For example, one child at the school suffered a very serious eye injury, and temporary additional support is clearly needed to enable that child to manage his or her new circumstances. There is no available funding for that, and that child must go through a protracted statementing process.

If primary schools had their fair share of resources, they could deal with such matters immediately. That would be in the interests of the child, the family, the class and the teacher. That particular school must also cope with a temporary SEN support teacher's being made redundant. It has insufficient funds to provide appropriate SEN support for Key Stage 2 pupils who are operating below the required standards in literacy and numeracy. Unless that problem is dealt with effectively at primary level, those pupils are at significant risk of leaving the education system without good grades in those core subjects.

There are insufficient funds to refurbish schools — some floors and ceilings have not been refurbished for over 20 years because of a funding shortage. Recently, my grandson had a near miss when a ceiling fell, moments after he brought the problem to the attention of his teacher. Thankfully, that school has been rebuilt, but many others have not even been refurbished.

Essential maintenance is barely catered for, despite it being exactly that — essential. Money for such measures must be found. Reduced expenditure on resources and refurbishment means that some schools operate on budgets as ridiculous as £15 a pupil a year to save funds for staffing, so that the maximum individual and group support can be provided where it is required.

None of the examples that I have mentioned is exaggerated. Instead, those examples are a sad indictment of the times that we live in. Where are the better times that we were promised by the DUP and Sinn Féin?

When it voted against the Budget, my party knew that there was not enough money to deliver all that was promised. The Minister says that she will deliver a better education system. How? Where is the money to do that? I urge her to be responsible, lead the way and show that she is a member of the Executive who will do what she often says she wants to — put children at the heart of her policies.

Confusion reigns supreme about the 11-plus, so the Minister must not allow the sorry state of affairs in primary-school funding to continue. Children are depending on us to deliver a better way of life for them through education and, as public representatives, the onus is on us to ensure that that happens. A lack of funds means less access to education for all children and, more importantly, for those on the SEN register. How can every school be a good school when they are all under extreme financial pressure?

Mr Lunn: The Alliance Party supports the motion. However, I assume that the Minister is urgently examining measures to increase funding to primary schools — in fact, I am sure that she does that on an ongoing basis. She must bring forward proposals; however, that will not be as simple as it sounds.

All the major subjects that are under review will contribute to an outcome that may provide funds to alleviate the problems experienced by our primary schools. The sustainable schools initiative, area-based planning and ESA all have the potential to make savings in the education budget.

I note the figures that the Northern Ireland Primary Principals' Action Group quote for the deficit in funding between Northern Ireland and Great Britain, and the differences of opinion about how wide those discrepancies are. Is the difference in funding between secondary and primary education the main issue, or is it the evidence from all sides that, irrespective of what funding is allocated to secondary education, we do not spend enough on primary schools and early-years funding?

Like the other members of the Education Committee, I have sat through presentations from educationalists and departmental officials ad infinitum, been to union conferences and private meetings and visited schools. The most impressive presentations were those from teachers and head teachers at the sharp end of the system, and the message is beyond argument — our primary schools are not given sufficient funds to do the job that we ask of them, and they are run ragged trying to cope.

We do not allow enough money for building maintenance, classroom assistants or special needs. We do not allow sufficient scope for preparation time, and we pile regulations, form filling and excessive bureaucracy upon initiatives. I heard that, this year, there are 70

different initiatives, and the Chairperson said that there are 56 — I will not argue about which is right, because they are both disgraceful. Some of those initiatives involve enormous amounts of time for pitifully small amounts of funds. As Basil McCrea said, we require core funding, not initiatives.

Money should be allocated on the basis of need, not by random formulae. I do not care how scientific the funding formula is, it is not doing its job, and we are failing our teaching professionals, our youngest children and their parents. I cannot think of any aspect of our primary education system that is regarded as satisfactory by those who work in it. The pressure that is being imposed is driving good people out of the teaching profession.

The Alliance Party's long-term solution will not surprise anyone; the costs of running a segregated system are indefensible. Whether our estimate of £1 billion or the higher figure quoted by Deloitte is accepted, there is an enormous waste of resources, and a lot of that must apply to education.

I have noted a gradual acceptance in recent times of that fact by other parties, and indeed, Members. Even the new Chairman of the Committee for Education has revealed his Alliance credentials by recently acknowledging that point. He has brought a welcome breath of fresh air to the education debate, which was good to see. The First Minister has also obliquely acknowledged our argument. He may argue about the amount, but whatever it is, it is substantial and is there to be saved.

Action, as opposed to a quick fix, is required for a sustainable remodelling of the system. Those who work in primary schools will continue to hold the line, provided that they can see light at the end of the tunnel. The sooner the Minister can draw all the strands together and present a cohesive plan, the better. She will have our support for the constructive reform of educational funding and structures, and, in particular, as highlighted by today's debate, for primary-school funding.

Miss McIlveen: We have heard a great deal about statistics already. However, sometimes it is easy to forget about the human issues when facts and figures are thrown about. The Committee for Education heard from primary-school principals who told us about the financial realities that they face in managing schools. I visited primary schools throughout my own Strangford constituency, and, along with party colleagues, I went to several primary schools in north and west Belfast only last week.

I am sure that many Members have received letters that are similar to the many that have been posted to my office. Headlines last week told of the high levels of absence among teachers, which results in part of the education budget being used to pay substitute teachers.

This year alone, 18,698 teaching days have been lost because of stress-related illnesses. Given the conditions under which many primary-school teachers have to work, I find myself echoing Frank Bunting of the Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO) in saying that I am surprised that the figure is not higher.

I am aware of schools in my own constituency that have had their extended-schools funding removed and now have to rely on parent-teacher associations (PTA) to raise funds. Parents are willing to do that because they care about their children's futures. As a result, they are prepared to go that extra mile to help, tough as that is in today's economic climate.

The East Belfast Primary and Nursery Principals' Group identified several areas in which core funding is grossly inadequate, including: no release time for teachers; a lack of administrative support; no ICT support for primary schools because they cannot afford it; an inability to afford technical and classroom assistants' support; a lack of pastoral-care support; poor special-needs provision; and a poor level of resourcing. Such issues are not exclusive to East Belfast.

One school that I visited could not afford a part-time secretary, and the principal was left to fulfil that role on top of her other duties. The Minister needs to address such problems before she can call every school a good school.

Schools are often forced to teach large composite classes as a result of laying teachers off in order to meet their budgets. They are unable to invest in the resources that are needed to teach the revised curriculum. It seems grossly negligent to me that a new curriculum is implemented when schools are ill-equipped to cope with it. There is embarrassment if schools get into debt, which is an additional burden that principals have to carry. Essentially, the principal is left to try to make ends meet.

As we heard, additional funding is available through departmental initiatives. However, principals apply for such initiatives only to find that the funding is stopped before any real benefits are realised. There are times when as much as £14,000 is spent on computers because the money needs to be spent; however, principals are aware of areas in which such money could have been much more beneficial. Principals are being distracted from their real jobs by having to chase funding for their schools.

One member of the Committee described the Department's initiatives as being like using a plaster. It is time that the Minister and her Department started to treat the illness rather than applying first aid. There is an acknowledgement — even among people in the Department — that it would suit them to produce a better formula in order to better distribute the funds to schools. That would enable the principals to distribute

the money in a way that addresses the needs of their particular schools. Furthermore, the Department needs to make efficiency savings in order to raise the proportion of the education budget that is allocated to front-line education.

At present, a paltry 63% goes to front-line education. In the rest of the UK, that figure is in the region of 80%.

1.30 pm

It is self-evident that primary-school and early-years learning are of the utmost importance. Teaching during that period sets the framework for later learning. Those are the formative years. It is during that time that difficulties with literacy and numeracy can be tackled before they become real problems. Addressing that at primary level leaves pupils free at secondary level to broaden their minds. We are not creating a satisfactory learning atmosphere for our children, and they will carry that on to secondary-level education.

It is time that the Minister focused on the growing crisis in primary schools. Now is the time for action. In the last year, all that we have seen from the Minister is prevarication. She talks a lot about failures and labelling failures, but her Department is failing primary schools and, as a consequence, failing our children.

There is deep frustration among principals, teachers and parents — some of whom are present today to hear this debate — that children are not getting the education to which they are entitled. I have no hesitation in supporting the motion.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom tacaíocht a thabhairt don rún seo. Ar dtús, ba mhaith liom a rá go bhfuil sé ceart agus cóir níos mó airgead a thabhairt don scolaíocht.

I support the motion and welcome its being tabled.

Last month, I joined Members, including Basil McCrea, Dominic Bradley, and the Chairperson of the Committee for Education, Mervyn Storey, in the Long Gallery — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: I ask Members to check that their mobile phones are switched off.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat. In the Long Gallery, I listened intently to a presentation from primary-school principals, of whom more than 130 were present. It is significant that so many considered the matter sufficiently important that they left the school setting for a whole day, which can be disruptive, to come here to express their views.

During that presentation, I heard concerns for the well-being and stress levels of principals and teachers; I keep hearing that. It may not be easy for people who are not parents or governors or do not have occasion to visit a primary school to understand the degree of

pressure and stress that is placed on teachers and principals nowadays.

Being a member of a board of governors affords me some opportunity to gain that insight. Today, I declare an interest as a governor of St Lawrence's Primary School, Fintona; St Patrick's Primary School, Eskra; and St Patrick's Primary School, Garvallah. I call on other Members, during this debate, to declare an interest as a member of a board of governors, if they have not already done so.

The pressures placed on principals and teachers include the revised curriculum, various initiatives, and performance review and staff development (PRSD), over which principals must preside.

Teachers have increasingly said that they need space to teach, with which we agree. If primary schools were to be granted additional funding they could employ someone with specialist expertise, such as an IT co-ordinator or, as Michelle McIlveen said, a part-time secretary, as required. That would help to free up the teaching principal. If schools were to get extra money it could lead to smaller class sizes, improved planning, preparation and assessment time for teachers, increased and improved learning resources, and more staff and management support.

I am pleased that the Minister acknowledges that the gap in funding between primary 7 pupils and year 8 pupils in a post-primary setting must be narrowed in the future. I also observe that that greatly exercised the Committee for Education. Everybody is increasingly aware that the earlier an intervention is made, the better that is for achieving results in schools.

Mervyn Storey called for the Minister and the Department to be proactive and imaginative, and I echo that call. John O'Dowd said that we should work collectively to garner more finance for education, because education is everyone's business. The SDLP likes to say that it voted against the Budget, but it remains a fact that Margaret Ritchie, the SDLP Minister, voted for the Budget when she was in the Executive room, at the Executive table. The SDLP is, therefore, rather disingenuous when it makes that point.

Finally, I welcome the fact that Mervyn Storey and other DUP MLAs recently visited schools on the Shankill Road. Perhaps they can get on-message with those principals about academic selection and the 11-plus, because the DUP has not been on-message with those principals for many years.

Mr McCausland: I will start by declaring that I am on the board of governors of Carr's Glen Primary School, Ligoniel Primary School and Wheatfield Primary School. I am also a member of the Belfast Education and Library Board.

So much — indeed, too much — of the debate on education has concerned the age of 11 and, with it, the issues of transfer and selection. The emphasis should be on children's early years, including the years spent in primary school. If children could get off to a good start, many of the problems that occur in later years would be dealt with and could be avoided. If educational disadvantages and inequalities could be dealt with at an early stage, the primary and secondary sectors would benefit, as would the children and society. More investment is needed at an early stage.

The Committee for Education heard from principals across the Province, and there was a unanimous voice no matter who came before the Committee. There are not enough resources at primary level, and there are too many special funds and special, short-term projects. The money is in the departmental budget, but, unfortunately, much of it is unwisely directed.

There is a general issue about primary-school funding across the Province. I must, however, speak on behalf of the teachers in my constituency. There are very special problems in the Shankill area and North Belfast. The Chairman of the Committee recently visited the Malvern, Springhill, Springfield and Edenbrooke primary schools in the Shankill area. He will soon receive a request to visit schools in North Belfast, if he has not already received that request.

Principals of schools in the Shankill area and North Belfast came to the Committee, and they spoke about the particular problems that they faced. They pointed out that they had benefited from extended-schools funding, but there was now a question over that funding because it had been reduced — it was even removed from some schools. Many of them had benefited from interface and Renewing Communities funding, but both of those had gone.

In the June monitoring round, the Minister put extended schools into her list of bids. However, there was no mention of interface or Renewing Communities funding. If she had put those into her bid as part of the June monitoring round, more money — even at this point in the year — could have been put into primary schools in those needy areas. I hope that the Minister of Finance and Personnel would have responded positively to those requests. The tragedy, however, is that the Minister did not even bother to ask, despite the fact that those school principals said that that funding should have been requested.

John O'Dowd asked for people to listen. Perhaps he should ask the Minister to listen to the principals who came to the Committee and clearly set out those issues.

The Minister did not bother. Yet schools such as Malvern Primary School, Edenbrook Primary School and Currie Primary School, which have difficult situations, have benefited to some small degree from that money

over the past few years. The money was welcome, although it was not the perfect scenario, because the money came with restrictions; it would have been better if the money had gone directly to the schools.

However, there are ways of saving money in current budgets so that money can be directed to primary schools. Special short-term initiatives tend to be costly and involve costs for setting-up, monitoring and reporting to the school and to the board — a whole range of issues. They are not the most efficient way of saving money. The most efficient course of action is to direct the money to the schools. A review of the funding formula for primary schools, taking particular account not only of social disadvantage but of educational disadvantage, is the way forward. I hope that when the review takes place, educational disadvantage will be one of the criteria, along with social disadvantage, and we will then see the children in those areas benefit.

Mr K Robinson: I am a governor of two schools — Hollybank Primary School on Monkstown estate and Whiteabbey Primary School. I also declare an interest as a former member of the North Eastern Education and Library Board and, perhaps most damning of all, as a former primary-school principal.

The issue of the differential in funding between primary and post-primary schools lies at the heart of the motion. In Northern Ireland, the funding for primary-school pupils stands at 66% of the funding for post-primary pupils. In monetary terms, that translates as £2,646 for each primary-school pupil, compared to £4,021 for each post-primary-school pupil. That compares to a differential of 78% in England, 71% in Scotland and 82% in Wales. The discrepancy revealed by those figures is of a sufficient size to be statistically significant and worrying. To make matters worse, the UK is not known for its generosity to primary-school pupils. Indeed, out of 29 countries, the UK has the twelfth lowest investment in primary education. That puts Northern Ireland at the bottom of the table once again — a position that must be addressed without delay.

I am not persuaded that the advent of the education and skills authority will result in administrative savings that can be redirected into front-line services in our schools. Experience has shown that any new structure in its early years invariably takes more financial resources that originally intended.

So far, under the LMS funding mechanism, the Minister has promised an increase from 1·02 to 1·05 in the age-weighted pupil units for primary-school pupils. That will not be nearly enough to address the gaping differential between primary and post-primary pupils. In fact, the Minister's proposal will, ultimately, lead to an increase of only £102 for each pupil, which will hardly close the differential.

Primary schools are concerned about the problem, partly because of the attitude towards them which historically lies behind their underfunding. Historically, primary schools were seen as a place to shove youngsters into to get them off the streets and keep them out of other people's hair. Therefore, they were put into large classes, with one teacher in charge, in the hope that they would be kept out of the view of society. That attitude must change. The primary-school stage is the key to the educational process. If we do not build that foundation, how can we expect the house to stand at secondary, further-education, or higher-education level? It is a historic attitude that we must break away from.

Attitudes in the Department of Education also lead to low morale in the teaching workforce. The Department often issues edicts but never seems to consider their impact. A school principal may open yet another envelope or email and trek around the school trying to break the good news — sadly, very rarely — or the bad news to his already overburdened staff.

A consultation exercise carried out by the Department of Education in 2007 revealed that 99·5% of teachers felt that their funding weighting should be increased significantly. That level of dissatisfaction should be of serious concern to the Minister. That reveals a depth of feeling that should not and must not be ignored, and which cannot be answered by a mere 4% increase in weightings for 2010-11.

1.45 pm

On 11 June 2008, more than 100 school principals, some of whom are present in the Public Gallery, descended on this Building to demand an extra £100 million plus for Northern Ireland's primary schools — and rightly so. It is unfortunate that they were driven to the extent of having to come here to ask for that. Surely the Department, the boards, and the education system must have been listening to them — if not, why not?

Principals claimed that a primary-school funding deficit of around £1,300 per pupil less than the post-primary level was unfair, unequal, and too high. That was rather mild language. They also warned that educational standards would be affected if the Government failed to invest more in the early years of education over the next two years.

I have news for the Minister: underfunding of the primary sector has seriously impaired the ability of schools to effectively deliver the numeracy and literacy targets that they are aiming for. It is a minor miracle that schools have managed to maintain levels of numeracy and literacy as high as they currently are. That achievement has been bought at the expense of the health of the head teachers and all the other teachers who have struggled to try to deliver endless initiatives.

The Primary Review in England stated:

“The Government should increase primary school budgets to match those in secondary schools to pay for specialist teachers to tackle illiteracy”.

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

Mr K Robinson: I regret that I have had to rush through these important issues, but I appreciate that my time is up. I support the motion.

Ms Anderson: Go raibh maith agat. Ba mhaith liom labhairt i bhfabhar an rúin seo. I support the motion. Last week, I attended a meeting in Derry at which the Education Minister spoke passionately about her reforms of the education system. The hundreds of people in that room were left in absolutely no doubt as to the Minister's commitment to deliver a world-class education service that cherishes all of our children equally, and which affords them every opportunity to reach their full potential in life.

Despite the often vitriolic reaction that she has met from the opponents of change, the Minister is clearly determined to pursue her reforms, because that is in the best interest of our children. I know that she enjoys the support of the vast majority of educationalists and, indeed, wider society.

Mr McCausland: Will the Member give way?

Ms Anderson: No; you have already had time to speak. The Minister has already demonstrated her commitment in a tangible manner by increasing primary-school funding. Members will also be aware that she is engaged in an RPA rationalisation process. There are currently 50,000 empty desks in our schools, and that is simply not sustainable. However, I ask the Minister to ensure that any savings that emerge from the rationalisation process will be invested straight back into front-line services.

At the heart of this debate, there must be a realisation that, owing to the constraints under which we operate — due to the fact that some in this Chamber, and across the North, seek to retain the link with Westminster, which provides a limited block grant — the Assembly is able only to deliver a certain amount for the people whom we are elected to represent. The reality is that the block grant that we receive is simply not adequate to provide the type of services that we want to see for our people.

Members need to make a decision: do we want to continue as a plastic parliament, with all the pomp and ceremony, but little substance, or do we want to take control of our own destiny — to take control of fiscal matters and policing and justice powers, and to start delivering real and meaningful change for all of our people?

Until we grasp that reality, I am afraid that the most that we will ever be able to do is to tinker around the edges of

a Budget that we all agree is simply inadequate. Although I support the motion, I urge all Members to think seriously about their responsibilities to their constituents.

Members have all been elected to deliver a better future. The people have put their faith in us — God knows that that might be questionable when one listens to the comments of some Members. It is about time that the Assembly started to have a bit more faith in itself and to take responsibility for its own affairs. Only then will it be able to deliver meaningful change for primary-school children, post-primary schoolchildren, pensioners, working families, single parents and every sector of society. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr Poots: I apologise that I was not present in the Chamber earlier in the debate — I was meeting members of the construction industry, which is facing serious problems. One of the issues that they raised was that capital projects are not being delivered in schools and hospitals. The industry is in crisis because decisions are not being made to move ahead quickly with capital projects. Schools are crying out for those facilities to be built.

Mr Storey: Is the Member aware that the Minister handed back £37 million in 2007 for capital projects that she was unable to deliver?

Mr Poots: I am well aware of that. That is disappointing because many schools need capital works to be carried out and facilities to be put in place. Instead, the Minister has handed money back to the Westminster Administration. That is to the detriment of children, the construction industry and the country of Northern Ireland.

Mr McElduff: Does the Member agree that his singular failure to preside over the development of a multi-sports stadium at Long Kesh has delayed the creation of 4,000 jobs that would have done much to help the construction industry?

Mr Poots: If the Member wishes to enter into a debate on sport, he can table a motion on that issue. This debate is on education, Mr McElduff. If you are not interested in education, you would be as well to leave the Chamber. The Assembly will discuss education, irrespective of what you wish to do.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. All Members must address their remarks through the Chair.

Mr Poots: The subject of the debate is the needs of primary-school children, who currently receive £1,375 less than children in the post-primary sector. Primary-school children in England receive 79% of the funding that is received by children in secondary schools. In Scotland, that figure is 72%, and in Northern Ireland it is just under 62%. That demonstrates the significant difference in the value that is placed on primary-school children and on that education sector in Northern Ireland,

vis-à-vis the rest of the United Kingdom. That is not good enough.

During the latest Education Committee meeting, I listened to Mr O'Dowd, who was extremely defensive — I could not understand why, because, in fairness, the current situation was inherited from direct rule Ministers. I suspect that if Sinn Féin goes ahead with its threat to pull down the institutions by Christmas if policing and justice powers are not devolved, that party will attack direct rule Ministers in a year's time for underfunding the post-primary sector, if that were the situation. Because that party happens to be in charge of the Education portfolio at present, it tries to defend the indefensible.

It is evident that the primary-school sector needs more resources to enable it to deal with children's particular needs. Northern Ireland has a serious problem of educational underachievement. Many young people leave school without requisite numeracy and literacy skills. Instead of focus being directed at pet projects of social change, the concentration should be on where the problem starts. Virtually all educationalists agree that that problem originates during children's early years. It is clear that failings exist in preschool provision and in the early years of primary school.

I have heard the Minister say that she is concerned with tackling educational underachievement. That problem must be tackled at its core, which is in the primary-school sector. The issue of funding for that sector must be addressed in order to ensure that children get the right start and that they achieve adequate numeracy and literacy skills by Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2. If resources were in place to assist children in the important early years, the secondary-school sector would not have to pick up the pieces after children had failed in their primary-school years.

I will welcome and fundamentally embrace change if the Minister's changes really are about tackling educational underachievement at the source of the problem. I hear a great deal about change, but it is often change for change's sake. The changes that are necessary and that will make a difference to children must be identified so that when they go out into the world of employment, they are prepared young people.

I lay down a challenge to the Minister. If she is serious about tackling educational underachievement, she must forget about her pet projects and about funding policies to which she is favourably disposed. She must provide funding to the primary sector, where it is required.

Mr Armstrong: The motion addresses an important issue facing the future of society in Northern Ireland. I, along with other Ulster Unionist MLAs, recently met a delegation of more than 100 primary-school principals from all sectors, who came to Stormont to express

their frustration at the lack of funding for the primary sector. I appeal to the House to unite behind the motion for the sake of our children.

Funding for primary schools in Northern Ireland is far below that of all other regions in the United Kingdom. One does not need much persuading that the heads of primary schools have a point, and that point must be addressed.

Recent debates on education have centred on the question of academic selection, and it has been said often that the system fails children at age 11. I know the importance of a good primary-school education, because I left school soon after my fourteenth birthday. If children have not managed to acquire basic educational skills at primary school, it does not matter how they transfer to post-primary school. If the basics have not been picked up at primary school, children will be at a huge disadvantage when trying to make up the ground at secondary level, no matter at what age they transfer or how much money is spent at secondary level.

It cannot be denied that money that is invested in education at primary level will pay dividends further down the line. We must accept that not all children will have equal chances in life. Some children's parents will value education; others will not. Some children will have parents who have spare time to sit with them and help them with their homework. Other children will not be as fortunate, because their parents have demanding jobs and do not have the spare time to be able to help. Factors such as income and nutrition will also have an impact.

In the real world, schools will never be able to eradicate such disadvantages, but it is surely not asking too much for them to seek to promote equality of opportunity for children inside the school gates, at least as far as the basics of the three Rs are concerned. In an ideal world, the teacher should be able to intervene to help a child who is falling behind in the basics to catch up. That would only be possible with smaller class sizes, which would allow the teacher to give individual attention to the children who needed it most.

That has a cost implication, but what are the hidden costs — not just financial — of the thousands of children who leave primary and secondary school with poor literacy and numeracy skills, leaving them handicapped in the labour market?

What about the cost to employers who cannot find workers with even basic education skills, or to taxpayers who must pay for benefits that go to people who are virtually unemployable? What about the human cost in unfulfilled potential? A great deal could be avoided by increasing investment in primary-level education.

2.00 pm

Additional resources are required to ensure that pupils are not left behind due to a lack of English language skills. That is only right, because such skills will help integration and social cohesion. If sufficient assistance to primary-level pupils is not provided, even more money will have to be spent in attempting to rectify mistakes when those pupils reach secondary level and are falling even further behind. The same principle must apply to all schools; get the basics right at primary-school level, and the jobs of secondary-school teachers will be made easier. That should be the aim not only of the Minister of Education but of all Members.

Mr Craig: I shall begin by declaring my interests. I am on the board of governors for Harmony Hill Primary School, Killowen Primary School and Laurelhill Community College.

There is no question that extreme pressure has been put on primary-school principals, especially over the past couple of years. Numerous principals — not only in my constituency, but throughout Northern Ireland — have been suffering from increasing degrees of sickness due to stress. However, that stress is not caused by teaching. Although teaching puts a lot of pressure on principals and primary-school teachers, the stress to which I am referring is caused by budgetary pressures, and the Chairperson of the Committee for Education referred to that earlier.

What did the Department do about that this year? From the extra £102 a pupil that each primary school was given, £61 went to cover inflation; £17 was spent on cleaners' pay rises; £10 must be spent on additional fuel costs, and that figure is rising; and the paltry £14 that is left over does little to relieve schools' financial pressures.

Furthermore, if one studies the figures closely, there has been paltry investment in the revised curriculum. Although there are areas to which the Minister has little or no trouble giving extra money — such as GAA matches and joint Irish-Spanish lessons — there has been no investment in the core primary school curriculum. The Minister appears to have no problem in finding money for her hidden political agenda.

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

Consider other jurisdictions: the Scottish Parliament's goal is to have only 18 pupils in each class from P1 to P3. Why is that? Maybe the Scottish Parliament consider achieving that objective to be a sounder investment in their children's education and future. Urgent action is required and, unlike other Members, I take nothing for granted. I do not assume that the Minister will review funding. In fact, I cannot identify any urgency in her to do so.

I commend the Northern Ireland Primary Principals' Action Group (NIPPAG). When it met in April, it unanimously agreed six resolutions, which have been presented to the Department of Education and, indeed, to the Northern Ireland Assembly. The situation in Northern Ireland is completely unacceptable.

Members referred to the fact that a P7 child attracts £1,258 a year less in core funding than a year 8 child in secondary school. That is unacceptable and leads to major difficulties for primary schools.

NIPPAG has made some demands, including smaller classes and planning, preparation and assessment (PPA) time for teachers. In England, all teachers are allowed to spend 10% of their time on PPA, but in Northern Ireland, teachers do not get that time. More and better learning resources, and more support staff and management support, were also among the demands. It is unacceptable that primary-school funding of that type has been cut to the absolute core. Primary-school principals are left with practically no money for school administration. That ridiculous situation must be addressed.

I listened with absolute astonishment to some Members' remarks today. They blamed the block budget for all the faults in the education system. That is an amazing thing to say when we consider that the British taxpayers —

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Mr Craig: The British taxpayers subsidise not only education, but the whole system here, to the tune of £4.5 billion. I support the motion.

Mr McCarthy: I must first declare an interest: I am honoured to serve on the board of governors in two of the many excellent primary schools on the Ards Peninsula, namely St Patrick's Primary School in Ballygalget, and Portaferry Integrated Primary School. I fully support this important motion and commend the Education Committee for bringing it before the Assembly for debate, and, I hope, action.

I welcome the presence of the Education Minister in the Chamber today. I hope that she will be totally convinced by our argument that primary-school children are being sold short when compared to those in other regions of the UK. That anomaly must be rectified without delay.

Unfortunately, I was unable to be present at the recent gathering in this Building of the many primary-school principals. However, they can be assured of my full support in their endeavours to get parity of treatment and the appropriate funding to manage their schools and enable their pupils to attain the highest possible educational standards. Everyone agrees on this issue, even the Minister herself, who wrote to NIPPAG on 31 July 2007:

"I do believe that the funding differential currently between primary and secondary is too great."

The question is: how and when can that discrepancy be put right? It is entirely up to the Minister. The Minister also stated:

"I am convinced that investment in early intervention delivers real benefits in improving access to learning and thus reducing later differences."

It is good to hear the Minister acknowledge those facts, but she really must follow up her words with action.

At its conference in Cookstown in April, the Primary Principals' Action Group passed six resolutions which it sees as paramount to delivering a first-class schools system for students. I give my full support to those six basic resolutions. Indeed, I appeal to the Minister and her Department to take whatever steps are necessary to deliver on those basic demands.

As the Alliance Party's health spokesperson, I paid particular attention to the fourth resolution. We acknowledge the stresses and strains experienced by all schoolteachers, and we must do whatever is necessary to ensure that their health and well-being is paramount. We must prevent the Health Service from having to unnecessarily fund the return to health of many in the teaching profession. Such health problems could and should have been avoided in the first place if sufficient funding had been put in place to allow our primary-school principals and staff to deliver the world-class education system and results to which we all aspire.

I commend all our teachers on their excellent contribution to education, as well as the parents who help to raise funds throughout the year to enable principals to purchase extra facilities — indeed, sometimes just the basic necessities — for the benefit of the pupils.

Teachers are like all other tradespeople: if they do not have the right tools for the job, the job can remain only half done, and that is unacceptable.

The Minister of Education once said that she did not want to be a Minister if all that she could deliver was second-class education provision for Northern Ireland. I plead with Minister Ruane to listen to school principals, the Committee for Education and her Assembly colleagues today, and deliver proper funding for the success of primary schools.

I commend Victoria Primary School in my constituency, which Members will have seen on television last night, for being number one for energy saving. I hope that the Minister will not take any funding away from that school because it is being energy efficient.

Mr Poots: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I apologise for not declaring an interest in that I am on the board of governors of Carr Primary School, Meadow Bridge Primary School and Riverdale Primary School.

Mrs M Bradley: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I declare an interest, in that I am a member of the board of governors of St Brigid's Primary School in Derry, just in case Barry McElduff is concerned that I did not declare that interest.

Mr Ross: I was just waiting for any further advances. I welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate. Although I am not a member of the Committee for Education, I have been contacted by several principals in my East Antrim constituency about this issue.

At this stage in the debate, many of the issues have already been covered. However, I am a member of the Committee for Employment and Learning, and I come at the matter from a slightly different angle. On that Committee, we have taken evidence about how many young adults in Northern Ireland lack the basic numeracy and literacy skills that they need in order to get on in life and find a good job. The frequency of the evidence that the Committee hears, and the number of young adults who do not have those skills, is startling.

Those people did not stop being able to read and write once they turned 16 years of age; they could never read or write. That is a direct result of their educational experience in their earliest years. Some 20% of children in Northern Ireland leave school without the appropriate level of numeracy and literacy skills, with the evidence pointing to the fact that that is most acute in inner-city areas, particularly among boys in Protestant areas.

Education is the building block for life. Early-years education is imperative for society, because today's children will be the workforce of the future. Many education debates have focused on post-primary education, academic selection and grammar schools. Members opposite repeatedly claim that a child's future should not be determined at the age of 11. A child's future is not determined at the age of 11, because, for most children, their educational opportunities and experiences in their earliest years will impact directly on their future attainment and academic ability. That is why primary schools must be well funded, and why, as an Assembly and a society, we must recognise the importance of early-years education. It is, after all, in primary school where we learn to read and write.

We have heard the facts and figures from other Members, and it has been clearly recognised that, in Northern Ireland, the gulf between the money that primary schools receive and that given to secondary schools is much greater than in England and Wales. There is also evidence that, if the figures from Northern Ireland were taken on their own, we would be lagging behind with regard to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development table in the ratio between the amounts that the Government invest in primary education and secondary education.

Mr I McCrea: Does my colleague agree that, with regard to the disparity of funding between primary and secondary schools, the answer is not to force teachers to take compulsory redundancies but to make extra funding available?

Mr Ross: That is the fact of the matter. Indeed, in July 2007, the Minister conceded that the funding differential between primary and secondary schools is too great. It is not a question of taking money away from other areas. However, we must ensure that, where money is focused, it goes to the right areas.

When I speak to primary-school principals, they are the first to say that they do not feel that the funding should necessarily be removed from secondary schools. They make the point, however, that resources must be available for them to do their job.

Over the past few months, we have heard a great deal about the credit crunch. As Mr Storey said in his opening comments, that comes at a time of increasing costs to heat buildings and to pay for fuel for minibuses — or for what, at a school that I recently visited, the children called the “venga bus”, and sang how the “venga bus is coming” when the minibus arrived. There are also issues such as paying for staff and cleaners, as well as natural inflation. Those costs all add up, and they make life very difficult for principals.

In the Chamber, we have often heard that we need to invest in the education of young people and focus on early-years education. That was mentioned again today. It is no coincidence that the most successful countries invest in young people's education, and we must do likewise. The primary sector must be funded properly to ensure that people leave primary school with the level of numeracy and literacy skills that they require. That means that we stop throwing money at schemes and activities that are politically motivated or short-lived initiatives. Resources must be targeted at core learning.

Mr McCarthy referred to a number of the issues that were highlighted by the Northern Ireland Primary Principals' Action Group.

2.15 pm

In my closing minute, I will turn briefly to the issue of class sizes. We have been told that a child in year 8 receives £1,250 more funding than a child in year 7, thus allowing secondary schools to have smaller class sizes. As my colleague for Lagan Valley Mr Craig said, reducing class sizes has been a priority in Scotland. There has been a great deal of research into the issue, and there is also a big move in the United States to reduce class sizes.

The statistics that show the results of taking such action speak for themselves. Evidence shows that if a class has fewer than 20 pupils, that has a dramatically

positive effect on pupils' results and attainment. Indeed, in other countries, Governments decided to focus money on education for early years. Although cost is an issue, we must ensure that the money that the Minister spends on schemes goes to the right places and makes a real difference to academic attainment.

I support the motion and hope that the Minister takes the relevant action to ensure that no child leaves school without the necessary numeracy and literacy skills.

Mr Kennedy: I join with others in welcoming the debate. I declare an interest as a member of the boards of governors of Bessbrook Primary School and Newry High School. It is significant that, on the Assembly's last day of term, we are focusing on this important issue. There is a growing and significant body of evidence that it is vital that there is adequate and significant investment in the initial years of education. It is known that children develop most quickly in their formative years. Therefore, it is crucial that they gain a firm foundation in literacy, numeracy and academic skills.

The Institute of Education in the University of London worked on the Effective Provision of Pre-School Education Project, which found that children who attended a primary school that was identified as academically more effective had better outcomes at the age of 10 than those who attended less-effective primary schools. Additionally, children who attended effective primary schools showed reduced antisocial behaviour and an increased possibility of gaining a higher education.

That study is backed up by other opinions such as those of Professor Heckman and Professor Robin Alexander, who is the former director of the Primary Review in England. Although there is now overwhelming evidence to suggest that investment in primary education is crucial to the future success of children and society, we have to ask why 99.5% of primary schools in Northern Ireland believe that their funding needs to be increased. Why is there a difference of more than £1,258 between funding for primary-school children and funding for secondary-school children in Northern Ireland?

Mr B McCrea: Is the Member aware that the Minister attempted to increase primary-school funding to close the differential, but that that small increase was insufficient, compared with the increase for secondary schools?

In fact, despite attempting to increase that funding, the outcome was an increase of £8 in the differential between the two sectors.

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to my colleague for highlighting that fact. I agree entirely, and we expect the Minister to address that issue later in the debate.

Why do we persist with a funding scheme that discriminates against primary-school pupils? Furthermore, the ratio of funding for primary-school children in Northern Ireland — in proportion to funding in secondary schools — is much lower than in the rest of the United Kingdom. Previously, the Minister stated:

“all grant-aided schools at all phases ... receive delegated funding according to their relative need.”

Is the relative need of primary-school children in Northern Ireland less than that of children in the rest of the United Kingdom? Sadly, the Minister of Education has taken her eye off the ball. Instead of focusing on educational issues, the Minister has pursued a political agenda, focusing on the transfer of children at the age of 11. Unfortunately, her agenda has been to fulfil a party-political plan, rather than an educational one.

The idea that problems can be solved solely by increased efficiency is an insult to teachers. Moreover, it is an easy, glib and political answer. A comprehensive review is necessary, and the Minister must examine measures and introduce new proposals to increase significantly funding to primary schools, otherwise it will send the message to parents, children and teachers in Northern Ireland that they are less valued than those in the rest of the United Kingdom.

Primary schools require smaller class sizes, increased planning and preparation time for teachers, more — and better — learning resources, and greater management support, and it is paramount that we deliver those improvements. I support the motion, and I hope that the Minister will engage positively with the Committee for Education and attempt to find solutions.

Mr Shannon: W B Yeats said:

“Education is not the filling of a bucket, but the lighting of a fire.”

I declare an interest as a member of the board of governors of Glaslough College.

Tha edyecatshun o'oor yung yins is yin o' graet muckle respoansibility, we put oor greatest tresur in tae tha hauns o' P1 teechers as we luk at them takkin oor wean bi tha haun an leed them intae a' new woarl o' larnin. We haep that they wull git tae ken eech wean an help them reech their goal as they delve intae tha woarls o' wurdns an nummers.

The education of our children is a major responsibility; we place our greatest treasure in the hands of the P1 teacher, who takes our children by the hand and leads them into a new world of education. We trust those teachers to get to know all of the children and to help them achieve their potential as they explore the world of words and numbers. We expect them to understand and work with each child as a unique person, while attaining educational targets for that age group — we demand a lot from teachers.

Resources must be made available to enable teachers to do their jobs effectively. Primary-school days are the most important and, perhaps, the simplest time in life. During those days, you went to school and could not wait for the bell to ring and release you to play with your friends. In school, you listened to the teacher, obeyed her requests, learnt tables and letters, studied the map to learn the countries of the world and listened to stories of historic battles. Although teachers still teach the basics, they also teach sciences, IT, French and crafts before a door is opened into secondary-school education.

I do not question teachers' ability to provide a more intensive education. Northern Ireland has the most qualified teachers in the world, who are capable of achieving educational targets. However, the Assembly does not allocate sufficient resources to allow them to do so.

Dr W McCrea: We must bear in mind what we are asking our teachers to do. Is it not ridiculous that the Department of Education can deny a board of governors the right to use money wisely for the education of children in the situation where a school requires an additional mobile classroom and its board of governors, because of their financial stewardship, are willing to pay for it from their own budget?

Mr Speaker: The Member will be allowed some extra time to speak.

Mr Shannon: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I am looking forward to that extra minute.

I agree wholeheartedly with Dr McCrea. As he says, the problem is that teachers need the resources to enable them to do their job. As class sizes swell, teachers have to cope with up to 30 pupils, and have to get to know each child while treating them all equally and while trying to squeeze every aspect of the curriculum into the school year. That is almost impossible, and it is obvious that more time is needed, for example, to bring the most badly-behaved children round or, indeed, to identify those children who will excel and encourage them. In the middle, many children need more help and more time, and teachers are finding it impossible to divide their time.

We always come back to funding. The more funding that is available, the more teachers we will have who will be able to spend one-on-one time with each child in order to help them achieve their full potential. The simple maths that I was taught in school — that was not yesterday — sticks with me. If more resources are made available, better quality teaching can be offered. If more support staff are taken on, learning programmes and the standard of education will be better. The equation is simple, as is the part that the Department of Education must play. It must stop throwing money away needlessly; it must fund primary schools properly

so that they can do the job that the Department — and every parent — is asking them to do.

I have been inundated with letters from parents, teachers and boards of governors. I will quote from one of them:

“It is indefensible that the Northern Ireland Executive presides over a situation where Primary schools in Northern Ireland receive only 61.8% funding of that of Secondary schools. Also, it is totally unacceptable that a secondary school pupil in Year 8 attracts £1,258 per year more than a child in Primary 7. In order for Primary schools to deliver what is now expected of them a significant increase in resources is now urgently required.”

The author of that letter goes on to say that in a recent survey comparing primary- and secondary-school funding per pupil, Northern Ireland, if ranked alone, would be twenty-sixth out of 29. The letter continues:

“This is hardly the way to build the economic prosperity and social cohesion our country needs now and in the future.”

If we want the right results, we must spend the money to build the foundation. I ask the Minister and the Department to ensure that the necessary and correct funding is made available urgently. The Department must ensure that all schools are viable and have the correct number of pupils. It must stop using education funding to make political points and gestures. If it made the money available, the difference to young people's lives and education would be noticeable. I urge the Minister and the Department to do the right thing: allocate the money properly, and not on a political basis, and secure the future of our children as a matter of urgency. I support the motion.

The Minister of Education (Ms Ruane): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Committee for Education for the opportunity to respond to the debate on funding for primary schools. I welcome the fact that the Committee would like more resources to be made available to primary schools. I also welcome the work of primary-school principals, and I thank them. It is fitting, at the end of the school year, to thank them for all their invitations to their schools and for the discussions that I have had with them. I have been in schools from every sector in communities throughout the North.

I also pay tribute to teachers. Like many others, I have been listening to the radio. It is very easy to bash teachers at this time of the year. I wish them the best as they go on their holidays, although many of them — and their support staff — will be working in the schools throughout the summer. I assure them that we support the fact that they have holidays. All of us, parents, teachers, educationalists and politicians alike, understand the importance of teacher holidays — both for them and for the children.

I sincerely welcome the fact that the primary principals throughout the North are working hard to

raise the issue of the disparity of funding between primary and post-primary schools.

I look forward to the support of all my colleagues on all Benches when I seek resources to continue increasing funding to the primary-school sector. I look forward to working with them all.

2.30 pm

I am delighted that the loud voices of primary-school principals are being heard. I am delighted that the trade unions, the Irish National Teachers' Organisation and the Ulster Teachers' Union, are working for the primary-school staff. I have attended their conferences; I pay tribute to the work that they do, and I listen to what they say, as do others, when they seek more funding. I hope that the Members opposite will also listen to those unions when they talk about the impact on our young people of academic selection at age 11. I note that all the teachers' unions released a statement about that last week.

Tá mé cinnte de na buntáistí de bheith ag infheistíocht inár mbunscoileanna. Tá ról bunúsach acu ag leagan dúshraith an oideachais; agus chomh maith leis sin, is iontu a dhéantar an idirghabháil luath atá rithábhachtach ag cosc nó ag laghdú deacrachtaí foghlama sa toadhcháil.

I am convinced of the benefits of investing in primary schools. They play a fundamental role in laying the foundations for education and in providing the early intervention that is so vital in preventing or reducing future difficulties in learning. Equally, I am fully committed to ensuring that those in greatest need receive the support and opportunities necessary to enable future school-leavers to break the cycle of deprivation that continues to affect many in our society.

Like the Members who spoke, I recognise that children should acquire in early education the basic skills that are necessary for success. As announced in my education budget on 12 February 2008, for the next three years, there will be a strong focus on early-years and primary education, including adjustments to the formula funding that is distributed to all schools, and specific funding for foundation-stage support. There is funding of £12 million as direct support to primary principals, who will be able to avail themselves of two days' release from teaching duties, as they requested. Furthermore, £8 million a year, for the next three years, will be available for early-years services.

Chuir mé barúlacha bunscoileanna agus grúpaí eile san áireamh ar mhaoiniú LMS, agus d'fhreagair mé ar na hábhair is inní dóibh tríd an ualú dhalta bunscoile a mhéadú ó 1.02 go 1.4 in 2008-09. Rinne mé seo le maoiniú LMS a mhéadú de réir a chéile thar thréimhse an Bhuiséid.

I have taken on board the views of primary schools and others on local management of schools (LMS)

funding issues, and I have responded to those concerns by increasing the primary-pupil weighting from 1.02 to 1.04 in 2008-09, with a view to increasing progressively the relative funding levels distributed to primary schools, under the LMS funding arrangements, across the budget period.

In the £20.4 million uplift to school budgets for 2008-09, compared to that of 2007-08, some £12.67 million was directed to primary schools. That represents an overall cash uplift of more than 3% and 4% a pupil. For 2008-09, the average increase of £102 a primary-school pupil is higher than the average increase for post-primary-school pupils.

I also brought in a sports and languages programme. I hope that Members understand the importance of physical fitness in dealing with the rising levels of obesity. I aimed that programme at primary schools, especially at P1 and P2 pupils, so that children can acquire fundamental skills, such as ball and co-ordination skills, at a very early age.

I also hope that Members were not suggesting that learning a second language at an early age will not be useful to our children in an increasingly global society. If we examine growth areas for languages in Europe, and if we wish to play our role in Europe, Spanish — Español — and Irish are two key, official languages — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. The Minister has the Floor.

The Minister of Education: I visited schools, the GAA and the Irish Football Association (IFA), and I witnessed the success of the various programmes that I introduced. The sports and languages programme is not merely another initiative; it is a long-term programme that we will continue to promote.

I would do more — I would do a lot more — if I had more money at my disposal. Only last week, my bids for additional money from the June monitoring round — for extended schools and to meet increased fuel and food costs — were turned down. I welcome the Finance Minister's mention of extended schools in his speech because it is a very good programme. As Members will know, I have raised the importance of extended schools at every available opportunity, whether in writing or at forums. I welcome the fact that the Finance Minister is listening to me now.

Significant resources are also being made available to primary schools outside the current formula-funding arrangements. An additional £32 million over the next three years, including £7 million in the 2008 financial year, will be made available to support primary schools with the delivery of the foundation stage of the revised curriculum. Primary 1 and primary 2 teachers are aware of just how important the initiative is. The additional funding will, for the first time, provide every year 1 and year 2 class with access to classroom assistants. A

further £12 million will be available specifically to ensure that teaching principals of primary schools are released from teaching duties at least two days a week. The initiative represents significant new money for primary schools. As I have said before — idir lúibíní — give me the money and I will put it into our primary schools because that is where it needs to go.

I recognise that many people, including primary-school principals, want more rapid progress to reflect the importance of primary learning in the balance of funding distributed across all schools. I also readily acknowledge that the differential between primary-school funding and that of the other phases — as measured by the average per pupil — is too wide. From day one, I have said consistently that I want more funding to be directed to early intervention, and the gap between primary and post-primary funding to be reduced.

I welcome the interest of all politicians in working-class children and social disadvantage. I ask the Members on the Benches opposite to understand the impact of the current selective system on children of social disadvantage.

Mr Ross: Will the Minister give way?

The Minister of Education: Through the Chair.

I ask the Members on the Benches opposite to talk to the primary-school principals and teachers who, year after year, have had to pick up the pieces when children are told that they are failures.

Mr Kennedy: Will the Minister give way?

The Minister of Education: No; the Minister will not give way. Members have had their chance to speak.

I ask the Members on the Benches opposite to talk to the educationalists. The vast majority — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. We have had a two-hour debate, which was the time allocated by the Business Committee. Every Member in the House has had an opportunity to contribute to the debate. The Minister is now responding to the debate. Members must allow the Minister to respond without being interrupted.

The Minister of Education: I will repeat myself, just in case people did not hear me over the interruptions from the Members on the Benches opposite. I ask those Members to talk to teachers and principals in primary, post-primary and secondary schools in their constituencies about the impact of the selective system.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Education: The issue is funding.

The Minister of Education: No, the impact of it —

The Chairperson of the Committee for Education: The issue is funding.

The Minister of Education: The selective system fails far too many of our young people, sending them out into a difficult world without the appropriate qualifications.

As I have said on many occasions, I am not prepared to preside over education apartheid. The Members opposite may do that, but I will not.

I am sure that Members who are concerned about funding for primary schools will join me in advising primary-school principals not to use their resources to further the aims of a private organisation that proposes private tests.

Various figures have been suggested to me and comparisons have been used, stating how many more resources need to be directed into primary-school funding. Officials have provided details to the Committee for Education on the quantum of suggested funding, stating that £200 per primary-school pupil equates to an additional funding need of approximately £31 million; and funding of £800 per primary-school pupil — as suggested by some — would cost about £123 million. I would love to have that money, and I look forward to every political party in the Assembly supporting me when I make a bid for £123 million. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

The Minister of Education: Such funding is not available to me — even though much of it comes into a block grant — and could be delivered only through extensive cuts to other essential services. What services will I cut?

Mr B McCrea: Will the Minister give way?

The Minister of Education: I will not give way.

I would love to secure more funding, and I look forward to the support of all Members when I bid for further resources.

If one of my Executive colleagues were to suggest moving money from one of their departmental responsibilities — such as health or housing — I would be more than willing to take him or her up on that. I would welcome any additional funding to enhance the provision of learning for pupils at all levels. I have argued for education priorities in the Budget priorities for the Assembly, and I will continue to do so. Furthermore, I look forward to the support of the Committee for Education when, jointly, we lobby the Finance Minister. When we are at it, we will also lobby the First Minister and the deputy First Minister, because if we are serious about dealing with underachievement in our selective system, we need to put more money into that system.

I assure the House that I am determined to ensure that funding provision best supports learners in schools

at all levels and that, within the available resources, there is an increased emphasis on early learning and support for the most disadvantaged. However, the figures that are being used to illustrate the difference in funding for primary schools do not provide an accurate picture of relative levels of funding.

The oft-quoted differential of 61·8% for a primary pupil compared to a post-primary pupil reflects only the age-weighted pupil unit funding delegated to schools under the formula-funding arrangements. That does not take account of all other funding factors, including some —

Dr W McCrea: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Is it in order for the Minister to plead poverty and look for £120 million when she handed back £50 million to the Exchequer?

Mr Speaker: That is not a point of order.

The Minister of Education: Go raibh maith agat. The oft-quoted differential of 61·8% for a primary-school pupil compared to a post-primary pupil reflects only the age-weighted pupil unit funding delegated to schools under the formula-funding arrangements. It does not take account of all other funding factors, including some that distribute significant funding to small primary schools — which I hear Members talk about constantly — in the form of small-school support and funding for above-average teaching costs. Nor does the differential take into account the significant funding, outside the formula-funded allocations, that is being made exclusively available to primary schools, with, for example, the investment of more than £20 million in the early-years primary school initiative Making a Good Start (MAGS), the foundation stage provision and support for primary-school teaching principals.

The assessment of primary schools in the North against international comparisons of funding is simply not comparing like with like. Such comparison is always difficult. The figure for primary schools here is based on a single budgetary differential for one factor of formula funding against a table of total expenditure data for countries in 2003.

It is impossible to say whether that is the case for other countries. Without extensive research on the basis for figures and detailed assessments of expenditure in schools, it is not possible to state where schools in the North would sit in such comparative tables.

2.45 pm

I have heard mention of other countries throughout Europe: I say to Members, go to other countries in Europe — go to Finland — and ask what they think of academic selection at 11. They think that it is disgraceful — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order, order. The Minister has the Floor.

The Minister of Education: They would say that it is disgraceful, discriminatory and unfair, and severely impacts on the education of our children. Those countries would not be turning a blind eye to the 12,000 people whom we are failing.

I want to emphasise the reality that, without significant increases in available resources within the totality of the education budget, the significant increases to funding being called for by primary schools could only be at the expense of those children in other phases of education, such as nursery and post-primary. The message has been received from schools and from representatives at all levels that the skewing of funding to primary level can be at the expense of stable provision for those other phases. Would anyone argue that I should rob Peter — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order, order.

The Minister of Education: Would anyone argue that I should rob Peter to pay Sinead? I think not. Or should that be: rob Nigel to pay Sinead?

Steps are being taken to maximise the use of resources in the education system. Those changes will take time, as will the release of more funding into the front-line services provided in schools. Shortly, I will be initiating a review of existing funding arrangements that will better inform the analysis of the funding required, not just for the primary sector but for all schools. I want that review to examine funding arrangements in the South of Ireland, in England, Scotland, and Wales, and throughout Europe, and to undertake extensive consultation across the education system in order to determine future funding arrangements.

In changing the current, largely historical funding arrangements, the core focus needs to be on maintaining stability for schools and avoiding an undue impact on school budgets, which would impact on education provision. I have asked my officials to draw up a coherent framework for a review that will provide assessment against current levels of provision; alignment with outcomes; and a focus on the potential funding arrangements required to support revised educational structures, collaboration and learning communities. Significant emphasis will be placed on ensuring that all stakeholders and partner bodies — including the Committee and the trade unions — are involved in that review process, culminating in recommendations for changes.

In the interim, as the Committee will be aware, proposals are being developed for the first steps toward a review of both formula funding and funding that is outside the formula. Proposals include distributing foundation-stage funding to primary schools under the common funding formula, which will consolidate that provision for schools, giving them additional flexibility over its deployment.

For many of those involved in the delivery of education services — in schools and education and library boards — the earmarking of funding by the Department has long been a source of frustration. The introduction of the education and skills authority will provide the opportunity for the Department to fundamentally re-evaluate previous practice and tackle that issue head on. In the past, the accepted practice was to earmark money to ensure that it was spent for the purpose for which it was given. I want to change that and focus on where that money should be and on ensuring that policy and the expected outcomes are being correctly delivered.

I recognise fully the importance of providing greater autonomy to schools in managing their budgets; a balance must be struck, however, to ensure that principals and boards of governors do not take short- or medium-term decisions at the expense of long-term priorities. It may be necessary, at times, to earmark budgets to ensure that specific initiatives are delivered; however, that should be the exception and not the rule.

Another facet of the review of public administration is the establishment of an education and skills authority. The authority will streamline the administration of education, and is expected to release an additional £20 million annually to spend on the direct delivery of services in schools. I look forward to the implementation of the review of public administration.

Departmental budgets for next year will be determined by the Executive and the Assembly during the Budget process, which is planned for autumn 2008. The overall resources available for the North for the next two years have been determined by the Treasury as part of the 2008-2011 comprehensive spending review. The scope for additional resources, therefore, is likely to be limited for all Departments. Nevertheless, I will continue to press for more resources for education at every opportunity, and I look forward to Members' support for my efforts. I hope that when the Budget is debated, everyone who spoke so passionately here today will be equally supportive of my call for more resources for education.

Recently, I launched the revised literacy and numeracy strategy for consultation. To give all young people the best opportunity to succeed in life and in work, we must all carefully consider the teaching and learning of reading, writing and mathematics. We must set out for teachers, schools, education and support bodies, parents and young people how we think every child can be given a fair chance.

I thank Members for tabling the debate. Primary schools have made their case for additional funding very well through their representations. I say to them, Maith sibh, well done, keep it up; we need to hear your voices. I am committed to ensuring that the balance of funding for primary schools reflects their fundamental role in building educational foundations, tackling the

cycle of deprivation, and equipping all learners with the skills and knowledge that they need.

The motion calls for an urgent examination of issues and proposals that would significantly increase funding in primary schools. Changes are unavoidably constrained by the need to ensure that children are properly supported at all stages.

Tacóidh an t-athbhreithniú ar mhaoiniú le cinntí agus le socruithe maoinithe sa toadhchá. Tá súil agam gur mhígh mé na céimeanna atá mé a ghlacadh le maoiniú don luath-fhoghlaim a mhéadú taobh istigh de na hacmhainní atá ar fáil dom.

The work on taking forward a review of funding will help to support future decisions and funding arrangements. I hope that I have explained the steps that I am taking to increase funding for early learning with the resources that are available to me. I am sure that as we move forward, Members will join with me in seeking to secure the maximum funding possible for all education services.

Go raibh míle maith agat. Beidh mé ag dréim le tacaíocht ó gach Comhalta. Thank you very much for all your support; I look forward to working with you in the days, weeks and months ahead.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Tá an-áthas orm achoimriú a dhéanamh ar an díospóireacht, chan amháin ar mo shon féin ach ar son an Choiste Oideachais. Gan amhras ar bith bhí díospóireacht shuimiúil spésiúil againn inniu, agus tá ard-áthas orm orm bhfuair an oiread sin daoine seans labhairt uirthi. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Cheann Comhairle as sin.

I declare an interest as a governor of an Irish-medium primary school. I thank the Members who participated in the debate today, which was extremely lively at times. I am glad that so many Members were afforded the opportunity to contribute to the debate.

I welcome members of the Northern Ireland Primary Principals' Action Group. Mr Basil McCrea and I met them at their conference in Cookstown, and we jointly sponsored their visit to the Long Gallery. I am glad that the Chairperson of the Committee for Education, other Committee members, Mr McElduff and I had the chance to address the group that day.

I will outline the per annum funding figures: primary-school pupils attract £2,045; secondary-school pupils in years 8 to 12 attract £3,302; and sixth-form pupils attract over £5,000. From my examination of the issues, I concluded that there are five main reasons that secondary-school pupils attract more funding than those at primary school: secondary schools require smaller classes for certain subjects; teachers are afforded preparation, planning and assessment time; some subjects require specialist accommodation; pupils require specialist equipment for certain subjects; and elements of the curriculum require specialist

support staff. The same five reasons apply to the even higher funding that is attracted by sixth-form pupils.

Why do primary-school pupils attract only £2,045 per annum? The five reasons for that are: pupils are taught in large classes; their teachers are not allocated 10% of their time for preparation, planning and assessment; the schools do not have the necessary specialist accommodation that many parts of the curriculum require; there is none of the specialist equipment that is needed to implement the revised curriculum; and primary schools do not have the specialist support staff who are required for many subjects, including IT.

I agree with the Minister that funding education should not be a case of robbing Peter to pay Paul. However, one cannot help thinking that the secondary sector is better off and that the primary sector is its poor relation. It is ironic that pupils who stay on at school beyond the statutory school-leaving age attract twice the amount of funding per capita as those in the early stages of their education. Surely that demonstrates where priorities lie — and they are not in the primary sector.

The Minister has told the House time and time again, and it has been reiterated in the debate, that early intervention is educationally and economically beneficial. However, the funding of the education system does not reflect those truths. Mr Kennedy reminded the Assembly that, in late 2007, the Nobel laureate economist James Heckman told us in Belfast that investment in policies that result in early intervention has a high rate of return, whereas social policies that mean intervention in later stages of the cycle result in a low economic return. Investment in primary education is, therefore, the best form of early intervention.

Primary-school principals are not asking for better treatment than their secondary-school colleagues; they want a level playing field so that primary-school pupils and their teachers have equality with their respective counterparts at secondary level, and they want that level playing field to extend to other geographical areas.

I thank members of the Assembly's Committee for Education, who accepted the motion that I put to them and that is being debated.

3.00 pm

I would have preferred the motion to have had more teeth, but, to ensure all-party support, I agreed to a wording that was not so strong. I am also grateful to the Committee for Education for agreeing to launch an inquiry into the funding of primary education in the new Assembly session.

I return to the debate and to the themes that Members have outlined. The Chairperson of the Education Committee, Mr Storey, and Ken Robinson spoke of age-weighted pupil units (AWPU). The increase from 1.02 to 1.04 in 2008-09 worked out at £102 per pupil. That increase was immediately absorbed by inflationary price rises, leaving only enough money to buy 20

minutes per day of a classroom assistant's time. The Chairperson of the Committee gave the House an assurance that the Committee would scrutinise the review of the funding formula.

Mr O'Dowd said that this debate marked the start of a process, and he welcomed all-party support for the motion. He cautioned against an increase in the AWPU — he believed that that might prove dangerous for smaller schools. However, he agreed that the funding formula should be reviewed.

Basil McCrea emphasised that educational underachievement begins in early life. Other Members, including Mr McCausland, Mr Ross and Mr Poots, agreed and — in common with the Minister and me — advocated early intervention.

Other Members, including Mr Lunn and Mr Basil McCrea, considered that there were too many initiatives and that there should be more core funding. The Department of Education accepts that the differentials are historical. Every party agrees that that situation should be addressed. Basil McCrea said that if nothing were done, the status quo would remain. He considered that we have a very good curriculum, but not the resources to deliver it.

Mary Bradley referred to a primary school in her constituency, and the effects of underfunding on it. She said that no additional classroom assistants will be provided for children with learning difficulties and a special-educational-needs support teacher has been made redundant.

Michelle McIlveen and Jonathan Craig referred to the high levels of stress in modern teaching and emphasised the need to address that problem. They also observed that some schools were relying on fund-raising by parent-teacher associations to compensate for underfunding.

Mr McElduff berated the SDLP for voting against the Budget. However, at the time, we warned the Minister that she had not costed her reforms and that they were not in the Programme for Government. I notice that, in her latest statement, on area-based planning, the Minister now agrees with us and is seeking more funding for her reforms. I am glad that she has come round to our way of thinking.

The Minister's party colleague Martina Anderson provided a fine eulogy of the Minister during a recent apparition in Derry. I was tempted on that occasion to call the Minister "blessed Cairtriona of Crossmolina".

I am glad that we have achieved such a strong degree of agreement on the motion, to which I add my support.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly calls on the Minister of Education to urgently examine measures and bring forward proposals which would significantly increase funding to primary schools.

Mr B McCrea: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. The time that was allotted for the debate was two and a half hours. I made a representation to you to the effect that Members should have longer to speak. Will you bring that matter to the attention of the Business Committee so that Members who wish to speak for longer, or who wish to speak a second time, can do so?

Mr O'Dowd: I thought yours was long.

Mr Speaker: Order. I am content to refer to the Business Committee the issue of the length of speaking time that is allocated to Members during debates.

Mr McLaughlin: Further to that point of order, it may be worthwhile to examine the Hansard report of the debate to see how often Members repeated the same point ad infinitum. It was a very predictable and boring discussion — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. This is, as always, the cut and thrust of debate — *[Interruption.]*

Mr D Bradley: Further to that point of order, Mitchel McLaughlin was not here for most of the debate. I do not see how he is in a position to pass judgement on it. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Storey: He only heard the Minister.

Mr McLaughlin: I was watching it on television.

Mr Speaker: Order. As regards Basil McCrea's point of order, and from the point of view of the Business Committee, all party Whips agree time limits for Members who wish to speak in debates. For the preceding debate those times were 10 minutes for the proposer, 10 minutes for the winding-up speech, 25 minutes for the Minister and five minutes for every other Member. Members should be clear on that issue.

Mr B McCrea: Further to my point of order, I accept the Speaker's explanation. However, perhaps the Business Committee when considering the matter will take as its primacy that every Member who wants to speak should be allowed to speak first and that if time remains, perhaps another way could be found.

Mr Speaker: I ask that the Member also refers those remarks to his party Whip.

Report of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development on Renewable Energy and Alternative Land Use

Mr Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 30 minutes for the debate. The proposer of the motion will have 10 minutes to propose the motion and 10 minutes for the winding-up speech. All other Members will have five minutes.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development (Dr W McCrea): I beg to move

That this Assembly approves the Report of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development (39/07/08R) into Renewable Energy and Alternative Land Use.

I apologise to Members for the slight delay in the delivery of the report. The Committee unanimously approved the report at its meeting on Tuesday 24 June and it must be said —

Mr Neeson: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Is it in order for the debate to take place today? On 30 January, the Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development wrote to the Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment and gave assurances that members of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment would have a week to consider the report's recommendations. That did not happen. Therefore, is it in order that the debate should proceed today?

Mr Speaker: All items of business on the Order Paper are in order. Perhaps, the Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development would like to address the point made by the Member?

The Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development: The Member is a former Deputy Speaker of the House and should know how the business of the House operates. When a matter of business is on the Order Paper, it is in order.

When he made his point of order, I was in the midst of apologising to Members, the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and members of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment for the delay in getting the report to them. The Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development — which is representative of the vast majority of Members in the House at the moment — passed the report on 24 June. The Printed Paper Office did an excellent job in getting the report to the Committee Office by the following Thursday. Unfortunately, the Committee was on a visit arranged and hosted by the Department on that day and it was not until the following day — 27 June — that the Committee Office was able to process and deliver the report.

The Committee could have delayed the report, but there is a tremendous pressure out there, and for the

Committee to allow the report to sit in abeyance until after the summer recess would not be fitting, and I do not think that any Member of this House would want the report to be sitting, collecting dust. We want action on the issue rather than standing on some little piece of ceremony. I apologise, and I assure the House that there was no discourtesy meant.

Today, we are dealing with issues that are relevant to the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development. I am sure that there are many issues that the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment will be able to take up, and I would be happy for the Department to take those on board.

Surely, Members are mature enough to realise that there is a tremendous need in the community for renewable energy. Rather than standing on ceremony, we should ensure that we take those needs seriously.

That is, unless we want to play a game that allows the report to sit in abeyance for the next two months, until we return and find time to reschedule it for debate. That is not what people want. I urge the honourable Member to think seriously before he suggests that we go down that road.

I have apologised on behalf of the Committee. Mr Neeson may hold up as many papers as he wants, but I am telling him exactly how it is. I would be delighted if the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment, of which he is a member, were to take its own action on renewable energy, at the same time as the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development fulfils its responsibilities and pursues its course.

My Committee tried to keep the matter completely within the remit of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, for which we are responsible. The Committee has no wish to stray into the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment's territory. I also put on record my apology to the Minister —

Ms J McCann: Will the Member give way?

The Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development: No, I have only 10 minutes in which to speak, and I want to deal with the issues. If the Member wants to speak, I am sure that she will catch your eye, Mr Speaker. That is a possibility if her party Whip has put forward her name to speak in the debate.

Mr Speaker, I am honoured to present the first report of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development to the House for Members' approval.

The Committee's inquiry was conducted against a background of low incomes in the farming sector, increased feed costs and pressure from Europe to comply with nitrates directives. Those are serious issues that fall within our remit, as the scrutiny Committee for the Department.

The Committee believed that practical solutions, evident in most other European countries, would already have been packaged and set for delivery. As the inquiry progressed, energy needs and the rising cost of meeting consumer demand were seldom out of the news headlines.

The Committee found that solutions existed, that they were available, and — importantly — that they were working. Unfortunately, those solutions were in other European countries, while Northern Ireland waited for them to be packaged.

I will not criticise Departments for the sake of doing so — I am simply reporting what the Committee found out during its deliberations. The Committee was deliberate in linking most of the recommendations in its report to the comments of individuals and organisations that provided it with evidence. However, as part of Government, we have a duty to apply constructive criticism when applicable, and to respond in an appropriate, positive manner.

Members are aware that the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment has the lead role on energy issues. The Committee took time to ensure that the inquiry's terms of reference precisely and clearly addressed renewable-energy matters in a rural context. The majority of the Committee's questions explored how macro-energy solutions could be applied to the rural environment and to rural communities.

However, the Committee was told that renewable energy is a legitimate concern for many Assembly Committees and must not be regarded as the exclusive preserve of either the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment or the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development.

Several of the report's recommendations call on the Executive to take collective action. The most important of those is the recommendation to use public-sector procurement to create a market demand for the use of biomass as an energy source. No Department on its own can achieve that. Central Government must create the market certainty that is required to encourage farmers to invest their time, land and money. I am certain that the agricultural sector will respond to that level of support.

Unfortunately, the lack of progress is frustrating stakeholders and some Committee members. They believe that Northern Ireland remains behind its counterparts in Europe. I have already stated that we based the report purely on evidence that was presented to the Committee. That evidence included 26 written submissions, four of which were from Departments or Government bodies.

The Committee called in witnesses from the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment,

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and it was extremely disappointed to learn of delays in key strategic reports.

I will depart slightly from my earlier statement about levelling criticism. Some criticism must be directed at the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development.

3.15 pm

The Committee was genuinely keen to learn about the actions deriving from the renewable energy action plan and, equally, from the agrifood waste challenge fund. Therefore, it was with great disappointment that the Committee learned that little progress had been made on the action plan. The Committee acknowledged the excellent research being undertaken at the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise and by the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI). Indeed, the Committee recommends that, using whatever resources are necessary, research should continue, particularly the on-farm anaerobic digestion trials and the research on whether anaerobic digestion might be another means of complying with the nitrates directives.

The Committee recommends that the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development establish a virtual centre of renewable energy excellence to capture the benefits of the work being undertaken in Northern Ireland and to introduce best practice in the rural context. That could also include a non-food crop centre for Northern Ireland to link research to production and to the market.

However, there remains a need to progress beyond research and into action. That action can be incorporated in, and provide value to, rural communities. It is genuinely unfortunate that the Department has not provided the Committee with evidence that those actions will be implemented in the long term. We must move beyond the research stage, and the Committee will support any bid for additional funding that the Department might make to ensure that there is movement on the matter. I could raise many other issues, but I realise that time is going by quickly.

I genuinely believe that the Committee has taken a very balanced approach throughout its preparation of the report, and members have been privileged to have received evidence from several very knowledgeable individuals and organisations. Indeed, we are still receiving submissions to the inquiry, which the Committee will continue to consider as part of the normal Committee sessions. We are indebted to all who have taken a keen interest in the Committee's work, and we applaud them for their role in the report.

I wish to put on record our thanks to our special adviser to the Committee, the Committee researcher, the Hansard staff and the Doorkeepers for their help during the inquiry as well as the Committee staff. I commend the report to the House and I trust that we will have its full backing.

Mr Doherty: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I commend the Chairperson, the Deputy Chairperson and members of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development for presenting the report on renewable energy and alternative land use.

I will quote from the section of the report relating to market certainty, which says:

“Rural businesses need more certainty of the market if they are to invest in the bio-energy sector; lack of confidence in the supply chain is a major barrier in the renewable energy sector. Farmers’ long-term commitment to energy crops needs the support of secure market demand.”

The recommendation in that section reads:

“Public sector procurement should favour biomass heating solutions, helping to create the market demand to stimulate the industry. Such a commitment would be aligned with the Government’s climate change and sustainable development objectives.”

Confidence and secure market demand are key to developing the whole sector. The question is how to secure market confidence and create a secure market demand. At this point, a huge onus lies on the Executive, as the collective body, to produce a working group spanning all sectors. For example, can heating systems be provided in new houses that will draw energy from agriculture? Other sectors must also be considered. Although this is a good, solid report, if we do not get market certainty it will sit on the shelf and gather dust.

Confidence and market certainty are required. The only way to achieve them is if the relevant Minister — Michelle Gildernew in this case — works with the Committee, raises the issue in the Executive and tries to establish a working group across the various sectors, from which a basic action plan to develop the sector will emerge.

Mr Savage: I support the motion. In 2005, the total greenhouse-gas emissions in Northern Ireland were 5.5% below the levels in 1990. However, there was a 15.8% reduction on 1990 emissions of greenhouse gases in the UK overall. Northern Ireland’s performance in response to climate change can be improved, and the report offers constructive proposals for the use of renewable energy. In addition, we face unprecedented rises in energy costs and emerging energy security issues. Renewable energy and alternative land use can play a crucial role in the future of energy provision in Northern Ireland and the UK. It can also offer business and diversification opportunities to the rural community.

I will examine the section of the report entitled “Opportunities for Farms and Rural Businesses”. I concur with the Committee’s findings:

“there was a lack of focus on the opportunities for family farms and rural businesses in the development of renewable energy with most of the attention, investment and fiscal support being for large-scale wind developments.”

I agree:

“The Executive should increase the use of biomass as an energy source, introducing a hierarchy of its use. There is widespread agreement that the best use of biomass is for heating, replacing fossil fuels. Below that in the hierarchy comes electricity generation and finally liquid biofuels, the least carbon-efficient use of biomass.”

It is also clear:

“Rural businesses need more certainty of the market if they are to invest in the bio-energy sector; lack of confidence in the supply chain is a major barrier in the renewable energy sector.”

The long-term commitment of farmers and small businesses to renewables requires the support of Government and the development of a secure market. With that in mind:

“Public sector procurement should favour biomass heating solutions, helping to create the market demand to stimulate the industry. Such a commitment would be aligned with the Government’s climate change and sustainable development objectives.”

Many technologies are fledgling, and it may be years before commercial application is taken up by many small businesses. However:

“There is much of value on which to build — some world-class research at the universities and at AFBI, a range of commercial companies investing in the sector here and a budding demand for some of the technologies ...

The Department for Agriculture and Rural Development should establish a (virtual) Centre of Renewable Energy Excellence to capture the benefits of the work being undertaken in Northern Ireland and to introduce best practice within a rural context.”

The report makes reasonable and considered recommendations that promote the use of renewable energy sources in Northern Ireland. The Committee’s most significant conclusion was that the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) could be more proactive in providing the necessary research and funding for — and implementation of — their relevant strategies, because they are having a detrimental effect on the potential renewables industry.

The report recognises the importance of Government support and subsidies for the fledgling field, much as it was to the development of wind power in the 1990s. That includes support for technological development and the creation of some market certainty for the initial stages of market development through initiatives such as the establishment of public procurement for biomass heat and electricity.

However, it is worth considering some of the wider issues that surround the potential agricultural and environmental effects of renewable energy and alternative land use.

Wider debates are going on about the effect that biofuel production could have on food costs, production and biodiversity. Such debates are important, and we must continue to examine whether the global aggregate environmental and humanitarian costs of biomass,

especially biofuels, are greater than the climate change and economic benefits.

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

Mr Savage: Although Northern Ireland has been intensively farmed, there are large areas of grazing land that provide many opportunities.

Mr P J Bradley: I welcome the opportunity to comment on the report. Although I support the motion, I wish to place on the record my views about renewable energies, which I accept will not necessarily be fully shared by all who contributed to the report. I said previously that some may think that such views place me out on a limb.

I have studied in reasonable detail many differing views and opinions on the subject of biofuels, and I have noted that some commentators have concerns about the content of the gas that is produced when biofuels are burned. One biomass expert claimed that when biofuels burn in an engine, the combustion gases that are produced are carcinogenic and over 20 times more potent than carbon dioxide. That is why I stated that I was disappointed that the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety did not avail itself of the opportunity to make a submission to the inquiry. However, as we heard from the Chairman, it may yet be on its way — the Committee is still receiving submissions. One day, the views of health departments around the globe may well determine the future thinking on the burning of biofuels.

I also urge caution to those who promote the use of our best agricultural land for biofuel crops. It is rather short-sighted to relegate prime farmland to growing products that we know little about. Questions must be asked about whether there is any long-term damage to topsoil when biofuels are grown. If that were to be the case, how many generations would it take for the soil to recover its former food-producing qualities?

It is such questions that force me to qualify my support for the alternative use of land and the growing of energy crops. Therefore, I suggest to those who may be listening seriously to the debate that only the abundant poor-quality land across Northern Ireland and the areas that are not best suited to producing good food should be used to grow biofuel crops.

There is, as the report claims, enormous potential to participate in the renewable-energy sector. However, that should not be at a price; prime farmland must be safeguarded. I know that by saying that I am somewhat ruling out the growing of rapeseed and other oil-bearing crops, but so be it.

It is an established fact that on the island of Ireland we grow the best grass and root crops in Europe, and high-quality grain crops. Why, at a time of great hunger

throughout the world, should we give up doing what we do best, which is producing high-quality, healthy food?

I refer to world hunger, and I contend that it would be foolish to think that food problems are confined to locations many tens of thousands of miles away. Our dependence on imported food is so great that contingency arrangements must be put in place for the day when the inward supply of food may not be so plentiful.

It should also be noted that the prime reason for the significant increase in food prices in recent times is the shortage of land for food production. In a joint statement issued in early July 2007, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development warned:

“Increased demand for bio-fuels is causing fundamental changes to agricultural markets that could drive up world prices for many farm products.”

Within six months to a year, those predictions have already become a reality.

If the inward supply of food were to cease tomorrow for whatever reason, in Northern Ireland we have enough food on supermarket shelves and in storage to feed people for five to six days. If we have no home-produced food to rely on, that could become a problem.

I accept that, should we develop the use of biomass as an energy source — even from less-favoured land — its best use would be for heating purposes. I doubt whether electricity generation or liquid biofuels will ever emerge as the answer to what we are hoping to achieve in deriving energy from the renewable sector.

I support the call to devise and develop the use of alternative energy, which might help to reduce our dependence on oil and natural gas, and, in keeping with my earlier comments on the protection of prime farmland, I believe that alternatives can be found.

3.30 pm

The utilisation of wind energy, although not necessarily a new discovery, is the most natural alternative available. Anaerobic digestion is another source worthy of thorough investigation. The principle is sound, but is the viability in keeping with the principle?

In mid-May, the Committee, as Members heard, visited the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute at Hillsborough. We saw at first hand the excellent experimental work carried out on anaerobic digestion. It was disappointing to learn that the Department’s action plan had not progressed in the first 15 months of its existence.

It is important that DARD ensures that no financial restrictions are placed on the work carried out at Hillsborough, as anaerobic digestion might one day allow many farming families —

Mr T Clarke: Will the Member give way?

Mr P J Bradley: I am sorry, but the time in which I have to speak is almost up.

Anaerobic digestion might one day allow many farming families to join the plans to deliver alternative sources of energy.

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

Mr P J Bradley: I support the motion, albeit with a health warning.

Mr Ford: I am certainly the first — and perhaps will be the last — Member to speak in this debate who did not help to write the report.

In that context, I do not intend to engage in the spat between representatives from the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment and the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development who raised the issue. However, it is important that this topic is debated; it should not sit on the shelf. It is something with which every Member of the Assembly should be seen to be engaged.

When the Chairperson began the debate he talked about the need for action, which Mr Doherty supported. It is regrettable to read in the report that the Department’s so-called action plan has sat for 15 months without any action being taken, which P J Bradley highlighted. If I were not running the risk of being accused of acting as opposition for opposition’s sake — although some Members here doubtless do that — I would say that unfortunately that is too often the case.

Departments have action plan after action plan. All kinds of wonderful recommendations are put down on paper, but sometimes we are not particularly good at putting those into practice. There is a lesson there for each of us. As the Chairperson said at the start of the debate, the Committee represents nearly every section of the Assembly. In fact, it is representative of the four Executive parties, and I trust that all members of the Committee will lobby their Ministers for some kind of movement forward, because this is an issue that requires a joined-up approach.

The issue does not just involve DETI, which is responsible for energy and the electricity-transmission infrastructure. Yesterday, during questions to the Minister for Social Development, the potential for alternative fuels to be used in social housing to deal with fuel poverty was highlighted.

The Department of the Environment (DOE) has major issues about, in particular, the Planning Service and its environmental responsibilities, and yet it did not have any input into this particular report. The report makes reference to building regulations, which have been held back by the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP). Some of us hold the opinion that, unfortunately, certain potential building regulations have not been carried through.

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The Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) has an overarching relationship with almost everything, but has particular responsibility for sustainable development. However, we are far off being able to meet the targets for renewable energy that we are obligated to under European, international and UK agreements. Real issues exist, which must be examined to see what needs to be done.

P J Bradley spoke of the role of the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS), but I am not sure that I necessarily agree with his comments in that respect. Some points, however, can be highlighted from outside regarding the Committee's report: in particular, the recommendation that there should be a hierarchy in the use of biomass. Will the Member who is to make the winding-up speech in this debate consider the use of more innovative thinking in looking at opportunities to develop combined heat and power on a domestic scale? We are not meeting those needs by saying that electricity comes after space heating. Otherwise it appears that the report is merely catching up with other people rather than using the unique opportunities of tidal power, which I may not be allowed to mention, and wind power, and the possibilities for growing willow and miscanthus as biomass. Northern Ireland should not be catching up with other countries; it should be innovating compared with other countries.

That ties in with the issue highlighted in the report's recommendation that refers to the Executive's risk aversion. Unfortunately, that seems to be a byword for the culture here; we are generally risk averse. It would be good to see a few failures because DARD had encouraged people to innovate. At present, it seems that DARD and other Departments are entirely risk averse and only a small number of entrepreneurs are taking risks and setting lessons for all of us.

The issues of anaerobic digestion are similar. I know that such work is currently under way at Hillsborough, but work on anaerobic digestion was done 20 years ago in a Portglenone monastery. We have not really moved a great deal — why not, after we faced the problems of the nitrates directive? To be parochial, in South Antrim, we might solve some of the problems of incinerating poultry litter if there were more anaerobic digestion.

We should praise the efforts that are being made by groups such as Balcas in respect of wood pellets; and by Rural Generation in respect of willow, particularly for remediation. We should, however, also face up to the fact that progress on wind energy is being held up by PPS 18. There are genuine issues of land quality and how we should encourage the appropriate growing of crops. Moreover, we should recognise the recent report by Action Renewables, which demonstrated the potential for 400 jobs in the long term in the field of alternative energy production.

Mr Irwin: I welcome the Committee's report, and I declare an interest as a farmer.

To the average farmer, the idea of renewable energy and alternative uses of land firmly remains a secondary option. For a number of years, farmers in Northern Ireland have been under considerable strain. We need to be cautious about championing the benefits of renewable energy when the Assembly could do much more to assist farmers in ways that would yield much more stabilising results.

In some cases, harnessing renewable energy requires a fairly large outlay of cash. In many cases, such finance is not readily available to farmers. Under recent programmes, the use of grant aid has been welcome. However, even with the assistance of such aid, a large contribution has been required from the farmer.

In some cases, farmers have been unable to use wind turbines due to units failing or blades working loose and flying across farmyards. Those types of stories, and the difficult situations in which farmers find themselves — when turbines cannot be used, or when the farmer's money is tied up — do not paint the perfect picture of renewable energy. I want an assurance from the Minister that the Department will do all in its power to help farmers to address those issues, which the Department has a moral duty to do.

Northern Ireland almost entirely relies on imported energy supplies such as oil, coal and electricity. Therefore, we have little control over the cost of energy. In recent months, world energy prices have risen sharply, and everyone is feeling the effects of that.

As the report points out, the development of renewable energy is in its infancy. A great deal of work remains to be done in order to encourage more rural businesses to consider using renewable energy. The renewable energy action plan must become the renewed focus of the Department. More importantly, rural businesses should be made fully aware of the funding options that are available to them. I welcome the report.

Mr Molloy: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I welcome the report. An important stage has been reached in respect of energy and in dealing with farm waste. The report details how we should implement a plan that will get the best from the energy that is available and how we capture it, particularly when it comes to crops and biomass.

As is already the case in many countries, such measures should be combined with waste-management structures. If such a system were put in place, it could deal with both farm waste and municipal waste. In some circumstances, one system can be combined with the other.

We recently held a debate on the issue of chicken litter. That matter could be dealt with by a combined

system that could deal with the waste and produce energy from it in a way that could be managed.

People have concerns about anaerobic digestion and incineration. Those concerns are rightly held, but there are means of modern technology that could deal with the mechanical biological treatment of waste, gasification and anaerobic digestion. Once a package is put together, there will be a mechanism that could deal with farm waste and municipal waste at the same time.

The benefits of producing crops to coincide with that system, and using the maximum amount of available resources, in order to provide a solution should be a cross-departmental challenge. The issue is not entirely one for DARD, nor DETI.

Several Departments can come together to ensure that we find practical ways of dealing with the situation. Our situation may be unique, but we can learn from the experiences of other countries — some of which have been well researched in the past few years — to ensure that we have a means of capturing energy and turning it into resources or fuel for the future. The report is important and the Assembly must take it on board.

This morning, I talked to a gentleman from Sweden about waste and waste management. He asked me what our plans were to develop energy from waste and how we were preparing to deal with the energy needs of the future. I had to tell him that we had no direct plan in place. He found it very strange that we had no overall strategy for dealing with energy and waste, considering the present fuel crisis and the problems associated with European directives to deal with waste and waste on farms.

The process is at an important stage, so we do not have time to sit back and let the matter rest on the shelf. Action must be taken across Departments and the Executive must make decisions. It is unfortunate that this Executive does not have the Executive programme funds of the previous Executive, which would have ensured that the matter was driven and resources were available. However, we must ensure that benefits can be gained from energy already on our farms to benefit our farmers and to clean up the environment.

Mr Bresland: I support the report of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development on renewable energy and alternative land use. The Committee sought to explore the potential economic benefits that Northern Ireland's agriculture industry and rural businesses could gain from renewable energy and alternative land use.

Northern Ireland farmers have always sought to provide high-quality food, and they are internationally renowned for excelling in breeding high-quality pigs, sheep and beef and dairy cattle, and for growing world-class grasses, clovers, grains and potatoes. The main aim of our farmers has been to produce top-

quality, healthy food and, regrettably, the agriculture industry in Northern Ireland has not been receiving its fair share of economic return. Many farmers have left the industry while others have diversified or sought alternative employment in order to maintain incomes for their families.

Recently, we have heard much about a possible world shortage of food. Farmers in Northern Ireland are not paid enough and continue to be choked with red tape, neither of which encourages the farming community to maximise its food-producing potential. Recent farm-gate price increases have been wiped out by the increasing cost of inputs, many of which are due to the continual increase in the demand for oil.

It is in that climate, along with new opportunities from the Northern Ireland rural development programme (NIRDP), that farmers are looking at the opportunities offered through renewable energy. The Assembly recently debated a motion on fuel costs and the effect of fuel poverty, and it was clear that we have little control over fuel costs beyond energy efficiency and the possibility of supporting renewable energy programmes.

The report highlights the need for a joined-up approach by several Departments, including the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, the Department for Social Development and, as regards planning policy, the Department of the Environment.

I take this opportunity to highlight one of the recommendations that supports the concept of a centre for renewable energy excellence. Many farmers benefited from the Peace II-funded Focus Farms Programme, which provided farmers in Northern Ireland with a resource that enabled them to learn at first hand new ideas, the impact of research and how such ideas affected working farms. That centre of excellence could give farmers the opportunity to learn at first hand the processes and pitfalls of any new direction for our farming community.

Such support also requires adequate and effective research that provides the industry with the information that is necessary to make choices. The need for such research has been highlighted in the report, especially that concerning anaerobic digestion and the benefits that the nitrates directive offers.

3.45 pm

I am confident that the farming community will see the opportunities that renewable energy can create. I hope that Departments will also respond positively to the opportunities that are outlined in the report.

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I welcome the Committee's timely report

on renewable energy and alternative land use, especially given the continued escalation of energy prices, which have an impact on us all.

The Committee has carried out a very valuable piece of work. However, I received the report only last Friday afternoon; I got sight of it only on Monday; and I have not had sufficient time to consider its recommendations in detail. That said, I intend to issue a detailed response to the Committee in due course.

I note that the Committee acknowledges that the bioenergy report that was commissioned by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and that will be available in several weeks will have a bearing on its own report. I also await the bioenergy report with interest. It, along with the Committee's report, will inform the development of a cross-departmental strategic approach to bioenergy. The DETI report in particular will assist in informing the rural community of the potential market opportunities that exist here in the North. My officials have been working closely with DETI to ensure that the interests of the land-based sector are considered fully.

Bioenergy is unique in that it can make a contribution to the three main energy markets — electricity, heat, and transport — all of which are important for family farm and rural businesses. It is also very important to ensure that bioenergy resources are deployed in the best possible way to optimise feed-stock uses and to give the best energy and carbon-reduction outcomes. The very challenging EU and public service agreement renewable energy targets are also rightly prominent in the Committee's report, and the response to the current consultation on the renewable energy strategy will also be key in developing a road map to address those targets. I note the Committee's comments of a strategic nature, and, in particular, I and my ministerial colleagues will wish to ensure alignment of departmental policies.

Turning to what my Department has done to date, the implementation of the 35 recommendations of the renewable energy action plan has provided a positive start. Perhaps more consideration could have been given to the work that officials have carried out in briefing the Committee on that action plan and on what has happened.

I will mention some of the other things that have been done. Training and awareness of renewable energy technologies has been provided to over 1,500 farmers. The well-attended renewables open day at the Loughry campus of the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE) last August, which I attended, was successful in communicating new technologies. That work continues at CAFRE in collaboration with the Carbon Trust and the Farm Energy Centre at Stoneleigh in England to develop a range of industry benchmarks that are aimed at delivering energy efficiencies at farm level.

Additionally, training for installers of renewable energy technologies has been funded under the INTERREG programme. The NIRDP in particular has implemented several measures that will help to further develop land-based renewable energy systems. Those measures include: the introduction of processing and marketing grants in the forestry sector; modernisation of agriculture holdings via biomass boilers and solar panels; support for short-rotation coppice; diversification; and business creation and development.

Case-study work from the wind-powered turbines that have been installed on the CAFRE estate will also provide much-needed information on operational issues. Work is also under way to assist the development of energy supply chains through demonstration of best practice through, for example, our focus farms and in the forestry sector.

A range of research programmes that have been sponsored by my Department are currently under way at AFBI in collaboration with other research centres. Miscanthus, which is an additional potential energy crop, is being evaluated, and at this stage yields look promising.

AFBI is also hosting an international conference and exhibition on renewable energy at the end of October to explore the local contribution that can be made to renewable energy targets. I am sure that the Committee will be interested in hearing about that conference and in perhaps attending it, so I would welcome the Committee's interest.

Biomass boilers at the CAFRE and AFBI sites will be used to evaluate and demonstrate the effectiveness of biomass systems for heat production in the rural community and the supply chains that are needed. There must be a sustainable procurement strategy. The supply of biomass in the North is finite; at present, some is brought across from Scotland. It must, therefore, be ensured that supply can meet demand. An on-farm anaerobic digester is also being trialled at AFBI Hillsborough. Innovation fund bids have been secured for research and development of anaerobic digestion in the local context.

On my appointment as Minister, I inherited the renewable energy action plan, which included a proposed challenge fund. In late 2007, I established a renewable energy policy unit. The Department has secured national and matching EU funds, which are available from 1 April 2009. At present, therefore, that money is not available. I am currently reassessing needs in the current climate in order to target any capital intervention for the best possible return and to ensure that sustainable technologies are identified.

The Committee report has come at a time when several reports, which include the all-Ireland grid study, are to hand. During the coming weeks and months, it is important that all reports are fully considered in order

to achieve a coherent framework. To assist that, I am currently establishing a stakeholder-led group to ensure that my Department's renewables action plan is reviewed and refreshed and that available support is effectively targeted at sustainable actions that contribute to targets for energy from renewable sources. Complementarity with existing work and reports will be a key objective of the group. My Department and its agencies have made a constructive start in building infrastructure and conducting research that will provide an important expertise base and will instil confidence in people to invest in the future.

I also recognise the importance of supporting policies that drive opportunities for renewable energy production and utilisation in an efficient, sustainable and balanced way, particularly for the rural community. I am keen to ensure that renewable energy policies are aligned across Government and are implemented in an integrated manner. I hope that Committee members will realise that renewable energy will demand long-term sustainable approaches and robust economic evaluations.

I agree with most of the Members' contributions. For example, I support comments on the balance of the food-versus-fuel debate and on the need to consider all forms of renewable energy, such as wind and wave energy. However, in saying that, the escalating price of energy is unlikely to recede. The challenge is on everyone to meet energy needs from more than just traditional sources. It is important that I make the point that I want farmers to be at the centre of appropriate business-led responses and for them to take a lead role in the exploitation and maximisation of the benefits of renewable energy.

As I said at the outset, I will respond in detail to the report within the eight weeks that is stipulated in the procedures of the House. I welcome the debate and the work that has been carried out. A joined-up partnership approach is needed in order to find long-term sustainable solutions to the substantial problem.

Mr W Clarke: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I apologise that I was late for the debate; I had to lead a delegation to meet the Minister for Regional Development in order to discuss sewerage problems in Newcastle. I have waited a long time for the meeting, so I could not give it up.

I thank the Minister and Members for their contributions to the debate. As was stated at the outset, the debate's subject matter is not reserved to any one Committee or Member. The variety of contributions that were made in the debate supports the Committee's viewpoint.

Go raibh maith agat. In making my winding-up speech, I do not want to take up too much of the House's time. However, I want to comment on one or two matters. I certainly do not intend to recount every point that has been made in the Chamber. The Committee seeks the

House's approval of its report. I assure Members that we — I, in particular — will also examine Hansard in order to follow up on what has been said. The Committee will forward Members' valid points to the relevant authorities, which is the proper action to take. Ultimately, all Members want the same outcomes. Committee members have done much work to bring the report to the House. It is important, therefore, that a way forward emerges from the report.

I will cover a few points from the debate. In response to the point of order, I apologise for not forwarding the report. As the Minister said, it is important that we all work in partnership and in a cohesive manner to move forward on the issue. The Committee will copy the report formally to the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment, and we will welcome the response of that Committee.

The Committee agrees wholeheartedly with Mr Doherty; we will do all in our power to ensure that the report does not simply gather dust. The Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment invested a great deal of time in the report. We must endorse it, and we must not allow it to gather dust because that would not be acceptable to the community. Given the high cost of fuel, I urge everyone to act on the report.

I acknowledge PJ Bradley's comments on biofuels, but the report states that biofuels are the least carbon-efficient type of biomass. The report does not suggest that the growth of commodities be stopped; it encourages the planned creation of demand. The Committee accepts Mr Ford's comments on combined power and will put those points to the Department. Mr Irwin is correct to say that the recent coverage of wind turbines is not a good advertisement for those technologies.

Mr Shannon: Is the Member aware of the story that appeared in the press today that wind turbines, if established on the east coast of Northern Ireland, could supply enough power for the whole of Northern Ireland? Will the Member agree that more should be done to encourage diversification from farming into tourism? Last week I read that in Ballywalter a farmer who grows potatoes and keeps milk cows now has a quad track, a crazy golf course and a railway.

Mr W Clarke: I agree wholeheartedly with Mr Shannon. Diversification may not suit all farmers, but it is an option for some; it is an excellent way forward for rural development.

The Committee welcomes the Minister's support for the report, and we look forward to receiving her detailed comments. The Committee is keen to move forward with the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and with other Departments.

The report presents a massive opportunity for rural communities to develop renewable energy, and that opportunity must be grasped. The Executive must increase the use of biomass, which includes woodchip

and wood pellets, and that is the one aspect to shine throughout the report. *[Interruption.]*

Mr W Clarke: That is anaerobic digestion.

Mr T Clarke: No, it is not.

Mr W Clarke: Each Minister must take on board some of the report's recommendations. Schools must be considered. Today, a school with a wood-pellet heating system won an award for its environmental nature and became the first school in the North of Ireland to do so. That shows what is achievable and the way forward. Hospitals and Government buildings and the public sector must start to lead the way. The Department for Social Development could lead the way by moving towards the use of wood-pellet and biomass energy in its social housing stock. Communal heating systems for leisure centres, for example, and in all Government buildings should be considered.

The farming community could come together to provide such heating systems through woodchip and biomass boilers. Farmers need a guaranteed income for such projects; they must be able to enter a five-year plan or service agreement to build confidence in the rural community to take up such initiatives. Establishing a centre of excellence is a key recommendation and, if we wish to make progress, we must grasp that opportunity.

4.00 pm

Hemp is a plant that must be considered seriously. Hemp has many, versatile uses — not the one of which Mitchel McLaughlin is thinking. *[Laughter.]* It is four times more viable than corn, and it can be used as a food supplement and as biomass. It grows widely and has already been planted in some areas in the North. Indeed, in my constituency, a house has been totally built from hemp, including the concrete and the building blocks.

The House is in agreement that embracing renewable forms of energy is the way forward. However, rural communities must be given confidence to buy into them, and Members must demonstrate leadership and have a plan to bring those communities with us.

The Committee thanks those people who took time to attend, and showed an interest in, its inquiry, and I hope that witnesses and stakeholders recognise the report in the positive light in which it has been presented to the House today. I commend the report to the House, and I seek Members' approval of it. Go raibh maith agat.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly approves the Report of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development (39/07/08R) into Renewable Energy and Alternative Land Use.

Motions to Amend Standing Orders

Mr Speaker: The next 26 motions relate to amendments to Standing Orders, so I propose to conduct the debate as follows: I propose to group the motions, as shown on the separate sheet that has been provided for Members, and to conduct four debates. Debate will take place on all the motions in the relevant group. When all Members who wish to speak have done so, I shall put the Question on the first motion. I shall then ask the Chairperson to move formally each of the remaining motions in the group in turn, and I will then put the Question on each motion without further debate. If that is clear, we shall proceed.

The first group consists only of motion (a), as indicated on the Order Paper.

The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Lord Morrow): I beg to move

(a) In Standing Order 15, leave out paragraph (1) and insert -

“(1) Except as provided for in paragraphs (1A) and (1B), any amendment to a motion shall be given in writing to the Speaker not later than 9.30 a.m. two clear Working Days before the day on which the motion is to be taken.

(1A) Any amendment to a motion to be debated on a day on which the Business Committee has arranged an additional sitting of the Assembly under Standing Order 10(6) shall, where the time between such decision of the Business Committee and the day of the additional sitting is less than two clear Working Days, be given to the Speaker not later than 9.30 a.m. on the day of the additional sitting.

(1B) Any amendment to a motion to be debated on a day on which the Assembly is summoned to meet earlier than that to which it stood adjourned shall, where the time between the Speaker's summons and the meeting to which the Speaker's summons relates is less than two clear Working Days, be given to the Speaker not later than 9.30 a.m. on the day on which the Assembly is summoned to meet.”

Standing Order 15 was reviewed at the Speaker's request. The Speaker has only between 9.30 am and 12.00 noon on Mondays, and between 9.30 am and 10.30 am on Tuesdays, in which to assess proposed amendments to motions. Such assessments can take time, and it is unreasonable for either the Speaker or the Member who tabled the motion to rush that job. Given that amendments are often technical or legal in nature, it is therefore important that they be given due and proper consideration. The Committee considers that, perhaps at times, using the current arrangements, a rush job can ensue, and that may produce the wrong result.

The Committee on Procedures set about reviewing Standing Order 15 in the normal manner. It commissioned research on how the procedure works elsewhere, and, for Members who are interested, that research can be found on the Committee's web pages. The Committee then consulted party Whips and the Business Committee to identify any problems that might arise if the period for tabling amendments were to be extended.

The Committee on Procedures' consideration of the matter was greatly helped by the Business Committee's decision to schedule business on a two-week basis.

Without that decision, it would have been very difficult to lengthen the time for tabling amendments. If it is agreed that amendments to motions should be tabled two working days in advance, there will be two consequential impacts on Standing Orders 10(6) and 11, which deal with additional plenary meetings called by the Business Committee and the Speaker under the conditions specified in the Standing Order. Those consequential amendments to Standing Orders 10(6) and 11 are shown as new paragraphs (1A) and (1B) in the motion. The renumbering of the paragraphs will be carried out as part of the annual summer reprint of Standing Orders. I commend the motion to the Assembly.

Mr O'Loan: I support the motion to amend Standing Orders. As the Chairperson said, the proposal has been well tested through proper consultation with all relevant sections in the Assembly. It is fair and proper to the parties in that they will have proper time to consider any motion that is tabled. Members will have adequate time to consider the motion and table an amendment to it if they wish to do so; most importantly, there will also be adequate time for others to consider an amendment and their response to it. The Assembly should, therefore, welcome the motion.

Mr Ford: I regret that I cannot be as positive as Mr O'Loan. It is certainly not my wish to make life difficult for you, Mr Speaker, or the people in your office — he says in an attempt to ingratiate himself to the Speaker. Issues would arise if several complicated or technical amendments were to appear before the Speaker at 9.25 am or 9.29 am on a Tuesday morning when there would be little time to consider them before the plenary sitting begins.

However, the motion would require that any amendment to a motion be submitted two full working days before the day on which the motion is to be taken. Thus, for a Monday Order Paper, amendments would have to be submitted by early Thursday morning. The Alliance Party feels that that significant period of notice could create difficulties in ensuring that amendments fit in well with the motion and can be properly considered.

I accept Lord Morrow's point that the provisional Order Paper is published a week in advance, and that practice has made a difference. Nevertheless, the official Order Paper emerges at the Business Committee meeting only on Tuesday lunchtime. Members may be informally notified by Whips on Tuesday afternoon of its contents, but some Back-Benchers may not see the Order Paper until late Thursday morning when the time for tabling amendments has passed. Perhaps party discipline is such that Whips will ensure that each and

every Member of their party is fully aware of what is going on. Lord Morrow is nodding, so clearly the DUP Whip is as efficient as the United Community Group's Whip.

However, an issue arose last week that caused concern. My colleagues and I had tabled a motion on the situation in Zimbabwe. When the motion was originally submitted, it was entirely appropriate. Several weeks later, when the motion was considered by the Business Committee for the provisional Order Paper, it was still entirely appropriate. When the Order Paper was finalised at the Tuesday Business Committee meeting, it was entirely appropriate. On the Thursday morning — which, under the proposed amendment to Standing Order 15, would be the last time for submitting amendments — it was appropriate. Yet the situation in Zimbabwe changed over the weekend, and it was possible for our party to table an amendment that was accepted first thing on Monday morning — and we appreciated your indulgence in that matter, Mr Speaker. That amendment ensured that the debate that was held was relevant and appropriate.

Mr O'Loan: First, I want to address the Member's more general points. Given that the proposal to amend this Standing Order has been before the Assembly for many months and that the Committee on Procedures has carried out a proper consultation on it, I am surprised that such a significant difficulty is being presented at this very late stage.

Secondly, with regard to the Zimbabwe motion, I thought about that issue when it arose, and, again, in the past few minutes, when I became aware that the Alliance Party was going to present concerns.

If that motion had had to go ahead as it was originally worded — because we were simply using the opportunity to express strong views about Zimbabwe — those views would still have been fully understood, and the House would have understood that the motion had been framed in light of the knowledge that existed at the time.

If the change to the Standing Orders goes through as proposed, we may at some time in the future detect difficulties that require further change. At this point, and with the Assembly having fully thought, and having been consulted, about the matter, we should not alter what is proposed. The change should be made and put to the test; and, if something needs changing in the future, let us change it. However, that may not be necessary.

Mr Ford: I am grateful to the Member for his second speech. There are two substantive points. I understand that my colleague raised his concerns when there was discussion in the Committee, but was not present when the vote was taken to approve this motion. Secondly, the key issue that was highlighted

— and this was the point that I was going to mention with regard to the Zimbabwe motion — was that it is fine to say that we may discover at some time in the future that there will be a problem; however, what we are actually saying is that last week there was a problem.

I do not see at this stage, as Standing Orders are proposed, that there would have been any way of dealing with that problem. If, for example, we were a body that had the Speaker's discretion to deal with a matter of urgency, I would have faith in the Speaker to consider matters of urgency. As I understand it, however, there is no such discretion in the Standing Order — it is rigid. Although it would have been possible to have had that debate around the motion as it was originally framed, to have sat in this Chamber, knowing that people from Zimbabwe were listening in the Gallery, to have heard Members make impassioned speeches in support of the motion, and then, in the end, to have had to withdraw the motion because it was not relevant, would not have given this place a good name as a proper parliamentary debating Chamber. Therefore, an issue that needs attention was highlighted.

Lord Morrow may give an assurance that the Committee will not just wait to see whether something occurs in a year or two, but will look urgently at how we might deal with what in other places would be called an emergency amendment or an urgency amendment.

Something potentially as early as Thursday for any Monday, given that the Order Paper is not always finalised two weeks in advance, but only one week in advance, raises issues that have not been thoroughly addressed. I appreciate that there is a problem and that the Committee has been trying to resolve it. However, I remain to be convinced that this is the way to do so.

The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures: I thank all those who took part in this discussion. The Committee did spend considerable time in examining this amendment, and it researched what happens in other legislatures. The Committee's approach was that, compared to other legislatures, the time provided in the Assembly's Standing Orders was deemed to be unreasonable.

Most other places allow two or three days. The Committee spent a significant amount of time looking at the impact of changing to one, two or three days, and that information was brought back by the Committee members to their parties. After further discussion, the Committee reached a consensus that two working days was workable, particularly as the Business Committee had moved to scheduling business on a fortnightly basis.

I have listened carefully to what Mr Ford said with regard to this matter, and there is merit in some of it. I do not want to misquote anyone, and I stand to be corrected if Members feel differently, but I do not

recall this issue being raised with the same force as it was raised by Mr Ford today.

4.15 pm

I remind the Member that, recently, the House adopted an additional Standing Order to deal with matters of the day, which are deemed, at your discretion, Mr Speaker, to deal with urgent issues that may arise from time to time. Therefore, we have made provision for such matters. I hope that that will go some way to reassure the Member.

The Member raised an issue about the motion on free and fair elections in Zimbabwe. I do not wish to be derogatory, but I suspect that not many people in Zimbabwe took notice of what Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly said about the matter. I would have thought, however, that there was still provision for a Member to come to the House and make a declaration that, owing to a change in circumstances, he or she felt that a particular motion could not proceed but that it would be presented again to the Business Committee. As a member of the Business Committee, I suspect that its members would be sympathetic to that. In fact, it would not be difficult to reschedule the motion, and it would lose none of its impact, given the continuing situation. Therefore, I take the Member's point, and I hope that he takes the point that we try to make.

Mr Ford: I appreciate that the Member is trying to make gestures in our direction by saying that if a motion were no longer relevant, we could handle it on another day; however, that could be at least two weeks hence. However, that would not have been a satisfactory way of dealing with it, given the crisis that faces Zimbabwe at the moment.

The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures: With all due respect, I suspect that the crisis in Zimbabwe is no worse today than it was when the motion was debated. Although the Member felt strongly about the issue — perhaps because it was election time — nothing seems to have changed in Zimbabwe. Regrettably, nothing has changed because of anything that the Assembly has done. Although the motion was passed unanimously, unfortunately, it did not change things for the people in that unfortunate, sad country. Therefore, in that particular instance, there would have been plenty of time for it to be re-addressed because of the change in circumstances as perceived by the Members. I beg to move that the House adopt the procedures.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved (with cross-community support):

(a) In Standing Order 15 leave out paragraph (1) and insert -

“(1) Except as provided for in paragraphs (1A) and (1B), any amendment to a motion shall be given in writing to the Speaker not

later than 9.30 a.m. two clear Working Days before the day on which the motion is to be taken.

(1A) Any amendment to a motion to be debated on a day on which the Business Committee has arranged an additional sitting of the Assembly under Standing Order 10(6) shall, where the time between such decision of the Business Committee and the day of the additional sitting is less than two clear Working Days, be given to the Speaker not later than 9.30 a.m. on the day of the additional sitting.

(1B) Any amendment to a motion to be debated on a day on which the Assembly is summoned to meet earlier than that to which it stood adjourned shall, where the time between the Speaker's summons and the meeting to which the Speaker's summons relates is less than two clear Working Days, be given to the Speaker not later than 9.30 a.m. on the day on which the Assembly is summoned to meet."

Mr Speaker: We will now move to the second group of amendments, which consist of motions (b) to (v), as stated on the Order Paper.

The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures: I beg to move

(b) In Standing Order 45(b)(i) after "46" insert -

"and 47". — [*The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Lord Morrow).*]

The following motions stood in the Order Paper:

(c) In Standing Order 46(3) line 2 leave out "and a number of Members other than himself/herself to" and insert -

"appointed in accordance with this Standing Order. The other Members of a Statutory Committee shall". — [*The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Lord Morrow).*]

(d) In Standing Order 46(4) leave out from line 12 to end of line 15 and insert -

"C is the number of Chairpersons and Deputy Chairpersons of Statutory Committees established under this Standing Order who are members of the party." — [*The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Lord Morrow).*]

(e) In Standing Order 46(5) line 5 leave out all after "Deputy Chairperson" and insert -

"of a Statutory Committee and to specify on which Committee that Member is nominated to serve. In making nominations, nominating officers shall prefer Committees in which they do not have a party interest over those in which they do have a party interest." — [*The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Lord Morrow).*]

(f) In Standing Order 46(7) line 1 leave out "paragraph 8" and insert -

"paragraphs (7A), (8) and (9)". — [*The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Lord Morrow).*]

(g) In Standing Order 46(7) leave out sub-paragraph (b) and insert -

"(b) if the person nominated does not take up the specified office within 15 minutes of the request being made (whether that person was present when nominated or not),

the power shall be exercisable by the nominating officer of the party for which the formula in paragraph (4) gives the next highest figure.

(7A) Where the nominating officer, the person nominated, or another Member of the Assembly asks the Assembly to extend the 15 minute time period mentioned in paragraph (7) and gives a

reason or reasons for so asking, the Assembly may grant the extension." — [*The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Lord Morrow).*]

(h) In Standing Order 46(8) leave out "Paragraph (7)" and insert -

"Paragraphs (7) and (7A)". — [*The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Lord Morrow).*]

(i) In Standing Order 46(9) line 1 leave out all after "as" and insert -

"necessary to ensure that the positions of Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson have been filled." — [*The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Lord Morrow).*]

(j) In Standing Order 46 after paragraph (9) insert -

"() Once a Member has accepted a nomination as Chairperson or Deputy Chairperson the Speaker shall announce and confirm the appointment." — [*The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Lord Morrow).*]

(k) In Standing Order 46 leave out paragraph (11). — [*The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Lord Morrow).*]

(l) In Standing Order 46 leave out paragraph (12) and insert -

"(12) A Member shall not be eligible for nomination as a Chairperson of a Statutory Committee if at the date of such nomination the Member is a Chairperson of another Statutory Committee or a Standing Committee." — [*The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Lord Morrow).*]

(m) In Standing Order 46 leave out paragraph (14) and insert -

"(14) If an office of Chairperson or Deputy Chairperson of a Statutory Committee becomes vacant by reason of any circumstances described in paragraph (13), the nominating officer of the party on whose behalf the previous incumbent was nominated shall nominate a member of the party who is a Member of the Assembly to replace the previous incumbent.

(15) If the nominating officer fails to make such a nomination within a period of ten days of the vacancy occurring or the nominated person does not take up office within this period, the power of nomination shall become exercisable by the nominating officer of the party for which the formula in paragraph (4) gives the next highest figure. Any such nominations must comply with paragraphs (5), (6), (11) and (12). Nominations shall be announced and confirmed by the Speaker at the next following meeting of the Assembly." — [*The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Lord Morrow).*]

(n) In Standing Order 47 leave out paragraphs (1) and (2). — [*The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Lord Morrow).*]

(o) In Standing Order 47 leave out paragraph (3) and insert -

"() Statutory Committees shall be constituted to reflect, as far as possible, the party composition of the Assembly except in so far as individual parties or individual Members may waive their rights." — [*The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Lord Morrow).*]

(p) In Standing Order 47(4) before paragraph (a) insert -

"() that each Statutory Committee will consist of 11 Members including the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson". — [*The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Lord Morrow).*]

(q) In Standing Order 47(4)(b) line 4, leave out "is" and insert -

"constitutes". — [*The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Lord Morrow).*]

(r) In Standing Order 47(4)(c) line 4, leave out "are allocated to each political party" and insert -

“is allocated to each political party as far as possible”. — [*The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Lord Morrow).*]

(s) In Standing Order 47(6) line 2, leave out “representation of the different political parties as soon as may be” and insert -

“allocation made under paragraph (4) as soon as practicable”. — [*The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Lord Morrow).*]

(t) In Standing Order 47 leave out paragraph (7) and insert -

“(7) The quorum of a statutory committee shall be five except when no decision is taken or question put to the committee, when the quorum shall be four. A quorum shall be deemed to be present where members are linked by a video-conferencing facility.” — [*The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Lord Morrow).*]

(u) In Standing Order 47 leave out paragraph (8) and insert -

“(8) A Statutory Committee shall continue for the duration of the Assembly unless the Assembly determines otherwise.” — [*The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Lord Morrow).*]

(v) In Standing Order 48 leave out paragraphs (3) to (7) and insert -

“(3) Ad Hoc Committees may be established from time to time to deal with any specific time-bounded terms of reference that the Assembly may set.

48A ESTABLISHMENT OF STANDING COMMITTEES

(1) Unless otherwise provided for in these Standing Orders, each Standing Committee shall have one Chairperson and one Deputy Chairperson appointed in accordance with this Standing Order as part of a process that is separate and distinct from the process of nominating the Chairperson or Deputy Chairperson of a Statutory Committee.

(2) By reference to the consolidated list of political parties and their members, the Speaker shall calculate each party’s figure for the purpose of this Standing Order by applying the formula -

$$\frac{S}{1 + C}$$

where

S is the number of seats which were held by members of that party on the day on which the Assembly first met following its election.

C is the number of Chairpersons and Deputy Chairpersons of Standing Committees established under this Standing Order who are members of the party.

Where two or more parties have an identical figure they shall be ranked by applying the formula -

$$\frac{V}{1 + C}$$

where

V is the total number of first preference votes cast for the party at the most recent general election of Members of the Assembly and C has the same meaning as above.

(3) The Speaker shall then invite the nominating officer of the party with the highest figure to nominate a member of that party who is a Member of the Assembly to be Chairperson or Deputy Chairperson of a Standing Committee and to specify on which Committee that Member is nominated to serve.

(4) Subject to paragraphs (5), (6) and (7), where the Speaker asks the nominating officer to make a nomination under paragraph (3) -

(a) if he/she fails to do so within 15 minutes of the request being made (whether the nominating officer was present when the request was made or not), or

(b) if the person nominated does not take up the specified office within 15 minutes, of the request being made, (whether that person was present when nominated or not).

the power shall be exercisable by the nominating officer of the party for which the formula in paragraph (2) gives the next highest figure.

(5) Where the nominating officer, the person nominated, or another Member of the Assembly asks the Assembly to extend the 15 minute time period mentioned in paragraph (4), and gives a reason or reasons for so asking, the Assembly may grant an extension.

(6) Paragraph (4) and (5) shall not operate whilst the Assembly is adjourned.

(7) Paragraphs (3) to (5) shall be applied as many times as may be necessary to ensure that the positions of Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson have been filled.

(8) Once a Member has accepted a nomination as Chairperson or Deputy Chairperson the Speaker shall announce and confirm the appointment.

(9) A Minister or junior Minister may not be the Chairperson or Deputy Chairperson of a Standing Committee.

(10) A Member shall not be eligible for nomination as a Chairperson of a Standing Committee if at the date of such nomination the Member is a Chairperson of another Standing Committee or a Statutory Committee.

(11) The Chairperson or Deputy Chairperson of a Standing Committee shall cease to hold office on -

(a) resigning that office by notice in writing to the Speaker;

(b) ceasing to be a Member of the Assembly; or

(c) being dismissed by the nominating officer of the party which nominated him/her and the Speaker is notified of his/her dismissal.

(12) If an office of Chairperson or Deputy Chairperson of a Standing Committee becomes vacant by reason of any circumstances described in paragraph (11), the nominating officer of the party on whose behalf the previous incumbent was nominated shall nominate a member of the party who is a Member of the Assembly to replace the previous incumbent.

(13) If the nominating officer fails to make such a nomination within a period of ten days of the vacancy occurring or the nominated person does not take up office within this period the power of nomination shall become exercisable by the nominating officer of the party for which the formula in paragraph (2) gives the next highest figure. Any such nominations must comply with paragraphs (9) and (10). Nominations shall be announced and confirmed by the Speaker at the next meeting of the Assembly.

48B MEMBERSHIP OF STANDING COMMITTEES

(1) Standing Committees shall be constituted to reflect, as far as possible, the party composition of the Assembly except in so far as individual parties or individual Members may waive their rights.

(2) Seats on Standing Committees will be allocated on a proportional basis in accordance with the following principles -

(a) that unless otherwise provided for in these Standing Orders, each Standing Committee shall consist of 11 Members including the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson;

(b) that not all the seats on a Standing Committee are allocated to the same political party;

(c) that the majority of the seats on each Standing Committee is allocated to a particular political party if the number of persons belonging to that party constitutes a majority of the Assembly membership;

(d) subject to paragraphs (b) and (c) above, that the number of seats on the Standing Committees of the Assembly which is allocated to each political party as far as possible bears the same proportion to the total of all the seats on the Standing Committees as is borne by the number of Members of that party to the membership of the Assembly; and

(e) subject to paragraphs (b) and (d) above, that the number of seats on each Standing Committee which is allocated to each political party as far as possible bears the same proportion to the number of seats on that Standing Committee as is borne by the number of Members of that party to the membership of the Assembly.

(3) The allocation of seats to parties or individual Members on the Standing Committees other than the Business Committee shall be undertaken by the Business Committee and shall be approved by resolution of the Assembly.

(4) The Business Committee shall review the allocation made under paragraph (2) as soon as practicable following any numerical changes to party membership in the Assembly.

(5) Unless otherwise provided for in these Standing Orders, the quorum of every Standing Committee shall be five, except when no decision is taken or question put to the Committee, when the quorum shall be four. A quorum shall be deemed to be present where Members are linked by a video-conferencing facility.

(6) Unless otherwise provided for in these Standing Orders, all questions at a Standing Committee shall be decided by a simple majority. Voting shall be by show of hands unless otherwise requested by a Member of the Committee.'

48C ESTABLISHMENT OF AD HOC COMMITTEES

(1) Ad Hoc Committees shall be established from time to time to deal with any specific time-bounded terms of reference that the Assembly may set. The Assembly shall decide the membership of any such Committee and may direct its method of operation.

(2) Each Ad Hoc Committee may exercise the power in section 44(1) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998." — [*The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Lord Morrow).*]

There are many amendments to be made to the Standing Orders for Statutory and non-Statutory Committees, which are listed as motions (b) to (v) inclusive on the Order Paper. Some of the amendments are substantial but most are grammatical. The amendments simply improve the readability and clarity of the Standing Orders for MLAs, staff and the general public.

Dealing with the amendments took up considerable Committee time and involved detailed consideration by the members, who, in the end, were unanimous in their support of the amendments. I wish to take the opportunity to thank them for their input and their work.

I will deal with each motion sequentially and explain the thinking of the Committee on Procedures.

Motion (b) is a tidying up exercise, and the Standing Order deals with proportionality and party strengths. Therefore, it should include a reference to Standing Order 47 as well as Standing Order 46.

Motion (c) is an amendment designed to improve the readability of the Standing Order. It makes no change to the substance, principles or meaning of the Standing Order.

Motion (d) is an amendment designed to improve the readability of the Standing Order and does not change its substance, principles or meaning. Members should note that the terms "Chairs" and "Deputy Chairs" have been changed to "Chairpersons" and "Deputy Chairpersons". That is a purely grammatical amendment, which will be made to all Standing Orders during the summer reprint.

The amendment outlined in motion (e) is designed to improve readability, and, again, does not change the substance, principles or meaning of the Standing Order.

I will discuss motions (f) and (g) together. Motion (g) deals with the principle that the power is exercisable by the nominating officer. That has been reformatted to show that it applies to sub-paragraphs (a) and (b). In its current form, it could be interpreted as applying to sub-paragraph (b) only — that is not the case. The principle of the 15-minute time period has been moved to a new paragraph — (7A) — for ease of understanding and improved clarity. Motion (f) allows for a cross-reference between paragraph (7A) and paragraph (9), as it applies to paragraph (7), which was not previously explicit.

Motion (h) is a consequential change to take account of the new paragraph (7A). Motion (i) is designed to improve the readability of the Standing Order and does not change its substance, principles or meaning.

Motions (j) and (k) deal with paragraphs (10) and (11). Members should note that those paragraphs are being swapped because, in application, paragraph (11) should precede paragraph (10). Furthermore, Members should be aware that paragraph (11) will be reworded in order to improve the readability of the Standing Order without changing its substance, principles or meaning.

Motion (l) refers to Standing Order 46(12) and is a substantive amendment. Under current Standing Orders, an MLA can be a Chairperson or Deputy Chairperson of both a Statutory and a Standing Committee. Although the Committee on Procedures found no problem with an MLA being a Deputy Chairperson of both a Statutory and a Standing Committee, members feel that the role of Chairperson is too time-consuming and intense. Therefore, the suggested amendment excludes MLAs from chairing two Committees.

Although the principle of paragraph (14) remains the same, motion (m) is, nevertheless, a substantive amendment. Paragraph (14) currently covers two principles — the nomination of an MLA to replace a Chairperson or Deputy Chairperson, and the timescale within which that nomination should occur. For clarity,

those two aspects have been separated, and the second principle now has its own paragraph — paragraph (15). A number of minor grammatical changes have been made to the new paragraph (15) to improve readability. The current version of paragraph (14) is deficient, because it covers only two of the three circumstances listed in Standing Order 46(13). Replacement of a Chairperson or Deputy Chairperson under paragraph (13)(c) is not covered in the current version of paragraph (14), but was applied in practice. In order to correct that deficiency, the Committee consulted the Northern Ireland Act 1998 to find technically correct wording, which differs from the current wording.

I now move to the amendments to Standing Order 47, which are listed as motions (n) to (u) on the Order Paper. Members should note that motions (n) and (p) should be read together. Those motions allow the information in paragraphs (1) and (2) to be amalgamated and moved to Standing Order 47(4), which will necessitate a renumbering exercise that will be conducted during the summer reprint.

Motion (o) is an amendment designed to improve the readability and clarity of the Standing Order and does not change its principles, substance or meaning. Motions (q), (r) and (s) also make minor grammatical amendments that are designed to improve clarity and understanding, while not affecting the principles or substance of the Standing Order.

Motion (t) is a substantial amendment. It arises out of the Assembly's approval of the recommendations in the 'Report on Committee Systems and Structures'. The motion allows a Committee to operate with a quorum of four when no decision is taken or question put.

Motion (u) is designed to improve the readability and clarity of Standing Order 47 and makes no change to the substance or principles of the Standing Order.

Motion (v) is a substantial amendment, and will make express provision for Standing Committees and Ad Hoc Committees. The current Standing Orders for non-Statutory Committees work by referring to the Standing Orders for Statutory Committees. That was less than satisfactory as there are important differences between the two types of Committee. For example, it is important that the Chairperson of a Statutory Committee is not of the same party as the Minister of the relevant Department. However, that is not an issue in the case of a non-Statutory Committee. As permanent Committees of the Assembly, non-Statutory Committees deserved their own unique and specific Standing Orders. That is what is being provided for in this motion.

Standing Order 44 (1) gives Ad Hoc Committees powers, but their ability to have a reduced quorum is left with the Assembly. Where suitable, motion (v)

follows the wording of Standing Orders 46 and 47 as revised by the previous motions to amend. There are some minor differences in wording in order to allow for differences in voting in the Business Committee and the quorum of the Audit Committee. Otherwise, the substantial and grammatical amendments in motions (b) to (u) have been followed.

I thank Members for their patience, and I recommend this group of motions to the Assembly.

Mr O'Loan: I wish only to speak in support of motion (t), which alters the quorum of a Statutory Committee. The present quorum is five in all circumstances. The motion to amend will direct the Committee to have a quorum of five when decisions are taken or when questions are put to the Committee, but four when the Committee is engaged in non-decision-making activity. That is a practical adjustment that all Members can support.

The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures: I thank the Member for his support. I do not wish to say anything else, as no other Member has raised any other issues.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved (with cross-community support):

(b) In Standing Order 45(b)(i) after "46" insert –
"and 47".

Resolved (with cross-community support):

(c) In Standing Order 46(3) line 2 leave out "and a number of Members other than himself/herself to" and insert –

"appointed in accordance with this Standing Order. The other Members of a Statutory Committee shall"

— [*The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures(Lord Morrow).*]

Resolved (with cross-community support):

(d) In Standing Order 46(4) leave out from line 12 to end of line 15 and insert –

"C is the number of Chairpersons and Deputy Chairpersons of Statutory Committees established under this Standing Order who are members of the party." — [*The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Lord Morrow).*]

Resolved (with cross-community support):

(e) In Standing Order 46(5) line 5 leave out all after "Deputy Chairperson" and insert –

"of a Statutory Committee and to specify on which Committee that Member is nominated to serve. In making nominations, nominating officers shall prefer Committees in which they do not have a party interest over those in which they do have a party interest." — [*The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures(Lord Morrow).*]

Resolved (with cross-community support):

(f) In Standing Order 46(7) line 1 leave out "paragraph 8" and insert –

"paragraphs (7A), (8) and (9)" — [*The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures(Lord Morrow).*]

Resolved (with cross-community support):

(g) In Standing Order 46(7) leave out sub-paragraph (b) and insert -

“(b) if the person nominated does not take up the specified office within 15 minutes of the request being made (whether that person was present when nominated or not),

the power shall be exercisable by the nominating officer of the party for which the formula in paragraph (4) gives the next highest figure.”

(7A) Where the nominating officer, the person nominated, or another Member of the Assembly asks the Assembly to extend the 15 minute time period mentioned in paragraph (7) and gives a reason or reasons for so asking, the Assembly may grant the extension.” — *[The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Lord Morrow).]*

Resolved (with cross-community support):

(h) In Standing Order 46(8) leave out “Paragraph (7)” and insert -
“Paragraphs (7) and (7A)” — *[The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Lord Morrow).]*

Resolved (with cross-community support):

(i) In Standing Order 46(9) line 1 leave out all after “as” and insert -

“necessary to ensure that the positions of Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson have been filled.” — *[The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Lord Morrow).]*

Resolved (with cross-community support):

(j) In Standing Order 46 after paragraph (9) insert -

“() Once a Member has accepted a nomination as Chairperson or Deputy Chairperson the Speaker shall announce and confirm the appointment.” — *[The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Lord Morrow).]*

Resolved (with cross-community support):

(k) In Standing Order 46 leave out paragraph (11). — *[The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Lord Morrow).]*

Resolved (with cross-community support):

(l) In Standing Order 46 leave out paragraph (12) and insert -

“(12) A Member shall not be eligible for nomination as a Chairperson of a Statutory Committee if at the date of such nomination the Member is a Chairperson of another Statutory Committee or a Standing Committee.” — *[The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Lord Morrow).]*

Resolved (with cross-community support):

(m) In Standing Order 46 leave out paragraph (14) and insert -

“(14) If an office of Chairperson or Deputy Chairperson of a Statutory Committee becomes vacant by reason of any circumstances described in paragraph (13), the nominating officer of the party on whose behalf the previous incumbent was nominated shall nominate a member of the party who is a Member of the Assembly to replace the previous incumbent.

(15) If the nominating officer fails to make such a nomination within a period of ten days of the vacancy occurring or the nominated person does not take up office within this period, the power of nomination shall become exercisable by the nominating officer of the party for which the formula in paragraph (4) gives the next highest figure. Any such nominations must comply with paragraphs (5), (6), (11) and (12). Nominations shall be announced and confirmed by the Speaker at the next following meeting of the

Assembly.” — *[The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Lord Morrow).]*

Resolved (with cross-community support):

(n) In Standing Order 47 leave out paragraphs (1) and (2). — *[The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Lord Morrow).]*

Resolved (with cross-community support):

(o) In Standing Order 47 leave out paragraph (3) and insert -

“() Statutory Committees shall be constituted to reflect, as far as possible, the party composition of the Assembly except in so far as individual parties or individual Members may waive their rights.” — *[The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Lord Morrow).]*

Resolved (with cross-community support):

(p) In Standing Order 47(4) before paragraph (a) insert -

“() that each Statutory Committee will consist of 11 Members including the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson;” — *[The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Lord Morrow).]*

Resolved (with cross-community support):

(q) In Standing Order 47(4)(b) line 4, leave out “is” and insert -
“constitutes”. — *[The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Lord Morrow).]*

Resolved (with cross-community support):

(r) In Standing Order 47(4)(c) line 4, leave out “are allocated to each political party” and insert -

“is allocated to each political party as far as possible”. — *[The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Lord Morrow).]*

Resolved (with cross-community support):

(s) In Standing Order 47(6) line 2, leave out “representation of the different political parties as soon as may be” and insert -

“allocation made under paragraph (4) as soon as practicable”. — *[The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Lord Morrow).]*

Resolved (with cross-community support):

(t) In Standing Order 47 leave out paragraph (7) and insert -

“(7) The quorum of a statutory committee shall be five except when no decision is taken or question put to the committee, when the quorum shall be four. A quorum shall be deemed to be present where members are linked by a video-conferencing facility.” — *[The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Lord Morrow).]*

Resolved (with cross-community support):

(u) In Standing Order 47 leave out paragraph (8) and insert -

“(8) A Statutory Committee shall continue for the duration of the Assembly unless the Assembly determines otherwise.” — *[The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Lord Morrow).]*

Resolved (with cross-community support):

(v) In Standing Order 48 leave out paragraphs (3) to (7) and insert -

“(3) Ad Hoc Committees may be established from time to time to deal with any specific time-bounded terms of reference that the Assembly may set.

48A ESTABLISHMENT OF STANDING COMMITTEES

(1) Unless otherwise provided for in these Standing Orders, each Standing Committee shall have one Chairperson and one Deputy Chairperson appointed in accordance with this Standing Order as

part of a process that is separate and distinct from the process of nominating the Chairperson or Deputy Chairperson of a Statutory Committee.

(2) By reference to the consolidated list of political parties and their members, the Speaker shall calculate each party's figure for the purpose of this Standing Order by applying the formula -

$$\frac{S}{1 + C}$$

where

S is the number of seats which were held by members of that party on the day on which the Assembly first met following its election.

C is the number of Chairpersons and Deputy Chairpersons of Standing Committees established under this Standing Order who are members of the party.

Where two or more parties have an identical figure they shall be ranked by applying the formula -

$$\frac{V}{1 + C}$$

where

V is the total number of first preference votes cast for the party at the most recent general election of Members of the Assembly and C has the same meaning as above.

(3) The Speaker shall then invite the nominating officer of the party with the highest figure to nominate a member of that party who is a Member of the Assembly to be Chairperson or Deputy Chairperson of a Standing Committee and to specify on which Committee that Member is nominated to serve.

(4) Subject to paragraphs (5), (6) and (7), where the Speaker asks the nominating officer to make a nomination under paragraph (3) -

(a) if he/she fails to do so within 15 minutes of the request being made (whether the nominating officer was present when the request was made or not), or

(b) if the person nominated does not take up the specified office within 15 minutes, of the request being made, (whether that person was present when nominated or not).

the power shall be exercisable by the nominating officer of the party for which the formula in paragraph (2) gives the next highest figure.

(5) Where the nominating officer, the person nominated, or another Member of the Assembly asks the Assembly to extend the 15 minute time period mentioned in paragraph (4), and gives a reason or reasons for so asking, the Assembly may grant an extension.

(6) Paragraph (4) and (5) shall not operate whilst the Assembly is adjourned.

(7) Paragraphs (3) to (5) shall be applied as many times as may be necessary to ensure that the positions of Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson have been filled.

(8) Once a Member has accepted a nomination as Chairperson or Deputy Chairperson the Speaker shall announce and confirm the appointment.

(9) A Minister or junior Minister may not be the Chairperson or Deputy Chairperson of a Standing Committee.

(10) A Member shall not be eligible for nomination as a Chairperson of a Standing Committee if at the date of such nomination the Member is a Chairperson of another Standing Committee or a Statutory Committee.

(11) The Chairperson or Deputy Chairperson of a Standing Committee shall cease to hold office on -

(a) resigning that office by notice in writing to the Speaker;

(b) ceasing to be a Member of the Assembly; or

(c) being dismissed by the nominating officer of the party which nominated him/her and the Speaker is notified of his/her dismissal.

(12) If an office of Chairperson or Deputy Chairperson of a Standing Committee becomes vacant by reason of any circumstances described in paragraph (11), the nominating officer of the party on whose behalf the previous incumbent was nominated shall nominate a member of the party who is a Member of the Assembly to replace the previous incumbent.

(13) If the nominating officer fails to make such a nomination within a period of ten days of the vacancy occurring or the nominated person does not take up office within this period the power of nomination shall become exercisable by the nominating officer of the party for which the formula in paragraph (2) gives the next highest figure. Any such nominations must comply with paragraphs (9) and (10). Nominations shall be announced and confirmed by the Speaker at the next meeting of the Assembly.

48B MEMBERSHIP OF STANDING COMMITTEES

(1) Standing Committees shall be constituted to reflect, as far as possible, the party composition of the Assembly except in so far as individual parties or individual Members may waive their rights.

(2) Seats on Standing Committees will be allocated on a proportional basis in accordance with the following principles -

(a) that unless otherwise provided for in these Standing Orders, each Standing Committee shall consist of 11 Members including the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson;

(b) that not all the seats on a Standing Committee are allocated to the same political party;

(c) that the majority of the seats on each Standing Committee is allocated to a particular political party if the number of persons belonging to that party constitutes a majority of the Assembly membership;

(d) subject to paragraphs (b) and (c) above, that the number of seats on the Standing Committees of the Assembly which is allocated to each political party as far as possible bears the same proportion to the total of all the seats on the Standing Committees as is borne by the number of Members of that party to the membership of the Assembly; and

(e) subject to paragraphs (b) and (d) above, that the number of seats on each Standing Committee which is allocated to each political party as far as possible bears the same proportion to the number of seats on that Standing Committee as is borne by the number of Members of that party to the membership of the Assembly.

(3) The allocation of seats to parties or individual Members on the Standing Committees other than the Business Committee shall be undertaken by the Business Committee and shall be approved by resolution of the Assembly.

(4) The Business Committee shall review the allocation made under paragraph (2) as soon as practicable following any numerical changes to party membership in the Assembly.

(5) Unless otherwise provided for in these Standing Orders, the quorum of every Standing Committee shall be five, except when no decision is taken or question put to the Committee, when the quorum shall be four. A quorum shall be deemed to be present where Members are linked by a video-conferencing facility.

(6) Unless otherwise provided for in these Standing Orders, all questions at a Standing Committee shall be decided by a simple

majority. Voting shall be by show of hands unless otherwise requested by a Member of the Committee.’

48C ESTABLISHMENT OF AD HOC COMMITTEES

(1) Ad Hoc Committees shall be established from time to time to deal with any specific time-bounded terms of reference that the Assembly may set. The Assembly shall decide the membership of any such Committee and may direct its method of operation.

(2) Each Ad Hoc Committee may exercise the power in section 44(1) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.” — [*The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Lord Morrow)*].

The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures:
I beg to move

(w) In Standing Order 50 leave out paragraph (4) and insert -

“(4) The Speaker shall nominate two Members of the Committee, either of whom, in the Speaker’s absence shall act as Chairperson of the Committee.”

The following motions stood in the Order Paper:

(x) In Standing Order 50 leave out paragraph (6) and insert -

“(6) The Business Committee shall comprise the Chairperson and a maximum of twelve other Members of the Assembly. Each of these other Members shall be entitled to appoint a substitute Member to attend the Committee in his or her place.” — [*The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Lord Morrow)*].

(y) In Standing Order 50 leave out paragraph (7) and insert -

“(7) Each party delegation present at the Committee, whether comprised of members or their substitutes, shall be entitled to cast a number of votes equivalent to the number of Members who adhere to the Whip of that party. For the purposes of this Standing Order, the Speaker shall not be considered to adhere to any Whip; but a Member acting as Chairperson in accordance with paragraph (4) shall be considered to adhere to a Whip.” — [*The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Lord Morrow)*].

There are three motions — (w), (x) and (y) — that deal with Standing Order 50. I will explain the three motions before they are voted on separately. All three motions have been agreed by the Business Committee and had unanimous support among members of the Committee on Procedures.

Motion (w) is a simple grammatical amendment and there is no change to the substance or meaning of the paragraph. Motion (x) is a substantial change in that it provides clarity on the separation of the Chairperson from the other members of the Committee; it also provides clarity that a substitute Business Committee member must be a Member of the Assembly. That is presumed in the current version but not made explicit. Motion (y) provides clarity on the unique voting arrangements of the Business Committee in that the Speaker does not vote but that an acting Chairperson is considered as adhering to a Whip and may cast the votes of his or her party delegation.

Mr O’Loan: I put on record that motions (w) to (y), which relate to Standing Order 50 and matters concerning the Business Committee, have been considered by my party’s Whip and the party Assembly group and that they assent to them.

The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures: I have nothing further to say on the issue.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved (with cross-community support):

(w) In Standing Order 50 leave out paragraph (4) and insert -

“(4) The Speaker shall nominate two Members of the Committee, either of whom, in the Speaker’s absence shall act as Chairperson of the Committee.”

Resolved (with cross-community support):

(x) In Standing Order 50 leave out paragraph (6) and insert -

“(6) The Business Committee shall comprise the Chairperson and a maximum of twelve other Members of the Assembly. Each of these other Members shall be entitled to appoint a substitute Member to attend the Committee in his or her place.” — [*The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Lord Morrow)*].

Resolved (with cross-community support):

(y) In Standing Order 50 leave out paragraph (7) and insert -

“(7) Each party delegation present at the Committee, whether comprised of members or their substitutes, shall be entitled to cast a number of votes equivalent to the number of Members who adhere to the Whip of that party. For the purposes of this Standing Order, the Speaker shall not be considered to adhere to any Whip; but a Member acting as Chairperson in accordance with paragraph (4) shall be considered to adhere to a Whip.” — [*The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Lord Morrow)*].

The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures:
I beg to move

(z) In Standing Order 76, at end insert -

“‘**Nominating officer**’, in relation to a party, means:

(a) the person registered under Part 2 of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 as the party’s nominating officer; or

(b) a member of the Assembly nominated by him.”

As there are not many letters left in the alphabet, I am sure that Members will be pleased to know that we are coming to the end.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures: This is another amendment that provides clarity for users of Standing Orders and members of the public who pick them up in an effort to understand the rules of the Assembly. The term “nominating officer” is used in Standing Orders for Committees and ministerial appointments, but there is currently no definition of what or who the nominating officer is. The definition in the amendment is lifted straight from the Northern Ireland Act 1998, as amended.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved (with cross-community support):

(z) In Standing Order 76, at end insert:

“‘**Nominating officer**’, in relation to a party, means:

(a) the person registered under Part 2 of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 as the party's nominating officer; or

(b) a member of the Assembly nominated by him.”

Adjourned at 4.39 pm.

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 27 June 2008

Written Answers to Questions

OFFICE OF THE FIRST MINISTER AND DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER

Peace III

Dr Farry asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to report on the implications of the delivery of Priority 2 (Dealing with the Past) under Peace III, arising from the delay in the creation of a formal strategy for victims and survivors.

(AQW 7342/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister (Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness): Although the formal strategy for victims and survivors has not yet been finalised, there will be no impact on the delivery of Priority 1 Theme 2 (Acknowledging and Dealing with the Past) under Peace III.

Travel Expenses

Mr Savage asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister how much it has spent on travel expenses since devolution. (AQW 7367/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: The following table sets out the costs incurred by the Office of the First and deputy First Minister in relation to official travel by all departmental staff and Ministers in pursuance of Departmental business objectives since 8 May 2007. These costs fall into two financial years and include mileage allowances, accommodation costs, subsistence and all other associated costs of travel.

Description	(£)
Travel Expenses – 2007-08 (8 May 2007 – 31 March 2008)	562,213
Travel Expenses – 2008-09 (1-30 April 2008)	12,237 ¹
Total	574,450

¹ Expenses claimed to date for the period 1-30 April 2008

Autistic Spectrum Disorder

Ms Anderson asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister for its assessment of the lack of provision for sufferers of Autistic Spectrum Disorder within the Disability Discrimination Act; and whether it is planning to raise this omission with the United Kingdom Government. (AQW 7455/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: Autistic Spectrum Disorder is provided for within the Disability Discrimination Act. Section 2 of the Disability Discrimination Act defines disability broadly as “a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on a person’s ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities”. Individual illnesses, conditions, disorders and syndromes are not listed in the Act, but it is clear that conditions and disorders on the autistic spectrum fall within the definition of mental impairment.

Furthermore, guidance was published on 21 April 2008 which explicitly confirmed that autistic spectrum disorders fall within the definition of mental impairment for the purposes of the 1995 Act. The provisions and protections of the 1995 Act therefore do apply to people suffering from autistic spectrum disorders, where that disorder has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on his or her ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

Funding for Children and Young People

Ms S Ramsey asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, following the publication of the Analysis of Public Expenditure on Children, if it has any plans to increase or bring forward new money for children and young people. (AQW 7504/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: The allocation of financial resources is determined by the budgetary process and increasing or bringing forward new money is not generally possible outside this context. There will, however, be opportunities throughout the budgetary period for departments to bid for additional money for children and young people through the in-year monitoring process.

North/South Bodies

Mr Easton asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister for a breakdown of all North-South Bodies and their functions. (AQW 7787/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: In accordance with the Agreement (of 8 March 1999) between the Government of the United Kingdom

of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Government of Ireland Establishing Implementation Bodies (the Agreement), the British and Irish Governments agreed on the establishment of six North South Bodies and the common arrangements applying to them. The six Bodies established under the Agreement were:

- Waterways Ireland;
- The Food Safety Promotion Board;
- The Trade and Business Development Body;
- The Special EU Programmes Body;
- The North/South Language Body; and
- The Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission.

The functions of each of these Bodies are set out in Annex 1 to the Agreement. A copy of the Agreement is in the Assembly Library.

In addition, in 1999, the North South Ministerial Council agreed to establish a publicly owned company – Tourism Ireland Limited. The Articles of Association of Tourism Ireland Limited have been placed in the Assembly Library.

Further information on the work of these Bodies is available on the North South Ministerial Council website – www.northsouthministerialcouncil.org.

PFI/PPP Projects

Mr McClarty asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister how many PFI/PPP projects have commenced since May 2007. (AQO 4157/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: Five PPP/PFI projects have been awarded to the successful bidders since May 2007 to date.

Respect for Diversity

Dr Farry asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to give its assessment of the importance of an open community that respects diversity in terms of ethnicity, religion and sexual orientation to attracting inward investment and skilled workers. (AQW 7984/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: The Programme for Government clearly sets out our commitment to develop a dynamic innovative economy which is underpinned by the creation of a “shared and better future, based on tolerance and respect for cultural diversity”.

The Programme for Government recognises the challenges that we face:

“We must continue our efforts to address the divisions within our society. Progress has been made, but at a time when our society is being transformed, sectarianism, racism and intolerance are still too evident. They mar our reputation, blight our economic prospects and have a corrosive effect on our society”.

There is, unquestionably, an economic imperative to tackle sectarianism, racism, inter-communal conflict and intolerance.

We have welcomed and supported those who have come to live and work here and we condemn hate crime and discrimination of any kind.

We are committed to a zero tolerance approach to hate crime in any of its manifestations. As we have said before, this is a top priority for the Executive.

We will continue to tackle these issues through an approach based on tolerance and respect for cultural diversity.

Equality-Proofed Legislation for the Blind

Mr Shannon asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what steps it is taking to equality-proof legislation for the blind. (AQW 8058/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, requires a public authority, in carrying out its functions, to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between certain groups of persons specified in that section, (including between those with a disability and those without) and to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious beliefs, political opinion or racial group. In line with this statutory duty, public authorities taking forward legislation affecting people who are blind are required to subject this to an equality screening and if appropriate conduct an Equality Impact Assessment. In addition all legislation introduced by NI Departments is subject to a Human Rights Impact Assessment.

Departmental Electrical Equipment

Mr Savage asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister the number of blackberry devices it has purchased since devolution.

(AQW 8104/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: The Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister has purchased 36 Blackberry devices for Ministers, advisers and officials since 8 May 2007.

Sustainable Development Strategy

Mrs Long asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what mechanisms exist or actions have been taken to ensure that all Departments play an active role in delivering the targets in the Sustainable Development Strategy. (AQW 8153/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: The Sustainable Development Unit within OFMDFM has commissioned, and received, interim progress reports in relation to the delivery of sustainable development targets from all Departments. We have recently commissioned final reports on delivery, which we intend to develop into a summary of progress against the first Sustainable Development Implementation Plan targets. This information will also be used to inform the future development of our next Implementation Plan. Additionally, all Departments have appointed senior officials as Sustainable Development Champions, who have responsibility for promotion of sustainable development internally, and act as departmental representatives on the OFMDFM led Sustainable Development Stakeholder Group.

Commissioner for Children and Young People

Ms S Ramsey asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister for its assessment of the report by the Commissioner for Children and Young People to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child. (AQW 8209/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: We welcome the report of the UK Children's Commissioners to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child. The report is evidence of the willingness of the UK commissioners to work together to make life better for all children and young people through promoting the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The UK Commissioner's report was a response to the UK report on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, sent to the UN Committee in July 2007. We will not be responding to the report directly. However, the Commissioner's report will influence the list of issues that the UN Committee will ask in relation to the UK report and we will respond to these later this year.

Ministers Taking Part in Media Interviews

Mr Burns asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the total expenditure on cosmetic/make-up products for Ministers taking

part in media interviews, since May 2007, broken down by Department. (AQW 8212/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: There has been no expenditure incurred on cosmetic/make-up products for Ministers or Junior Ministers taking part in media interviews, since May 2007

Planning Appeals Commission

Mr Storey asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister how many planning appeals were made to the Planning Appeals Commission in the last year, and what was the average time taken to determine those appeals that requested (i) an informal hearing; (ii) a formal hearing; (iii) written representation (accompanied site visit); and (iv) written representation (unaccompanied site visit). (AQW 8266/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: The Planning Appeals Commission is a tribunal Non-Departmental Public Body. Given its independent tribunal status, it is appropriate for its Chief Commissioner to provide a response directly to you, and we understand she has written to you in the following terms:

"I have been asked to provide you with information requested in the above Assembly Question.

The Commission received 1516 appeals in the last financial year 2007/2008.

I have also provided, in the table below, figures for the average time taken to decide an appeal for all of the procedures available. These figures indicate the time taken to determine appeals already heard within the last financial year.

Procedure	Median Time (Weeks)
Formal Hearing	84
Informal Hearing	63
Written Representation (accompanied Site Visit)	56
Written Representations (unaccompanied Site Visit)	60

The Commission publishes updates of these figures on a monthly basis via its website.

I would be happy to provide any further information you require arising out of this response or to meet with you to discuss the matter if that would be more suitable."

Environmental Protection Agency

Dr Farry asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, further to their letter to the Speaker of 12 June 2008 in relation to the decision of the Minister of the Environment to not proceed with the creation of an independent Environment Protection Agency, whether the original decision of the Minister, announced to the Assembly on 27 May, was a breach of the Article 2.4(vi) of the Ministerial Code.

(AQW 8315/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

Our letter of 12 June 2008 to the Speaker informed him of the view of the Executive that there was no contravention in this case of section 28A(1) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. It follows, therefore, that the Executive also took the view that there was no contravention of the Ministerial Code.

Environmental Protection Agency

Dr Farry asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, further to their letter to the Speaker of 12 June 2008 in relation to the decision of the Minister of the Environment to not proceed with the creation of an independent Environment Protection Agency, whether the original decision of the Minister, announced to the Assembly on 27 May, was a breach of the Article 2.4(v) of the Ministerial Code, given that the issue of an Environmental Protection Agency was not addressed within the Programme for Government.

(AQW 8316/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

Our letter of 12 June 2008 to the Speaker informed him of the view of the Executive that there was no contravention in this case of section 28A(1) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. It follows, therefore, that the Executive also took the view that there was no contravention of the Ministerial Code.

Cost of Living Subcommittee

Mr Cobain asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister if it will establish a Cost of Living sub-committee of the Executive. (AQO 4071/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

We recognise that recent, well publicised increases in fuel and energy costs are having an impact on the cost of living for all of us. We also recognise that it is to be expected that those most vulnerable and less well-off in our society will feel the effects of these price increases more acutely.

The Executive will soon consider its strategy to tackle poverty and social exclusion and patterns of

deprivation, in line with its statutory obligation. This will take account of the recommendations of the OFMDFM Committee following its inquiry into child poverty.

Proposals include the establishment of an Executive sub-committee to agree and monitor key actions in relation to poverty to be taken in a co-ordinated way across Departments to deliver our commitments within the Programme for Government, to eliminate poverty.

The Executive will look at any proposals to establish a sub-committee.

Draft Policy on Cohesion, Sharing and Integration

Mr Dallat asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister if it will confirm that the new draft policy on Cohesion, Sharing and Integration will not involve a reduction in the present level of funding available under the separate strategies once they are amalgamated. (AQO 4144/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

We can confirm that there will be no reduction in funding levels under the Programme of Cohesion, Sharing and Integration.

We remain open, of course, to suggestions as to how we might strengthen these six shared aims of the 'former' Racial Equality Strategy.

As stated on many occasions and through the Programme for Government, we are fully committed to the cross-cutting theme of building a shared and better future for all our people.

The Budget recognises that the past 3 years have seen significant progress in improved relationships, with historic low levels of violence and tension. We want to ensure that improved relationships within the whole community continue and we want to address the challenges that face new and host communities.

The direct expenditure on good relations and good race relations by OFMDFM in the past 3 years was in the region of £21 million. Additional funding of almost £7.5m has been provided in the Budget over the next 3 years from 2008/2011; total investment will therefore be approximately £29m, to meet the PSA target of a shared and better future for all. A key element of the investment proposals includes a significant increase over the period to promote inclusion and integration at local level.

The new Programme is not intended to replace or subsume the existing Racial Equality Strategy which was endorsed by the Assembly on 3 July 2007. Rather it will provide the co-ordinated framework

for its delivery. We consider that the six shared aims set out in the Racial Equality Strategy are robust and comprehensive. We will re-visit them following the launch of the new Programme. This will be done in close consultation with minority ethnic groups and the wider community. We are committed to the partnership process which developed the six shared aims originally.

Draft Constitutional Reform Bill

Mr McNarry asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister if it has engaged with, or been consulted by, the Office of the Lord Chancellor and the Minister of Justice on the contents of a draft constitutional reform bill for the United Kingdom, in the last two months. (AQO 4094/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice wrote to us on 25 March 2008 to advise us of the publication of the Draft Constitutional Renewal Bill and the White Paper "The Governance of Britain" and to invite our views on his proposed reforms. The reforms relate to excepted and reserved matters.

Talks with the US Government

Mr Burnside asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what talks it has had with the United States Government and business interests following the appointment of a new First Minister/deputy First Minister team. (AQO 4065/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: Our Bureau in Washington continues to have regular contact with senior officials at the US Department of State and in the Bush Administration on a wide range of devolved matters.

The appointment of the new First Minister and the re-appointment of the deputy First Minister was communicated to key staff in the Bush Administration by the Director of the Bureau on Thursday 5th June.

We did of course welcome President Bush to Stormont Castle last Monday. We had useful discussions with the President and his staff on a number of issues including US inward investment and the further development of links between universities and research and development establishments here and in the US.

Finally, we hosted Mrs Loretta Brennan Glucksman and other American Ireland Fund donors at Stormont Castle on Friday. The American Ireland Fund has been greatly supportive over the years. The work that the Fund does to help local communities whether it be in education, citizenship, economic development or sport cannot be underestimated. More recently, many

of the Fund's donors played a key role in encouraging US companies to travel to Belfast for the Investment Conference. We used the event on Friday to re-emphasise the Executive's commitment to growing a strong and dynamic economy here, to improve the lives of all.

Interface Areas

Mr P Maskey asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister how it intends to target resources to interface areas which continue to suffer the effects of segregation and sectarianism. (AQO 4163/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: We remain fully committed to addressing those divisions which mar our reputation, blight our economic prospects and have a corrosive effect on our society particularly at interface areas.

For example, we recently confirmed our intention to continue the invaluable work that is ongoing in North Belfast by providing funding of £100,000 this financial year for a diversionary programme targeted at young people at risk of becoming involved in interface violence over the summer months. We continue to work closely with all our partners in this area and in particular the North Belfast Community Action Unit.

We fund all 26 District Councils to operate community relations based programmes which include bonfires initiatives which challenge sectarian behaviours, youth-based activities targeting sectarianism and racism and integration of minority ethnic people into host communities.

Funding of £400,000 per annum is provided by the Department for a range of Summer Intervention Programmes, which are delivered by the Education and Library Boards. These Programmes support work at interface areas and challenging those behaviours associated with interface violence. We have also contributed £250,000 to the Re-imaging Communities Programme which is designed to help communities tackle the visible signs of racism and sectarianism. This project is proving particularly successful and all available budgets have now been allocated.

Our sponsorship of the Community Relations Council enables a broad range of regional and local activities and initiatives to take place by core-funding of interface workers; conflict resolution workers and programmes; small grants for cross-community events and research on good relations particularly in interface communities.

Cohesion, Sharing and Inclusion Strategy

Ms Lo asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister when the Cohesion, Sharing and Inclusion Strategy will be published. (AQO 4105/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: It is our intention to publish the Programme of Cohesion, Sharing and Integration as soon as possible.

Discrimination Against Women

Ms S Ramsey asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister how it will contribute to the imminent meeting of the United Nations Investigating Committee on Compliance with the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women. (AQO 4161/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: We welcome the obligation, and the opportunity, for this administration to contribute to the forthcoming meeting of the United Nations Committee on the Convention of the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (the CEDAW Committee), due to take place on 10 July 2008. We also recognise the enormous amount of work undertaken by local groups who have, separately, prepared shadow reports to the CEDAW Committee about the implementation of the Convention in Northern Ireland.

We are glad of the opportunity to outline to the CEDAW Committee, the measures we have taken and will take to secure and deliver rights and equal opportunities for women in our jurisdiction. To this end all Executive Ministers and a wide range of public bodies and departments have contributed to briefing in response to questions raised by the CEDAW Committee, and to issues raised in reports to this Committee made by other bodies, relating to full implementation of the wide-ranging provisions of the Convention.

We are working to ensure that this information is fully available to the Committee both during the meeting, and in follow-up correspondence. We will also undertake to respond fully with any further questions raised by the CEDAW Committee. The OFMDFM Departmental Assembly Committee have indicated their intention to consider the outcome of the meeting after they reconvene in September 2008. We look forward to receiving their advice on the implementation and reporting on the United Nations Convention.

Play and Leisure Policy

Mrs M Bradley asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the levels of funding

for the Play and Leisure Policy in comparison with other parts of the UK. (AQO 4175/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: The Play and Leisure Policy has yet to be agreed by the Executive. Following this approval, implementation groups will be tasked with developing the action plans for 0-11 year-olds and for 12-18 year-olds. Part of this work will include an assessment of the current level of spending on play, both here and in other parts of the UK. This information will help shape the future levels of funding required.

Banking-Sector Crisis and the Economy

Mr B McCrea asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister for its assessment of the likely impact of the crisis in the banking sector on economic potential. (AQO 4077/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: As a small open economy, Northern Ireland cannot remain immune from global economic events such as the banking crisis.

Current global economic conditions and financial market developments clearly present us with significant challenges. When combined with falling house prices, increasing inflation, rising food and oil prices, this may, in the short term, undermine business and consumer confidence reducing expenditure and slowing economic growth in Northern Ireland.

The slowing world economy may also impact in the short term on the overall volume of inward investment available and on demand for our exports globally. However, the success of the US/NI Investment Conference, the recent investment announcements that have been made, and the actions that we are taking to implement the Programme for Government, should make the economy more competitive going forward.

Cohesion, Sharing and Integration Strategy

Mrs O'Neill asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what action it is taking to ensure that ethnic minority groups play a full role in the development and implementation of the Cohesion, Sharing and Integration Strategy. (AQO 4171/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: The proposals for a Programme of Cohesion, Sharing and Integration, which will be brought forward as soon as possible, will be subject to full consultation and Equality Impact Assessment.

The consultation will be comprehensive and will be framed to elicit the views of all who have an interest in cohesion, sharing and integration here. There will be targeted consultation of minority ethnic people and

migrant workers (among others) to ensure that we take account of their views in developing the Programme.

This Programme will provide for, amongst other things, the delivery of the Racial Equality Strategy, which was endorsed by the motion made by the Assembly on 3 July 2007.

We consider that the six shared aims of the Racial Equality Strategy are robust and comprehensive and that the section concerning the “Scale of the challenge” in the Strategy is more relevant now than ever before.

We will revisit the six shared aims following the launch of the ‘Programme of Cohesion, Sharing and Integration for a shared and better future’ in the light of the results of the consultation on the Programme. This will be done in close consultation with minority ethnic groups and the wider community. We are committed to the partnership process which developed the six shared aims and the Strategy originally.

We remain open, of course, to suggestions as to how we might strengthen these six shared aims.

Community Relations Legislation

Mr Savage asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what progress has been made on the review of the Community Relations Legislation. (AQO 4076/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: We are fully committed to building a shared and better future for all. We are bringing forward a Programme of Cohesion, Sharing and Integration to tackle issues of sectarianism and racism which will refresh the previous administration’s separate but associated policies on good relations and good race relations. The commitment to review Community Relations legislation was part of the policy of the previous administration and we will consider the need for a review in the context of the proposed refreshed policy.

Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy

Mr P Ramsey asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister when the Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy will be published. (AQO 4125/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: In line with its statutory obligation under Section 28E of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 the Executive Committee will shortly consider and agree proposals for the adoption of an overall strategy to tackle poverty, social exclusion and patterns of deprivation here based on objective need.

Meeting with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland

Mr McCallister asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister when it next plans to meet with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and the Prime Minister. (AQO 4078/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: It is not normal practice to provide details of Ministers diaries in advance. We plan to meet the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister on the basis of business need.

Protections for Religious Belief

Mr Storey asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the protections in place for ‘religious belief’ under equality legislation. (AQO 4118/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: Religious belief is protected under the Fair Employment and Treatment (NI) Order 1998. There are also relevant provisions in the Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations (NI) 2003 and the Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations (NI) 2006.

AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Team-Building Exercises

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many away days and team-building exercises have been organised by her Department for departmental staff in each of the last five years. (AQW 7820/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew): The following table provides approximate information regarding the amount of away days and team building exercises in each of the last five years:-

2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
27	43	37	35	24

Bee Health Strategy

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what plans she has to prepare a 10-year bee health strategy, similar to that being implemented by the Welsh Assembly Government. (AQW 7887/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: The Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) are not currently implementing a 10-year bee health strategy; rather Defra and WAG are consulting on a strategy, aimed at sustaining the health of honeybees and beekeeping in England and Wales. Beekeepers here have been advised through their membership of the Council of National Beekeeping Associations (CONBA) and by my officials to respond to this consultation. It is my intention to consider the need for a strategy here following the outcome of this consultation.

In light of the current concerns for the health and welfare of bees, I would be keen to consider the matter fully later in the year.

Fighting Dogs

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many successful prosecutions were made for breeding fighting dogs in (i) 2006; and (ii) 2007. (AQW 7900/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: Under the Dogs Order (NI) 1983, as amended by the Dangerous Dogs Order 1991, it is an offence to breed or to breed from certain types of dogs which are generally known as 'dangerous' or 'fighting' dogs.

Local Councils are responsible for enforcing this legislation. From figures they have provided to my Department on offences under the 1983 Order, there is no record of prosecutions for the specific offence of breeding such dogs in 2006 or 2007.

Waste Management

Mr Savage asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how much her Department has spent on waste management since devolution. (AQW 7975/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and its Agencies has spent £207,143 on waste management since 8 May 2007.

Single Farm Payment Scheme

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how much money was raised via the withholding of money from farmers through the Single Farm Payment Scheme during the year 2007-2008 in relation to (i) Compulsory Modulation; and (ii) Voluntary Modulation. [R] (AQW 7978/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: In the 2007 Single Farm Payment (SFP) scheme year, €18.079m was deducted from the SFP budget in respect of Compulsory Modulation. The budget for refunding the Compulsory Modulation deducted from the first €5,000 of payments per farmer (under the franchise arrangement) is in the process of being calculated and is currently estimated to be €5.885m, leaving a net deduction of €12.194m.

Compulsory Modulation is deducted from the SFP budget by the EU Commission and then distributed to Member States according to an EU allocation key. Member States in turn allocate it to their regions. Hence, the amount of Compulsory Modulation allocated to our rural development budget does not necessarily equal the amount deducted from the SFP budget.

€12.213m was allocated to our rural development budget in respect of 2007 SFP scheme year Compulsory Modulation deductions.

€16.271m was deducted from the SFP budget in respect of Voluntary Modulation in the 2007 scheme year and was all allocated to our rural development budget.

Single Farm Payment Scheme

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how much money was raised via the withholding of money from farmers through the Single Farm Payment Scheme during the year 2005-2006 in relation to (i) Compulsory Modulation; and (ii) Voluntary Modulation. [R] (AQW 7979/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: In the 2005 Single Farm Payment (SFP) scheme year, €10.172m was deducted from the SFP budget in respect of Compulsory Modulation. The budget for refunding Compulsory Modulation deducted from the first €5,000 of payments per farmer (under the franchise arrangement) was €3.507m, leaving a net deduction of €6.665m.

Compulsory Modulation is deducted from the SFP budget by the EU Commission and then distributed to Member States according to an EU allocation key. Member States in turn allocate it to their regions. Hence, the amount of Compulsory Modulation allocated to our rural development budget does not necessarily equal the amount deducted from the SFP budget.

€5.5m was allocated to our rural development budget in respect of 2005 SFP scheme year Compulsory Modulation deductions.

No deduction for Voluntary Modulation was made in respect of the 2005 scheme year.

Single Farm Payment Scheme

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how much money was raised via the withholding of money from farmers through the Single Farm Payment Scheme during the year 2006-2007 in relation to (i) Compulsory Modulation; and (ii) Voluntary Modulation. [R] (AQW 7980/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: In the 2006 Single Farm Payment (SFP) scheme year, €14.463m was deducted from the SFP budget in respect of Compulsory Modulation. The budget for refunding the Compulsory Modulation deducted from the first €5,000 of payments per farmer (under the franchise arrangement) was €4.708m, leaving a net deduction of €9.755m.

Compulsory Modulation is deducted from the SFP budget by the EU Commission and then distributed to Member States according to an EU allocation key. Member States in turn allocate it to their regions. Hence, the amount of Compulsory Modulation allocated to our rural development budget does not necessarily equal the amount deducted from the SFP budget.

€9.72m was allocated to our rural development budget in respect of 2006 SFP scheme year Compulsory Modulation deductions.

€16.271m was deducted from the SFP budget in respect of Voluntary Modulation in the 2006 scheme year and was all allocated to our rural development budget.

Post Office Closures

Mr Armstrong asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the effect of post office closures on small rural towns and villages; and what action her Department is taking to ensure as many public services as possible remain within local rural communities. (AQW 7987/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: It is my assessment that these closures are a loss of a valuable social and economic service in rural areas and I am particularly concerned about the potential impact on the more vulnerable sections of our society. I raised these concerns when I met with Post Office and Postwatch and I have pressed for the six month review of the changes to clearly identify and measure the social impacts of the closures.

Access to services in rural issues involves many Government Departments and it is my intention to address such issues through a range of actions, including the development of the concept of rural champion, the enhancement of the rural proofing process and the development of the North's first Rural White Paper.

Overgrazing of Heather

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what steps her Department will take within the Northern Ireland Species Action Plan (Red Grouse) to address over-grazing of heather. (AQW 8031/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: This Action Plan Red Grouse was published by Environment and Heritage Service (EHS) in April 2008. My Department contributes to Species Action Plan targets for red grouse by addressing the overgrazing of heather as follows:

1. Farmers/landowners who claim direct agricultural support must follow Cross-Compliance. One of the Cross-Compliance Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition Measures states that all claimants must avoid overgrazing.
2. The Less Favoured Areas Compensatory Allowance (LFACA) Scheme provides area payments for Severely Disadvantaged Areas and Disadvantaged Areas. As a condition of payment all recipients are now subject to Cross Compliance Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition measures and overgrazing is not permitted.
3. Currently over 50,000 ha of moorland are managed under DARD's agri-environment schemes. By following scheme prescriptions, participants control both the timing and number of livestock grazing moorland and prevent overgrazing.
4. DARD undertakes inspections of all these schemes to ensure compliance with scheme rules including preventing overgrazing.
5. Later this year, the NI Peatland and Upland Biodiversity Delivery Group will hold a workshop to help deliver the conservation actions required for Red Grouse in relation to peatland and upland habitats.

Forest Amenities in North Antrim

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what action she is taking to improve the amenities at forests in North Antrim. (AQW 8082/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: My Department's Forest Service manages an extensive estate of infrastructure and property and has an ongoing programme of maintenance and improvement. This includes upkeep of the forest parks including paths, trails, scenic drives, toilet blocks and caravan sites.

In relation to the forests in the North Antrim area, there are a number of improvements scheduled in this business year, subject to competing priorities, such as re-landscaping at the car park at Ballycastle Forest and improved visitor information at Ballypatrick Forest. Work has also recently concluded on the revised route of the Ulster Way which impacts on four forests in the area. Forest Service is also working with a local Council to provide a circular walk at Breen forest which will link Forest Service land to a Council car park facility and the proposal includes replacement signage.

In line with the Forestry Strategy published in 2006, Forest Service has already started work on exploring opportunities with both private and public sector organisations to improve the quality and range of facilities including high tress adventure facilities and a review of the caravan and camping provision throughout the forest estate which is expected to result in improved facilities.

Promotion of Forests as Tourist Attractions

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what discussions she has had, or plans to have, with the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment in relation to promoting forests in North Antrim as tourist attractions. (AQW 8083/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: I have discussed the issue of tourism in forests, in general terms, with the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment at a North South Ministerial Council Sectoral meeting in May. The Forestry Strategy sets out the framework for us to explore opportunities for partnership arrangements to improve public use of forests. Within the context of the Strategy, a Social Use Strategy is being developed in this business year which will take into account the varying demands in relation to recreation in forests, which from a tourism perspective will be especially relevant to those forests within the signature project areas including the Causeway Coast and Glens.

My Department's Forest Service continues to work with a range of organisations, including the Tourist Board to facilitate and promote the enjoyment of forests including those in the North Antrim area. As part of the ongoing work to improve public access, work has recently been completed on the revised route for the Ulster Way which includes some 4 forests in this area and is expected to be officially launched in spring 2009. A market sounding exercise for High Trees Adventure facilities at some of our forests has gone to press this week with a view to being available for the spring 2009. Further work relating to caravan and camping provision in forests is also planned.

Forestry Service Jobs

Mr Armstrong asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many Forestry Service jobs have been transferred to Belfast in each of the last five years, broken down by location from which the jobs were transferred. (AQW 8091/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: In the past five years, two Forest Service jobs at the Forest Officer II grade have been transferred to Dundonald House, Belfast, from Pomeroy Forestry School, Pomeroy.

Relocation of Jobs

Mr Armstrong asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what consideration has been given to relocating some posts from the departmental headquarters to a more central location in the countryside. (AQW 8093/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Although the headquarters of the Department is in Dundonald House, there are already a number of permanent posts in DARD offices in other locations throughout the North of Ireland.

The Department has not been giving consideration to the relocation of posts from the departmental headquarters to a more central location in the countryside. Consideration may be given to the relocation of individual posts should business needs require this.

CULTURE, ARTS AND LEISURE

Community and Voluntary Groups

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how many community and voluntary groups his Department is currently funding; the amount of funding given to each project; and where these projects are based. (AQW 7397/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr Campbell): I refer the member to the attached tables which detail the information requested largely on the basis of information provided by the Arms Length Bodies sponsored by the Department.

ARTS

The table below gives details of the funding provided by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland to community and voluntary groups.

Name	Grant (£)	Council Area
Steeple Cultural & Heritage Association	6,010	Antrim Borough Council
Ards Arts Collective	2,700	Ards Borough Council
Comhaltas Ceoltoiri Eireann (Ards Branch)	2,200	Ards Borough Council
Donaghadee Male Voice Choir	8,095	Ards Borough Council
Aghavilly Accordion Band	500	Armagh City and District Council
Armagh And Dungannon Arts Care Committee	9,000	Armagh City and District Council
Armagh City Choir	4,350	Armagh City and District Council
Armagh Old Boys Silver Band (and Social Club)	8,800	Armagh City and District Council
Music for Armagh	10,000	Armagh City and District Council
The Charles Wood Summer School	5,000	Armagh City and District Council
The John Hewitt Society	4,000	Armagh City and District Council
Mid Armagh Community Network	23,000	Armagh City and District Council
The Armagh Rhymers Workers Co-operative Ltd	67,000	Armagh City and District Council
Ballymena Chamber Orchestra	1,844	Ballymena Borough Council
Maine Valley Accordion And Fiddle Club	5,000	Ballymena Borough Council
Portglenone Senior Citizens Arts and Crafts Club	1,039	Ballymena Borough Council
Bann Rhythm Irish Dance Group	2,750	Banbridge District Council
ADAPT NI	70,000	Belfast City Council
Afro Community Support Organisation Northern Ireland	10,000	Belfast City Council
Aisling Ghear	67,320	Belfast City Council
Andersonstown Traditional & Contemporary Music School	50,000	Belfast City Council

Name	Grant (£)	Council Area
Arts and Disability Forum	76,271	Belfast City Council
Arts Ekta	900	Belfast City Council
Arts for All	10,000	Belfast City Council
ArtsCare	45,292	Belfast City Council
Audiences Northern Ireland	212,000	Belfast City Council
Belfast & District Set Dancing and Traditional Music Society	20,000	Belfast City Council
Belfast and District Set Dancing and Traditional Music Society	10,000	Belfast City Council
Belfast Community Circus School	147,500	Belfast City Council
Belfast Exposed Photography	100,000	Belfast City Council
Belfast Operatic Company	5,000	Belfast City Council
Belfast Print Workshop	89,019	Belfast City Council
Belfast Theatre Co	8,891	Belfast City Council
Belfast Women Drummers / Chidambaram Womens Samba Band	3,870	Belfast City Council
Blackstaff Press Limited	79,300	Belfast City Council
Bright Lights	7,800	Belfast City Council
Bruiser Theatre Company	45,000	Belfast City Council
C21 Theatre Company Limited	4,864	Belfast City Council
Cahoots NI Ltd	79,450	Belfast City Council
Catalyst Arts	20,000	Belfast City Council
Catalyst Arts Limited	3,825	Belfast City Council
Cinemagic Ltd	9,270	Belfast City Council
Community Arts Forum	115,196	Belfast City Council
Craft Northern Ireland	130,000	Belfast City Council
Creative Writers Network	60,000	Belfast City Council
Crescent Arts Centre	147,000	Belfast City Council

Name	Grant (£)	Council Area
Culturlann McAdam O'Fiaich	161,290	Belfast City Council
Dance United Northern Ireland	24,250	Belfast City Council
Factotum	17,000	Belfast City Council
Feile an Phobail	123,000	Belfast City Council
Flaxart Studios	38,680	Belfast City Council
Fortwilliam Musical Society	5,000	Belfast City Council
Golden Thread Gallery	107,000	Belfast City Council
Irish Pages Ltd.	30,000	Belfast City Council
J2Z festival Association	7,520	Belfast City Council
Jigsaw Theatre Productions	8,050	Belfast City Council
Kabosh Theatre Ltd	81,890	Belfast City Council
Kids in Control	30,000	Belfast City Council
Lagan Legacy	6,500	Belfast City Council
Lagan Press Ltd	49,600	Belfast City Council
Linen Hall Library	35,000	Belfast City Council
Louis Macneice Centenary Poetry Readings	9,375	Belfast City Council
Lyric Players Theatre	606,722	Belfast City Council
Moving on Music	109,150	Belfast City Council
New Belfast Community Arts Initiative	38,000	Belfast City Council
Northern Ireland Music Industry Commission	20,000	Belfast City Council
Northern Ireland Music Industry Commission	5,000	Belfast City Council
Old Museum Arts Centre	242,650	Belfast City Council
Open Arts	70,081	Belfast City Council
Orchid Studios Association	14,523	Belfast City Council
Ormeau Avenue Gallery Ltd	300,000	Belfast City Council
Paragon Studios	24,350	Belfast City Council
Partisan Productions	20,000	Belfast City Council
Play Resource Warehouse	64,450	Belfast City Council

Name	Grant (£)	Council Area
Prime Cut Productions Ltd	100,950	Belfast City Council
Prison Arts Foundation	71,280	Belfast City Council
Queen Street Studios	31,032	Belfast City Council
Queen Street Studios	5,116	Belfast City Council
Ransom Productions Ltd	20,000	Belfast City Council
Rawlife Theatre Company	10,000	Belfast City Council
Replay Productions Ltd.	115,635	Belfast City Council
Royal Society of Ulster Architects (RSUA)	45,000	Belfast City Council
Skyway Club	9,772	Belfast City Council
Sonorities Contemporary Music Festival	20,000	Belfast City Council
Source/Photo Works North	24,000	Belfast City Council
Spanner in the Works	14,460	Belfast City Council
St George's Singers (Belfast) Limited	6,150	Belfast City Council
Streetwise Community Circus Workshops	33,531	Belfast City Council
The Beat Initiative	100,000	Belfast City Council
The Cathedral Quarter Arts Festival	100,000	Belfast City Council
The Jigtime Programme of Irish Music	25,000	Belfast City Council
Tinderbox Theatre Company	104,000	Belfast City Council
Ulster Orchestra Society Ltd	2,050,113	Belfast City Council
Ulster Youth Choir	20,100	Belfast City Council
Ulster Youth Choir	10,000	Belfast City Council
Ulster Youth Orchestra	4,021	Belfast City Council
Voca Loca Women's Singing Group	2,610	Belfast City Council
Wheelworks	60,000	Belfast City Council
Woodvale Community Centre Committee	5,344	Belfast City Council

Name	Grant (£)	Council Area
Young at Art	85,000	Belfast City Council
Youth Action Northern Ireland	25,000	Belfast City Council
Youth Lyric	5,000	Belfast City Council
Wynchurch Art Group	900	Castlereagh Borough Council
Best Cellars Music Collective Ltd	19,000	Castlereagh Borough Council
Big Telly Theatre Company	105,000	Coleraine Borough Council
Ardboe Central Youth Band	5,000	Cookstown District Council
Mid Ulster Culture & Heritage Association	4,300	Cookstown District Council
All Set Cross Cultural Project	25,000	Craigavon Borough Council
Portadown 2000 (Millennium Court Arts Centre)	51,000	Craigavon Borough Council
Maghery Traditions Group	10,000	Craigavon Borough Council
Musical Expressions	2,000	Craigavon Borough Council
St John's Independant Accordion Band	8,320	Craigavon Borough Council
An Gaelaras Ltd	84,867	Derry City Council
An Gaelaras Ltd	4,160	Derry City Council
Context Gallery	39,600	Derry City Council
Context Gallery	9,650	Derry City Council
Destined Ltd	9,950	Derry City Council
Drama in Hand/ Handful Productions	3,050	Derry City Council
Echo Echo Dance Theatre Company	55,000	Derry City Council
Eden Place Arts Centre	30,000	Derry City Council
Guildhall Press	35,000	Derry City Council
Maydown Youth Training Project Ltd - Waterside Theatre	70,000	Derry City Council
North West Play Resource Centre (The Playhouse)	127,000	Derry City Council
Sole Purpose	3,700	Derry City Council
The City of Derry Guitar Festival	9,250	Derry City Council

Name	Grant (£)	Council Area
The Nerve Centre	198,911	Derry City Council
The Void Art Centre	85,000	Derry City Council
Towards Understanding And Healing	9,780	Derry City Council
Verbal Arts Centre	175,657	Derry City Council
Waterside Women's Group	9,959	Derry City Council
Voluntary Arts Network (on behalf of Voluntary Arts Ireland)	60,000	Down District Council
Ardglass GFC	3,400	Down District Council
Ballee and District Community Group	8,180	Down District Council
Brookvale Rural Association	5,128	Down District Council
Bawn Silver Band	5,500	Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council
Canary Fifing and Drumming Club	720	Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council
Coalisland Learn and Leisure Association	6,217	Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council
Discovery 80 Ltd. Share Centre	20,000	Fermanagh District Council
Erne Art Group	1,600	Fermanagh District Council
Erne Music Club (Belleek and District)	8,700	Fermanagh District Council
Gospel West	3,600	Fermanagh District Council
Letterbreen Silver Band	5,795	Fermanagh District Council
Magheraboy Flute Band	3,600	Fermanagh District Council
Castleward Opera	159,000	Lisburn City Council
Northern Ireland Piping & Drumming School	56,510	Lisburn City Council
Ulster Association of Youth Drama	34,650	Lisburn City Council
Ballycoan Pipe Band	5,970	Lisburn City Council

Name	Grant (£)	Council Area
Colin Neighbourhood Partnership	10,000	Lisburn City Council
Fusion Theatre	5,000	Lisburn City Council
Island Youth Theatre	9,000	Lisburn City Council
Lisnagarvey Operatic and Dramatic Society	5,000	Lisburn City Council
Upper Crossgare Pipe Band	5,000	Lisburn City Council
Moneymore Accordion Band	2,880	Magherafelt District Council
Antrim Glens Traditions Group	3,293	Moyle District Council
Bangor Drama Festival	800	North Down Borough Council
Maiden Voyage (NI) Ltd	20,000	North Down Borough Council
Open House Traditional Arts Festival Ltd	60,000	North Down Borough Council
Seacourt Print Workshop Limited	50,550	North Down Borough Council
Bangor Operatic Society	5,000	North Down Borough Council
Hollywood Music Festival	4,000	North Down Borough Council
Seacourt Print Workshop Ltd	9,953	North Down Borough Council
Drake Music Project Northern Ireland	42,000	Newry and Mourne District Council
Sticky Fingers Early Years Arts	63,487	Newry and Mourne District Council
Kingdom of Mourne Ulster Scots	9,850	Newry and Mourne District Council
Glengormley Irish Traditional Music School	5,000	Newtownabbey Borough Council
Anglo-Indian Films Ltd	9,802	Belfast City Council
Belfast Film Festival Ltd	6,050	Belfast City Council
Centre Stage Theatre Company Ltd	10,000	Belfast City Council
Comhaltas Ceoltoiri Eireann - Portglenone Branch	1,400	Ballymena Borough Council
Crafts Development Northern Ireland	10,000	Belfast City Council

Name	Grant (£)	Council Area
Drake Music Project (Northern Ireland) Limited	9,994	Newry and Mourne District Council
Indian Community Centre	9,800	Belfast City Council
Royal Mencap Society	8,850	Belfast City Council
Creggan Education And Research Services Ltd	9,650	Omagh District Council

The table below gives details of the funding provided by the Northern Ireland Screen Commission to community and voluntary groups.

Name	Grant (£)	Council area
AmmA Centre	93,750	Armagh city and district council
Belfast Film Festival	40,500	Belfast city council
Cinemagic (After Schools Film Clubs)	60,000	Belfast city council
Cinemagic Festival	50,000	Belfast city council
Northern Visions	78,750	Belfast city council
Studio On	237,500	Castlereagh borough council
Nerve Centre	138,750	Derry city council
Nerve Centre (After Schools Film Clubs)	20,000	Derry city council

FORAS NA GAELIGE

The table below gives details of the funding provided by Foras na Gaeilge to community and voluntary groups.

Name	Grant (£)	Council Area
Iontao Iontaobhas Ultach	62,442	Belfast City Council
Forbairt Feirste	30,245	Belfast City Council
Pobal	45,532	Belfast City Council
Raidió fáilte	22,765	Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council
An Gaeláras	30,376	Derry City Council
Cultúrlann MacAdam Ó Fiaich	22,941	Belfast City Council
Cumann Cultúrtha Mhic Reachtain	20,147	Belfast City Council
Coiste Forbartha Charn Tóchair	16,744	Magherafelt

Name	Grant (£)	Council Area
An Droichead	17,890	Belfast City Council
Gaelphobal an tSratha Báin	9,855	Strabane District Council
Pobal an Chaistil	10,407	Moyle District Council
Ionad Uíbh Eachach	8,955	Belfast City Council
Glór na Móna	9,105	Belfast City Council
Cumann GaelachChnoc na Rós	9,363	Derry City Council
Cumann Gaelach Leath Chathail	9,278	Down District Council
Craobh Naomh Pádraig	850	Belfast City Council
An Clochar Éire Óg	500	Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council
Glór na nGael, Uachtar Tíre	850	Down District Council
Cumann Cultúrtha Mhic Reachtain	592	Belfast City Council
Droichead, An	857	Belfast City Council
Coláiste Bhlinne	750	Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council
Conradh na Gaeilge, Bóirche Íochtair	875	Down District Council
Naíscoil Mhuire	586	Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council
Bunscoil an Traonaigh	491	Fermanagh District Council
Club Óige Setanta	812	Derry City Council
Coláiste Shliabh gCuilinn	325	Down District Council
Cumann Gaelach Áit Thí Cathail	750	Down District Council
Grathaine na Cnoc	419	Fermanagh District Council
Naíscoil an Chaistil	875	Moyle District Council
Naomh Lorcán Ó Tuatháil CLG	395	Down District Council
Cumann Óige Thír Eoghain	547	Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council

ULSTER-SCOTS AGENCY

The table below gives details of the funding provided by the Ulster Scots Agency to community and voluntary groups.

Name	Grant (£)	Council Area
George A Dummigan Memorial Accordion Band	800	Larne Borough Council
Hounds of Ulster	2,025	Newtownabbey Borough Council
Gig'N The Bann Festival Committee	1,500	Ballymena Borough Council
Moyné Ulster Scots Association	2,137	Donegal County Council
RSPBA NI Branch, Co Antrim Section	967	Lisburn City Council
William Savage Memorial Flute Band	1,575	Down District Council
The Royal Scottish Country Dance Society	5,036	Castlereagh Borough Council
York Island Arts & Heritage Association	5,535	Castlereagh Borough Council
West Belfast Orange Hall	1,875	Belfast City Council
Aghavilly Accordion Band	984	Armagh City and District Council
Altnaveigh House Ltd	4,912	Newry and Mourne District Council
Ardinariff Historical & Cultural Society	1,125	Limavady Borough Council
Ardinariff Historical & Cultural Society	2,235	Limavady Borough Council
Aughintober Pipe Band	2,193	Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council
Aughnagurgan Scottish Dance Association	2,996	Armagh City and District Council
Aughrim Fife & Lambeg Drumming Club	1,200	Magherafelt District Council
Altnaveigh School of Dance	4,123	Newry and Mourne District Council
Ballinacross Accordion Band	800	Magherafelt District Council
Ballinran Community Association	1,443	Newry and Mourne District Council

Name	Grant (£)	Council Area
Ballybay Community Association	918	Craigavon Borough Council
Ballygrainey Rural Development Association	1,125	North Down Borough Council
Ballymageough Rural Development Association	2,379	Newry and Mourne District Council
Ballymageough Rural Development Association	3,450	Newry and Mourne District Council
Ballymoughan Flute Band	1,200	Magherafelt District Council
Ballyvea Rural Development Association	2,137	Newry and Mourne District Council
Ballyvea Rural Development Association	525	Newry and Mourne District Council
Ballydonaghy Pipe Band	1,800	Antrim Borough Council
Ballywalter Community Action Group	1,042	Ards Borough Council
Ballywillan Community & Cultural Group	1,687	Coleraine Borough Council
Benburb Memorial Pipe Band	1,773	Dunagannon and South Tyrone Borough Council
Belfast Orangefest 2008	3,225	Belfast City Council
Benraw Rural Community Association	1,350	Banbridge District Council
Bloomhill Rural Development Association	1,361	Dunagannon and South Tyrone Borough Council
Blue Eagle Productions	10,886	NI Wide
Borderline/Redwine Productions	2,250	Belfast City Council
Border Minority Group	750 (Euro)	Monaghan County Council
Broughshane & District Community Association Ltd	1,175	Ballymena Borough Council
Brookeborough Flute Band	1,575	Fermanagh District Council
Brookmount Cultural & Education Society	1,350	Lisburn City Council

Name	Grant (£)	Council Area
Broomhedge Ulster Scots Society	251	Lisburn City Council
Bright Lights	3,735	Belfast City Council
Bright Lights	1,125	Belfast City Council
Burt Scottish Country Dance Club	2,334	Derry City Council
Cairncastle LOL 692 Community & Cultural Group	1,050	Larne Borough Council
Carryduff & District Drum Majors	815	Castlereagh Borough Council
Carleton Street Community Development Association	300	Craigavon Borough Council
Carnagh Accordion Band	984	Armagh City and District Council
Centre for Migration Studies - Ulster American Folk Park	1,500	Omagh District Council
Closkelt Highland Dancers	1,020	Down District Council
Coleraine Festival Committee	6,412	Coleraine Borough Council
County Armagh Drum Majors Group	1,856	Armagh City and District Council
Cowan Memorial Flute Band	1,350	Dunagannon and South Tyrone Borough Council
Corbert Accordion Band	1,800	Lisburn City Council
Crimson Arrow Pipe Band	1,381	Ards Borough Council
Cranny Cultural & Community Group	562	Magherafelt District Council
Curlough Accordion Band	1,293	Dunagannon and South Tyrone Borough Council
Cullybackey District LOL No 20	948	Ballymena Borough Council
Cullybackey Pipe Band	750	Ballymena Borough Council
Cup of Tae Festival	1,125	Donegal County Council
Derriaghy District LOL No 11	1,312	Lisburn City Council
Desertmartin Accordion Band	800	Magherafelt District Council
Drumnaleg Community Association	871	Armagh City and District Council

Name	Grant (£)	Council Area
Drumnaleg Community Association	187	Armagh City and District Council
Drumquin Pipe Band	1,996	Omagh District Council
Drumquin Pipe Band	1,998	Omagh District Council
Drum Accordion Band	660 (Euro)	Monaghan County Council
Drum Accordion Band	1,736	Monaghan County Council
Dunamoney Community Group	1,920	Magherafelt District Council
Dunloy Accordion Band	1,687	Ballymoney Borough Council
Dunloy Accordion Band	1,822	Ballymoney Borough Council
East Donegal Ulster Scots Association	1,020 (Euro)	Donegal County Council
East Donegal Ulster Scots Association	4,106 (Euro)	Donegal County Council
East Donegal Ulster Scots Association	2,306	Donegal County Council
East Donegal Ulster Scots Association	10,005	Donegal County Council
East Antrim Elementary Accordion Orchestra	421	Larne Borough Council
East Belfast Titanic Festival	19,169	Belfast City Council
Eden Accordion Band	1,200	Ballymoney Borough Council
Edentiloan & District US Association	677	Dunagannon and South Tyrone Borough Council
Fermanagh Arts Festival	3,862	Fermanagh District Council
Gillian Jones - Sponsorship For Attainment of A Fellowship	2,250	North Down Borough Council
Goldsprings TDFB	1,575	Ards Borough Council
Greyabbey Junior Drumming Club	1,489	Ards Borough Council
Hartford Community Development & Cultural Association	1,871	Armagh City and District Council
Heart of Down Highland Dancers	1,953	Down District Council

Name	Grant (£)	Council Area
Heart of Down Highland Dancers	577	Down District Council
Institute of Ulster Scots Studies	89,244 (Euro)	Derry City Council
Institute of Ulster Scots Studies	150,000	Derry City Council
Killyglen Accordion Band	1,816	Carrickfergus Borough Council
Killycoogan Accordion Band	1,687	Ballymena Borough Council
Kingdom of Dalriada Ulster Scots Society	5,556	Ballymoney Borough Council
Kilbroney Integrated Primary School	540	Newry and Mourne District Council
Lisnaskea Accordion Band	1,406	Fermanagh District Council
Larne District LOL No 1 Education & Cultural Group	187	Larne Borough Council
Lisburn Fusiliers Flute Band	1,269	Lisburn City Council
Maghera Sons of William Flute Band	1,050	Magherafelt District Council
Magherageg Rural Community Association	798	Omagh District Council
Macosquin Cultural & Regeneration Group	1,350	Coleraine Borough Council
Magherboy Flute Band	800	Fermanagh District Council
Marlaco Pipe Band	1,905	Armagh City and District Council
Marlagh Educational & Culture Group	975	Ballymena Borough Council
Megargy Cultural & Community Group	375	Magherafelt District Council
Mid Armagh Community Network	12,787	Armagh City and District Council
Mid Armagh Community Network	1,125	Armagh City and District Council
Mosside Development Group	13,875	Newtownabbey Borough Council
Mountfield Ulster Scots Association	930	Omagh District Council
Moyne Ulster Scots Association	2,193	Donegal County Council

Name	Grant (£)	Council Area
Mulnahorn Pipe Band	810	Fermanagh District Council
Pert Rural Community Network Association	1,462	Armagh City and District Council
Pioneer Flute Band	1,350	Craigavon Borough Council
Pride of Lagan Valley Flute Band	1,575	Belfast City Council
Portstewart Community Association	4,237	Coleraine Borough Council
Raffrey Pipe Band	1,507	Belfast City Council
RSPBA (NI) Fermanagh Section	1,312	Fermanagh District Council
Riada Concert Group	1,710	Ballymoney Borough Council
Royal Scottish Pipe Band Association	22,500	Lisburn City Council
Salterstown Flute Band	1,350	Cookstown District Council
Schomberg Fife & Drum	956	Newry and Mourne District Council
Schomberg Folk Orchestra	1,518	Newry and Mourne District Council
Sir George White Memorial Flute Band	1,687	Ballymena Borough Council
Sixmilewater Cultural Society	675	Newtownabbey Borough Council
Sixmilewater Cultural Society	2,685	Newtownabbey Borough Council
South Londonderry Ulster Scots Association	900	Magherafelt District Council
Sollus School of Highland Dance	7,455	Strabane District Council
South Belfast Cultural Society	6,690	Belfast City Council
Stranocum Ulster Scots Cultural & Heritage Society	1,687	Ballymoney Borough Council
Tamlaght Pipe Band	1,800	Fermanagh District Council
Tandragee Community Association	2,400	Armagh City and District Council
The Bridge Community Association	1,153	Belfast City Council

Name	Grant (£)	Council Area
Ulster Scots Language Society	13,110	NI Wide
Ulster Scots Folk Orchestra	5,917	Craigavon Borough Council
Upper Crossgare Pipe Band	2,250	Lisburn City Council
William Beattie Memorial Accordion Band	309	Ballymena Borough Council
The Ely Centre	1,743	Fermanagh District Council
Banbridge Pipe Band	2,306	Banbridge District Council
Closkelt Pipe Band	1,350	Banbridge District Council
O'Neill Pipe Band	2,418	Monaghan County Council
Cairncastle LOL 692 Community & Cultural Group	1,875	Larne Borough Council
Quoile Ulster Scots Society	1,575	Down District Council
Derryogue Flute Band	2,137	Newry and Mourne District Council
Craiganeer Accordion Band	843	Moyle District Council
Ballymartin Pipe Band	1,743	Newry and Mourne District Council
Donemana Pipe Band	1,350	Strabane District Council
Ballyarnett Scottish Ceilidh Dance Club	2,025	Derry City Council
Cranfield Cultural Society	1,968	Newry and Mourne District Council
Stranocum Ulster Scots Cultural & Heritage Society	187	Ballymoney Borough Council
Crossgar Young Defenders	2,216	Lisburn City Council
Ballytober Parents Association	2,625	Moyle District Council
Kirknarra School of Dance	2,586	Newry and Mourne District Council
Lower Iveagh Cultural & Heritage Society	4,031	Lisburn City Council
Poundbridge & District Community Association	1,800	Lisburn City Council

Name	Grant (£)	Council Area
Lisbeg Pipe Band	990	Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council
Ulster Scots Cultural Development Trust	2,400	Antrim Borough Council
Ulster Scots Cultural Development Trust	750	Antrim Borough Council
Waringsford Pipe Band	1,912	Lisburn City Council
Seymour Hill & Conway Community Network & Queensway Flute Band	187	Belfast City Council
Tannagh Hill Scottish Country Dancing	465	Armagh Borough Council
Carleton Street Community Development Association	2,362	Craigavon Borough Council
Newbuildings Community & Environmental Association	15,665	Derry City Council
Ballycarry Community Association	6,375	Larne Borough Council
Portavogie Heritage Historical Society	6,292	Ards Borough Council
Cairncastle LOL 692 Community & Cultural Group	1,050	Larne Borough Council
Bushmills Ulster Scots Heritage Group	10,613	Moyle District Council
The Blue Thistle Highland Dancers	13,462	Omagh District Council
Mountfield Ulster Scots Association	1,434	Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council
Laganview Enterprise Centre	1,627	Lisburn City Council
Battlehill Pipe Band	787	Armagh City and District Council
Dungonnell Ulster Scots & Cultural Society	187	Antrim Borough Council
East Donegall Ulster Scots Association	1,395 (Euro)	Donegal County Council
Friends of Slieve Roe House	300	Newry and Mourne District Council

Name	Grant (£)	Council Area
Seapatrick Cultural & Educational Society	731	Banbridge District Council

SPORT

The table below gives details of the funding provided by Sport NI to community and voluntary groups.

Name	Grant (£)	Council Area
Bready Cricket Club	1,692,451	Strabane District Council
O'Brien's GAC	245,000	Derry City Council
Kickhams Creggan GAC	240,000	Antrim Borough Council
Lisnaskea Emmetts GAC	220,000	Fermanagh District Council
Bready Cricket Club	125,000	Strabane District Council
Greysteel Community Enterprise	72,000	Limavady Borough Council
Na Magha Hurling Club	238,274	Derry City Council
Greysteel Community Enterprise	550,000	Limavady Borough Council
St Mary's GAC	235,000	Derry City Council
Waringstown Cricket Club	40,000	Craigavon Borough Council
Disability Sports Northern Ireland	125,000	NI Wide
Playboard	554,896	NI Wide
Upper Springfield Development Trust	179,460	Belfast City Council
North East Area Partnership	170,901	Antrim Borough Council
Greater Shankill Partnership	137,690	Belfast City Council
North Belfast Sport Forum	140,000	Belfast City Council
Brownlow Campus Sports Trust	130,366	Craigavon Borough Council
Down Clubmark Sports Association	130,366	Down District Council
Age Concern	131,000	NI Wide
Clarendon Development Association	126,866	Belfast City Council
Old Library Trust	121,166	Derry City Council

Name	Grant (£)	Council Area
The Boys' Brigade (Belfast Battalion)	119,491	Belfast City Council
Sport South East	117,266	Down District Council
Greater Village Regeneration Trust (GVRT)	118,296	Belfast City Council
Newry & Mourne Carers Limited	112,500	Newry and Mourne District Council
Southern Sports Partnership	111,799	Armagh City and District Council
Playboard	108,957	NI Wide
Lower Ormeau Residents' Action Group	109,530	Belfast City Council
Derry Healthy Cities	104,000	Derry City Council
Lagan Watersports Ltd	92,775	Belfast City Council
Brownlow Campus Sports Trust	69,195	Craigavon Borough Council
Lower Ormeau Residents' Action Group	67,440	Belfast City Council
Derry Healthy Cities	67,041	Derry City Council
Youth Sport Omagh Ltd	66,063	Omagh District Council
Greater Village Regeneration Trust (GVRT)	65,310	Belfast City Council
Cookstown and District Sports Forum	53,293	Cookstown District Council
Youth Sport Omagh Ltd	37,982	Omagh District Council
North Belfast Play Forum	33,000	Belfast City Council
North Belfast Play Forum	28,000	Belfast City Council
Craigavon Sports Advisory Council	18,790	Craigavon Borough Council
PHAB NI Inclusion Matters	79,000	NI Wide
Clubs for Young People	71,665	NI Wide
Belfast Youth Sport Development	60,000	Belfast City Council

DIRECT CAPITAL GRANTS FROM DCAL CULTURAL AND LANGUAGE DIVERSITY

Name	Grant (£)	Council Area
Grand Orange Lodge of Ireland	33,000	NI Wide

SIGN LANGUAGE

Name	Grant (£)	Council Area
Hands that Talk	1,760	NW Based
RNID (Royal National Institute for the Deaf)	23,000	NI Wide

ARTS

Name	Grant (£)	Council Area
Lyric Theatre	2,500,000	Belfast City Council
Old Museum Arts Centre	1,737,000	Belfast City Council
Old Museum Arts Centre Gallery	1,710,000	Belfast City Council
North West Fund [*]	1,650,000	Derry City Council
NW Public Art	35,000	Derry City Council

* This includes funding for An Gaelaras, The Gasyard, The Waterside Theatre and the Void Gallery.

The Department has also allocated £100,000 resource grant to the Belfast Festival at Queens for 08/09.

Waste Management

Mr Savage asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much his Department has spent on waste management since devolution. (AQW 7976/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure has spent £5924.71 on Waste Management since Devolution on 8 May 2007.

Blackberrys Purchased by the Department

Mr Savage asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how many Blackberrys have been purchased by his Department since devolution. (AQW 8169/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure has purchased 15 Blackberrys since Devolution on 8 May 2007.

Multi-Sports Stadium at the Maze/Long Kesh Site

Mrs Long asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much his Department has spent on the proposed multi sports stadium at the Maze/Long Kesh site. (AQW 8235/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

My department has spent £3,583,094 to date on the proposals for a Multi-Sports Stadium. Most of this expenditure, £3,139,530, has been incurred on stadium design. Business planning, the Business Case, Programme, Management and other consultancy costs account for the balance of £443,564.

Funding for Football Clubs

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what financial assistance was made available to football clubs in the (i) Premier League; (ii) First Division; and (iii) Intermediate League, over the last three years, (a) in total; and (b) broken down by club. (AQW 8278/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

Sport Northern Ireland (SNI) is responsible for the development of sport in Northern Ireland including the distribution of funding. SNI has provided financial assistance over the last three financial years to football clubs in the (i) Premier League; (ii) First Division; and (iii) Intermediate League as follows:

2005/06 – There were no exchequer or lottery awards issued to soccer in this financial year.

2006/07 EXCHEQUER FUNDING TO SOCCER

Organisation	Award (£)	Premier League	1st Division	Intermediate
Ballymena Utd FC	168,326	168,326		
Newry City FC	2,179	2,179		
Dungannon Swifts FC	2,402	2,402		
Portadown FC	4,995	4,995		
Glentoran	11,706	11,706		
Ards FC	1,888		1,888	
Linfield FC	11,628	11,628		
Armagh City FC	3,365	3,365		
Cliftonville FC	804,023	804,023		
Crusaders FC	2,134	2,134		
Donegal Celtic FC	3,150	3,150		
Totals	1,015,794	1,013,906	1,888	0

There were no lottery awards issued to soccer in financial year 2006/07.

2007/08 EXCHEQUER FUNDING TO SOCCER

Organisation	Award (£)	Premier League	1st Division	Intermediate
Linfield FC	4,425	4,425		
Cliftonville FC	900	900		
Portadown FC	800,900	800,900		
Donegal Celtic FC	938	938		
Totals	807,163	807,163	0	0

There were no lottery awards issued to soccer in financial year 2007/08.

EDUCATION

Bunscoil an Chaistil

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education to detail the unresolved matters between her department and Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta in relation to the club bank scheme proposals for Bunscoil an Chaistil. (AQW 3334/08)

The Minister of Education (Ms Ruane): Léiríonn líon na ndaltaí a tugadh isteach i mBunscoil an Chaistil le blianta beaga anuas inmharthanacht na scoile agus, dá bharr sin, tá an scoil i dteideal cur isteach ar chlár caipitil na Roinne.

The intakes at Bunscoil an Chaistil in recent years have demonstrated the viability of the school and as such the school is eligible for consideration in the department's capital programme. A club bank scheme is not therefore considered to be appropriate to meet the school's accommodation requirements. Officials from my department have visited the school to assess the accommodation and discuss with the school's representatives the position and the next steps in the process.

Balmoral High School

Mr Adams asked the Minister of Education (i) what action her Department has taken; and (ii) what plans are in place, in relation to the future of Balmoral High School in West Belfast. (AQW 7633/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá an Roinn ag obair le Bord Oideachais agus Leabharlann Bhéal Feirste, ar leis Ardscoil Balmoral, le roghanna cuí a aimsiú maidir le húsáid na scoile san am atá le teacht. Tá an Roinn agus an Bord ag breithniú roghanna malartacha oideachasúla don suíomh cé nach ndearnadh cinntí ar bith go fóill.

The Department is working with the Belfast Education and Library Board, which owns Balmoral High School, to identify suitable options for the future use of the site. The Department and the Board are considering alternative educational uses for the site though no decisions have yet been taken.

Secondary School Places in North Down

Mr Cree asked the Minister of Education why a number of pupils in the North Down constituency have been unable to secure a place in a secondary school in the area for the 2008-09 academic year; and how many pupils are affected. (AQW 7636/08)

The Minister of Education: Thug Bord Oideachais agus Leabharlann an Oirdheiscirt le fios dom go bhfuil 23 dhalta, a bhfuil seoltaí acu i toghcheantar Thuaisceart an Dúin, gan áit faoi láthair in iarbhunscoil don bhliain acadúil 2008/09.

The South-Eastern Education and Library Board have advised me that 23 pupils with addresses in the North Down constituency are currently without a place in a post-primary school for the 2008/09 academic year. The reason for this is that all the schools for which the pupils expressed preferences on their transfer forms were over-subscribed and other applicants better met the schools' admissions criteria. The admissions criteria of schools are chosen by the Board of Governors of the school and reflect its priorities for school admissions. In these circumstances applicants should contact the Transfer Officer of the South-Eastern education and library board who will be able to advise them of schools within a reasonable travelling distance of their homes, which have places available.

Planning, Preparation and Assessment Time for Teachers

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of Education if she has any plans to introduce measures to ensure that teachers are entitled to a minimum of 10 per cent of their timetabled teaching commitment for planning, preparation and assessment. (AQW 7733/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá tabhairt isteach Am Pleanála, Ullmhúcháin agus Measúnaithe (PPA) ar cheann de na bearta a mhol tuarascáil "Curran 2" chun am táirgiúil na múinteoirí a mhéadú.

The introduction of Planning, Preparation and Assessment (PPA) Time is one of a number of measures recommended by the "Curran 2" report to increase teachers' productive time. Another is the need to relieve the pressures on teaching principals in our smaller primary schools and, as a result of the Budget 2007 process, I have been able to make available almost £12m over the next three years for this purpose. However, it has not been possible to provide resources for PPA, the annual cost of which is estimated at over £30m.

I am aware of the difficulties faced by our teachers and I believe that schools should be encouraged to develop strategies for ensuring that teachers can avail of PPA time where possible. I understand that the teachers' unions and employing authorities are committed to the principle of PPA time and that the matter is under consideration at the Teachers' Negotiating Committee.

Surplus Primary School Places

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education how many surplus places there are in each primary school in Bangor. (AQW 7769/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá an t-eolas a iarradh mionsonraithe sa tábla faoi iamh.

The information requested is detailed in the attached table.

Bangor	07/08 Enrolment	Estimated Surplus Places
Ballyholme	600	71
Ballymagee	404	2
Bangor Central	562	24
Bloomfield Road	232	176
Clandeboye	177	349
Crawfordsburn	188	43
Grange Park	364	-
Kilcooley	101	455
Kilmaine	602	-
Rathmore	430	156
Towerview	317	64
St Comgall's	284	-
St Malachy's	269	142
Totals:	4,530	1,482
Wider Bangor area		
Conlig	43	13
Glencraig	228	3
Totals:	271	16
Overall total:	4,801	1,498

Towerview Primary School

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education for her assessment of the capacity of the new-build for Towerview Primary School to cater for the volume of pupils. (AQW 7782/08)

The Minister of Education: The South Eastern Education and Library Board has planned the new school for 11 classbases, catering for up to 320 pupils, plus a 2-classbase special unit and a nursery unit, and construction is currently underway. New schools are planned on the basis of their projected enrolments. There are currently 317 pupils at the school, excluding pupils in the special unit.

Tá mé ar an eolas maidir leis an inní a léirigh Bunscoil Towerview maidir leis na hacmhainní atá á gcur ar fáil agus beidh oifigigh ag plé na saincheisteanna a ardaíodh faoin chóiríocht úr leis an scoil.

I am aware of the concerns expressed by Towerview Primary School about the facilities being provided and officials will be discussing with the school the issues which have been raised about the new accommodation.

Team-Building Exercises

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education how many away days and team-building exercises have been organised by her Department for departmental staff in each of the last five years. (AQW 7838/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá an t-eolas a iarradh mionsonraithe sa tábla faoi iamh.

The information requested is detailed in the attached table.

Away Days / Team Building Days	
Financial Year	Number of days
2003/04	33
2004/05	23
2005/06	22
2006/07	29.5
2007/08	38

The away days detailed in the above table include days organised by the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) which provides inspection services for the Department of Education (DE), the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) and the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL).

Away days in the main are used for Business Planning. As an Investor in People there is a requirement to involve people when developing the organisation's business plan and when agreeing team and individual objectives. It is not possible to show separately the number of away days (business planning) and team building exercises. In the Department of Education, however, teambuilding days are generally arranged through Employer Supported Volunteering with Voluntary Service Bureau at nil cost.

Team-Building Exercises

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education how many staff hours have been taken up with departmental or cross-departmental away days, or

team-building exercises, in each of the last five years.
(AQW 7842/08)

The Minister of Education: Níl eolas san fhormaid a iarradh ar fáil go réidh agus níorbh fhéidir é a chur ar fáil ach ar chostas díreireach.

Information in the form requested is not readily available and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Grammar School Places

Miss McIlveen asked the Minister of Education how many grammar school places have been available, broken down by gender and school, in the South Eastern Education and Library Board areas and Belfast Education and Library Board in each of the

last five years, and for the forthcoming academic year.
(AQW 7877/08)

The Minister of Education: Sa tábla atá ceangailte leis seo tá eolas maidir le líon na n-áiteanna atá ar fáil i scoileanna gramadaí i gceantar Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlann an Oirdheiscirt agus Bhéal Feirste i ngach ceann de na cúig bliana dheireanacha, agus an bhliain acadúil atá le teacht fosta.

The number of available grammar school places by school in the South Eastern and Belfast Education and Library Board area in each of the last five years, and also the forthcoming academic year is provided in the attached table. I should explain that the Department does not hold figures on the gender breakdown of the pupils attending co-educational schools, but the attached table groups schools according to whether the school is co-educational, or a girls or boys school.

		2003/2004 Approved Admissions Number	2004/2005 Approved Admissions Number	2005/2006 Approved Admissions Number	2006/2007 Approved Admissions Number	2007/2008 Approved Admissions Number	2008/2009 Approved Admissions Number
Belfast Education and Library Board							
Co-Educational Schools							
141-0079	Grosvenor Grammar School	155	155	155	155	155	155
141-0270	Wellington College	110	110	110	110	110	110
142-0022	Methodist College	240	240	240	240	240	240
142-0028	Belfast Royal Academy	200	200	200	200	200	200
142-0095	Rathmore Grammar School	180	180	180	180	180	180
142-0277	Aquinas Diocesan Grammar School	110	110	110	110	110	110
Girls' Schools							
142-0018	Bloomfield Collegiate School	100	100	100	100	100	100
142-0029	St Dominic's High School	145	145	145	145	145	145
142-0082	Dominican College	150	150	150	150	150	150
142-0089	Strathearn School	110	110	110	110	110	110
142-0264	Victoria College	130	130	130	130	130	130
142-0265	Hunterhouse College	100	100	100	100	100	100
Boy's Schools							
142-0020	Campbell College	140	140	140	140	140	140
142-0021	St Mary's Christian Brothers' Grammar School	175	175	175	175	175	175
142-0027	Royal Belfast Academical Institution	154	154	154	154	150	150
142-0030	St Malachy's College	150	150	150	150	150	150
South-Eastern Education and Library Board							
Co-Educational Schools							
441-0063	Regent House School	210	210	210	210	210	210

		2003/2004 Approved Admissions Number	2004/2005 Approved Admissions Number	2005/2006 Approved Admissions Number	2006/2007 Approved Admissions Number	2007/2008 Approved Admissions Number	2008/2009 Approved Admissions Number
441-0085	Down High School	128	128	128	128	128	128
442-0044	Sullivan Upper School	150	150	150	150	150	150
442-0050	Friends' School	140	140	140	140	140	140
442-0051	Wallace High School	170	170	170	170	170	170
442-0259	Our Lady & St Patrick's College	180	180	180	180	180	180
Girls' Schools							
441-0097	Glenlola Collegiate School	157	157	157	157	157	157
442-0086	Assumption Grammar School, Ballynahinch	135	135	130	125	120	120
Boys' Schools							
442-0015	Bangor Grammar School	136	136	136	136	136	136
442-0088	St Patrick's Grammar School, Downpatrick	110	110	96	96	96	96

Post-Primary Schools

Mr Burns asked the Minister of Education (i) for a breakdown of pupils first preference choices for all post-primary schools in the North Eastern Education and Library Board; (ii) how many places were available at each school; (iii) how many pupils selected each individual school; and (iv) how many pupils selected each individual school, broken down by transfer procedure grade, in each of the last 3 years. (AQW 7902/08)

The Minister of Education: Soláthraíonn na táblaí thíos an t-eolas a iarradh. Soláthraíonn an chéad tábla (i) briseadh síos chéad rogha na ndaltaí do gach iar-bhunscóil i mBord Oideachais & Leabharlann an Oirthuaiscirt; (ii) líon na n-áiteanna atá ar fáil i ngach scoil; agus (iii) líon na ndaltaí a roghnaigh gach scoil.

The tables below provide the requested information. The first table provides (i) breakdown of pupils' first preference choices for all post-primary schools in the North-Eastern Education & Library Board; (ii) the number of places available at each school; and (iii) the number of pupils that selected each school. This last figure in this table is the sum of the number of pupils who expressed a preference for the school taking account of all (not just first) preferences. Please note that as applicants express preferences for more than one school the same applicant may feature in the figures for more than one school. The next three tables break this last group down by Transfer Procedure grade in each of the last 3 years.

2008/09

- (i) breakdown of pupils first-preference choices for all post-primary schools in the NEELB area
- (ii) the number of places available
- (iii) the number of pupils that selected each school

Name of School	(i) First Preference Applications	(i) First Preference by Transfer Grade							(ii) No. of Places Available	(iii) No. of pupils that selected each school
		A	B1	B2	C1	C2	D	Others		
Garvagh High School	33						14	19	70	35
Magherafelt High School	74	1			1	6	11	55	100	95

Name of School	(i) First Preference Applications	(i) First Preference by Transfer Grade							(ii) No. of Places Available	(iii) No. of pupils that selected each school
		A	B1	B2	C1	C2	D	Others		
Larne High School	72				1	4	24	43	135	104
Maghera High School	12					2	2	8	70	14
Carrickfergus College	117			2	11	13	43	48	160	146
Ballycastle High School	58		4	3	2	6	7	36	92	62
Ballymoney High School	120	4	1	1	2	10	27	75	130	130
Ballyclare Secondary School	180	6	1	2	12	25	84	50	180	234
Cullybackey High School	75			1	3	1	20	50	130	132
Monkstown Community School	129			1	1	8	55	64	164	142
Glengormley High School	119		1	1	5	12	59	41	210	174
Parkhall College	108		1		1	6	48	52	150	145
Dunclug College	92				1	3	35	53	110	131
Dunluce School	106				3	1	32	70	110	109
Downshire School	88	2			7	8	47	24	160	147
Ballee Community High School	40					1	17	22	100	73
Newtownabbey Community High School	29				1	1	10	17	130	29
Coleraine College	34						8	26	103	36
St Aloysius' High School, Cushendall	4						1	3	52	9
St Comgall's High School, Larne	17						2	15	140	27
Our Lady of Lourdes High School	23				2		8	13	80	33
St Patrick's College, Ballymena	58	1	1	1	1	4	20	30	150	89
St Joseph's High School, Coleraine	36						10	26	98	56
St Colm's High School	67	5	1	3	2	1	6	49	68	71
St Mary's College	37			1	2	1	7	26	70	46

Name of School	(i) First Preference Applications	(i) First Preference by Transfer Grade							(ii) No. of Places Available	(iii) No. of pupils that selected each school
		A	B1	B2	C1	C2	D	Others		
St Paul's College	54	1	2	5	1	3	8	34	54	63
St Pius X High School	154	9	6	9	8	8	28	86	140	173
Edmund Rice College	103	2			3	3	29	66	120	122
Cross & Passion College, Ballycastle	128	6		1	5	3	17	96	130	135
St Patrick's College, Maghera	190	12	9	8	15	10	28	108	190	200
St Benedict's College	77			1	3		25	48	100	95
Crumlin Integrated College	39	1		2	1	1	9	25	75	50
Slemish College, Ballymena	203	16	8	16	10	17	76	60	120	268
North-Coast Integrated College	66	1					23	42	80	73
Ulidia Integrated College	119	3	2	1	5	8	47	53	80	144
Sperrin Integrated College	81	4	1	1	2	4	19	50	80	116
Ballyclare High School	220	140	27	22	18	11	1	1	186	253
Coleraine High School	107	41	13	12	16	13	10	2	120	135
Carrickfergus Grammar School	125	73	19	20	7	2	1	3	116	140
Antrim Grammar School	147	61	15	21	20	18	8	4	105	184
Cambridge House Grammar	185	36	17	24	35	36	35	2	150	268
St Louis' Grammar School, Ballymena	195	93	26	29	24	8	9	6	139	209
Ballymena Academy	212	155	27	20	6	2	1	1	176	220
Dalriada School	163	114	15	13	10	6		5	125	163
Coleraine Academical Institution	109	30	8	10	17	13	30	1	125	126
Loreto College	147	82	17	17	13	11	5	2	120	160
Larne Grammar School	130	56	11	21	17	16	9		110	156
Rainey Endowed School	122	64	12	15	15	9	6	1	100	132

Name of School	(i) First Preference Applications	(i) First Preference by Transfer Grade							(ii) No. of Places Available	(iii) No. of pupils that selected each school
		A	B1	B2	C1	C2	D	Others		
Dominican College	101	29	10	10	15	11	21	5	69	116
Belfast High School	173	104	27	23	10	5	3	1	136	200
St Mary's Grammar School, Magherafelt	171	146	13	8	3	1			153	176
St Macnissi's College	96	32	10	10	12	8	21	3	90	107

(iv) the number of pupils that selected each school, broken down by transfer procedure grade for 2008/09

Name of School	(iv) No. of pupils that selected each school	(iv) Broken down by Transfer Grade						
		A	B1	B2	C1	C2	D	Others
Garvagh High School	35						16	19
Magherafelt High School	95	1			7	13	14	60
Larne High School	104				3	17	37	47
Maghera High School	14				1	2	2	9
Carrickfergus College	146			3	15	18	57	53
Ballycastle High School	62		4	3	3	7	9	36
Ballymoney High School	130	4	1	3	4	13	29	76
Ballyclare Secondary School	234	6	1	8	31	44	95	49
Cullybackey High School	132			1	5	21	47	58
Monkstown Community School	142			4	4	12	57	65
Glengormley High School	174		1	7	19	24	77	46
Parkhall College	145		1	1	7	19	60	57
Dunclug College	131				4	17	53	57
Dunluce School	109				3	2	35	69
Downshire School	147	2	1	5	16	16	72	35

Name of School	(iv) No. of pupils that selected each school	(iv) Broken down by Transfer Grade						
		A	B1	B2	C1	C2	D	Others
Ballee Community High School	73				3	7	35	28
Newtownabbey Community High School	29				1	1	10	17
Coleraine College	36						11	25
St Aloysius' High School, Cushendall	9						5	4
St Comgall's High School, Larne	27						2	16
Our Lady of Lourdes High School	33			1	2	5	11	14
St Patrick's College, Ballymena	89	1	1	4	5	6	33	39
St Joseph's High School, Coleraine	56					4	25	27
St Colm's High School	71	5	1	3	2	2	6	52
St Mary's College	46		1	1	2	2	7	33
St Paul's College	63	1	2	7	3	4	11	35
St Pius X High School	173	9	7	12	14	10	33	88
Edmund Rice College	122	2		2	9	8	34	67
Cross & Passion College, Ballycastle	135	6		3	8	4	18	96
St Patrick's College, Maghera	200	12	9	10	19	12	30	108
St Benedict's College	95			2	8	3	32	50
Crumlin Integrated College	50	2		3	1	5	13	26
Slemish College, Ballymena	268	16	10	21	17	40	101	63

Name of School	(iv) No. of pupils that selected each school	(iv) Broken down by Transfer Grade						
		A	B1	B2	C1	C2	D	Others
North-Coast Integrated College	73	1				1	28	43
Ulidia Integrated College	144	3	2	4	11	14	53	57
Sperrin Integrated College	116	5	2	1	8	10	36	54
Ballyclare High School	253	140	27	34	30	16	4	2
Coleraine High School	135	41	17	15	22	20	17	3
Carrickfergus Grammar School	140	73	19	30	9	4	2	3
Antrim Grammar School	184	61	15	33	30	29	11	5
Cambridge House Grammar	268	36	23	48	45	52	59	5
St Louis' Grammar School, Ballymena	209	93	27	30	25	12	13	9
Ballymena Academy	220	155	27	21	6	7	3	1
Dalriada School	163	114	15	12	10	7	1	4
Coleraine Academical Institution	126	30	10	15	19	18	30	4
Loreto College	160	82	18	16	17	14	10	3
Larne Grammar School	156	56	11	28	26	25	10	
Rainey Endowed School	132	65	15	17	16	11	7	1
Dominican College	116	28	10	11	19	16	27	5
Belfast High School	200	104	27	32	18	10	6	3
St Mary's Grammar School, Magherafelt	176	146	13	8	4	2	2	1
St Macnissi's College	107	32	10	15	15	11	22	2

(iv) the number of pupils that selected each school, broken down by transfer procedure grade for 2007/08

Name of School	(iv) No. of pupils that selected each school	(iv) Broken down by Transfer Grade						
		A	B1	B2	C1	C2	D	Others
Garvagh High School	15						5	10
Magherafelt High School	79		2		3	5	20	49
Larne High School	66				2	2	33	29
Maghera High School	20						6	14
Carrickfergus College	135			6	11	15	59	44
Ballycastle High School	58	1		3	1	3	10	40
Ballymoney High School	134	1	1	4	9	8	38	73
Ballyclare Secondary School	204	1	1	1	27	20	100	54
Crumlin High School	65				2	6	16	41
Cullybackey High School	143	1		1	3	8	67	63
Monkstown Community School	118	1		1	5	8	46	57
Glengormley High School	135			3	5	13	73	41
Parkhall College	127				3	9	62	53
Dunclug College	87				1	8	40	38
Dunluce School	92				2	4	43	43
Downshire School	144			5	11	8	77	43
Ballee Community High School	57					3	31	23
Newtownabbey Community High School	27					1	7	19
Coleraine College	43						17	26
St Aloysius' High School, Cushendall	1							1
St Comgall's High School, Larne	31						14	17

Name of School	(iv) No. of pupils that selected each school	(iv) Broken down by Transfer Grade						
		A	B1	B2	C1	C2	D	Others
Our Lady of Lourdes High School	38		1	1	1	3	10	22
St Patrick's College, Ballymena	62			2	2	2	22	34
St Joseph's High School, Coleraine	39						27	12
St Colm's High School	59		2	1	3	2	9	42
St Mary's College	59	2	1	1	2	3	9	41
St Paul's College	50	1		1		3	10	35
St Pius X High School	157	6	9	13	9	13	35	72
Edmund Rice College	104				7	7	39	51
Cross & Passion College, Ballycastle	107	5	1	4	3	1	25	68
St Patrick's College, Maghera	217	21	3	10	11	11	34	127
St Benedict's College	90	2		2	3	6	41	36
Slemish College, Ballymena	250	15	12	13	12	18	117	63
North-Coast Integrated College	77		1			2	35	39
Ulidia Integrated College	153	1	3	3	3	8	57	78
Sperrin Integrated College	85		1		2	7	30	45
Ballyclare High School	222	129	25	28	21	14	5	
Coleraine High School	118	38	17	19	11	14	17	2
Carrickfergus Grammar School	149	77	19	28	16	8	1	
Antrim Grammar School	141	54	14	19	21	18	13	2

Name of School	(iv) No. of pupils that selected each school	(iv) Broken down by Transfer Grade						
		A	B1	B2	C1	C2	D	Others
Cambridge House Grammar	222	29	16	24	37	46	64	6
St Louis' Grammar School, Ballymena	136	73	18	13	15	10	7	
Ballymena Academy	188	139	18	19	7	4		1
Dalriada School	178	104	20	25	12	7	6	4
Coleraine Academical Institution	135	31	9	20	16	19	36	4
Loreto College	136	73	16	19	6	5	15	2
Larne Grammar School	123	55	10	15	12	16	12	3
Rainey Endowed School	125	61	17	14	15	11	6	1
Dominican College	105	28	9	20	12	5	31	
Belfast High School	165	96	25	18	10	9	4	3
St Mary's Grammar School, Magherafelt	201	146	30	15	3	3	1	3
St Macnissi's College	101	43	4	11	8	16	18	1

(iv) the number of pupils that selected each school, broken down by transfer procedure grade for 2006/07

Name of School	(iv) No. of pupils that selected each school	(iv) Broken down by Transfer Grade						
		A	B1	B2	C1	C2	D	Others
Garvagh High School	29				1		9	19
Magherafelt High School	70	1	1		2	6	19	41
Larne High School	68					3	35	30
Maghera High School	25					2	10	13
Carrickfergus College	168	1		10	9	29	72	47
Ballycastle High School	53	1	1		1		9	41

Name of School	(iv) No. of pupils that selected each school	(iv) Broken down by Transfer Grade						
		A	B1	B2	C1	C2	D	Others
Ballymoney High School	149		3	2	9	13	37	85
Ballyclare Secondary School	222			24	18	31	100	49
Crumlin High School	55				4	5	9	37
Cullybackey High School	112	2	1		2	6	47	54
Monkstown Community School	129			4	8	10	47	60
Glengormley High School	191		1	12	15	21	73	69
Parkhall College	152				7	12	68	65
Dunclug College	109	1			1	6	49	52
Dunluce School	95		1	1		9	32	52
Downshire School	132			12	7	16	57	40
Ballee Community High School	50				1	2	21	26
Newtownabbey Community High School	32				1	2	7	22
Coleraine College	53				1	1	7	44
St Aloysius' High School, Cushendall	14	1					5	8
St Comgall's High School, Larne	17						6	11
Our Lady of Lourdes High School	36	1	1		2	2	8	22
St Patrick's College, Ballymena	78			2	1	9	39	27
St Joseph's High School, Coleraine	55				1	8	29	17
St Colm's High School	74	3	3	2	4	7	16	39
St Mary's College	41	3		1	1	3	6	27
St Paul's College	61	4	1	7			15	34

Name of School	(iv) No. of pupils that selected each school	(iv) Broken down by Transfer Grade						
		A	B1	B2	C1	C2	D	Others
St Pius X High School	149	1	6	7	9	12	26	88
Edmund Rice College	82		1	1		6	24	50
Cross & Passion College, Ballycastle	121	5	3	2	6	3	16	86
St Patrick's College, Maghera	187	16	9	18	5	14	20	105
St Benedict's College (amalgamation of St Olcan's & St Malachy's High Schools)	85		1		3	13	28	40
Slemish College, Ballymena	231	31	9	18	14	19	99	41
North-Coast Integrated College	108	2				4	29	73
Ulidia Integrated College	125	5	2	5	8	10	53	42
Sperrin Integrated College	82	1		1	7	6	23	44
Ballyclare High School	296	145	32	52	28	23	11	5
Coleraine High School	145	60	20	28	12	14	9	2
Carrickfergus Grammar School	161	69	30	38	8	11	4	1
Antrim Grammar School	155	61	13	21	24	23	11	2
Cambridge House Grammar	178	24	14	42	30	38	26	4
St Louis' Grammar School, Ballymena	187	90	20	28	18	19	10	2
Ballymena Academy	188	138	29	10	4	4		3
Dalriada School	133	85	16	8	11	4	5	4

Name of School	(iv) No. of pupils that selected each school	(iv) Broken down by Transfer Grade						
		A	B1	B2	C1	C2	D	Others
Coleraine Academical Institution	124	40	11	16	19	15	23	
Loreto College	184	97	26	23	12	13	9	4
Larne Grammar School	121	57	9	23	16	10	6	
Rainey Endowed School	107	63	15	13	12	2	2	
Dominican College	116	26	8	11	17	28	24	2
Belfast High School	218	104	27	38	19	17	9	4
St Mary's Grammar School, Magherafelt	196	155	25	11	4		1	
St Macnissi's College	104	37	8	13	14	13	17	2

Sustainable Schools Policy

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education to outline her Department's sustainable schools policy. (AQW 7990/08)

The Minister of Education: The draft policy on Sustainable Schools identifies six criteria which should be considered in assessing a school's viability, namely:

- Quality Educational Experience
- Stable Enrolment Trends
- Sound Financial Position
- Strong Leadership and Management
- Accessibility
- Strong Links with the Community.

For each of the criteria a number of indicators are identified as relevant to sustainability and are intended to help signal whether action needs to be taken.

The criteria will not be used in a mechanistic fashion. Each case should be considered on its individual circumstances but the over-riding consideration must be the quality of education that a school provides for the children.

Tá sé de rún agam an doiciméad polasaí i gcomhair an Pholasaí um Scoileanna Inmharthana, bunaithe ar na critéir seo, a sholáthar don Choiste Oideachais go

luath lena gcuid tuairimí a fháil; foilseofar an polasaí ina dhiaidh sin.

I intend to provide the policy document for the Sustainable Schools Policy, based on these criteria, to the Education Committee shortly for their views, after which the policy will be published.

Education and Skills Authority

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education what progress has been made on the establishment of the Education and Skills Authority. (AQW 7991/08)

The Minister of Education: Progress to ensure the establishment of the Education and Skills Authority (ESA) is ongoing. Departmental officials continue to work closely and engage with key staff in education organisations to design the key service delivery models for the ESA.

Dréachtaíodh Bille Oideachais, a sholáthróidh an creat reachtúil chun an ESA a bhunú mar chomhlacht reachtúil faoi Aibreán 2009. Tugadh an cháipéis sin do chomhghleacaithe san Fheidhmeannas lena gcuid barúlacha a fháil, agus táthar ag súil go dtabharfar an Bille seo isteach sa Tionól chomh luath agus is féidir.

An Education Bill, which will provide the legislative framework to establish the ESA as a statutory body by April 2009 has been drafted and

circulated to Executive colleagues for comment, and it is hoped that this Bill will be introduced to the Assembly as soon as possible.

School Meal Tickets

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Education what consideration she has given to changing the school meal tickets issued to children whose parents are on benefits, so that no distinction can be made between school meal tickets. (AQW 8033/08)

The Minister of Education: The Education and Library Boards are responsible for the award of free school meals, and have been set a strategic target by the Department to increase the uptake of free school meals by means such as raising the awareness of entitlement and addressing the issues around why parents do not take up their entitlement.

I appreciate that the perceived stigma associated with free meals is a sensitive area and in response a number of schools have introduced cashless systems. Outside this system, the use of passes or tickets is normally a choice made by the schools. Spreagfaidh Roinn s'agamsa na Boird Oideachais agus Leabharlann chun oibriú le scoileanna le díriú ar fheiliúnacht a gcóras riaracháin.

My Department will encourage the Education and Library Boards to work with schools to address the appropriateness of their administrative systems.

Primary Languages Programme

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education how many of the 65 tutors appointed to the primary languages programme will be (i) fully qualified teachers; and (ii) qualified teachers of Irish and Spanish. (AQW 8042/08)

The Minister of Education: All tutors appointed to the primary languages programme must have excellent oral language competence in Spanish or Irish, which is assessed at interview. As the participation of the classroom teacher is an important aspect of the programme a teaching qualification is not essential. Teachers will be working alongside tutors in delivering language lessons, thus ensuring high standards and quality learning experiences for pupils.

Mar sin féin, thuig mé i gcónaí go dtugann an clár seo deiseanna do mhúinteoirí atá ag cuardach oibre le cur lena gcuid taithí agus tá mé sásta gur múinteoirí láncháilithe iad 22 de na 65 theagascóir a ceapadh ar chlár teangacha na mbunscoileanna, lena n-áirítear 11 mhúinteoir cáilithe Spáinnise agus 3 múinteoirí cáilithe Gaeilge.

However, I have always recognised that this programme provides opportunities for teachers looking for work to build up their experience and I am pleased to note that, of the 65 tutors appointed to the primary languages programme, 22 are fully qualified teachers, including 11 qualified teachers of Spanish and three qualified teachers of Irish.

Primary Languages Programme

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education how many schools will be serviced by each of the 65 tutors appointed to the primary languages programme; and how much time each will be allocated and at what frequency. (AQW 8043/08)

The Minister of Education: Go dtí seo, tá suim léirithe ag 324 scoil i gclár teangacha na mbunscoileanna agus cuireadh teagascóirí ar fáil do 284 acu. Cuirfear níos mó teagascóirí ar fáil do scoileanna sa chuid eile den scoilbhliain seo agus ag tús na chéad scoilbhliana eile.

To date, 324 schools have expressed an interest in the primary languages programme and tutors have been allocated to 284. More schools will be allocated tutors in the remainder of this school year and the beginning of next.

Tutors have been allocated between two and 19 schools each, depending on factors such as part-time/full-time availability and location. Each school is allocated one hour per week of language tutor time.

Primary Languages Programme

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education what training will be available to permanent teachers in primary schools participating in the primary languages programme. (AQW 8051/08)

The Minister of Education: Ceann de na spriocanna atá ag Clár Teangacha na mBunscoileanna ná tacú le múinteoirí bunscoile a muinín a fhorbairt maidir le teangacha a theagasc. Oibríonn múinteoirí ranga in éineacht leis an teagascóir leis an cheacht a chur i gcrích, agus cuirtear acmhainní teagaisc ar fáil dóibh leis sin a éascú.

One of the objectives of the Primary Languages Programme is to support primary teachers in developing their confidence in language teaching. Classroom teachers work alongside the tutor to deliver the lesson, and are provided with teaching resources to facilitate this. Resources were disseminated at awareness-raising events and further opportunities for professional development will be provided for teachers as the programme develops. Teachers will also be supported by their Link Officer from the local Education and Library Board.

Primary Languages Programme

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education how long the primary languages programme will last. (AQW 8052/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá Clár Teangacha na mBunscoileanna á thabhairt isteach ón scoilbhliain 2007/08, agus tá sé beartaithe go dtabharfaidh sé tacaíocht inmharthana do bhunscoileanna sa bhliain 2008/09 agus ina dhiaidh sin. Measfar an clár agus beidh forbairtí san am atá le teacht ag brath ar an eolas sin.

The primary languages programme, being introduced from the 2007/08 school year, is intended to provide sustainable support for primary schools in 2008/09 and beyond. The programme will be evaluated and this will inform future developments.

I will also be considering the best means of providing continuing support for languages in primary schools, in light of the recommendations I am expecting shortly from joint Queens University-University of Ulster Subject Centre for Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies on a languages strategy for the North of Ireland.

Primary Languages Programme

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education what resources she has allocated to the primary languages programme. (AQW 8053/08)

The Minister of Education: Go dtí seo, thug mé £455,000 do chlár teangacha na mbunscoileanna; clúdaíonn sé sin an tréimhse suas le Márta 2009.

To date I have allocated £455, 000 to the primary languages programme, covering the period up to March 2009. As a result of the Budget 2007 outcome, I have also secured additional funding for primary languages up to and including March 2011, and in the coming months allocations will be made to support an expansion of the programme in 2008-09. Beyond this, when current work to develop a wider strategy for the promotion of language learning in schools has been completed, I will, in the context of this strategy, be announcing how I intend to build on the initial stages of the programme in future years.

Primary Languages Programme

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education what role the Education and Library Boards will play in the delivery of the primary languages programme. (AQW 8054/08)

The Minister of Education: Bunaíodh Grúpa um Theangacha sna Bunscoileanna, ina bhfuil ionadaithe

ó na Boird Oideachais agus Leabharlann agus comhlachtaí eile oideachais, le soláthar an chláir a bhainistiú i scoileanna.

A Primary Languages Group, consisting of representatives from the Education and Library Boards and other education bodies, has been established to manage delivery of the programme in schools. The Boards are responsible for chairing the group and the South Eastern Education and Library Board, as lead Board, employs the language tutors. The Group is also providing training and guidance materials for teachers and tutors, and monitoring the Programme on an ongoing basis, including reporting on its progress to the Partnership Management Board and the Department.

Child-Minding Places Available

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Education how many child-minding places have been available in each parliamentary constituency in each of the last three years. (AQW 8059/08)

The Minister of Education: Léiríonn na figiúirí atá ar fáil líon na bhfeighlithe páistí atá cláraithe leis na hIontaobhais Sláinte agus Chúraim Shóisialta mar seo a leanas

The figures available indicate the number of childminders registered with the Health and Social Care Trusts as:

- 3,730 in 2005
- 3,627 in 2006
- 3,567 in 2007

Figures are not yet available for the current year. Statistics on the basis requested are not held per parliamentary constituency.

Sports in Schools

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education if she is satisfied that school pupils have opportunities to enjoy a wide range of sports. (AQW 8071/08)

The Minister of Education: Faoi na scoileanna aonair atá sé réimse na n-imeachtaí spóirt a sholáthróidh siad a chinntiú agus tá mé sásta go bhfuil deis ag daltaí sult a bhaint as réimse leathan spóirt ar scoil; tá go leor deiseanna taobh amuigh de scoil fosta a chuireann lena gcuid roghanna.

It is a matter for individual schools to determine the range of sporting activities they will provide and I am satisfied that pupils have the opportunity to enjoy a wide range of sports in school, supplemented in many cases by opportunities outside school.

I place a very high importance on our young people having more opportunities to take part in physical activity and sport, especially in light of the rising levels of childhood obesity. That is why I have introduced my Curriculum Sports Programme, to give our youngest pupils more opportunities to develop their physical literacy skills through Gaelic games or soccer. My Department will also be working with the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure as part of the ten year Strategy for Sport and Physical Recreation, to ensure our young people have wider access to a range of sporting opportunities.

Towerview Primary School

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education how many fully-funded and part-funded nursery places are available at Towerview Primary School. (AQW 8073/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá 52 áit pháirtaimseartha ar fáil ag Bunscoil Towerview; tá gach ceann acu lánmhaoinithe.

There are 52 part-time places available at Towerview Primary School, all of which are fully-funded.

Admissions Criteria in Schools

Mr O'Loan asked the Minister of Education if the entry criteria for a controlled school are approved by the relevant Education and Library Board. (AQW 8079/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá na critéir iontrála do scoileanna faoi réir Alt 16 de Education 1997 and the Secondary Schools (Admissions Criteria) Regulations 1997. Níl aon cheangal ar na Boird Oideachais agus Leabharlann a leithéid de chritéir a fhaomhadh.

The admissions criteria for schools are subject to Article 16 of the Education 1997 and the Secondary Schools (Admissions Criteria) Regulations 1997. There is no requirement for the Education and Library Boards to approve such criteria.

Montessori Teaching Qualification

Mr Doherty asked the Minister of Education if her Department will give recognition to the Montessori teaching qualification for the purposes of employment as a learning support or resource teacher. (AQW 8114/08)

The Minister of Education: Ba mhaith liom aird an chomhalta a dhíriú ar na freagraí a thug mé ar na ceisteanna a chuir sé cheana AQW 1380/08 agus AQW

1438/08; foilsíodh na freagraí sin sa Tuarascáil Oifigiúil ar 23 Samhain 2007.

I refer the member to my answers to his previous questions AQW 1380/08 and AQW 1438/08 published in the Official Report on 23 November 2007.

Bangor Academy

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Education to confirm whether work on the new Bangor Academy school building was completed on the day specified or continued beyond this date. (AQW 8121/08)

The Minister of Education: Thug Príomhfheidhmeannach Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlann an Oirdheiscirt le fios go bhfuair an foirgneamh ag Acadamh agus Coláiste Séú Bliain Bheannchair lánseirbhís ar 30 Aibreán 2008 de réir an dáta a sonraíodh sa chlár a síníodh laistigh den chonradh dar dáta 1 Meán Fómhair 2006.

The Chief Executive of the South Eastern Education and Library Board has advised that the building at Bangor Academy and Sixth Form College achieved service availability on 30 April 2008 as per the day specified in the programme signed within the contract dated 1 September 2006.

Bangor Academy

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Education if teachers were required to use their own cars to transport equipment and furniture to the new Bangor Academy school; and why the PPP/PFI company did not complete this work. (AQW 8122/08)

The Minister of Education: Dheimhnhigh Príomhfheidhmeannach Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlann an Oirdheiscirt nach raibh ar mhúinteoirí aon ábhair a scinceáil; bhí iallach dlíthiúil ar an chonraitheoir sin a dhéanamh. I gcás gur iompair múinteoirí nithe, a rogha féin a bhí ann.

The Chief Executive of the South Eastern Education and Library Board has confirmed that teachers were not required to decant any materials; the contractor was legally obliged to do this. Where teachers did transport items it was of their own choice.

Bangor Academy

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Education if areas of Bangor Academy school are out of bounds for pupils and whether work remains to be completed at the school. (AQW 8123/08)

The Minister of Education: Thug Príomhfheidhmeannach Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlann an Oirdheiscirt le fios go bhfuil an ceantar ar chúl Acadamh Bheannchair, atá mar chomhéadan idir oibreacha Chéim I, críochnaithe ar 30 Aibreán 2008, agus oibreacha Chéim II, thar teorainn do dhaltáí ar chúiseanna sláinte agus sábháilteachta. Tá sconsa thart air agus fanfaidh sé ansin go dtí go gcríochnófar oibreacha Chéim II níos moille i mbliana.

The Chief Executive of the South Eastern Education and Library Board has advised that the area to the rear of Bangor Academy, which is the interface between Phase I works, completed on 30 April 2008, and Phase II works, is out of bounds to pupils on the grounds of health & safety. It is fenced off and will remain so until Phase II works are completed later this year.

Bangor Academy

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Education to detail all faults that have been registered in relation to the completion of work at the new Bangor Academy school building. (AQW 8124/08)

The Minister of Education: Thug Príomhfheidhmeannach Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlann an Oirdheiscirt le fios dom go ndrécataítear liostaí fabhtanna don fhoirgneamh, mar a tharlaíonn le gach tionscadal tógála agus tugann an conraitheoir fúthu. Is obair leanúnach atá ann. Cuirfear cóip den liosta mionsonraithe fabhtanna ar fáil don Aire.

The Chief Executive of the South Eastern Education and Library Board has advised that as with all construction projects snagging lists are drawn up for the building and addressed by the contractor. This is ongoing work. A copy of the detailed snagging list will be made available to the Member.

Bangor Academy

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Education if teaching budgets and teaching days have been lost as a result of the failure of work being completed on time at the new Bangor Academy school building. (AQW 8125/08)

The Minister of Education: Thug Príomhfheidhmeannach Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlann an Oirdheiscirt le fios gur cheadaigh an Roinn Oideachais laethanta eisceachtúla dúnta d'Acadamh Bheannchair ionas go dtiocfadh leo bogadh chuig an fhoirgneamh úr agus ní de thairbhe nár críochnaíodh an obair in am.

The Chief Executive of the South Eastern Education and Library Board has advised that exceptional closure

days were granted by the Department of Education to Bangor Academy for the move to the new building and not as a result of the work not being completed on time.

Post-Primary Schools in North Down

Dr Farry asked the Minister of Education what plans she has to increase the authorised levels of enrolment for post-primary schools in the North Down constituency, to address the lack of places for local year 8 pupils. (AQW 8189/08)

The Minister of Education: Níl aon phleananna ann na leibhéil údaraithe iontrála d'iar-bhunscoileanna a mhéadú i dtoghcheantar Thuaisceart an Dúin, ar an ábhar go bhfuil soláthar cuí ann do dhaltáí sa cheantar sin atá ag aistriú chuig iar-bhunscoileanna i Meán Fómhair 2008.

There are no plans to increase the authorised levels of enrolment for post-primary schools in the North Down constituency, as there is adequate provision for pupils in that area transferring to post-primary schools in September 2008.

The South-Eastern Education and Library Board have advised that there are 45 children currently unplaced who have addresses in the North Down area. However, there are 252 places available in schools which serve pupils living in the area.

School Enrolments

Mr Gallagher asked the Minister of Education to detail, for each Education and Library Board area, the total number of (i) primary schools; (ii) primary schools with current enrolment of less than 100 pupils; (iii) post-primary schools; and (iv) post-primary schools with current enrolment of less than 300 pupils. (AQW 8200/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá an t-eolas a iarradh mionsonraithe sa tábla faoi iamh.

The information requested is detailed in the attached table.

TOTAL PRIMARY AND POST PRIMARY SCHOOLS AND PRIMARY SCHOOLS WITH AN ENROLMENT LESS THAN 100 PUPILS AND POST PRIMARY SCHOOLS WITH AN ENROLMENT LESS THAN 300 PUPILS – 2007/08

ELB	Primary1		Post primary	
	No. of schools	No. of schools with enrolment of less than 100 pupils ²	No. of schools	No. of schools with enrolment of less than 300 pupils ²
BELB	96	9	38	5

ELB	Primary1		Post primary	
	No. of schools	No. of schools with enrolment of less than 100 pupils ²	No. of schools	No. of schools with enrolment of less than 300 pupils ²
WELB	187	92	44	12
NEELB	212	79	52	8
SEELB	162	40	39	6
SELB	228	96	53	8
Total	885	316	226	39

Source: NI school census.

Notes:

1. Primary school enrolments include pupils in nursery, reception and year 1 – 7 classes. Preparatory Departments of grammar schools have also been included.
2. The schools with enrolments less than 100 and 300 pupils are included in total number of schools.

Alternative Education Projects in Schools

Ms J McCann asked the Minister of Education if alternative education projects, for example Satellite Supports for Schools, will be mainstreamed within the education continuum under the Education and Skills Authority. (AQW 8203/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá athbhreithniú á dhéanamh ag Roinn s'agamsa ar sholáthar oideachais mhalartaigh agus tá obair á déanamh le heiseamláir de sholáthar a fhorbairt a chuirfear i bhfeidhm trasna na mBord Oideachais agus Leabharlann ar fad.

My Department has been undertaking a review of alternative education provision and work is in hand to develop a model of provision which will apply across all Education and Library Board areas. The proposals will be the subject of public consultation later this year. I hope you will appreciate that, until this process has been completed, I am not in a position to outline the future model of provision.

Ministerial Commitments

Miss McIlveen asked the Minister of Education to detail her Ministerial commitments for Wednesday 11 June 2008. (AQW 8296/08)

The Minister of Education: Dé Céadaoin 11 Meitheamh, bhí na dualgais Aireachta seo a leanas orm:

On Wednesday 11 June, I had the following Ministerial commitments:

School visit - St Mary's PS, Divis Street, Belfast

School visit - Fleming Fulton Special School, Malone Road, Belfast

School visit - St Therese Nursery School, Poleglass, Belfast and

A meeting with Larne Borough Council at Larne Council Offices.

Ballymacash Primary School

Mr Poots asked the Minister of Education what plans her Department has to provide a new teaching block at Ballymacash Primary School, Lisburn, and to remove the mobiles currently on site. (AQW 8355/08)

The Minister of Education: Expenditure, funded by the Department for Employment and Learning, on English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses in Further Education colleges in each of the last 3 years for which validated data is available, was as follows:

2006/07	£1,469,297
2005/06	£865,059
2004/05	£691,628

Funding was also available within the New Deal programmes. However, it is not possible to identify this funding separately.

EMPLOYMENT AND LEARNING

Non-EU Students

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what grants are available for university study for students coming from outside the European Union, and in particular for those studying medicine. (AQW 7873/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning (Sir Reg Empey): Eligibility for student finance in Northern Ireland is determined by residence (and other) criteria which may be satisfied by any student regardless of their nationality or country of origin. The eligibility criteria is prescribed in the Education (Student Support) Regulations which stipulate that, in order to be eligible for maintenance grant support, students must have been ordinarily resident in the UK and Islands throughout the three year period preceding the first day of the academic year of the course. If this condition is met, students can apply for means tested maintenance grant support for all eligible higher education courses, including medicine.

Fees Increase

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Employment and Learning why the fees for non-vocational art classes at the Northern Regional College, Newtownabbey, have increased significantly for enrolment in September 2008. (AQW 7888/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

The Northern Regional College has confirmed that the hourly rate for its non-vocational courses at its Newtownabbey campus has not increased since last year. What has changed is the way in which the college can offer concessionary fees. For example, in the past it was common practice for colleges to offer age-based concessionary fees to senior citizens. However, the Employment Equality (Age) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006 (S.R No. 261) means that colleges are no longer able to offer concessionary fees to senior citizens on the basis of age alone for any of the courses they provide, including non-vocational courses. The Northern Regional College has also taken independent advice which has confirmed that it can no longer provide concessionary fees for non-vocational art classes on the basis of age, as the college would be treating those outside the age limits unfairly.

I would advise you that it is the responsibility of individual colleges to set the level of fees, including concessionary fees, for the courses they provide, and that my Department does not normally intervene in this process. However, the Department has been working closely with colleges on the specific issue of concessionary fees for older people. As a result, I can confirm that, like all FE colleges in Northern Ireland, the Northern Regional College has extended its normal means test criteria for offering concessionary fees to include those in receipt of Rates Relief. This has the potential to increase the number of older people who are entitled to claim concessionary fees, but in a way that is compliant with Age Legislation.

Team-Building Exercises

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what is the total cost incurred by the Department on away days or team-building exercises in each of the last five years. (AQW 7923/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

The total cost incurred by the Department on away days and team-building exercises in each of the last five years is set out in the following table.

	Total
April 2003 to March 2004	£51,399
April 2004 to March 2005	£50, 275
April 2005 to March 2006	£46,346

	Total
April 2006 to March 2007	£62,439
April 2007 to March 2008	£22,875

Team-Building Exercises

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many away days and team-building exercises have been organised by his Department for departmental staff in each of the last five years. (AQW 7924/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

The number of away days and team-building exercises organised by DEL is set out in the following table.

	Total
April 03 to March 04	19
April 04 to March 05	31
April 05 to March 06	27
April 06 to March 07	42
April 07 to March 08	40

Team-Building Exercises

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many staff hours have been taken up with departmental or cross-departmental away days, or team-building exercises, in each of the last five years. (AQW 8001/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

April 03 to March 06: Information was not kept in relation to the data requested during this period.

	Total staff hours based on a 7.5 hour day
April 06 to March 07	9412.5
April 07 to March 08	8655

Further Education Lecturers' Pay Dispute

Mr Ross asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on the further education lecturers' pay dispute. (AQW 8020/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

Agreement has been reached by Further Education college employers and the University & College Union (UCU) on an immediate suspension of industrial action by college lecturers and the proposed action by college

employers against staff who are not fulfilling their contractual obligations as a result of that industrial action. The suspension will last until December 2008 to allow employers and unions to agree a pay deal for 2008/09, and to address longer term pay and conditions issues with the assistance of the Labour Relations Agency.

Jobs in the Hospitality and Tourism Sector

Mr Ross asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what discussions (i) he has had; (ii) he plans to have, with the Minister of Enterprise Trade and Investment in relation to the number of jobs required in the hospitality and tourism sector; and what action has he taken to ensure that the demand for jobs in this area is met. (AQW 8021/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: The role of my Department is in relation to skills matters in the economy as a whole including the tourism and leisure sector which has 52,100 employee jobs. Whilst I have not had any specific discussions with the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Investment on job creation in the tourism sector there has been ongoing contact between officials in my Department and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment in relation to tourism skills matters. My department also works closely with People 1st, the Sector Skills Council for the tourism, hospitality and travel sector, which introduced the UK skills passport in Northern Ireland in January 2008.

Strabane Campus of the North West Regional College

Mrs McGill asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what plans he has to improve facilities at the Strabane Campus of the North West Regional College. (AQW 8179/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: As you are aware the former North West Institute had submitted proposals for a new build at its Strabane campus, and that the newly appointed North West Regional College's Senior Management Team and Governing Body are reviewing these proposals, which were submitted by their predecessors. Further decisions will be made when the College has updated its Estates Strategy, the objective of which is to clarify accommodation needs across all campuses. In the meantime, a £220k programme of maintenance and refurbishment works is due to commence at the Strabane campus in July 2008 with an estimated completion date of September 2008.

Belfast Metropolitan College

Mr Newton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what is the projected revenue to be generated from the sale of the Brunswick Street and College Square East campuses of the Belfast Metropolitan College. (AQW 8191/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: The Belfast Metropolitan College sites at College Sq East and Brunswick St will be sold on the open market when the new accommodation becomes available. In February 2008 the Land and Property Services Agency estimated a land value for both sites of £22.5m. Given the current volatility of the property market and the fact that the sites will not be sold until 2012 no attempt can be made to project the land value at that time.

Pensioners Attending Further Education Colleges

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what steps he is taking to protect concessionary fees for pensioners seeking to register for courses at further education colleges. (AQW 8217/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: You will be aware that, following the introduction of the Employment Equality (Age) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006 (S.R No. 261) on 1st October 2006, colleges are no longer able to offer concessionary fees to senior citizens on the basis of age alone. The Department has considered, with colleges, additional criteria that may be applied by colleges as part of their fees policies, and which could increase the number of senior citizens who would be entitled to concessionary fees in a way that is compliant with these regulations. The Department has identified the Rate Relief Scheme as another means tested benefit for deciding who is entitled to concessionary fees. This will add to existing "means tested" criteria such as learners in receipt of Income Support, Jobseekers Allowance (Income based), Guaranteed Pension Credit, learners holding an income based NHS Exemption Certificate, or learners on a low income. This has the potential to increase the number of pensioners who will be entitled to claim concessionary fees. All further education colleges in Northern Ireland have agreed that, as from the start of the 2008/09 academic year, they will adopt a consistent approach to the implementation of age legislation, and they are already using these criteria for the September 2008 intake to their courses.

Teacher Training

Mr Newton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to confirm whether negotiations in

relation to teacher training will focus on educational need and not specific educational vested interests.

(AQW 8247/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: I am committed to ensuring that teacher education is of the highest quality possible and that the primary role of the University Colleges is related strongly to teacher education. These issues will be the focus of my discussions on this important subject.

European Social Fund Programme

Mr Newton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning if he will (i) apply a demand-led policy/strategy when considering match funding for European Union measure 1.1 European Social Fund projects; and (ii) scrutinise applications to ensure there is fairness and equality of funding opportunity and allocation.

(AQW 8248/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: As you will be aware, the Northern Ireland European Social Fund (NIESF) Programme 2007-2013 will provide projects with 65% programme funding, made up of 40% from EU Funds and 25% contribution from my Department. The remaining 35% 'match funding' must be secured independently from other public sources by the project promoters. This is the same procedure used for previous ESF Programmes. It has been made clear to all projects throughout both the consultation and approval process for the NIESF Programme that the offer of Programme funding is conditional on the project obtaining the remaining 35% matched funding from whatever other public sector sources. On 29 January 2008 officials in the Department of Finance & Personnel notified other Departments about the match funding needs forecast by successful applicants. Regarding the provision of match funding by my Department, DEL may contribute to match funding when a project meets specific policy objectives of the Department, for example the Disability Advisory Service will match-fund a number of projects during the Programme period. Projects offered funding under Priority One of the NIESF Programme were selected through a publicly advertised competition for available EU funding. Applications were selected on merit through an open and independently scored selection process using selection criteria which had been approved by the Competitiveness and Employment Monitoring Committee.

Adult Learners at Further Education Colleges

Mr Attwood asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many adult learners pursued Continuing Education courses at Further Education Colleges in the last five academic years, broken

down by age and full-time and part-time courses.

(AQW 8262/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: The number of adult learners who pursued Continuing Education courses (defined as all provision) at NI Further Education Colleges in the last five academic years for which data are available is shown in the tables below.

Adult Learners in the Northern Ireland Further Education Sector by Age Group and Mode of Attendance from 2002/03 to 2006/07

	2002/03		
Age Group	Full time	Part Time	Total
18 to 24	6,910	18,296	25,206
25 to 39	621	30,592	31,213
40 to 59	244	26,970	27,214
60 & over	25	14,787	14,812
Overall	7,800	90,645	98,445

	2003/04		
Age Group	Full time	Part Time	Total
18 to 24	9,077	19,876	28,953
25 to 39	1,116	35,804	36,920
40 to 59	431	31,826	32,257
60 & over	49	17,661	17,710
Overall	10,673	105,167	115,840

	2004/05		
Age Group	Full time	Part Time	Total
18 to 24	8,779	21,528	30,327
25 to 39	1,071	36,871	37,942
40 to 59	376	33,220	33,596
60 & over	41	18,596	18,637
Overall	10,287	110,215	120,502

	2005/06		
Age Group	Full time	Part Time	Total
18 to 24	10,043	20,509	30,552
25 to 39	1,265	35,367	36,632
40 to 59	449	31,724	32,173
60 & over	43	17,538	17,581
Overall	11,800	105,138	116,938

Age Group	2006/07		
	Full time	Part Time	Total
18 to 24	10,111	20,083	30,194
25 to 39	1,132	32,962	34,094
40 to 59	392	28,710	29,102
60 & over	51	15,405	15,456
Overall	11,686	97,1600	108,846

Source: Further Education Statistical Record

Queen's University Belfast and Stranmillis University College

Mr Attwood asked the Minister for Employment and Learning (i) if his Department received a copy of a September 2007 Queen's University proposal for the merger of Queen's University Belfast and Stranmillis University College; (ii) if so, when was the copy received, and (iii) how did the Department respond to the proposal. (AQW 8263/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: The Chair of the Governing body of Stranmillis University College wrote to the Department on 23 April 2008 about strategic options for the University College. Enclosed with the letter were a number of documents including a letter from Queen's University to Stranmillis College dated 20 September 2007 and the Powerpoint Slides used by the University in its presentation to the Governing Body on 17 April 2008. The letter sets out background information about Queen's and responses to a series of questions posed by Stranmillis. The Department noted the information provided and wrote to the Chair thanking him for the documentation and reminding him that a full, costed business case and economic appraisal would be required to Green Book standards and that any decision to merge would require Departmental consent and would be subject to full Committee and Assembly consultative and legislative procedures.

ENTERPRISE, TRADE AND INVESTMENT

Animal Waste at Granville in Dungannon

Mr Gallagher asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what correspondence has taken place between his Department and Linergy about the development of additional facilities for the disposal of animal waste at Granville, Dungannon; and what offers of grant aid his Department has made to Linergy. (AQW 7755/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mrs A Foster): Invest NI has kept in regular contact with Linergy Power Ltd during the progression of the project, to keep them advised as to progress. Negotiations with the company are ongoing.

Destination Fermanagh

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how much money (i) has been provided to Destination Fermanagh to date; and (ii) is projected to be provided to Destination Fermanagh in 2008-2009 and 2009-2010. [R] (AQW 7972/08)

Mrs A Foster: "Destination Fermanagh – The Vision for Tourism 2006-2016" was launched on 15th June 2006. This strategy was developed in partnership between NITB, the local council and industry stakeholders as the basis for investing in Fermanagh's long-term tourism product.

To date NITB has contributed £41,000 and Fermanagh District Council has contributed £35,000 towards the development of this strategy.

NITB received a Destination Fermanagh Action Plan, for the period 2008 to 2012, on 13th June 2008 and will now consider this in the context of the delivery of its corporate plan objectives for the period 2008-2011.

Invest NI

Mr A Maskey asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (i) what office space Invest NI is currently leasing in the South Belfast constituency; (ii) if any of the office space is currently occupied by Invest NI client companies, and if so at which locations; (iii) if any of the leased office space is vacant, and if so for how long and at which locations (iv) what the length is of each contract and how long each has been in place; and (v) how much has been paid to date on the contracts for the vacant office space. (AQW 7988/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: In the South Belfast Constituency Invest NI pays or makes contribution to rental on five properties. Of these, one is the Public Private Partnership (PPP) contract for its HQ and the other four are traditional leases. A table setting out the details of these leases is attached.

Invest NI also pays or makes contribution to rental on twelve other properties across the rest of Northern Ireland. Seven of these properties make up Invest NI's Regional Office Network, one is a lease transferred to Invest NI from its predecessor, the Industrial Development Board (IDB) and the remaining four are via direct support for organisations the terms of which explicitly include support for accommodation costs. A table setting out the details of these leases is also attached.

RENTAL AGREEMENTS IN THE SOUTH BELFAST CONSTITUENCY

Current Leases	Client Occupancy	Vacant	Contract Term	Vacant costs	Comment
InvestNI HQ	InvestNI	Occupied in full	25 years	Nil	PPP Serviced accommodation
Galwally House	Ex LEDU office	Vacant since Nov 05	25 years from 01/06/1990	£403,906.25 inc vat	Despite being actively marketed by a leading Northern Ireland Estate Agent and efforts by Lands and Property Services to negotiate with landlords, both Galwally House and LEDU House have both been vacant since November 2005. Some interest has recently been shown from the public and private sectors.
Ledu House	Ex LEDU office	Vacant since Nov 05	25 years from 01/12/1984	£640,566.67 inc vat	As above
Franklin St	NI-CO are a DETI Public Sector Body	Occupied in full	25 years from 31/01/1988	Nil	The process for assignment of the lease to NI-CO is close to completion
Waterfront Plaza ground floor	Allen Systems Group	Partially leased by Allen Systems Group.	15 year from 4th June 2004	£568,136 on the vacant portion.	Lease Assigned from DFP Office Accommodation to meet urgent FDI client need. ASG have first refusal on remaining space. Being actively marketed with interest from FDI clients. An element of our property solutions for clients in the South Belfast area.

RENTAL AGREEMENTS IN THE SOUTH BELFAST CONSTITUENCY

Current Leases	Client Occupancy	Vacant	Contract Term	Vacant costs	Comment
Timber Quay Londonderry	Invest NI Regional Office	Occupied in full	15 years from Oct 06	Nil	
Omagh Office	Invest NI Regional Office	Occupied in full	5 years from Mar 06	Nil	
Omagh Office Storage	Invest NI Regional Office	Occupied in full	Ongoing agreement	Nil	Off-site storage
Ballymena Office	Invest NI Regional Office	Occupied in full	20 years from Oct 06	Nil	
Coleraine Office, Science park	Invest NI Regional Office	Occupied in full	7 month licence from Jan 08	Nil	A new 6 month licence has recently been agreed
Eniskillen Office	Invest NI Regional Office	Occupied in full	Ongoing agreement	Nil	
Newry Office	Invest NI Regional Office	Occupied in full	15 years from Sep 04	Nil	
Craigavon Office	Invest NI Regional Office	Occupied in full	Ongoing agreement	Nil	
Campsie Unit A		Vacant	25 years from 1992	£249,595 paid by Invest NI since 2002	Rent prior to April 2002 was paid by the Industrial Development Board. Whilst Invest NI does not hold the financial records of the Industrial Development Board, under the terms of the lease the rent due to be paid for the period covering 1992 – 2002 is approximately £250,000.

Current Leases	Client Occupancy	Vacant	Contract Term	Vacant costs	Comment
National Industrial Symbiosis Program Craigavon	NISP	Occupied in full	April 08 for 1 year	Nil	100% Invest NI funded including their accommodation
Millennium Centre Springfield rd Belfast	Enterprise Council	Occupied in full	Jan 2007 for 3 years	Nil	InvestNI funded including their accommodation
BioBusinessNI		Occupied in full		Nil	InvestNI funded including their accommodation
Carbon Trust in NI Science Park	Carbon Trust	Occupied in full	3 years from March 08	Nil	100% Invest NI funded including their own accommodation

Invest NI

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what consideration has been given to the suggestion in the Second Varney Review that the functions of Invest NI should be reviewed.
(AQW 8014/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The review into the functions of Invest NI was one of a number of recommendations that Sir David Varney made in his report into the competitiveness of the Northern Ireland economy. I am currently considering the implications of the report for the Department and Invest NI.

Following detailed consideration of the report, the Executive, through the Finance Minister, will be issuing a response to Sir David and HM Treasury. This will include the Executive's position on the recommendation to conduct a review into the work of Invest NI.

Jobs in the Hospitality and Tourism Sector

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what discussions she (i) has had; and (ii) plans to have, with the Minister for Employment and Learning in relation to the number of jobs required in the hospitality and tourism sector.
(AQW 8022/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: I have not yet had the opportunity to discuss the number of jobs in the tourism sector with the Minister for Employment and Learning. However, there has been ongoing contact between my Department and the Department for Employment and Learning regarding tourism skills. These skills are a key element of the Deliver Memorable Experiences programme of the Tourism Strategic Framework for Action (SFA) 2004-2008. This contact will continue as DETI develops, and

takes forward, the next phase of the SFA and I will meet my Ministerial colleague, should the need arise.

Latest figures from the March 2008 Quarterly Employment Survey estimated that there were 52,100 employee jobs in sectors related to Tourism and Leisure activities in Northern Ireland, a net increase of 11,400 jobs over the last 10 years.

The Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) codes which are taken to comprise the Tourism & Leisure sector and their description are as follows: 551 Hotels; 552 Camping Sites and Other Provision of Short-Stay Accommodation; 553 Restaurants; 554 Bars; 633 Activities of Travel Agencies and Tour Operators, Tourist Assistance Activities not Elsewhere Classified; 925 Libraries, Archives, Museums and Other Cultural Activities; 926 Sporting Activities; 927 Other Recreational Activities.

Invest NI Overseas Office

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment the cost of each overseas Invest NI Office per annum, and what investment has been generated from each Invest NI Office over the last five financial years.
(AQW 8041/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Invest NI has offices in North America, India, Republic of Ireland, Great Britain, Europe and Asia and focuses on three key sectors which are ICT, financial services and business services.

The table below shows the operating costs and investment generated from Invest NI overseas offices.

The data are grouped according to their geographical area to enable like for like comparison of cost against investment.

The India office was opened mid-year 2007/8 and costs are still being reconciled for that year.

COMPARISON OF COSTS OF AND INVESTMENT GENERATED BY INVEST NORTHERN IRELAND'S OVERSEAS OFFICE NETWORK

	2003/04		2004/05		2005/06	
	Costs	Investment	Costs	Investment	Costs	Investment
North America	£2,109,224	£96,292,557	£1,967,751	£123,357,813	£1,709,608	£211,532,578
India	N/A	£0	N/A	£15,222,000	N/A	£7,424,566
Republic Of Ireland	£245,496	£8,747,323	£240,132	£22,612,001	£264,277	£32,974,502
Great Britain	£792,671	£28,684,973	£760,836	£36,558,557	£801,213	£27,114,648
Europe	£426,628	£15,635,036	£384,159	£11,859,950	£406,299	£73,262,054
Asia	£386,131	£26,155	£444,657	£63,260	£478,167	£9,881,000
Total	£3,960,150	£149,386,044	£3,797,535	£209,673,581	£3,659,564	£362,189,348

	2006/07		2007/08	
	Costs	Investment	Costs	Investment
North America	£1,495,981	£60,889,659	£1,401,629	£119,560,136
India	N/A	£42,704,000	*	£19,958,118
Republic Of Ireland	£226,061	£47,422,824	£217,570	£41,093,893
Great Britain	£806,576	£5,900,949	£795,888	£18,615,519
Europe	£391,907	£15,656,480	£167,206	£29,405,000
Asia	£492,811	£3,229,976	£134,636	£27,500,000
Total	£3,413,336	£175,803,888	£2,716,929	£256,132,666

Notes:

1. 2007/08 figures are provisional and subject to change.
 2. Figures include both first-time inward investments and reinvestments by existing externally-owned clients.
- * The India office was opened mid-year 2007/8 and costs are still being reconciled.

Attracting Financial Services Jobs

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how Invest NI intends to maximise the opportunities presented by the announcement on 14 April in relation to attracting financial services jobs to Northern Ireland. (AQW 8062/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Invest NI has already developed a strategy to target the Financial Services sector globally and is actively cultivating relationships at a very senior level with a number of key accounts across Europe and the United States. This strategy is focused on the following areas: Financial Services Technology, Funds Servicing Operations (middle and back office) and specialist niche areas such as derivatives, quantitative finance and compliance.

During 2007, Northern Ireland has seen strategic investments by two high-profile financial institutions. Citi, one of the world's largest financial corporations, has established a Centre of Excellence in Belfast promoting 716 jobs and in July 2007, Bank of Ireland Securities Services announced its intention to promote

149 jobs creating its first UK hedge fund administration centre. Both investments have further strengthened the Northern Ireland Financial Services proposition.

The announcement made on 14 April presents a "win-win" scenario for both the NI economy and the continued growth of the Irish funds industry. We intend to use the announcement to complement and not compete against the Financial Services Industry in Ireland. Financial firms based in Ireland that are planning to grow and expand can now access the skills available Northern Ireland. This will increase the opportunity for us to build skills, deliver quality employment opportunities and give the potential for Northern Ireland to further its growing reputation as a centre of excellence in the financial sector.

Invest NI is working closely with DEL and the education sector to develop a supply of suitably qualified people to avail of these employment opportunities.

Sporting Murals in the Glens of Antrim

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the benefits of sporting murals in the Glens of Antrim in attracting tourists; and if the Tourist Board will promote them.
(AQW 8080/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The Northern Ireland Tourist Board and their partners in tourism, promote the Glens of Antrim as part of the Causeway Coastal Route. A number of towns and villages along the Route have been identified as important to the visitor experience, allowing visitors to engage with friendly, local people and to encounter local customs and traditions. Promotion of the Route draws attention to features such as historic monuments, beautiful landscapes, walking and cycling trails, golf, traditional music and dance, sports, languages, arts and crafts, as well as the cultural fabric of towns and villages such as festivals and sporting murals.

Bed and Breakfast Facilities

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many Bed and Breakfast facilities there are in the Moyle District Council area.
(AQW 8081/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: There are 74 certified premises providing Bed and Breakfast facilities in the Moyle District Council area. This figure consists of 65 Bed and Breakfast establishments and nine Guest House establishments.

Forests in North Antrim

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what discussions she has had, or plans to have, with the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development in relation to promoting forests in North Antrim as tourist attractions.
(AQW 8084/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: I have not discussed with the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development the promotion of forests in North Antrim as tourist attractions. However, I do not rule out future discussions on this subject should the need arise.

The Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) has met with Forest Service to encourage the use of forests and forest parks for outdoor tourism activities such as walking, mountain biking and cycling. In addition, NITB specifically promotes forest parks on the Causeway Coastal Route in North Antrim via the consumer website discovernorthernireland.com. These

include Glenariff Forest Park, Ballypatrick Forest and Portglenone Forest. Also included is the Moyle Way, a way-marked walk which includes Ballycastle Forest and Glenariff Forest Park.

Reconnect Applications

Mr B Wilson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment if she will transfer the surplus funds from the Environment and Renewable Energy Fund for energy from waste projects, to Reconnect applications.
(AQW 8086/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment does not hold any surplus funds from the Environment and Renewable Energy Fund which was a two year scheme that ended on 31 March 2008.

Reconnect Grants

Mr B Wilson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many applications for reconnect grants received before 31 March 2008 did not result in a grant being offered.
(AQW 8087/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Of the 9,010 applications received by reconnect before 31 March 2008, 2,400 applications were unable to receive grant offers due to insufficient funding and a further 770 applications were rejected because they were incomplete.

Departmental Electrical Equipment

Mr Savage asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment the number of blackberry devices the Department has purchased since devolution.
(AQW 8107/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Since devolution the Department of Enterprise Trade and Investment, including its *Non Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs), has purchased 56 blackberry devices.

*DETI's NDPBs are: Invest NI, NI Tourist Board, Health and Safety Executive for NI and the General Consumer Council NI.

Invest NI Office Space

Mr Brady asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (i) what office space Invest NI is currently leasing in the Newry and Armagh constituency; (ii) if any of the office space is currently occupied by

Invest NI client companies, and if so at which locations; (iii) if any of the leased office space is vacant, and if so for how long and at which locations (iv) what the length is of each contract and how long each has been in place; and (v) how much has been paid to date on the contracts for the vacant office space. (AQW 8216/08)

Mrs A Foster: In the Newry and Armagh Constituency, Invest NI leases office space at one location, Drumalane Mill in Newry. The office space leased by Invest NI in this property is occupied by Invest NI's Southern Regional Office on the basis of a 15 year lease effective from September 2004.

In the interests of clarity, information on all the property Invest NI pays or makes contribution to rental on, within Northern Ireland's Parliamentary Constituencies, can be found in the answer to AQW 7988 08.

Broadband Services in Northern Ireland

Dr Farry asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what the average speed of broadband services is in Northern Ireland compared to other regions of the United Kingdom. (AQW 8244/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The broadband speed experienced by any individual consumer depends on a number of factors. These include: the service the consumer has subscribed to; if using ADSL technology, the distance between the customer's premises and the exchange; and how many other users are sharing the system at any point in time, whether on the customer's premises or shared with others on the Internet more widely.

My Department does not measure broadband speed. The communications regulator, OFCOM, has recently announced that it intends to undertake a survey across the whole of the UK examining broadband speeds – the findings of which it expects to publish in a market report in the second half of this year.

Credit Unions

Ms J McCann asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what plans she has to ensure that the Credit Unions in Northern Ireland are given the same rights and financial options as Credit Unions in England, Scotland, Wales and the Republic of Ireland.[R] (AQW 8385/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Officials from my Department are in regular discussions with the credit union movement in Northern Ireland about potential legislative and other changes to the current regulatory framework. In addition, my predecessor provided evidence by way of a Memorandum of Evidence to the Committee

for Enterprise, Trade and Investment as part of its current inquiry into the Role and Potential of Credit Unions, and Opportunities and Barriers in Northern Ireland. I look forward to the outcome of this inquiry and will give full and careful consideration to all recommendations made.

Invest NI Office Space

Ms J McCann asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what office space Invest NI is leasing in West Belfast constituency. (AQW 8498/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Invest NI does not lease any office space in the West Belfast parliamentary constituency.

Invest NI Office Space

Ms J McCann asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how much has been paid to date on contracts for vacant office space held by Invest NI in West Belfast constituency. (AQW 8499/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Invest NI does not lease any vacant office space in the West Belfast constituency.

Invest NI Office Space

Ms J McCann asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment if any of the office space being leased by InvestNI in West Belfast constituency is currently occupied by Invest NI client companies and if so, at which locations. (AQW 8500/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Invest NI does not lease any office space in the West Belfast Parliamentary constituency.

Invest NI Office Space

Ms J McCann asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what office space leased by Invest NI in West Belfast constituency is vacant, its location and length of time it has been vacant, and (i) the length of each contract; and (ii) for how long each contract has been in place. (AQW 8501/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Invest NI does not lease any vacant office space in the West Belfast parliamentary constituency area.

Working from Home

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what percentage of the Northern Ireland workforce work from home; and if this figure is set to increase. (AQW 8512/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Latest figures from the January to March 2008 Labour Force Survey estimate that 11.0% of all those in employment in Northern Ireland work at home or use their home as a base for work. The equivalent figure for employees only (i.e. excluding the self-employed) is lower at 3.7%.

No assessment has been made as to the potential for this figure to increase in the future.

ENVIRONMENT

MOT Certificates

Mr Bresland asked the Minister of the Environment how many vehicles currently have valid MOT certificates. (AQW 7929/08)

The Minister of the Environment (Mr S Wilson): The Driver & Vehicle Agency's records show that at 11 June 2008 a total of 542,388 (11,971 motorcycles and 530,417 private cars) had a valid MOT certificate.

Social Housing Scheme at Former Ballyduff Primary School Site

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of the Environment what approaches have been made to the Planning Service by the Department of Education and the Department for Social Development, to enable new housing to be constructed on the site of the former Ballyduff Primary School. (AQW 7962/08)

The Minister of the Environment: Planning Service has no record of any approaches by Department of Education or Department for Social Development about the potential of a housing scheme on the Ballyduff Primary School site.

Planning Service however is aware from the NIHE website that a housing development by Oaklee Housing Association is scheduled on the Social Housing Development Programme for the Primary School site.

Removal of Graffiti and Flags at Clough Castle, Co Down

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister of the Environment what action his Department has taken to remove

graffiti and flags from the grounds of Clough Castle, Co Down. (AQW 7966/08)

The Minister of the Environment: My Department is in discussion with members of the local community in Clough to ensure the removal of flags that were erected without permission on the masonry remains of this important historic monument. We are aware of some graffiti on the monument itself, but most of the graffiti is on property not managed by my Department. My Department is seeking, through this local discussion, to have the graffiti removed and I am confident that the problem will be resolved.

Waste Management

Mr Savage asked the Minister of the Environment how much his Department has spent on waste management since devolution. (AQW 7974/08)

The Minister of the Environment: My Department has spent £13.81 million on waste management since devolution.

Team-Building Exercises

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment how many staff hours have been taken up with departmental or cross-departmental away days, or team-building exercises, in each of the last five years. (AQW 8000/08)

The Minister of the Environment: Due to the variety and range of away days and team building exercises it is not practicable to provide an accurate total for these events.

Team-Building Exercises

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment how many away days and team-building exercises have been organised by his Department for departmental staff in each of the last five years. (AQW 8004/08)

The Minister of the Environment: Due to the variety and range of away days and team building exercises it is not practicable to provide an accurate total for these events.

Team-Building Exercises

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment the total cost incurred by the Department on away days or team-building exercises in each of the last five years. (AQW 8005/08)

The Minister of the Environment:

Year	Total £
2003/04	13,938.96
2004/05	38,283.34
2005/06	184,926.07
2006/07	42,801.99
2007/08	21,809.74
Total	301,760.1

Red Kite Introduction

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment what consideration he has given to the impact of Red Kite introduction in South Down; and how that will relate to his Department's intention to increase Red Grouse numbers to 300 pairs, for which Co Down is one of the areas designated. (AQW 8030/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The potential impacts of Red Kite re-introduction on native wildlife have been considered by the RSPB, EHS and CNCC and are considered to be minimal. Red kite re-introduction will not affect the targets set for increasing the population of Red Grouse in Northern Ireland.

Better Regulation for a Better Environment

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment what financial assistance is available in the 'Better Regulation for a Better Environment' to encourage compliance by businesses to improve overall environmental performance. (AQW 8035/08)

The Minister of the Environment: Currently there is no direct financial assistance available from the Department to businesses. However, "Better Regulation for a Better Environment", the EHS Enforcement Better Regulation Programme, is focusing on tools and initiatives to make compliance easier and less costly for companies.

The NetRegs website provides clear, sector-specific advice on environmental obligations and good practice which can produce real savings and benefits for businesses, e.g. reduced costs of raw materials through greater resource efficiency, lower waste disposal costs and lower energy costs.

To provide additional incentive, my officials will also work with Department of Finance and Personnel and Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to ensure that government procurement and support is directed to those businesses which can demonstrate environmental compliance and good practice.

Townland Addresses

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of the Environment what action his Department is taking to protect and promote townland names; and if he will bring forward legislation to amend Article 11 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Northern Ireland) Order 1995, to allow district councils to number townland addresses. (AQW 8037/08)

The Minister of the Environment: Whilst I fully recognise the historic, cultural and linguistic importance of townland names, my Department has no responsibility in this area.

My Department will shortly appoint a Local Government Boundaries Commissioner to carry out a review and make recommendations on the boundaries of the 11 new local government districts provided for in the Local Government (Boundaries) Act (Northern Ireland) 2008. In bringing forward this legislation, the department ensured that the rules applying to the Commissioner which state that a townland shall not be included partly in one district or ward and partly in another (except where unavoidable) were retained.

In dealing with general correspondence within my Department, replies are posted to the address supplied by the correspondent, so if the townland is mentioned in the postal address, this will be included in the reply. Where a townland name is included in a planning application, that name will be recorded and used thereafter in relation to the application.

Article 11 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 makes provision in relation to the naming of streets and the numbering of buildings. I am not persuaded that the legislation should be amended to allow for the numbering of individual properties within townlands as I am not convinced that this provides a feasible or practical way forward.

I am aware that some councils, in recognition of the importance of townland names locally, and to encourage the continued use of townland names, have decided that all new signs bearing road names would also include the townland name underneath. I believe that the adoption of such a policy by other councils would be preferable to the numbering of individual properties within townlands.

Grouse Study Steering Committee of the Environment and Heritage Service

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment when the Grouse Study steering committee of the Environment and Heritage Service will commence. (AQW 8060/08)

The Minister of the Environment: There are no immediate plans for EHS to establish a Grouse Study steering committee. The delivery of the Red Grouse Species Action Plan is closely related to the delivery of peatland and upland Habitat Action Plans which are dealt with by the Peatland and Upland Biodiversity Delivery Group. Later this year, the Biodiversity Delivery Group will be inviting interested parties to participate in a workshop to help deliver the conservation actions required for the Red Grouse Species Action Plan in relation to peatland and upland habitats.

Red Grouse Stock

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment if he will encourage Red Grouse stock to be supplemented with Grouse from Scotland as part of the Northern Ireland Action Plan (Red Grouse). (AQW 8061/08)

The Minister of the Environment: There are no plans to encourage Red Grouse stocking from Scotland. Indeed, the Northern Ireland Species Action Plan for Red Grouse specifically indicates that Scottish birds should not be released in those parts of Northern Ireland which are currently free from signs of previous introductions i.e. Counties Tyrone and Fermanagh.

Nuclear Waste

Mr B Wilson asked the Minister of the Environment if he will give an undertaking that he will not give consent to local authorities to provide sites for the burial of nuclear waste. (AQW 8085/08)

The Minister of the Environment: It would not be appropriate for me to give such an undertaking at this stage in the process. Any proposals initiated by local authorities in Northern Ireland would go through a rigorous selection procedure requiring my approval and that of the Executive Committee and the NI Assembly.

Planning Policy Statement 14

Mr Armstrong asked the Minister of the Environment the current status of Planning Policy Statement 14 and he expects to be in a position to make a public announcement on the outcome of the Review. (AQW 8089/08)

The Minister of the Environment: I expect to submit a revised draft PPS 14 to the Executive Committee very soon with a view to issuing for public consultation.

Environment Agency

Mr Armstrong asked the Minister of the Environment what discussions have been held between his Department and counterparts in the rest of the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland in relation to the creation of an Environment Agency. (AQW 8092/08)

The Minister of the Environment: A DOE official discussed the processes involved in creating a non-Departmental public body with officials of the Department of Environment Food and Rural Affairs in June 2007.

Planning Applications Linked to the Rural Development Programme (2007-2013)

Mr Doherty asked the Minister of the Environment whether he will ensure that planning applications linked to the Rural Development Programme (2007-2013) will be expedited to achieve the maximum uptake of funding. (AQW 8126/08)

The Minister of the Environment: My Department will give priority to those planning applications dependent on grant aid and other commercial, industrial and social infrastructure proposals with a clear strategic, employment, community or public interest dimension. An instruction to this effect was issued to Planning Service staff in July 2006. There is however also an onus on applicants to submit planning applications in a timely manner and include all necessary information required to determine the proposal.

Draft UK Marine Bill

Dr Farry asked the Minister of the Environment what discussions he has had with the United Kingdom Government in relation to the Marine Bill, including the opportunities and implications for Northern Ireland. (AQW 8186/08)

The Minister of the Environment: I have not as yet had the opportunity to discuss the draft UK Marine Bill with the United Kingdom Government.

Local Government Boundary Commissioner

Dr Farry asked the Minister of the Environment what progress has been made in appointing a Local Government Boundary Commissioner; and when a provisional set of recommendations will be available. (AQW 8187/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The process of appointing the new Local Government Boundaries Commissioner is almost complete and the new Commissioner will be appointed on 1 July 2008.

The timing of the publication of the provisional set of recommendations is a matter for the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner.

The Stables in Sion Mills

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of the Environment when his Department was first alerted to the deteriorating condition of 'The Stables' in Sion Mills, West Tyrone; what action was taken in relation to the alert; and for an update on the condition of 'The Stables'. (AQW 8202/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The building has been deteriorating for several years. The Department has been in discussion with the owner to try to secure the future of the building. To date he has declined to do so.

The Department has moved to secure the future of the building by publishing a vesting order on 19 June 2008, following last week's collapse of its clock tower. The stable block will come into the ownership and protection of my Department one month after the publication of this notice. In the interim, and thereafter we will continue to work with our partners to secure the long term future of this building.

An Urgent Works Notice was issued by recorded delivery, addressed to the owner of the building, again on 19 June 2008, specifying the works that are urgently required for its preservation. Seven days after the Urgent Works Notice has been served on the owner, the Department will move in to secure the building and help protect it from any further deterioration.

Meanwhile we have acted in co-operation with our partners in Strabane District Council, Roads Service, etc, to erect a hoarding along the road edge to help ensure the safety of the public.

The current condition of the building is very poor, and the roof in extremely poor condition. Specialist staff in the Department have advised that it can still be saved and reused. The clock tower and some sections of roof have collapsed, and important pieces of the clock are, by agreement with the owner, now in the safe keeping of my Department.

Pollution of Glenavy River

Mr Burns asked the Minister of the Environment to make a statement on the latest pollution incident that occurred in the Glenavy River, between 13 and 16 June 2008. (AQW 8208/08)

The Minister of the Environment: At 09.30 hrs on 16 June 2008, Environment and Heritage Service (EHS)

received a report of an unknown pollutant in the Glenavy River where it flows through Glenavy village. The report indicated that there were a number of dead fish present and EHS informed the Fisheries Conservancy Board (FCB).

A combined investigation was carried out by EHS Water Quality Inspectors and staff from FCB in order to determine the source of the pollution and assess the environmental impact. During that investigation, the number of dead fish observed indicated that a major Fishkill had occurred and the overall incident severity was classified as 'High'.

From the investigation, the pollutant was identified as being from an agricultural source and statutory samples have been taken with a view to initiating prosecution through the Public Prosecution Service.

Reform of the Planning System

Ms Lo asked the Minister of the Environment if he intends (i) to present a paper to the Executive on the current reform of the planning system; and (ii) to make a statement to the Assembly on this issue, before the summer recess. (AQW 8230/08)

The Minister of the Environment: As I indicated when I took up my appointment as Minister of the Environment, reform of the planning system is one of my top priorities.

- (i) I have had discussions with my officials on the significant progress that has been made to date and I expect to bring my emerging proposals to the Executive and Environment Committee very shortly, with a view to issuing a public consultation paper later in the year.
- (ii) I do not expect to make a statement to the Assembly on the issue until after the summer recess.

Craigmore Landfill Site

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of the Environment why a hazardous impact assessment was not carried out on the Craigmore (near Garvagh) landfill site before approval was granted to resume dumping there. (AQW 8256/08)

The Minister of the Environment: In considering recent planning applications for the Craigmore site, determinations were carried out under the Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 1999. Planning Service took the view that the proposals would not give rise to significant adverse environmental effects. The planning applications were detailed in terms of content and provided sufficient

information for Planning Service to properly consider the applications. Planning Service was satisfied that in each instance the planning application could be determined without requesting the production of an environmental statement.

Craigmore Landfill Site

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of the Environment why there was no 'change of use' public notification in the most recent planning applications for the Craigmore landfill site. (AQW 8257/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The most recent planning applications for the Craigmore landfill site were advertised in the local newspapers. They were not however advertised as change of use applications because no change of use was involved. This is an existing waste management facility and it remains a waste management facility.

Craigmore Landfill Site

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of the Environment why no action has been taken to remove illegal waste from the Craigmore landfill site given that a recovery operation was ordered after it was condemned as having illegal and hazardous waste in large volumes. (AQW 8258/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The landfill site was a licensed facility and the previous owner was prosecuted for offences committed while he had control of the site. The current owner is required to remediate the waste that is contained in the old part of the landfill to the current environmental protection standards. The waste does not need to be removed and all harmful or polluting emissions will be controlled by the site operator under the terms of his permit.

EHS has no knowledge of a 'recovery operation' having been ordered or of the site being 'condemned'.

Craigmore Landfill Site

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of the Environment what efforts have been made to establish that there is no overlap in ownership or management in the Craigmore landfill site between the previous owner, who was convicted and jailed for illegal activity on the site, and the new owner who has received approval to resume operations. (AQW 8259/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The Environment and Heritage Service (EHS) has established information regarding land ownership in order to be satisfied that the current holder of a

permit to operate a landfill site is the owner of the land. Prior to this EHS also established the same information regarding the previous owner as part of the investigation that led to his imprisonment and a confiscation order being made in relation to illegal operation of the site.

EHS has been unable to identify evidence to suggest that the current owner of the site had ownership or control of the land prior to his purchase of it.

Multiple Landfill Sites

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of the Environment to outline his plans to ban multiple landfill sites in the same geographical area and to detail what discussions have taken place with the European Union. (AQW 8260/08)

The Minister of the Environment: I have no plans to ban multiple landfill sites in the same geographical area and no discussions have taken place with the European Union.

New Local Government Boundaries

Mr Cobain asked the Minister of the Environment why current plans for new local government boundaries and districts exclude the creation of a single local authority for the continuous urban area of Belfast, Newtownabbey and Castlereagh. (AQO 4059/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The deliberations of the Executive Sub Committee on Local Government Reform, chaired by my colleague and predecessor Mrs Foster, in relation to council numbers were confined to the three possible configurations for the seven, eleven and fifteen district models set out in the RPA Further Consultation Document of March 2005. It will be a matter for the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner, when appointed, to determine the precise boundaries of the new local government districts within the framework provided by the Local Government (Boundaries) Act (Northern Ireland) 2008.

Highway Code

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of the Environment what plans he has to circulate the new Highway Code to homes in Northern Ireland. (AQO 4093/08)

The Minister of the Environment: My Department will be publishing a revised Highway Code for Northern Ireland in July. I intend to circulate the new Code widely and my Department is currently seeking to identify the resources necessary to distribute copies free of charge to every household in Northern Ireland.

This would be a new initiative aimed at providing every home with access to practical and easily understood road safety advice and another important step in the ongoing campaign to save lives.

Road Safety Improvements

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment what initiatives he is taking to improve road safety within the 18-25 age bracket; and if he is aware of the Test plus Pass plus initiative recently started in Newtownards and Strangford. (AQO 4159/08)

The Minister of the Environment: My Department has a range of initiatives in place aimed at improving road safety among young drivers. These include:

- a driver training scheme for students aged 17 to 18 years;
- active promotion of Road Traffic Studies and GCSE Motor Vehicle and Road User Studies (MVRUS) in post-primary schools;
- the “Theatre in Education” programme for sixth-formers which focuses on attitudes to driving; and
- road safety advertising campaigns, many of which are targeted at 17-24 year-old males.

On 23 May 2008, my predecessor issued a letter to NI consultees seeking comments on the range of questions asked in a recent GB consultation by DfT on proposals to reform the way people learn to drive and the way they are tested. Following on from this, I will shortly be issuing a separate consultation on proposals for a scheme of graduated driver licensing here. The package of measures proposed will help improve road safety, particularly among young and novice drivers.

I am aware of the Test Plus initiative and I understand that the organisers of the scheme have been discussing the matter with my officials.

Renewable Fund for Householders

Mr Kennedy asked the Minister of the Environment if he will consider the establishment of a Renewables Fund based on European Investment Bank finance to assist householders to install ecosystems, repayable only on the sale of the property. (AQO 4060/08)

The Minister of the Environment: I have no plans to establish a Renewables Fund based on European Investment Bank finance to assist householders to install ecosystems. Renewable energy is the responsibility of the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment.

Prosecution Rates

Mr Attwood asked the Minister of the Environment what steps the Department has taken to improve the enforcement and prosecution rates following the Criminal Justice Inspectorate report? (AQO 4180/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The Department has developed a detailed Action Plan in response to the Criminal Justice Inspectorate’s report and this will be published in July. It is a matter of record that the majority of their recommendations have been accepted. For example, the new Northern Ireland Environment Agency will have a single Environmental Crime Unit dealing with serious offences and persistent offenders.

Climate Change

Mr P Maskey asked the Minister of the Environment what assessment he has made of the impact of climate change; and what action he is taking to address the issue. (AQO 4135/08)

The Minister of the Environment: My Department published in January 2007 the Scottish and Northern Ireland Forum for Environmental Research report “Preparing for a Changing Climate in Northern Ireland”. This has become known as the “SNIFFER Report”. On the basis of UK climate change modelling, the report examines past and projected future climate for Northern Ireland and anticipates significant change over the coming century with air temperatures rising by 3 degrees centigrade, summer rainfall decreasing by 50% whilst winters may be 25% wetter.

In January 2008, the previous Minister, joined with the National Trust to help launch the Shifting Shores Report. The publication presents an assessment of possible impacts on a number of coastal National Trust properties.

In relation to actions taken, my Department:

- Has made available best advice on the actions necessary to adapt to climate change. For example, the SNIFFER report recommends adaptation strategies in respect of the natural and built environment, economic infrastructure and social well-being
- Supports the Northern Ireland Climate Change Impacts Partnership which includes within its membership representatives of the business, voluntary, NGO, professional and government sectors. The purpose of the partnership is to broaden and deepen understanding of climate change issues.

Policy Development Panels

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment what progress has been made on the reconstitution of the Strategic Leadership Board and the newly constituted Policy Development panels. (AQO 4089/08)

The Minister of the Environment: Since my predecessor announced the decisions on the future shape of local government in her statement to the Assembly on 31st March 2008, my Department has been engaging with NILGA to reconstitute the Strategic Leadership Board, and to constitute, and agree Terms of Reference for, the three new Policy Development Panels.

The reconstitution of the Strategic Leadership Board is now complete. I will Chair the Board and the President of NILGA will be Vice Chair. The membership consists of the four NILGA Vice Presidents and a representative from each of the five main political parties. The Board is supported and advised by the Chief Executives of three councils and senior representatives from Departments that are transferring functions. The functions of the Board are: to be the pinnacle and driver for the overall modernisation process; to agree a joint overall vision and strategy for change; to provide clarity on expected outcomes; to develop an overall work programme in conjunction with the Policy Development Panels; and to consider contributions and cascade questions and issues for action through the Policy Development Panels and Transition Committees.

The constitution of the Policy Development Panels is almost complete and terms of reference for them have been agreed. Panel A will have responsibility for Governance and Relationship Issues, including: Community Planning; Governance; Central/Local Government Relationships. Panel B will have responsibility for Service Delivery Issues, including: Service Delivery Improvement; and Performance Management. Panel C will have responsibility for Structural Reform Issues, including: Human Resources; Capacity Building; Finance; Estates; Regional and Sub-Regional Design; and Transfer of Functions. One panel has already had its first meeting and I am hopeful that the other two will have their first meetings within the next few weeks.

Statement of Continuity Involvement

Ms Lo asked the Minister of the Environment what plans he has to prepare a Statement of Community Involvement as required by Article 3 of the Planning Reform Order 2006. (AQO 4096/08)

The Minister of the Environment: My Department is currently preparing a Statement of

Community Involvement which will be required under Article 3A of the Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1991 when Article 3 of the Planning Reform (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 is commenced. The Commencement Order for Article 3 will be made later this year and the Statement of Community Involvement published as soon as possible thereafter.

Planning Applications

Ms J McCann asked the Minister of the Environment how many planning applications have been approved for apartments in the Dunmurry Lane and Dunmurry Village area. (AQO 4149/08)

The Minister of the Environment: I regret that the current system of electronic data retrieval – 20/20 – does not record applications in sufficient detail to provide the information requested. To provide accurate figures for the years in question could only be done by a manual search of all our existing files. This would not be available in the time and would incur disproportionate costs.

It may be helpful to note that the new electronic system – ePIC – will be able to store and retrieve such data.

Review of the Planning System

Mr Ross asked the Minister of the Environment for his plans to bring forward a paper on the fundamental review of the planning system. (AQO 4088/08)

The Minister of the Environment: As I indicated when I took up my appointment as Minister of the Environment, reform of the planning system is one of my top priorities. I have had discussions with my officials on the significant progress that has been made to date and I expect to bring my emerging proposals to the Executive and Environment Committee very shortly, with a view to issuing a public consultation paper later in the year.

Guidelines for Building Apartments

Mr Neeson asked the Minister of the Environment what guidelines have been established by the Planning Service for the building of apartments. (AQO 4099/08)

The Minister of the Environment: All proposals for new residential development including applications for apartment development are subject to consideration in the context of Planning Policy Statement 7 (PPS7) 'Quality Residential Environments'.

Further policy tests are contained within Planning Policy Statement 6 (PPS6) 'Planning, Archaeology and the Built Environment' and its addendum 'Areas

of Townscape Character', where new apartment development is proposed in Areas of Townscape Characters and Village Character.

Supplementary planning guidance is also a material consideration for such applications, including, 'Creating Places, Achieving Quality in Residential Development' and Development Control Advice Note 8, 'Housing in Existing Urban Areas'. Where a proposal meets the criteria as laid out in these policies and guidance, approval may be granted. However, these publications make it clear that 'cramming' or other inappropriate developments which would adversely affect residential amenity will be resisted.

My predecessor requested that all Planning Service staff be reminded of the need to consider fully the impact on the established residential character when processing applications for new residential development. To this end a Planning Circular on the assessment of planning applications for residential development in urban areas, villages and other small settlements issued to Planning Service operational staff in August 2007.

Implementation of the Taxis Act

Mr Boylan asked the Minister of the Environment how his Department is going to reconcile implementation of the Taxis Act given that the Taxi Cost Index Report will not be started until early 2009. (AQO 4167/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The Taxis Act (Northern Ireland) 2008 creates a new legal regulatory framework which covers the licensing of operators, drivers and vehicles; fares and taximeters; hiring taxis at separate fares; and enforcement. Given the very broad scope of this legislation, it will need to be implemented in stages as initiatives are developed. In advance of the Taxis Cost Index Report, which is due to be commenced in early 2009, my officials are already working on implementing the Act by preparing to commence provisions to improve enforcement; developing policies for taxi operator licensing; devising new specifications for taxi vehicles and taximeters; and improving the Department's taxi licensing IT systems.

Better Regulation Task Force

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister of the Environment what groups will be represented on the Better Regulation Task Force. (AQO 4121/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The first meeting of the Better Regulation Board involved the CBI, the Federation of Small Businesses, the Ulster Farmers Union, the Northern Ireland Chamber of

Commerce and Industry, the Construction Employers Federation and Northern Ireland Water. The Environment Sector will be represented at the next meeting by the Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside. The Quarry Products Association will also attend the next meeting.

Grants to Improve Listed Buildings

Rev Dr Robert Coulter asked the Minister of the Environment how many community based organisations have applied for grants to improve listed buildings over the last three years. (AQO 4087/08)

The Minister of the Environment: Nine community based organisations have applied for such grants over the past three financial years.

The following have received funding:

- Hearth Revolving Fund (2 grants)
- Holywood Old School Building Preservation Trust
- Irish Landmark Trust
- Friends of Lissan Trust
- Old Belmont School Preservation Trust
- Sion Mills Building Preservation Trust (x2)
- White House Preservation Trust
- Caledon Regeneration Group

In addition, Gracehill Old School Trust received funding towards the acquisition of a listed building.

It is hoped that many more community based organisations will now take advantage of the additional funding specifically set aside for such organisations to assist in the rescue of our listed buildings at risk. The availability of this additional funding was announced by my predecessor, Arlene Foster, at the Environment and Heritage Service's 'Regeneration and Heritage' Conference on 20 May.

Hightown Landfill Site

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of the Environment what conditions are attached to the Hightown Landfill site at Upper Hightown Road in Newtownabbey. (AQO 4182/08)

The Minister of the Environment: Planning permissions for the infill of Hightown Quarry have issued in 1988, 1989 and 1993. Conditions prevent the deposition of putrescible or household waste. Conditions also require that the final levels of infill do not exceed the contoured levels shown on the approved plans and that wheel wash facilities are provided for the duration of tipping operations.

An application for a Pollution Prevention Control Permit, in order to continue operating a landfill, was refused by the Department on 26th June 2007. This decision was subsequently appealed by the operators and is now being dealt with by the Planning Appeals Commission. In the interim Macwill Services are being regulated under the conditions of their existing Waste Management Licence.

Copies of the conditions relating both to the planning approvals and to the Waste Management Licence are available in the Assembly Library.

FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

Data Protection Breaches

Mr Burns asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many public sector staff have been punished for data protection breaches in each of the last 5 years, broken down by department. (AQW 7767/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr Dodds): The information requested is provided in the following table.

Department	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	Total across all years
DCAL	0	0	0	0	0	0
DHSSPS	0	0	0	0	0	0
DETI	0	0	0	0	0	0
DSD	1	2	4	6	14	27
DRD	0	0	0	0	0	0
DE	0	0	0	0	0	0
DOE	0	0	0	0	0	0
DARD	0	0	0	0	0	0
OFMDFM	0	0	0	0	0	0
DEL	0	0	1	0	0	1
DFP	0	0	0	0	0	0

Team-Building Exercises

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many staff hours have been taken up with departmental or cross-departmental away days, or team-building exercises, in each of the last five years. (AQW 7999/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The table below reflects the number of team building/away days over the last five years. It is encouraging to note the number of community and environmental projects that staff in the Department have committed their time to.

Year	Team Building	Corporate Social Responsibility	Total
2004	8	0	8
2005	10	1	11
2006	10	3	13
2007	3	5	8
2008	0	3	3

Information in relation to how many staff hours have been taken up with departmental or cross-departmental away days, or team building exercises in each of the last five years is not readily available and could only be compiled at disproportionate cost.

Team-Building Exercises

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many away days and team-building exercises have been organised by his Department for departmental staff in each of the last five years. (AQW 8065/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The table below reflects the number of team building/away days over the last five years. It is encouraging to note the number of community and environmental projects that staff in the Department have committed their time to.

Year	Team Building	Corporate Social Responsibility	Total
2004	8	0	8
2005	10	1	11
2006	10	3	13
2007	3	5	8
2008	0	3	3

Information in relation to how many staff hours have been taken up with departmental or cross-departmental away days, or team building exercises in each of the last 5 years is not readily available and could only be compiled at disproportionate cost.

Office of the Interim Assembly Commissioner for Standards

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how much funding his Department gives to the Office of the Interim Assembly Commissioner for Standards. (AQW 8109/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The Assembly Ombudsman for Northern Ireland has a total funding allocation of £1.581million for 2008/09. Within this, a sum of £10,000 is identified by the Office of the Assembly Ombudsman for Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Complaints for the provision of an investigative resource for the Committee on Standards and Privileges.

Ulster Savings Certificates

Mrs Long asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel (i) how many Ulster Savings Certificates are yet to be reclaimed; and (ii) how much money is owed to certificate holders. (AQW 8149/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: There are 85,680 Ulster Savings certificates, belonging to 27,628 holders, yet to be reclaimed as at 20th June 2008.

The total value of Ulster Savings certificates yet to be reclaimed is £6.2m, comprising £2.1m principal and £4.1m interest.

Ulster Savings Certificates

Mrs Long asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what plans he has to reunite Ulster Savings Certificate holders with their money. (AQW 8150/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The Department has taken steps to contact certificate holders as far as is practicable since the 1990 policy review recommended the winding up of Ulster Savings. As a result, a number of holders and relatives of deceased certificate holders have reclaimed certificates. While Ulster Savings certificates to the value of £105m were held in 1997, this has now been reduced to £6.2m.

The Department has made information about the scheme available on its website and ensured that any enquiries through the Post Office and National Savings and Investments are directed to DFP. In addition, contact details regarding the scheme are available in the Phone Book in Northern Ireland and on the website of HM Revenue and Customs.

The Department continues to consider other opportunities to publicise the Ulster Savings scheme.

Ulster Savings Certificates

Mrs Long asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether he has any plans to make Ulster Savings Certificates traceable through the MyLostAccount.org.uk website. (AQW 8152/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: Whilst the Department has no immediate plans to make Ulster Savings certificates traceable through mylostaccount.org.uk, the feasibility of using this website is in the early stages of being explored.

The Department continues to consider all viable opportunities for raising awareness of the Ulster Savings Scheme.

Team-Building Exercises

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel the total cost incurred by the Department on away days or team-building exercises in each of the last five years. (AQW 8160/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The total costs incurred by the Department on away days or team-building exercises in each of the last five years are set out in the table below.

Year	Cost of Away Days (£)	Cost of Team Building Exercises (£)	Total Cost (£)
2003-04	16,769	2,415	19,184
2004-05	26,305	26,104	52,409
2005-06	37,026	17,666	54,692
2006-07	34,407	9,196	43,603
2007-08	16,516	12,993	29,508

Building Regulations

Mr B Wilson asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel if he will amend the building regulations to waive the fee for loft insulation to encourage energy conservation. (AQW 8224/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The fees that may be charged for building regulations work by district councils are established by the Building (Prescribed Fees) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1997. The Department will shortly be conducting a review of these regulations, and will consider this matter as part of that review.

A district council may waive any fee if it chooses to do so.

Number of 11-18 Year Olds in Ballycastle

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many young people between the ages of 11 and 18 there are in the Ballycastle electoral ward area; and for his Department's projection of the growth in this sector over the next 10 years. (AQW 8371/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel:

Population estimates and projections are produced for Northern Ireland and Local Government Districts only. Equivalent statistics are not produced at electoral ward level. Statistics provided therefore relate to the Ballymena, Ballymoney and Moyle Local Government Districts.

The table below shows the 2001 and 2006 population estimate and current principal population projection for the year 2015 for persons aged 11 to 18 for Northern Ireland and the areas noted above.

TABLE: POPULATION ESTIMATE AND PROJECTION FOR PERSONS AGED 11-18 YEARS IN NORTHERN IRELAND AND BALLYMENA, BALLYMONEY AND MOYLE LOCAL GOVERNMENT DISTRICTS (2001, 2006 AND 2015)

Year	Population aged 11-18 years			
	Northern Ireland	Ballymena LGD	Ballymoney LGD	Moyle LGD
2001 Estimate	212,400	7,000	3,400	2,100
2006 Estimate	204,400	6,600	3,300	2,000
2015 Projection	184,700	6,200	3,500	1,700

Number of 11-18 Year Olds in the Glens

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many young people between the ages of 11 and 18 there are in the Glens electoral ward area; and for his Department's projection of the growth of this sector over the next 10 years. (AQW 8373/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel:

Population estimates and projections are produced for Northern Ireland and Local Government Districts only. Equivalent statistics are not produced at electoral ward level. Statistics provided therefore relate to the Ballymena, Ballymoney and Moyle Local Government Districts.

The table below shows the 2001 and 2006 population estimate and current principal population projection for the year 2015 for persons aged 11 to 18 for Northern Ireland and the areas noted above.

TABLE: POPULATION ESTIMATE AND PROJECTION FOR PERSONS AGED 11-18 YEARS IN NORTHERN IRELAND AND BALLYMENA, BALLYMONEY AND MOYLE LOCAL GOVERNMENT DISTRICTS (2001, 2006 AND 2015)

Year	Population aged 11-18 years			
	Northern Ireland	Ballymena LGD	Ballymoney LGD	Moyle LGD
2001 Estimate	212,400	7,000	3,400	2,100
2006 Estimate	204,400	6,600	3,300	2,000
2015 Projection	184,700	6,200	3,500	1,700

Numbers of 11-18 Year Olds

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what are the projected numbers of 11 to 18 year olds for the years 2010, 2015 and 2020, and what percentage in each year is projected to be immigrants. (AQW 8382/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The table attached gives the 2001 and 2006 population estimates and the current 2010, 2015 and 2020 principal population projections for persons aged 11 to 18 years in Northern Ireland.

Table population estimates and projections for persons aged 11-18 years in Northern Ireland, 2001-2020

Year	Northern Ireland population aged 11-18
2001 Estimate	212,400
2006 Estimate	204,400
2010 Projection	197,600
2015 Projection	184,700
2020 Projection	186,300

Population projections include assumptions on annual net migration levels but not on the overall future number of immigrants in the population.

Take-Up of Lone Pensioner Rates Relief

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of the take-up of lone pensioner rate relief. (AQO 4069/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: Two new measures, Lone Pensioner Allowance and an increase to the savings limit for Rate Relief for pensioners, were introduced from 1 April 2008 to provide additional assistance towards the cost of paying rate bills.

Lone Pensioner Allowance, which provides for a 20% reduction in rates, is for pensioners aged 70 and over who live alone. It is administered jointly - Land and Property Services deals with owner-occupiers, while the Northern Ireland Housing Executive looks after those living in the social and private rented sector properties.

The initial take-up of Lone Pensioner Allowance has been very encouraging as, at 6 June 2008, around 14,250 applications had been received.

The Rate Relief scheme provides additional financial assistance to ratepayers on low incomes and, to encourage more pensioners to apply for this relief, the savings limit for entitlement was raised from £16,000 to £50,000 for pensioners aged 60 and above. Currently, almost 4,000 pensioners receive Rate Relief, and just over 59,000 pensioners receive Housing Benefit. The Housing Benefit and Rate Relief schemes are also administered jointly.

Rates Arrears

Mr Burns asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for the scale and nature of the extra resources being brought in to address the rate arrears problem; and to identify the source of this additional money. (AQO 4092/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: Land and Property Services has secured the provision of an additional 20 staff to assist with the clearance of backlogs of rating work. Funding for the additional staff was subject to the normal headcount approvals.

Public-Sector Jobs in Rural Areas

Mr O'Loan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel if he has considered the approach of the Scottish Government, in its consideration of the location of public sector jobs, which includes a small units initiative to bring high quality jobs to remote and rural areas. (AQO 4158/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: As you may know Professor George Bain is chairing the independent Review of policy on the location of public sector jobs in Northern Ireland. I understand that during the course of his Review he has taken evidence from each of the jurisdictions in the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland on their experience of relocation. The evidence from Scotland suggests that a small number of posts can bring demonstrable benefits to remote and rural areas such as the Scottish islands. I understand that Professor Bain is considering this, along with all the other evidence that is available to him, in the context of his Review. His objective is to recommend a distribution of public sector jobs that

best enhances the sustainable social and economic development of Northern Ireland. However it would be premature to speculate on any conclusions of the independent Review team at this stage.

Viewing of Publicly Owned Art in Departments

Mr Armstrong asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what arrangements are in place for members of the public to view publicly owned works of art held in secure areas of government buildings. (AQO 4084/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The Department of Finance and Personnel organises an annual joint touring exhibition of Government owned art with the Office of Public Works (OPW) in Dublin. The Exhibition provides the public in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland with the opportunity to view a selection of the best works of art from the two collections. There are usually two venues in the north and three in the south each year.

In addition to the touring exhibition, members of the public have been permitted to view specific pieces of art that are held in secure Government buildings. This is mainly on request for purposes of academic research or from family members of deceased artists. Staff in Properties Division will arrange for a private viewing.

Varney 2 Report

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what plans he has to respond to the Varney 2 report. (AQO 4129/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I will, after discussion with Executive colleagues, formally convey my response on the Varney 2 Report to the Chief Secretary to the Treasury.

Much of the analysis in this second report should be welcomed and it provides a useful backdrop to the development of the new Regional Economic Strategy. There are, however, some issues which generate concern (for example in the area of disposing of public assets) and I will need to relay these to the Chief Secretary.

Regional Economic Strategy

Dr Farry asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on the regional economic strategy. (AQO 4133/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The previous draft Regional Economic Strategy (RES) reflected the limited aspirations of the Direct Rule Administration. Work has recently commenced on the

revision of the RES. This must reflect the ambitions of the Executive as set out in the Programme for Government.

My officials have recently reconstituted a RES inter-departmental working group to take forward the RES work programme. It is envisaged that a working paper will be available for consideration and input by key stakeholders later this year.

The revised RES will then be released for public consultation, and will be produced in time to assist in the formulation of the next Budget.

Water Charge Bills

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel if he will issue a single household bill that will include a water charge. (AQO 4055/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: Following the publication of the Independent Water Review Panel report, which recommends that from 2009/10 water and sewerage payments should be collected through the same billing and collection system as rates, the Executive agreed that this issue should be taken forward and examined jointly by both DRD and DFP.

Work has been ongoing within DRD, with the close involvement of officials from my own Department, in producing a business case which considers all the available options, in light of the many administrative, legislative and policy issues which would need to be addressed.

The work around this business case has yet to be completed so at this stage there are no conclusions to report.

The question of billing is also tied to that relating the methodology that will be used to determine how water and sewerage charges will be calculated from next year and onwards. This work has also not reached a conclusion.

Equal Pay Claims

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what implications there are for the labour market from the successful resolution of the equal pay claim. (AQO 4113/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The resolution of the equal pay claim could have significant implications for the Northern Ireland Civil Service paybill. The extent of the financial implications will ultimately depend on the outcome of discussions between officials and the trade unions and on the approach approved by the Executive. Any equal pay adjustment that amounted to a significant increase

in the salaries of the affected grades could distort the local labour market and aggravate the constraint on private sector economic activity through the crowding out effect. Such factors will be an important consideration in the discussions with the trade unions.

Levels of Sick Leave in Departments

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what analysis he has made of efforts by Departments to reduce levels of sick leave. (AQO 4111/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: Like my predecessor, Peter Robinson, I consider the level of sickness absence in the NICS to be unacceptable and I fully intend to maintain the pressure on Departments to improve their performance in this area.

I am aware that Peter Robinson met recently with all the Permanent Secretaries to discuss sickness absence and to hear what they were doing to address the problem within their respective Departments. He impressed on senior officials the Executive's commitment to dealing robustly with the issue and reinforced the importance of senior management accountability for this issue.

My officials have now prepared an updated civil service wide action plan, setting out a number of key actions for all departments. Actions include top management commitment and greater accountability, improved case management, improved training and awareness for line managers and staff and a greater level of audit and compliance.

There will also be a new focus on local strategies where individual Departments and Agencies will analyse patterns of sickness absence within their organisations with a view to highlighting any trends or "hotspots" requiring particular attention.

There is now a much higher profile given to sickness absence across all NI Departments and I will ensure that it is kept to the fore of the agenda.

Major Capital Spends

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline any reviews his Department will carry out on procedures for major capital spends. (AQO 4126/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The current procedures are set out in Government Accounting Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Practical Guide to the Green Book. The NI Practical Guide to the Green Book generally accords with the principles of the HM Treasury Green Book, and should be read in conjunction with it, which remains

an authoritative guide to the principles of appraisal, evaluation, approval and management of projects.

In addition, The Strategic Investment and Regeneration of Sites (NI) Order 2003 provides for the Strategic Investment Board to advise the Executive on the formulation and implementation of its programme of major investment, and to provide advice and assistance to public bodies carrying out major capital projects.

Currently there are no plans to carry out a review of procedures for major capital spends.

Access to Benefits

Mrs M Bradley asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what are the main lessons taken from the study produced for his Department by A2B 'Access to Benefits on take-up of Rate Relief and Disabled Person's Allowance'; and what plans he has to implement these findings. (AQO 4091/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: As you know, the issue of poor take up of rate reliefs among the elderly was something that arose following the review of the domestic rating system which my predecessor carried out last year. One of the first actions that he took following that review was to ask Help the Aged and Age Concern to undertake a study to identify what steps could be taken to improve this.

The report produced by Access to Benefits, in conjunction with Help the Aged and Age Concern, was a very detailed and thorough one. It contains some 35 recommendations in total, covering a wide range of areas. Some also go beyond the remit of this Department and have implications for others involved in the delivery of Government benefits.

In terms of what the main lessons are from the report, these relate to the need to increase the public awareness and understanding of the reliefs that are available; to simplify the process of application; to increase the level of joined-up working with other Government Departments; and to liaise more closely with the community and voluntary sector in this work.

As I said, the recommendations contained in the report are wide ranging and need to be considered carefully. I have asked the Land and Property Services Agency to examine the report and to identify what actions they could take to meet these recommendations and also to say what the implications would be in terms of staff and other resources. I will report back to this Assembly once that assessment has been carried out. I have also asked my officials to liaise with colleagues in both the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and Social Security Agency around those recommendations which would entail a more joined up approach.

Linked to the issue of take up of reliefs is the question of data sharing. While this did not form a specific

recommendation in the Access to Benefits report, the Department is currently considering what scope there is for increasing data sharing with other Government Departments with the aim of increasing the take up of reliefs. Legislative change will be required in order to achieve this and a consultation document around this issue, along with an associated Privacy Impact Assessment, will be issued in the coming weeks.

Tendering for Government Projects

Mr McLaughlin asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel in view of the downturn in the construction industry, what steps will the Minister take to ensure that indigenous construction companies are assisted and facilitated in the tendering process for Government projects. (AQO 4156/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: Public procurement is governed by the Public Contracts Regulations 2006 which preclude favouring local companies in the procurement of works, supplies or services.

The Investment Strategy for public sector projects necessarily dictates a procurement strategy increasingly dependent upon the establishment of frameworks. Where local SMEs cannot meet minimum turnover criteria to sustain a framework obligation, CPD encourages local companies to form consortia in order to bid for frameworks in their own right, or to look for opportunities within the supply chains of firms or consortia successfully emerging from the framework procurement competitions.

CPD and the construction industry are jointly developing proposals for promoting equality and sustainability through sustainable procurement in construction. Under these the Principal Supply Chain Partners are encouraged to publish available supply chain opportunities on their websites, or where appropriate, in the local press.

Public Service Buildings and Sustainable Energy

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what steps he is taking with Executive colleagues to ensure that more public service buildings convert from using fossil fuel to more sustainable energy options. (AQO 4035/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: Public service buildings include the NICS Government Office Estate, healthcare and district council buildings, the schools estate and buildings used for more specialised agricultural, scientific or other needs.

Within the DFP managed Government Office Estate, the policy has been to convert from oil to natural gas as the fossil fuel of choice on account of its lower CO2 emissions. However, the Department recognises that there is value and security in diversity of energy supply, including the use of more sustainable options. The Sustainable Development Strategy and subsequent Implementation Plan includes a target for the Government Office Estate to be carbon neutral by 2015 and a further target to reduce CO2 emissions by 30% below 1990 levels by 2025. This will require an increasing use of suitable cost effective renewable technologies.

A review of the office estate is ongoing and under the Workplace 2010 proposals, a number of the significant Government Office Estate buildings would transfer to a Private Sector Partner (PSP) in 2009. The PSP will be required to comply with a range of sustainability and energy efficiency requirements within the first six years of contract commencement. These would include, for example, the installation of biomass heating systems, solar water heating, combined heat and power, ground source heating and cooling and photo-voltaic panels.

While this major policy review is being developed, a feasibility study on buildings in the residual estate was conducted. Although this study indicated a lack of suitability and cost effectiveness of installing renewable technologies in a number of these remaining buildings, a project to install a range of renewable energy technologies in eleven DFP managed buildings is under way. Currently two of the office estate buildings are equipped with alternative energy supplies; the effectiveness of these supplies is being monitored.

DFP is also responsible for the overall policy and promotion of energy efficiency across both local and central government bodies within Northern Ireland. Established in 1993, the Central Energy Efficiency Fund administered by DFP provides capital grant assistance for energy and carbon dioxide saving measures, including the installation of renewable energy technologies, in buildings occupied by public bodies which cannot be financed from Departmental budgets or other sources. In total, twenty five renewables schemes from across the public sector have been funded (eleven of which have been funded since 2006).

Other steps within the wider public service buildings include the following:

- Healthcare buildings have been pro-active in converting from using fossil fuel to more sustainable energy options when feasible. The Health Estates Sustainable Development Design Brief will encourage Health and Social Care Trusts to show evidence of having considered the option of installing sustainable low carbon technology on all new build if appropriate to the design.

- There is a range of renewable technologies in operation within the schools estate, with further at planning stage.
- Currently within the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE) Estate two renewable energy technologies have been installed. The wind turbines and biomass burners at Loughry and Greenmount campuses will provide 12% of CAFRE's energy requirements.

Details of projects to install renewable energy technologies in District Council buildings are not retained centrally.

HEALTH, SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC SAFETY

Multiple Sclerosis

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people are diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. (AQW 7836/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Mr McGimpsey): The number of people suffering with multiple sclerosis in Northern Ireland is not currently available.

Banbridge Community Health Village

Mr Simpson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why the expected decision on the business case for Banbridge Health Village was not completed by the anticipated March 2008 date. (AQW 7849/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Banbridge Community Health Village is an ongoing health and social care development on the former Banbridge Hospital site. Several elements have already been completed including a supported living facility for older people with dementia in partnership with Fold; a supported living facility for people with physical disability in partnership with Oaklee; the Polyclinic and ambulance station refurbished; and Banbridge GPs relocated to the site since May 2007.

The current business case proposals are for a new Health and Care Centre along with a new Learning Disability Day Centre within the Banbridge community health village. A number of outstanding issues remain to be clarified with the Trust. A decision on approval cannot be taken until this appraisal process has been completed, which is now estimated should be by August of this year.

GP Waiting Times

Mr Moutray asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is the average waiting time for an appointment with a GP, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust area. (AQW 7850/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Department does not gather or centrally hold information on average waiting times for appointments with GPs. As there are approximately 7.3 million GP consultations in Northern Ireland each year and over 360 GP practices, this information could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Banbridge Community Health Village

Mr Simpson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on plans for Banbridge Community Health Village. (AQW 7852/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Banbridge Community Health Village is an ongoing health and social care development on the former Banbridge Hospital site. Several elements have already been completed including a supported living facility for older people with dementia in partnership with Fold; a supported living facility for people with physical disability in partnership with Oaklee; the Polyclinic and ambulance station refurbished; and Banbridge GPs relocated to the site since May 2007.

The current business case proposals are for a new Health and Care Centre along with a new Learning Disability Day Centre within the Banbridge community health village. A number of outstanding issues remain to be clarified with the Trust. A decision on approval cannot be taken until this appraisal process has been completed, which is now estimated should be by August of this year.

Lurgan Hospital

Mr Simpson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline his plans for Lurgan Hospital over the next 10 years. (AQW 7853/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Lurgan Hospital will continue to provide a wide range of services locally.

Currently the hospital provides day hospital, assessment, rehabilitation, as well as a range of specialist services including a child development clinic, mammography breast screening services, a stroke rehabilitation unit, physiotherapy, occupational therapy and speech and language therapy.

It is also planned that a one-stop consultant led clinic and community stroke rehabilitation service will be operational by autumn 2008, and that a cardiology ICATS (Integrated Clinical Assessment and Treatment Service) clinic will be piloted during 2008/09.

Dermatology Unit in Craigavon

Mr Simpson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is the current situation in relation to the dermatology unit in Craigavon. (AQW 7855/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The dermatology unit, currently situated at Lurgan Hospital, is in the process of moving to the Craigavon Area Hospital site. The move is necessary as the condition of the existing facility at Lurgan is not at an acceptable level for the delivery of a modern dermatology service. It is expected that the move will be completed by March 2009.

The Southern Health and Social Care Trust has approved a business case for the relocation, which has been the subject of a public and patient consultation exercise including a workshop that was held on 31 March 2008. As a result of the workshop, a user forum has been established to enable current and former patients to shape and influence the development of their new service. The next forum meeting will take place on 23 June.

Unavailability of Treatments

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what financial assistance is available to patients who have to travel abroad to attend hospitals and clinics due to the unavailability of treatments in Northern Ireland. (AQW 7859/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Where a consultant refers a patient outside Northern Ireland for medical treatment they will be entitled to claim reimbursement of expenses. Assistance with such costs is the responsibility of Health and Social Services Boards.

Financial assistance for patients travelling outside Northern Ireland is available for the reimbursement of travel costs including transport costs (flights/ferries, rail, bus and tube fares, mileage), accommodation costs, subsistence costs and other expenses such as car parking.

Non-EU Nursing Students

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what financial assistance

is available for students from outside the European Union studying nursing. (AQW 7874/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department commissions 730 pre-registration nursing places per annum from Queen's University, Belfast, and University of Ulster. Students who gain one of these places are entitled to a non-means tested bursary of £5770 per annum, and may be entitled to other allowances including dependency allowances, contribution to childcare and a maternity allowance amongst others.

Student bursary rules across the four jurisdictions in the UK vary, however in order to be offered a commissioned pre-registration nursing place with access to a bursary in Northern Ireland, an overseas student must be a national of an EC or EEA state. If the student does not meet this criteria, they are ineligible for financial assistance.

Binge Drinking

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what information he has in relation to levels of binge drinking amongst those aged (i) under 16; (ii) 16 to 24; and (iii) over 24 years. (AQW 7901/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information on the level of binge drinking in Northern Ireland is available from the Adult Drinking Patterns Survey (2005). Respondents

in this survey were aged between 18 and 75, and thus information on binge drinking amongst those aged (i) under 16 and aged (ii) 16 to 24 years is not available as requested. The table below shows the percentage of respondents who drank in the week before the survey that had engaged in at least one binge drinking session, by the following age groups (i) 18 to 24 years old, and (ii) over 24 years old.

	%
18 to 24 years	58
Over 24 years	35
All	38

In the Adult Drinking Patterns Survey (2005) report binge drinking is defined as consuming 10 or more units of alcohol in one session for males and seven or more units of alcohol for females.

Car Parking Charges at Hospitals

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what individuals/groups will be exempt from car parking charges at hospitals. (AQW 7903/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The following table summarises the patient care path and the application of free car parking which Trusts will be required to apply:

Patient Care Path	Application of Free Car Parking			
	Patient	Next Of Kin/Partner	Relative	Visitor
Radiotherapy Chemotherapy	Yes	Yes if transporting patient	Yes if transporting patient	N/A
Renal dialysis	Yes	As above	As above	N/A
Critical Care/High Dependency	N/A	Yes	Discretionary	Discretionary

Trusts will be expected to use their discretion to allow exemption in other situations where the duration and/or frequency of visits lead to significant charges.

Prostate Cancer

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is the current incidence of prostate cancer; how many deaths occurred in each Health and Social Trust area, in each of the last 5 years, where the disease was (i) mainly attributable; and (ii) contributory to, the cause of death; and what is the projected prevalence for each Health and Social Trust area up to 2013. (AQW 7906/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information on the number of new cases of cancer each year is held by the Northern Ireland Cancer Registry. The most recent information available relates to 2005. The table below details the number of new cases of prostate cancer (ICD-10 C61) in each of the last five years.

TABLE 1: INCIDENCE OF PROSTATE CANCER IN NORTHERN IRELAND BY YEAR OF DIAGNOSIS AND HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE TRUST: 2001-2005

	Year of Diagnosis				
	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Belfast	102	124	149	146	125

	Year of Diagnosis				
	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Northern	134	152	187	193	192
South Eastern	114	129	129	129	152
Southern	90	125	149	151	147
Western	105	116	130	154	116
Unknown	14	17	10	8	15
NI	559	663	754	781	747

Source: NI Cancer Registry

The most recent death registration information available relates to 2007. Tables 2 and 3 show deaths registered in each year since 2003 where the primary or secondary cause of death was prostate cancer.

(I) TABLE 2: DEATHS FROM PROSTATE CANCER AS PRIMARY CAUSE BY HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE TRUST AND YEAR OF DEATH REGISTRATION: 2003-2007^P

Health and Social Care Trust	Registration Year				
	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007 ^P
Belfast	49	43	46	49	50
Northern	54	77	60	58	63
South Eastern	46	46	41	46	49
Southern	36	32	44	31	34
Western	32	43	31	28	39
Northern Ireland	217	241	222	212	235

Source: General Register Office, NISRA

P Provisional data.

(II) TABLE 3: DEATHS FROM OTHER CAUSES WITH PROSTATE CANCER AS A SECONDARY¹ CAUSE BY HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE TRUST AND YEAR OF DEATH REGISTRATION: 2003-2007^P

Health and Social Care Trust	Registration Year				
	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007 ^P
Belfast	14	14	17	19	12
Northern	15	16	26	27	30
South Eastern	8	9	18	19	23
Southern	12	13	19	24	18
Western	12	14	15	10	20

Health and Social Care Trust	Registration Year				
	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007 ^P
Northern Ireland	61	66	95	99	103

Source: General Register Office, NISRA

P Provisional data.

1 Secondary cause refers to a reference to prostate cancer shown on the death certificate but where prostate cancer was not the primary cause of death.

Information is not available on the projected prevalence of prostate cancer.

Prostate Cancer

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is the cost of a 7 week course of radiotherapy for the treatment of prostate cancer; how many radiotherapy treatments have there been for each year since 2002; and how many projected treatments will take place up to 2013.

(AQW 7907/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Patients suffering from prostate cancer normally undergo radiotherapy treatment five times per week for seven weeks. The approximate cost of this treatment is £8,750 per patient.

	Number of prostate cancer patients	Number of radiotherapy sessions
Aug ¹ – Dec 2003	64	2240
Jan – Dec 2004	199	6965
Jan – Dec 2005	264	9240
Jan – Dec 2006	346	12110
Jan – Dec 2007	345	12075

1 Figures are not available for the period prior to August 2003

It is not possible to accurately predict the number of radiotherapy treatments that may take place up to 2013; however, as cancer incidence increases with age, and with an increasing ageing population, it is expected that there will be an increase in cancer levels.

Prostate Cancer

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans he has to introduce brachytherapy treatment for prostate cancer as an alternative to radiotherapy; and to compare

(i) average costs; and (ii) treatment times, of each treatment. (AQW 7908/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) issued guidance in February 2008 supporting the use of brachytherapy for selected cases of prostate cancer; the Department is currently considering this guidance in the context of its relevance to the HSC.

In the interim, commissioners have signalled agreement in principle to the introduction of prostate brachytherapy at the Cancer Centre and the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust is in the process of developing a business case for this new service.

	Average treatment times	Average treatment costs
Brachytherapy	2 day case procedures to insert pellets, which give off radiation over several weeks or months	Not available
Radiotherapy	7 weeks – radiotherapy 5 times per week for 7 weeks	£8,750 per patient

Prostate Cancer

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what consideration he has given to the introduction of a screening process for prostate cancer; and if his Department will explore overseas methodology like that currently employed in the Tirol province of Austria. (AQW 7909/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The National Screening Committee, which advises Government and UK Health Departments, has considered the evidence for prostate cancer screening and has concluded that the current research evidence does not support a national population-based screening programme. The main reason for this is that the current Prostate Specific Antigen test has limited accuracy. The National Screening Committee continues to keep under review new and emerging research evidence on prostate cancer screening and will advise the Department accordingly.

Middletown Centre of Excellence for Autism

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when his Department was first consulted about the medical requirements for the Middletown Centre of Excellence

for Autism; and what provision was requested in relation to (i) medical provision; (ii) personnel; and (iii) costs. (AQW 7910/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: This Department became involved in initial discussions on a suggested Middletown Centre in 2002. Based on information available, no formal request for provision has been received by my Department in relation to medical provision, personnel and costs. I understand that since November 2007 some outline discussions have taken place between staff from the proposed Middletown Centre and local Health and Social Care commissioners and providers. These discussions have not involved detailed information linked to medical provision, personnel and costs.

Clostridium Difficile

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many (i) reported cases there were of clostridium difficile in private hospitals and facilities; and (ii) private patients contracted clostridium difficile whilst in any hospital, in each of the last 3 years. (AQW 7917/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:

- (i) My Department does not hold such information in respect of private hospitals and facilities.
- (ii) This information is not available. For the purposes of mandatory surveillance of Clostridium difficile no such distinction is made between patients.

Agenda for Change Pay and Conditions Review

Ms Anderson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to explain the reasons for the delay in implementing the Agenda for Change pay and conditions review for frontline ambulance staff at Altnagelvin Hospital. (AQW 7925/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Agenda for Change implementation process for frontline ambulance staff at Altnagelvin Hospital is being carried out in partnership by the Northern Ireland Ambulance (NIAS) HSC Trust and local Health Service Trade Unions. Paramedic, Emergency Medical Technicians and Rapid Response Paramedic jobs have already been subjected, unsuccessfully to the regionally agreed matching process. These jobs will consequently now require a full job evaluation and relevant staff have

been notified. The NIAST will take this work forward once Job Evaluation Questionnaire forms have been returned from the nominated representatives within these staff groups. As an interim measure Paramedic, Emergency Medical Technicians jobs were put on to Agenda for Change rates of pay in July 2007 on a without prejudice basis, subject to the outcome of full job evaluation. Enhanced rates for unsocial hours and overtime are also included and arrears backdated to 1 October 2004 have been paid.

Agenda for Change Pay and Conditions Review

Ms Anderson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action he will take to resolve the delay in implementing the Agenda for Change pay and conditions review for frontline ambulance staff at Altnagelvin Hospital.
(AQW 7926/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Agenda for Change implementation process for frontline ambulance staff at Altnagelvin Hospital is being taken forward by the Northern Ireland Ambulance HSC Trust in partnership with the Health Service Trade Unions and in accordance with regionally agreed job matching and job evaluation protocols. Consequently, I cannot intervene in this process.

Midwives

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many (i) trainee midwives have joined; and (ii) midwives have left, the nursing profession in each of the last 5 years.
(AQW 7950/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:

- (i) The number of midwives who have joined the Northern Ireland Health Service in the last 5 years is shown in Table 1 below. Note that not all of these joiners will be trainees that have just qualified as Midwives.

TABLE 1: NUMBER OF MIDWIVES JOINING THE NORTHERN IRELAND HEALTH SERVICE

Year	Midwife Joiners	
	Headcount	WTE
2003/04	59	42.07
2004/05	70	55.35
2005/06	56	37.25

Year	Midwife Joiners	
	Headcount	WTE
2006/07	69	48.25
2007/08	62	41.56

Source: Human Resource Management System.

- (ii) The number of Midwives who have left the Northern Ireland Health Service in the last 5 years is shown in Table 2 below.

TABLE 2: NUMBER OF MIDWIVES LEAVING THE NORTHERN IRELAND HEALTH SERVICE

Year	Midwife Leavers	
	Headcount	WTE
2003/04	51	38.33
2004/05	66	47.36
2005/06	40	27.94
2006/07	60	43.73
2007/08	63	49.00

Source: Human Resource Management System.

Table 1 & 2 Notes:

- (i) Joiners will include Midwives who have just qualified as a Midwife, but may also include midwives joining the NI Health Service after a career break, from another country or from the private sector.
- (ii) Leavers may include: retirees, staff transferring to the private sector, staff transferring to the NHS in England, Scotland or Wales, staff transferring to the Republic of Ireland, staff taking a period of unpaid leave and other destinations.
- (iii) Information on the actual destination of leavers is not collected.
- (iv) WTE = Whole-Time Equivalent.

Laboratory Results

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what the turnaround times are for laboratory results in (i) the Royal Victoria Hospital; (ii) the Ulster Hospital; and (iii) Belfast City Hospital, compared to their allocated timescales. (AQW 7951/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information requested is not available.

Methamphetamine Addiction

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people were treated for addiction to methamphetamine in each of the last five years, broken down by parliamentary constituency.
(AQW 7956/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information in the form requested is not available.

Malicious Fires

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many maliciously started fires the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service has attended in each of the last 5 years; and what costs were incurred. (AQW 7958/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The table below shows the number and costs of mobilisations by the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service to malicious fire incidents in each of the last 5 financial years.

Year	No. of Malicious Incidents	Cost (£000)
2003/04	16,864	27,474
2004/05	14,358	26,859
2005/06	13,680	28,269
2006/07	14,090	31,344
2007/08	14,114	30,828

Residential Care Funding

Dr W McCrea asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people in residential and nursing homes, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust, have their care funded by the Health and Social Care Trust, under their continuing health care obligation. (AQW 7959/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information is not collected centrally.

Patients Accommodated After Hospital

Dr W McCrea asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many older people discharged from hospital to (i) nursing homes; and (ii) residential homes, were accommodated under article 4(a) and 7 of the Health and Personal Social Services (Northern Ireland) Order 1972 in (a) 2006-07; and (b) 2007-08, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust. (AQW 7960/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information is not collected centrally.

Residential Care Complaints

Dr W McCrea asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people in residential care made complaints in relation to having to pay for care in (i) 2006-07; and (ii) 2007-08, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust. (AQW 7961/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information is not collected centrally.

Air Ambulance Provision

Mr Savage asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the provision of an air ambulance. (AQW 7971/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I refer the member to the answer I gave to AQW 3270/08.

Homestart Projects

Dr Farry asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is the status of future funding for Homestart projects that were not covered by the Childhood Fund. (AQW 7981/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department is continuing to fund those locally-based Home Start schemes formerly supported by the Children's Fund. We have no plans to support any other Home Start schemes.

Commissioning of Surgical Procedures

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much his Department has paid to private hospitals to perform surgical procedures on Health Service patients, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust area, in each of the last three years. (AQW 7995/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The commissioning of surgical procedures is a matter for the Health and Social Services Boards rather than the Department.

The information is not available in the format requested.

Cases of Toxicariasis

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many cases of Toxicariasis have been recorded in each of the last 3

years; and how many of the recorded cases involved children aged under 16. (AQW 8018/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The number of cases of Toxicariasis recorded in each of the last 3 years is not available.

Mortality Rates in Maternity Units

Mr McHugh asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many new born babies died within 48 hours of birth in each of the last 3 years, broken down by maternity unit; and how the mortality rate at each maternity unit compares with the average. (AQW 8025/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information requested is not available.

Waiting Times for Consultants

Mr McHugh asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why patients are told there is a waiting list of several months to see a consultant, but if they are willing to pay they can see the same consultant within days. (AQW 8026/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Following the achievement of the health service waiting time targets for 2007/08, I remain committed to reducing waiting times for assessment and treatment further over the coming year.

New targets have been set to ensure that, from April 2008, no health service patient will wait more than 13 weeks for a first outpatient appointment and no more than 21 weeks for inpatient or day case treatment reducing to 9 weeks for outpatients and 13 weeks for treatment by March 2009.

Patients of course have the freedom to choose consultation and treatment in the private sector.

Chemotherapy in the Erne Hospital

Mr McHugh asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans his Department has for introducing a satellite service to administer chemotherapy in the Erne Hospital, given the length of time it takes patients to travel to Belfast for daily treatment. (AQW 8027/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Western Health and Social Services Trust is currently considering arrangements that would enable the Trust to provide outreach chemotherapy to patients within the southern sector of

the Western Board, taking account of the safety recommendations associated with chemotherapy delivery. One benefit of such a service would be to reduce the requirement for patients living in the southern sector of the Western Board area to travel long distances for their treatment.

It is anticipated that an outreach chemotherapy service to the southern sector of the Western Board may commence early next year.

Intensive Care Unit at the Tyrone and Fermanagh Hospital

Mr McHugh asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he has plans to close the Intensive Care Unit at the Tyrone and Fermanagh Hospital and replace it with a similar service to that which exists at Gransha Hospital. (AQW 8028/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Western Trust is modernising its mental health inpatient services in line with internal reviews conducted by the former Foyle and Sperrin Lakeland Trusts and plans to have 30 acute beds at Gransha Hospital and 26 acute beds at Tyrone and Fermanagh Hospital. The current inpatient buildings on both sites will be replaced with new modern facilities over the next 3 to 5 years, all built to Psychiatric Intensive Care Unit standards.

This approach is consistent with the Bamford Review of Mental Health and Learning Disability.

Mobility Training for the Blind

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what steps he will take to improve mobility training for those who are registered as blind. (AQW 8057/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: This is an operational issue which is the responsibility of Health and Social Care Trusts (HSCT). If a person is registered as blind, the appropriate HSCT offers mobility training based on assessed need. This training is carried out both within the home and community environments with very clear targets identified for improvement.

Services cover all age groups therefore the mobility and orientation needs of each individual change on a regular basis. All training needs are therefore addressed on an ongoing basis.

Staff Shortages Within the Tyrone and Fermanagh Hospital

Mr McHugh asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to give his assessment of staff shortages within the Tyrone and Fermanagh Hospital which has resulted in Intensive Care Unit staff being expected to be available to cover emergencies when on breaks. (AQW 8063/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Based on the information provided by the Western Trust, I understand that there are no staff shortages within the acute wards or the Intensive Care Unit at Tyrone and Fermanagh Hospital.

Mental-Health Services at Tyrone and Fermanagh Hospital

Mr McHugh asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether the mental health services at Tyrone and Fermanagh Hospital will be targeted to address the £37 million cuts needed by the Western Health Board. (AQW 8069/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Western Trust plans to reform and modernise its mental health services in line with the Bamford Review and the Comprehensive Spending Review. Major investment is planned in community and specialist mental health services over the next 3 years to maintain and care for individuals in their own homes. For the Tyrone and Fermanagh Hospital, this will lead to the integration of the acute inpatient and Psychiatric Intensive Care Units, to provide new modern facilities.

Departmental Staff with Disabilities

Mr Bresland asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what funding has been provided by his Department for people with learning disabilities in each of the last 4 years, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust. (AQW 8090/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department makes funding allocations to Health and Social Services Boards rather than Health and Social Care Trusts and the information is therefore not available in the format requested.

Malicious Fires in Limavady

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety the cost to the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service of attending

malicious fires in Limavady since 1 January 2007. (AQW 8144/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service estimates that the total cost of attending malicious fires in the Limavady area in the period 1 January 2007 to 17 June 2008 was £432,432.

Fire Hydrant Cover in the Rowreagh Road Area

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action he is taking to ensure adequate fire hydrant cover in the Rowreagh Road area of the Ards peninsula, where a substantial fire recently occurred. (AQW 8165/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I am assured by the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service that the provision of water for firefighting purposes in the Kirkistown area, which includes the Rowreagh Road, is adequate and commensurate with the local risk, and that further measures to supplement and sustain the water supply for firefighting are covered by existing Fire Service operational procedures.

Stair Lifts in Homes

Mr Gallagher asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many applications for stair lifts to be fitted in homes were (i) received; (ii) approved; and (iii) approved but are yet to be installed, in 2006-07 and 2007-08, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust area. (AQW 8199/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The data requested is not collected centrally and comparative figures are not available.

Action on Disability Project in West Belfast

Ms J McCann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if arrangements have been put in place to undertake the detailed appraisal recommended by his Department before further funding for the Action on Disability project in West Belfast could be secured. (AQW 8204/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department will continue to fund all projects formerly supported by the Children's Fund until March 2009. These include the Action on Disability project in West Belfast.

As you know, we will consider funding some projects after that date based on the outcome of an

appraisal of the performance of individual projects. Discussions on what form this appraisal might take are at an advanced stage and I would hope to be in a position to let projects know soon what these arrangements will be.

Token Payments

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why the token payment offered each week to adults attending the Southern Health and Social Care Trust day care centres has been withdrawn, and if he will undertake to have this token payment reinstated. (AQW 8211/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The responsibility for operational matters in the provision of services rests with the Health and Social Care Trusts within Northern Ireland. It is not part of my role to reverse decisions made by the Southern Health and Social Care Trust (the Southern Trust). However, I have been advised by the Southern Trust that the situation regarding the payments to which you refer is currently under review.

Surgical Resignations at Altnagelvin hospital

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the transitional plan which the Western Health and Social Care Trust is developing to deal with the recent resignation of two colorectal surgeons at Altnagelvin hospital. (AQW 8214/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The recruitment and retention of staff is a matter for individual Health and Social Care Trusts.

The Western HSC Trust has advised that a recruitment exercise is underway to replace the two colorectal surgeons who recently resigned from their positions at Altnagelvin Hospital. In the interim two locum consultant surgeons will be employed and any further arrangements necessary to maintain care for patients during this transitional period will be addressed by the Western HSC Trust.

Cancer Services at Altnagelvin Hospital.

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans are in place to (i) maintain and (ii) sustain, cancer services at Altnagelvin hospital. (AQW 8215/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The cancer unit at Altnagelvin Hospital

provides a wide range of cancer services; including services aimed at early detection and screening, imaging, surgery, chemotherapy and pathology. There are no plans to reduce or curtail in any way the range of cancer services currently available. In April this year I announced that a new satellite radiotherapy unit will be established at Altnagelvin. This represents a very significant commitment not only to sustain cancer services but to expand the range of treatments available to the population of the Northwest.

Orthopaedic Appointments at Altnagelvin Hospital

Mr Gallagher asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 7744/08, (i) how many patients from the Western Health and Social Care Trust were offered appointments at the North West Independent Hospital; (ii) how many of those subsequently had further appointments/ surgery at the North West Independent Hospital in the financial years 2006/07 and 2007/08; and (iii) how much was paid by the Western Trust to cover the costs of all such appointments and treatments. (AQW 8293/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Number of patients from the Western Health and Social Care Trust seen at the North West Independent Hospital (NWIH)

	Outpatients sent to NWIH	Number of patients who had surgery at NWIH	Total Cost
2006/07	2130	1389	£2.7m
2007/08	2884	2091	£5.3m

Source: Western Health and Social Care Trust

Notes:

- Number of patients who had surgery reflects both outpatient conversions and daycase / inpatient waiting list patients

It has been necessary to use the independent sector to supplement health service capacity to deliver the reductions in waiting times seen over the last year. This will continue to be necessary while waiting times are further reduced and any shortfalls in capacity addressed.

Loss of 3 Senior Consultants at Altnagelvin Hospital

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the impact that the loss of 3 senior consultants at Altnagelvin Hospital will have on patients on waiting lists for operations. (AQW 8389/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Western Health and Social Care Trust is currently recruiting permanent replacements for 3 consultants who have recently resigned their posts at Altnagelvin. In the meantime the Trust has put interim arrangements in place to ensure that there will be no significant impact on patients waiting for treatment.

Midwife-Led Maternity Unit for Omagh

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when he will make an announcement on the proposed midwife-led Maternity Unit for Omagh. (AQW 8393/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The feasibility study, completed by the Western Health and Social Services Board on the provision of a midwife-led maternity unit in Omagh, identifies a number of complex issues in relation to mother and baby safety and the sustainability of such a service.

I want to give those issues full and careful consideration and will make an announcement when I have done so.

Retained Firefighters

Mr McLaughlin asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he will remove the restrictions presently applied to 'Retained Firefighters' which under the 'Variable Crewing Proposal' prevents them from applying for 'Variable Crew' positions, since in the application of their skills 'retained' firefighters are indistinguishable from 'full-time' firefighters; and if he will provide 'Retained Firefighters' the same employment protections and opportunities as their 'full-time' colleagues. (AQW 8407/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: There are no restrictions currently applied to Retained Firefighters under the variable crewing proposal preventing them from applying for Variable Crew positions.

Retained Firefighters may apply for Wholetime Firefighter vacancies in exactly the same manner as external candidates; this is through a selection process which includes aptitude tests and, if successful, a structured interview followed by a medical examination.

3-Tesla MRI Scanner

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to explain the difference between a 3-Tesla MRI scanner and a 1.5-Tesla MRI scanner; and the advantages of using a 3-Tesla MRI scanner. (AQW 8435/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The tesla number refers to the field strength of the magnet contained in the scanner. The 3 tesla scanner has a more powerful magnetic field than the 1.5 tesla machine.

The greater magnetic field strength can potentially provide better image quality and quicker scan times in some incidences. However there are some technical draw backs.

Bed Pressures in Altnagelvin Hospital

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what his Department is doing to alleviate the current bed pressures in Altnagelvin Hospital; and what impact this is having on patient referrals from the Tyrone County and Erne Hospitals. (AQW 8436/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Western Trust is taking a number of measures to improve bed management at Altnagelvin Hospital. These include referrals to the Acute Medical Unit rather than to wards, daily and twice daily meetings of the clinical team to monitor patient flows, and better planning of unscheduled and scheduled admissions.

Plans are also in place to move to 23-hour stay for surgical patients, admitting patients on the day of surgery and expanding pre-assessment for all surgical procedures.

In addition, the Trust is implementing the recommendations of its review of Emergency Care and Medicine, including the establishment of an Observation Unit in the Accident and Emergency Unit, increasing the size of the Acute Medical Unit and implementing ambulatory care protocols.

Referrals from the Tyrone County and Erne Hospitals have not been adversely affected by bed pressures at Altnagelvin.

Consultants in Altnagelvin Hospital

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why three senior consultants have decided to leave Altnagelvin Hospital in the next three months; and when he expects they will be replaced with professionals of similar expertise. (AQW 8441/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The reasons for the resignation of any HSC employees are private and therefore it would be inappropriate for me to comment. I understand that, as is the case when any staff vacancy arises, the Western Trust has initiated arrangements for the recruitment of replacement staff.

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Footpath to Link Killyleagh and Delamont Park

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the action he is taking to provide a footpath to link Killyleagh and Delamont Park between the 30 mph signs and the footpath close to Delamont. (AQW 6365/08)

The Minister for Regional Development (Mr C Murphy): My Department's Roads Service recently carried out a technical assessment of a proposal to provide a footway linking Killyleagh to Delamont Park on the Downpatrick Road, Killyleagh. However, this proposal attracted a low priority and has not been included in the Minor Works Programme for the Down District Council area.

Work Programme on the Hillhall Road

Mr Craig asked the Minister for Regional Development what is the work programme, including timescales, on the Hillhall Road following completion of the Westlink project. (AQW 7816/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: In response to AQW 7816/08 and AQW 7817/08, officials in my Department's Roads Service have advised that the initial findings from a recent route study of the Hillhall Road, including the connecting routes on the Ballylesson Road and Purdysburn Hill, identified the potential for five improvement schemes. These proposed schemes would enhance road safety and traffic progression and are considered to provide value for money.

The proposed schemes will now be considered for inclusion in Roads Service's Minor Works programme. However, it should be noted that any schemes proposed would be subject to the availability of the necessary lands and finance and must compete for priority with all other minor works proposals. Therefore, it is not possible at this stage to be more specific about a work programme or to outline a five year plan for potential schemes on the Hillhall Road.

In relation to AQW 7818/08, the Hillhall Road is a signed alternative route for traffic wishing to avoid possible delays associated with the ongoing improvement works on the M1/Westlink. For this reason, Roads Service has attempted to keep the Hillhead Road free from significant road works. This does not exclude work arising from the cyclic inspections and associated maintenance repairs on the Hillhall Road. Inspections are carried out on a 4 week cycle by Roads Service and any defects discovered are categorised for repair on a priority basis related to their severity.

Work Programme on the Hillhall Road

Mr Craig asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline a five year plan and total expenditure for a major and remedial work programme on the Hillhall Road. (AQW 7817/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: In response to AQW 7816/08 and AQW 7817/08, officials in my Department's Roads Service have advised that the initial findings from a recent route study of the Hillhall Road, including the connecting routes on the Ballylesson Road and Purdysburn Hill, identified the potential for five improvement schemes. These proposed schemes would enhance road safety and traffic progression and are considered to provide value for money.

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Work Programme on the Hillhall Road

Mr Craig asked the Minister for Regional Development what is the remedial work programme, including timescales, for the Hillhall Road during the Westlink project. (AQW 7818/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: In response to AQW 7816/08 and AQW 7817/08, officials in my Department's Roads Service have advised that the initial findings from a recent route study of the Hillhall Road, including the connecting routes on the Ballylesson Road and Purdysburn Hill, identified the potential for five improvement schemes. These proposed schemes would enhance road safety and traffic progression and are considered to provide value for money.

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Exemptions from Water Charges

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Regional Development what consideration has been given and decisions made to make places of worship exempt from water charges. (AQW 7825/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: The Executive agreed with the Independent Water Review Panel's recommendation that billing for water and sewerage services should be extended to all non-domestic properties from 1st April 2008. The Executive decided to phase this in over a two year period with customers paying half of the full bill in 2008/09 and the full amount from 2009/10.

As I have indicated in response to similar questions, places of worship are classed as non-domestic and it is Northern Ireland Water's policy to install water meters for billing purposes on all properties that are not used exclusively for domestic purposes. These properties include charities and other non-profit organisations such as churches and schools. Prior to the recent extension of non-domestic payments, the company was already billing some 1,200 church properties.

The Panel in its Strand 2 report concluded that everyone should contribute towards water and sewerage services.

Footpath on the Corkey Road in Loughgiel

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development why the Roads Service has reversed a previous commitment to provide a footpath on the Corkey Road in Loughgiel. (AQW 7875/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: Officials from my Department's Road Services

have advised that due to competing priorities, it has unfortunately not been possible to include the improvement scheme to provide a footpath at Corkey Road, Loughgiel, in the current financial year's planned programme of works.

However, this improvement scheme remains on Roads Service's list of proposed schemes and will be prioritised within a future works programme taking account of the availability of funding at that time.

Road Surfacing Schemes

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what road surfacing schemes are planned for the Ballyholme and Groomspoint areas of Bangor over the next three years. (AQW 7892/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: I can confirm that my Department's Roads Service does not have any planned resurfacing schemes for the Ballyholme, Groomspoint, Abbey and Bangor West areas of Bangor over the next three years.

However, the resurfacing programme is constantly kept under review.

Road Surfacing Schemes

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what road surfacing schemes are planned for the Abbey area of Bangor over the next three years. (AQW 7893/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: I can confirm that my Department's Roads Service does not have any planned resurfacing schemes for the Ballyholme, Groomspoint, Abbey and Bangor West areas of Bangor over the next three years.

However, the resurfacing programme is constantly kept under review.

Road Surfacing Schemes

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what road surfacing schemes are planned for the Bangor West area of Bangor over the next three years. (AQW 7894/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: I can confirm that my Department's Roads Service does not have any planned resurfacing schemes for the Ballyholme, Groomspoint, Abbey and Bangor West areas of Bangor over the next three years.

However, the resurfacing programme is constantly kept under review.

Carbon Emissions

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans he has to reduce carbon emissions on roads and by the transport system. (AQW 7937/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: The Regional Transportation Strategy recognised that carbon emissions from transport are linked to private car use and levels of congestion. The reduction of carbon emissions from transport can best be achieved by successfully encouraging travellers / commuters from their private cars to other, sustainable modes, such as public transport, walking and cycling, and by tackling congestion. The Strategy and its associated Transport Plans contain proposals to encourage such a modal shift and recognise the need to remove structural deficiencies (bottlenecks) where lack of capacity causes undue congestion.

My Department is also working to directly reduce its roads and transport carbon emissions resulting from street lighting. Roads Service has replaced the highest wattage street lights, where possible, with more energy efficient ones. Further energy conservation/ carbon reduction measures currently being implemented and assessed include the selection of appropriate lighting levels for new schemes, reduced burning hours, the use of white light lamps and dimming systems.

Translink companies have also been actively pursuing energy management / energy efficiency programmes. All Ulsterbus and Metro buses and coaches have been running on bio diesel since April 2008. This will reduce carbon emissions from Ulsterbus and Metro buses by typically 4% to 5%.

As part of a review of the Regional Transportation Strategy my Department intends to assess the relevance and effectiveness of current policies in tackling transport emissions.

Carbon Emissions

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development what discussions he has had with the Energy Saving Trust in relation to the reduction of carbon emissions. (AQW 7938/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: I have had no direct discussions with the Energy Saving Trust but the Trust has written to me recently about proposals to help reduce emissions from transport. My officials will be discussing these proposals and are also currently exploring the scope for an emissions study in respect of road transport to be undertaken by the Trust.

Road Surfacing Schemes

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what new road surfacing schemes are planned for the Hollywood area over the next 3 years. (AQW 7968/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: With regard to AQW 7968/08, my Department's Roads Service has advised that it plans to carry out a carriageway re-surfacing scheme on Victoria Road in Hollywood during the 2009/10 financial year.

In relation to AQW 7969/08, Roads Service hopes to carry out carriageway re-surfacing schemes on New Road and High Bangor Road in Donaghadee within the next 3 years.

With regard to AQW 7970/08, Roads Service has no plans to carry out any re-surfacing schemes in Millisle during the next 3 years.

I should advise, however, that Roads Service's re-surfacing programme is kept under constant review and that the commencement of the works will be dependent upon the availability of funding at that time and other competing priorities.

Road Resurfacing Schemes

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what new road surfacing schemes are planned for Donaghadee over the next 3 years. (AQW 7969/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: With regard to AQW 7968/08, my Department's Roads Service has advised that it plans to carry out a carriageway re-surfacing scheme on Victoria Road in Hollywood during the 2009/10 financial year.

In relation to AQW 7969/08, Roads Service hopes to carry out carriageway re-surfacing schemes on New Road and High Bangor Road in Donaghadee within the next 3 years.

With regard to AQW 7970/08, Roads Service has no plans to carry out any re-surfacing schemes in Millisle during the next 3 years.

I should advise, however, that Roads Service's re-surfacing programme is kept under constant review and that the commencement of the works will be dependent upon the availability of funding at that time and other competing priorities.

Road Resurfacing Schemes

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what new road surfacing schemes are planned for Millisle over the next 3 years. (AQW 7970/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: With regard to AQW 7968/08, my Department's Roads Service has advised that it plans to carry out a carriageway re-surfacing scheme on Victoria Road in Holywood during the 2009/10 financial year.

In relation to AQW 7969/08, Roads Service hopes to carry out carriageway re-surfacing schemes on New Road and High Bangor Road in Donaghadee within the next 3 years.

With regard to AQW 7970/08, Roads Service has no plans to carry out any re-surfacing schemes in Millisle during the next 3 years.

I should advise, however, that Roads Service's re-surfacing programme is kept under constant review and that the commencement of the works will be dependent upon the availability of funding at that time and other competing priorities.

Waste Management

Mr Savage asked the Minister for Regional Development how much his Department has spent on waste management since devolution. (AQW 7973/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department including Roads Service spent £713,424 on waste management in the period from 8 May 2007 to 31 May 2008.

Street Lighting Schemes

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what new street lighting schemes are planned for Millisle over the next 3 years. (AQW 8006/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: In relation to AQW 8006/08, I can confirm that my Department's Roads Service proposes to carry out a street lighting scheme at the car park at Moss Road, Millisle during the current financial year. Roads Service has no plans, at this stage, to carry out any street lighting schemes in the following two financial years in Millisle.

With regard to AQW 8009/08, I can confirm that my Department's Roads Service proposes to carry out a street lighting scheme at Ashfield Drive, Donaghadee during the current financial year. Roads Service has no plans, at this stage, to carry out any street lighting schemes in the following two financial years in Donaghadee.

In regard to AQW 8010/08, I can confirm that my Department's Roads Service proposes to carry out street lighting schemes at the Chruchill Park and Churchill Crescent, Ballyholme during the current financial year. Roads Service also proposes to carry

out street lighting schemes at Ashley Park, Ashley Drive and Glenburn Park, Ballyholme during the 2009/2010 financial year.

Street Lighting Schemes

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what new street lighting schemes are planned for Donaghadee over the next 3 years. (AQW 8009/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: In relation to AQW 8006/08, I can confirm that my Department's Roads Service proposes to carry out a street lighting scheme at the car park at Moss Road, Millisle during the current financial year. Roads Service has no plans, at this stage, to carry out any street lighting schemes in the following two financial years in Millisle.

With regard to AQW 8009/08, I can confirm that my Department's Roads Service proposes to carry out a street lighting scheme at Ashfield Drive, Donaghadee during the current financial year. Roads Service has no plans, at this stage, to carry out any street lighting schemes in the following two financial years in Donaghadee.

In regard to AQW 8010/08, I can confirm that my Department's Roads Service proposes to carry out street lighting schemes at the Chruchill Park and Churchill Crescent, Ballyholme during the current financial year. Roads Service also proposes to carry out street lighting schemes at Ashley Park, Ashley Drive and Glenburn Park, Ballyholme during the 2009/2010 financial year.

Street Lighting Schemes

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what new street lighting schemes are planned for the Ballyholme and Groomsport area of Bangor over the next 3 years. (AQW 8010/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: In relation to AQW 8006/08, I can confirm that my Department's Roads Service proposes to carry out a street lighting scheme at the car park at Moss Road, Millisle during the current financial year. Roads Service has no plans, at this stage, to carry out any street lighting schemes in the following two financial years in Millisle.

With regard to AQW 8009/08, I can confirm that my Department's Roads Service proposes to carry out a street lighting scheme at Ashfield Drive, Donaghadee during the current financial year. Roads Service has no plans, at this stage, to carry out any street lighting schemes in the following two financial years in Donaghadee.

In regard to AQW 8010/08, I can confirm that my Department's Roads Service proposes to carry out street lighting schemes at the Chruchill Park and Churchill Crescent, Ballyholme during the current financial year. Roads Service also proposes to carry out street lighting schemes at Ashley Park, Ashley Drive and Glenburn Park, Ballyholme during the 2009/2010 financial year.

Waste Water Treatment Facilities in Saintfield

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans his Department has, and the timescale for, upgrading waste water treatment facilities in Saintfield. (AQW 8017/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that a £4.5 million contract has been awarded for the design and construction of a new Wastewater Treatment Works on the site of the existing Saintfield Works.

Construction work has commenced and is expected to be completed by March 2010. The new works is designed to meet Environment and Heritage Service discharge standards and will cater for population growth in the area up to the year 2030.

Car Parks

Mr Ross asked the Minister for Regional Development how many car parks in the East Antrim constituency are owned by his Department. (AQW 8023/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: Details of car parks in my Department's ownership, deemed to be within the East Antrim constituency, are provided in the table below.

Town	Location
Carrickfergus	High Street
Carrickfergus	Lancastrian Street
Carrickfergus	St. Brides Street
Whiteabbey	Shore Road
Whiteabbey	Whiteabbey Village
Larne	Agnew Street
Larne	Circular Road West
Larne	Fairhill
Larne	Narrow Gauge Road
Larne	Bridge Street
Larne	Circular Road East

Town	Location
Larne	Exchange Road
Larne	High Street
Larne	Inver
Larne	Ramp
Larne	Riverdale

My Department also provides parking facilities in off-street car parks which are leased. Details of the leased car parks, deemed to be within the East Antrim constituency, are provided in the tables below.

Town	Location
Carrickfergus	Joymount
Whitehead	Balmoral Avenue

Co-operation Between Roads Service and Northern Ireland Water

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development what co-ordination there is between Roads Service and Northern Ireland Water, to ensure that roads are not re-surfaced and then dug up within a short space of time for water pipes to be laid. (AQW 8032/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: The Street Works (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 ("the Order") provides a legislative framework for street and road works undertaken by utility providers, including Northern Ireland Water (NI Water), to the extent that these must be co-ordinated with Roads Service.

Under the Order, my Department issued a Code of Practice for the co-ordination of street works and works for road purposes and related matters. This document, prepared by the Northern Ireland Road Authority and Utilities Committee (NIRAUC) and my Department, provides practical guidance on a wide range of responsibilities for my Department's Roads Service and undertakers in relation to street or road works. NI Water is represented at the NIRAUC.

The guidance requires:

- NI Water to register their intention to carry out street works with Roads Service for the purpose of co-ordinating street works;
- Street works to be co-ordinated through a computerised register, the Northern Ireland Streetworks Register And Notification System (NISRANS);
- Local co-ordination between Roads Service and all utility providers, including NI Water. This co-ordination is undertaken through meetings at Roads

Service divisional level and is concerned primarily with direct co-ordination of individual schemes and dissemination of information; and

- Roads Service to notify NI Water of the completion of any substantial road works for the purpose of restricting any further work for a period of 12 months.

In addition to this, officials from Roads Service, at various levels, are in daily contact with NI Water to agree and adjust work or traffic management plans where necessary, to achieve effective co-ordination to help mitigate against disruption to the road user.

Notwithstanding the above, Roads Service considers that the current regulatory regime could be further improved to help maintain the flow of traffic on the network. It is in the process of bringing in additional legislation similar to that being introduced in England and Wales.

The new legislation (The Street Works (Amendment) (NI) Order 2007) will include powers for Roads Service to charge and issue permits to utility providers for the carrying out of street works; to direct the dates and routes by which works are to be undertaken; and to impose an embargo on further works for up to five years following substantial road or street works.

Alterations to the Roads Network

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development how much it cost Roads Service to complete alterations to the roads network in the vicinity of (i) Lagan Integrated College; and (ii) Millennium Integrated Primary School (AQW 8049/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service carried out a minor works improvement scheme in 2004, at the junction of Manse Road and Glencreagh Road, Castlereagh. This scheme included the provision of a new widened and realigned carriageway; right turn pockets at Lagan College and Glencreagh Road; improved sightlines at the Manse Road / Glencreagh Road junction; and the construction of approximately 1.3km of new footway to provide continuous pedestrian access on Manse Road between Four Winds Roundabout and Lagan College. The total cost for this scheme was £650,000.

Road improvement works were carried out at the site of the Millennium Integrated Primary School as a condition of its planning approval. The works, which were necessary to ensure satisfactory means of access in the interests of road safety and the convenience of road users, cost approximately £330,000 and were implemented and funded by the Department of Education. Following careful monitoring of the location after completion of the scheme, it became apparent that drivers were not observing the signs

and road markings and that safety was being threatened by illegal overtaking manoeuvres in the vicinity of the school. To address this, Roads Service installed further traffic islands, signs, road markings and lighting. This work, which cost £29,000, was completed in December 2004.

Controlled Pedestrian Crossing at Moneyreagh Primary School

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) how much it costs to erect a controlled pedestrian crossing; and (ii) if he will grant permission for a controlled pedestrian crossing to be erected in the vicinity of Moneyreagh Primary School. (AQW 8072/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: I am advised by my Department's Roads Service that the cost of providing a controlled pedestrian crossing is site specific and will therefore vary, depending on the degree of kerb modifications required, the availability of a suitable power supply and other local factors.

The cost for providing a pedestrian crossing on the Church Road, Moneyreagh is estimated to be in the region of £30,000 to £35,000.

The provision of new controlled crossing facilities is governed by criteria that are designed to ensure that every location is assessed equally and that they are provided where they are most needed. I understand that pedestrian and vehicle surveys were carried out in the vicinity of Moneyreagh Primary School in January 2002 and again in October 2007. The results of these surveys fell below that required for further consideration of a controlled crossing. Consequently, Roads Service has no plans to provide to provide a controlled pedestrian crossing at this location.

Street Lighting Schemes

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what new street lighting schemes are planned for the Abbey area of Bangor over the next three years. (AQW 8075/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: In relation to AQW 8075/08, I can confirm that my Department's Roads Service proposes to carry out a street lighting scheme at Castle Park during the current financial year. Roads Service has no plans, at this stage, to carry out any street lighting schemes in the following two financial years in the Abbey area of Bangor.

With regard to AQW 8076/08, I can confirm that my Department's Roads Service proposes to carry out a street lighting scheme at Innisfayle Park,

Innisfayle Avenue, Innisfayle Crescent, Innisbrook Gardens, Silverstream Crescent, Silverstream Park, and Silverstream Gardens during the current financial year. Roads Service has no plans, at this stage, to carry out any street lighting schemes in the following two financial years in the Bangor West area of Bangor.

In regard to AQW 8077/08, I can confirm that my Department's Roads Service proposes to carry out a street lighting scheme at Invergarry Avenue, Rannoch Road, and Dalwinney Road during the current financial year. Such schemes are planned for Kintyre Avenue, Lochinver Avenue, Invergorie Road, and Strathleven Park during the 2009/2010 financial year. Roads Service has no plans, at this stage, to carry out any street lighting schemes in the 2010/2011 financial year in Holywood.

Street Lighting Schemes

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what new street lighting schemes are planned for the Bangor West area of Bangor over the next three years. (AQW 8076/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: In relation to AQW 8075/08, I can confirm that my Department's Roads Service proposes to carry out a street lighting scheme at Castle Park during the current financial year. Roads Service has no plans, at this stage, to carry out any street lighting schemes in the following two financial years in the Abbey area of Bangor.

With regard to AQW 8076/08, I can confirm that my Department's Roads Service proposes to carry out a street lighting scheme at Innisfayle Park, Innisfayle Avenue, Innisfayle Crescent, Innisbrook Gardens, Silverstream Crescent, Silverstream Park, and Silverstream Gardens during the current financial year. Roads Service has no plans, at this stage, to carry out any street lighting schemes in the following two financial years in the Bangor West area of Bangor.

In regard to AQW 8077/08, I can confirm that my Department's Roads Service proposes to carry out a street lighting scheme at Invergarry Avenue, Rannoch Road, and Dalwinney Road during the current financial year. Such schemes are planned for Kintyre Avenue, Lochinver Avenue, Invergorie Road, and Strathleven Park during the 2009/2010 financial year. Roads Service has no plans, at this stage, to carry out any street lighting schemes in the 2010/2011 financial year in Holywood.

Street Lighting Schemes

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what new street lighting schemes are

planned for Holywood over the next three years. (AQW 8077/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: In relation to AQW 8075/08, I can confirm that my Department's Roads Service proposes to carry out a street lighting scheme at Castle Park during the current financial year. Roads Service has no plans, at this stage, to carry out any street lighting schemes in the following two financial years in the Abbey area of Bangor.

With regard to AQW 8076/08, I can confirm that my Department's Roads Service proposes to carry out a street lighting scheme at Innisfayle Park, Innisfayle Avenue, Innisfayle Crescent, Innisbrook Gardens, Silverstream Crescent, Silverstream Park, and Silverstream Gardens during the current financial year. Roads Service has no plans, at this stage, to carry out any street lighting schemes in the following two financial years in the Bangor West area of Bangor.

In regard to AQW 8077/08, I can confirm that my Department's Roads Service proposes to carry out a street lighting scheme at Invergarry Avenue, Rannoch Road, and Dalwinney Road during the current financial year. Such schemes are planned for Kintyre Avenue, Lochinver Avenue, Invergorie Road, and Strathleven Park during the 2009/2010 financial year. Roads Service has no plans, at this stage, to carry out any street lighting schemes in the 2010/2011 financial year in Holywood.

Road Signage

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development if he will provide directional signage for Ballycastle and the Causeway coastal route at the M2 turnoff for Antrim, Ballymena and Coleraine. (AQW 8102/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the number of destinations that can be accommodated on direction signage is limited, both in terms of physical space, and the amount of information that can be safely relayed to drivers. Only primary destinations are shown on main route signing with non-primary destinations being signed as they are approached.

Ballycastle is not considered as a primary destination and is not, therefore, signed from the M2 at Dunsilly. Direction signage to Ballycastle is, however, provided from the Larne Road Roundabout in Ballymena, along the M2 Ballymena Bypass, the A26 and the A44 Drone's Road.

As regards the Causeway Coastal Route, the Northern Ireland Tourist Board has carried out an extensive signing programme along the Route from Belfast to Derry over the past 2 years and has supplemented the route by appropriate tourist literature.

Signing commences on the M2 at Greencastle and continues along the coast to Derry. The Causeway Coastal Route is not a destination in itself and can be joined at many points along the route. The signing already in place was agreed as being the total signing requirement for the project, and there are no plans to provide signage for other supplementary routes to or from the Coastal Route.

The number of signing destinations used has to be limited in the interests of road safety, clarity and reducing environmental clutter. In both these cases it is believed that sufficient signage has been provided to enable drivers to reach their destination by the most suitable route.

Rathlin-Ballycastle Ferry Service

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Regional Development if all interested parties who tendered for the Rathlin-Ballycastle Ferry Service were aware of the £1.2 million additional funding announced in the budget. (AQW 8193/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: The allocation of additional funding available for the ferry service was announced by the Finance Minister on 22 January 2008. I welcomed it in a news release on the 24 January 2008.

The announcement was made during the tender process which concluded on the 28 February 2008. Until bids are received it is not possible to know who the interested parties are. It would not have been appropriate to approach possible interested parties.

Rathlin-Ballycastle Ferry Service

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Regional Development if the relief vessel for the MV Canna on the Rathlin-Ballycastle Ferry Service has a passenger carrying certificate. (AQW 8194/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: Under the existing contract the relief vessel has a passenger certificate.

Under the new contract the relief vessel is a freight-only vessel without a passenger certificate as an additional passenger only vessel will be available for this purpose.

Rathlin-Ballycastle Ferry Service

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Regional Development if the successful tender for the Rathlin-Ballycastle Ferry Service included a safety management plan. (AQW 8195/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: No. It was not a requirement prior to the award of the contract although all bidders were required to state that they would meet all necessary safety requirements prior to the service being commenced.

Rathlin-Ballycastle Ferry Service

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Regional Development if he is aware of any safety concerns relating to the past record of the successful tenderer for the Rathlin-Ballycastle Ferry Service. (AQW 8196/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: No. I am aware that a complaint was made on 14 June but, on investigation, was found to be groundless.

Rathlin-Ballycastle Ferry Service

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Regional Development if he is satisfied that the successful tenderer for the Rathlin-Ballycastle Ferry Service has in place all requirements, including (i) a ticketing system; (ii) international safety management documentation; and (iii) an environmental plan, in keeping with the tendering process. (AQW 8197/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: The successful tenderer is currently finalising a number of items, including those listed, with a view to commencing the new service on 1 July 2008.

Water Charges for Churches

Mr Gallagher asked the Minister for Regional Development what churches his Department consulted prior to the introduction of water charges for churches on 1 April 2008. (AQW 8201/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: The majority of non-domestic premises (including churches) have been making payments for water for many years. The Executive unanimously agreed with the Independent Water Review Panel's recommendation that billing for water and sewerage services should be extended to all non-domestic properties from 1st April 2008.

The Executive made it clear that it would not have time to consult separately on the independent review's strand 1 report due to the need to set its budget. However, the draft budget, which reflected the decisions taken on water, was subject to public consultation. In addition, a separate equality consultation was carried out on the DRD elements of the draft budget.

Public consultation on the non-domestic proposals was previously undertaken between November 2004 and March 2005. All the main churches were included in that consultation and were invited to respond to the proposals put forward. The Department's former Water Service also had a meeting with representatives of the main churches in early 2005.

Water and Sewerage Capacity Issues at Rougery Road, Toome

Mr McLaughlin asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) for an update on the Rougery Road (Toome) and surrounding area water and sewerage capacity issues; (ii) what action will be taken to address the issues; and (iii) for a timescale for addressing these issues. (AQW 8261/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that it plans to provide a new wastewater treatment works for Toome and a project, which will include the rationalisation of local wastewater pumping stations, is scheduled to start during 2010/11. The project will be progressed subject to available funding, resolution of land issues and the satisfactory completion of all statutory processes. When the location of the new works is finalised, Northern Ireland Water proposes to carry out a feasibility study to determine the cost of extending the sewerage system to provide first time services for properties on the Rougery Road. However, an initial assessment based on the provisions of the Water and Sewerage Services (NI) Order 2006 would indicate that a contribution towards the cost of providing the sewer would need to be made by those benefiting from the extension.

A Zonal Study has recently been completed for the Toome area, which assessed the adequacy of the water distribution system and identified parts of the system that need to be upgraded. The Study has recommended that a section of water main on the Rougery Road be upgraded, and work is scheduled to commence in 2010. This work should lead to an improvement in water pressure to homes in the area and reduce the risk of interruptions to the water supply.

Glenpark Road in Gortin, Omagh

Mr Doherty asked the Minister for Regional Development what measures his Department intends to take, including realignment works, to enhance the safety of the Glenpark Road, Gortin, Omagh for road users. (AQW 8297/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that various schemes carried out on the Glenpark Road over the past five years, have resulted in the improvement of approximately 80% of this road.

Recently, a 160 metre portion of the road was realigned to improve stability and later this year, Roads Service intends to survey a further 600 metres stretch of the road from Lenamore Road towards Omagh to determine whether realignment of this portion is viable.

E-WAY Rapid Transit Scheme

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister for Regional Development whether the proposed E-WAY rapid transit scheme will extend along the present greenway between Dundonald and Comber. (AQW 8388/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: It is proposed that the E-Way rapid transit route commences at Millmount, Dundonald where it is envisaged that a Park and Ride site will be located to serve drivers coming from the Comber / Newtownards area. There are no plans to extend the route along the present greenway between Dundonald and Comber.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Social Housing Scheme in Monkstown

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister for Social Development what steps she is taking to ensure that the 2 sites identified in Monkstown for social housing schemes will not be delayed or affected by the Housing Executive engaging with private developers who may have surplus accommodation units in their possession that are unlikely to be sold, due to the current downturn in the private sector housing market. (AQW 7963/08)

The Minister for Social Development (Ms M Ritchie): The two sites are included in the Social Housing Development Programme for potential development in 2010/11 and 2012/13, subject to planning. There will continue to be the facility to purchase existing accommodation from the private market as determined by local housing need, but the intention is to progress the two schemes as currently programmed.

Social Housing Scheme at Former Ballyduff Primary School Site

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister for Social Development what progress has been made between her Department and the Department of Education in relation to the release of the site of the former Ballyduff Primary School, for the development of a housing scheme. (AQW 7964/08)

The Minister for Social Development: This site has been secured by my Department for social housing

and Oaklee Housing Association is programmed to start 20 houses in 2009/10.

Housing Executive Jobs in Omagh

Mr McHugh asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to her answer to AQW 5090/08, to provide a detailed breakdown of the savings that will be made by the Housing Executive in transferring 20 jobs from Enniskillen to Omagh. (AQW 8024/08)

The Minister for Social Development: In the short term the establishment of the Omagh Service Centre will result in a saving equivalent to two management posts which covered four district offices at Fermanagh, Dungannon, Omagh and Cookstown. This equates to a saving of some £60k, with £15k of that figure attributable to the Fermanagh office. In the longer term, further savings will be delivered across all grades.

Post Office Card Account

Mr McElduff asked the Minister for Social Development whether she will make representations to the Department of Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform to retain the Post Office Card Account (POCA2) as a Post Office product. (AQW 8047/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The current Post Office card account contract ends in March 2010. Government is required to tender competitively for the new service, in order to ensure that best value for money for the taxpayer is achieved. It would not be appropriate for me to attempt to influence this process to try and ensure a particular outcome.

Social Housing Schemes in the East Antrim Constituency

Mr Ross asked the Minister for Social Development what sites have been identified for social housing schemes in the East Antrim constituency; and when work will commence on these schemes. (AQW 8112/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The table below details the locations where social housing will be started during the period 2008/09 to 2012/13.

Provider	Location	Units	Need
2008/09			
Hearth	Re-Improvement, Glenarm	13	General Needs/Singles
Oaklee	Ellis Street, Carrickfergus	11	Elderly

Provider	Location	Units	Need
2009/10			
Oaklee	Minorca Drive, Carrickfergus	15	General Needs
Oaklee	Drumalla House, Phase 1, Carnlough	20	General Needs
2010/11			
Fold	Eden Orbits, Phase 3, Carrickfergus	10	General Needs
To be confirmed	Monkstown 1	20	General Needs
2011/12			
Oaklee	Drumalla House, Phase 2, Carnlough	20	General Needs
Oaklee	Croft Road, Phase 1, Carnlough	11	General Needs
Triangle	Carrick Care Leavers	7	Young People at Risk
To be confirmed	Larne Town	10	General Needs
To be confirmed	Whitehead	8	General Needs
To be confirmed	McKeens Avenue, Carrickfergus	11	General Needs
To be confirmed	Sunnylands/Fergus Court 1, Carrick	15	General Needs
To be confirmed	Windmill, Carrickfergus	11	Elderly
2012/13			
Oaklee	Ballycarry, Larne	1	Learning Disabilities
To be confirmed	Carrick Central 1	15	General Needs
To be confirmed	Glenarm	6	General Needs
To be confirmed	Glynn	6	General Needs
To be confirmed	Whiteabbey Village 1	18	General Needs
To be confirmed	Eden 3B	15	General Needs
To be confirmed	Monkstown 2	20	General Needs
To be confirmed	Sunnylands/Fergus Court 2, Carrick	15	General Needs

Houses Designated as Unfit

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development how many houses were designated as unfit in the Down Council area in 2005, 2006 and 2007. (AQW 8116/08)

The Minister for Social Development: As these two questions are linked I shall answer them together. The information requested is not readily available by constituency, however, I can report at District Council level. The Housing Executive carries out a House Condition Survey every five years, the previous one being completed in 2006. That survey recorded 750 unfit houses in Down District, 500 in Castlereagh District and 400 in Ards District.

Replacement Grant Regulations

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development what plans she has to reconsider and update the Replacement Grant Regulations. (AQW 8117/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The Housing Renewal Grants (Reduction of Grant) Regulations (NI) 2004 which constitute the means test for housing grants including replacement grant are updated regularly and a further update is planned for later this year. An ongoing review by the Housing Executive of its Grant Strategy may identify a need for other amendments to the relevant regulations. Any such proposals would be subject to consultation.

Houses Designated as Unfit

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development how many houses were designated as unfit in the Strangford constituency in 2005, 2006 and 2007. (AQW 8120/08)

The Minister for Social Development: As these two questions are linked I shall answer them together. The information requested is not readily available by constituency, however, I can report at District Council level. The Housing Executive carries out a House Condition Survey every five years, the previous one being completed in 2006. That survey recorded 750 unfit houses in Down District, 500 in Castlereagh District and 400 in Ards District.

Social Security Agency's Strategic Business Review

Mr Doherty asked the Minister for Social Development, in relation to the Social Security Agency's Strategic Business Review into Jobs and

Benefits Accommodation, (i) who is conducting the review, including the relevant Department; (ii) when the outcome of the review will be known; (iii) how many other locations are being looked at in terms of whether they retain or lose a back office benefit processing centre. (AQW 8138/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The Social Security Agency's (SSA) Strategic Business Review (SBR) is being taken forward by a multi disciplinary team of staff from across the Agency. The SSA is an executive agency within the Department for Social Development (DSD).

On current plans, the change proposals emerging from the review will be subject to public consultation from late July to September 2008. Following analysis of the consultation results and consideration of other issues such as the review of policy on the Location of Public Sector Jobs (Bain report), final decisions on the way forward will be made in Autumn 2008. In terms of back-office benefit processing, the review is focussed solely on the Agency's network of 35 Jobs and Benefits/Social Security Offices.

New Jobs and Benefits Office in Strabane

Mr Doherty asked the Minister for Social Development if the decision not to proceed with a replacement site for the new Jobs and Benefits Office in Strabane was communicated to the tender competition private bidders; and to detail all communications to this effect. (AQW 8139/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The Department of Finance and Personnel's Contracts Branch advised bidders in writing, on 20 February 2007, that the Department would not be proceeding with the tender exercise for the new Strabane Jobs & Benefits office as a value for money tender had not been received.

New Jobs and Benefits Office in Strabane

Mr Doherty asked the Minister for Social Development why a decision to lodge a planning application for the redevelopment of the existing site for the Strabane Jobs and Benefits office was submitted prior to the completion of a private sector process for a replacement site; if the decision to run a parallel approach is in breach of the Official Journal of the European Communities; who took this decision; and on what date it was taken. (AQW 8143/08)

The Minister for Social Development: As no value for money tenders were received in response to the procurement exercise, the Social Security Agency had to consider other options for the delivery of a new

office to ensure that clients could benefit from the same enhanced work focused service which is available elsewhere in the province. This exercise was not a separate tender process, nor was it in breach of OJEC procedures. A Contingency Plan was developed which included proposals to build a new office on the existing site at Urney Road. The Senior Responsible Officers for the Jobs and Benefits Project gave approval to adopt this approach in January 2007 and this was subsequently approved by the SSA/DEL Modernisation Board at its meeting in February 2007. Bidders were advised that the Department would not be proceeding with the tender exercise in writing in February 2007 and the planning application for the new office on the existing site was submitted on 26 March 2007.

New Jobs and Benefits Office in Strabane

Mr Doherty asked the Minister for Social Development who prepared the pre-tender estimate for the delivery of a replacement site for the new Jobs and Benefits office in Strabane; what similar type office development was used as the comparative for this exercise; and if the costs for the subsequent plans to redevelop the existing site at Urney Road were subject to a valid appraisal, as robust as that governing the tender competition process for the initial plan to deliver a replacement site for the new office. (AQW 8145/08)

The Minister for Social Development: Consultants employed by Central Procurement Directorate on behalf of the SSA prepared the pre-tender estimates for the tender competition. The costs used for the estimates were based on rates sourced from tenders received by the consultants for similar developments. The site cost was based on land values provided by Land and Properties Services.

The current proposal to redevelop the existing site at Urney Road is subject to exactly the same process of robust economic appraisal as previous plans for delivery of a replacement office on a new site. The original economic appraisal for the Strabane Jobs & Benefits office is being updated to reflect the latest costs. The economic appraisal is being produced in compliance with HM Treasury's Green Book and in consultation with Departmental economists. The economic appraisal when completed will be submitted to the Department of Finance and Personnel for approval.

Construction (Design & Management) Regulations 2007

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development what procedures are in place for her Department to monitor and record the implementation of, and compliance with (i) the standards of the guidelines in relation to the design objectives and building

practices to provide sustainable, safe and durable homes; and (ii) the new Construction (Design & Management) Regulations 2007 requirements, by Housing Associations and the Housing Executive. (AQW 8171/08)

The Minister for Social Development: Design standards for housing associations, including the new Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 2007, are set down in the Department's Housing Association Guide. The Department audits compliance against these requirements.

The Chief Executive of the Housing Executive, as Accounting Officer, is responsible for ensuring the Housing Executive's compliance with all applicable regulations.

Sustainable, Safe and Durable Homes

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development what steps her Department is taking to encourage the implementation of its own guidelines in relation to the design objectives and building practice to provide sustainable, safe and durable homes. (AQW 8172/08)

The Minister for Social Development: Pursuant to the answer I gave the Member in respect of AQW8171, my Department is only responsible for implementation of these guidelines in new social housing. My Department audits compliance against these requirements and funding is dependant on this. There are no similar requirements in the private sector.

Housing Executive Properties

Mr McClarty asked the Minister for Social Development how many people are on the waiting list for Housing Executive properties in the (i) Coleraine; and (ii) Limavady, Council areas. (AQW 8291/08)

The Minister for Social Development: At 31 March 2008, the waiting list was as follows:-

- Coleraine: 1427 of which 741 were in housing stress
- Limavady: 569 of which 236 were in housing stress

Annadale Flats Multi-Element Improvement Scheme

Mr Spratt asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to her answer to AQW 7551/08, how many of the 145 flats identified for the multi-element improvement scheme are currently 3 bedroom properties. (AQW 8302/08)

The Minister for Social Development: As these two questions are linked I shall answer

them together. Of the 145 Housing Executive flats identified for multi-element improvement 45 are currently 3-bedroom. The waiting list for Annadale is predominately for singles, with only one family in housing stress requiring 3-bedroom accommodation. The proportion of three bedroom accommodation proposed is considered sufficient for current needs.

Disability Living Allowance

Mr Ross asked the Minister for Social Development how many people have been in receipt of Disability Living Allowance, in each of the last 12 months.

(AQW 8308/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The information requested is set out in the table below.

DISABILITY LIVING ALLOWANCE -RECIPIENTS

June 2007	172,054
July 2007	171,822
August 2007	172,651
September 2007	172,674
October 2007	172,800
November 2007	172,909
December 2007	172,940
January 2008	173,236
February 2008	173,091
March 2008	173,685
April 2008	173,498
May 2008	173,685

Annadale Flats Multi-Element Improvement Scheme

Mr Spratt asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 7551/08, what is her assessment of the impact of such a small proportion of three bedroom flats, as part of the Annadale Flats Multi-Element Improvement Scheme, on the development of a family based community.

(AQW 8310/08)

The Minister for Social Development: As these two questions are linked I shall answer them together. Of the 145 Housing Executive flats identified for multi-element improvement 17 are currently three bedroom. The waiting list for Annadale is predominately for singles, with only one family in housing stress requiring three bedroom accommodation. The proportion of three bedroom accommodation proposed is considered sufficient for current needs.

Disability Living Allowance

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development how many people have been turned down for Disability Living Allowance after a review of their current award, in each of the last 3 years, broken down by parliamentary constituency.

(AQW 8323/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The information requested is not available as the data systems do not hold the information in this format. The figures in the table below relate to how many people have been turned down for Disability Living Allowance after a review of their current award, in each of the last 3 years.

Year	Entitlement Ended
2005/06	438
2006/07	538
2007/08	684

Disability Living Allowance

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development how many reviews of current Disability Living Allowance awards have been completed in each of the last 3 years, broken down by parliamentary constituency.

(AQW 8325/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The information requested is not available as the data systems do not hold the information in this format. The figures in the table below relate to how many reviews of current Disability Living Allowance awards have been completed in each of the last 3 years.

Year	Total Number of reviews
2005/06	10,940
2006/07	10,204
2007/08	12,691

ASSEMBLY COMMISSION

Sir Henry Wilson MP

Mr McCausland asked the Assembly Commission when the portrait by H. W Gates of Sir Henry Wilson MP was acquired; when it was moved to the artefacts store; and where was the portrait hanging prior to it being moved to the artefacts store. (AQW 7912/08)

The Representative of the Assembly Commission (Rev Dr R Coulter): The Assembly Commission does not hold any records of when or how the portrait of Sir Henry Wilson was acquired. The Assembly Commission has no exact date as to when the painting, along with others, was moved to the artefacts store however there is a record of the portrait being hung in Room 3 in papers dated November 1994. There are records indicating that paintings were hung in Parliament Buildings in 1933 and 1973, however no reference is made to the portrait of Sir Henry Wilson.

Following further research it was discovered that the painting is mentioned in the book *Field Marshall Sir Henry Wilson, 'A Political Solider'* by Keith Jeffery, 2006. In this it states that the painting is in fact a copy of the portrait by Sir Oswald Birley, and it hung in the Prime Minister's room in Parliament Buildings, with a set of framed metal ribbons underneath, which Cecil Wilson left to Sir James Craig in her will. This statement is reiterated in page 54 of the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, where it asserts that the original painting hangs in Marlborough College and a copy was located in the Prime Ministers room, Parliament Buildings.

Sir Henry Wilson MP

Mr McCausland asked the Assembly Commission if there has ever been a room in Parliament Buildings named in honour of Sir Henry Wilson MP. (AQW 7913/08)

The Representative of the Assembly Commission: The Assembly Commission is not aware of any room in Parliament Buildings being named after Sir Henry Wilson MP at any point in its history.

Assembly Gift Shop

Mrs D Kelly asked the Assembly Commission what arrangements are in place for accepting euros in transactions in the Assembly Gift Shop and restaurants in Parliament Buildings. (AQW 7954/08)

The Representative of the Assembly Commission: The Assembly Gift Shop and restaurants will take Euros by the end of June 2008.

Assembly Business Office Staff

Mr Attwood asked the Assembly Commission (i) how many staff are employed in the Business Office; (ii) the job titles of the Business Office staff; (iii) whether there are proposals to revise the staff structure in the Business Office, including any proposals for new positions; and (iv) how

recruitment for any new positions will be conducted. (AQW 7992/08)

The Representative of the Assembly Commission:

- (i) There are currently twelve posts in the Assembly Business Office comprising:
 - 3 at Assembly Clerk level;
 - 3 at Assistant Assembly Clerk level;
 - 3 at Clerical Supervisor level; and
 - 3 at Clerical Officer level.
- Nine of the 12 posts are filled and 3 are vacant.
- (ii) The titles of staff currently in post are:
 - 3 Assembly Clerks;
 - 1 Assistant Assembly Clerk and 1 Clerical Supervisor temporarily promoted to Assistant Assembly Clerk;
 - 1 Clerical Supervisor and 2 Clerical Officers temporarily promoted to Clerical Supervisor;
 - 1 Clerical Officer.
- (iii) There are no proposals to revise the staffing structure of the office or to create further new positions.
- (iv) Recruitment for vacant posts will be conducted in accordance with Assembly policy. This may include open competition, re-deployment or voluntary transfer of staff from other offices within the Assembly.

Internet Connections in Parliament Buildings

Dr Farry asked the Assembly Commission what steps are being taken to improve the speed of internet connections in Parliament Buildings, particularly during the early afternoon period. (AQW 8185/08)

The Representative of the Assembly Commission: The NI Assembly currently shares an Internet connection with the NI Civil Service with a capacity of 34 Megabits per second. This "shared services" arrangement enables the NI Assembly to take advantage of the NICS's dedicated Anti Virus, Anti Spam and Internet security systems at a lower cost than if the NI Assembly undertook the work itself. The NI Assembly uses technology called "caching" to enhance the capacity of the link.

The IS Office monitors the performance of the Internet connection on a daily basis. The speed of response can be affected by;

- The time of day (which influences the response of websites based in American in particular);
- The total number of people sharing the outgoing connection; and

- The size of any particular website's connection to the Internet.

The issue of the apparent congestion was raised formally with the NICS at a meeting on the 14th December 2007. A planned upgrade to increase the capacity and resilience of the link is underway and the IS Office are currently monitoring progress. Both the NICS and the NI Assembly rely heavily on the internet connection and as the changes have the potential to cause disruption, the work has proceeded cautiously. The work is scheduled for completion in July.

Staff Positions in the Assembly

Mr Attwood asked the Assembly Commission how it is decided which staff positions in the Assembly are recruited by (i) public advertisement; (ii) internal trawl; (iii) redeployment; and (iv) any other method.

(AQW 8554/08)

The Representative of the Assembly Commission: During the period when the Assembly was in suspension, and, following that, during the Review of the Assembly Secretariat, there was a freeze on all external recruitment to the Assembly. Filling of posts was therefore only possible through temporary means – temporary promotion, emergency redeployment of Civil Servants or by the use of staff provided by recruitment agencies.

Following completion of the Review, and consideration of the Report, the Assembly Commission agreed that by 2010 staff employed in the Secretariat should be direct employees of the Commission. No further secondment opportunities other than in exceptional circumstances (e.g. for fixed term posts) would be offered through open recruitment.

The Commission has now agreed a recruitment schedule which has been developed to achieve "separation" within this timescale.

To date all permanent recruitment to the Assembly has been through public advertisement and open recruitment.

At its meeting on 24th June 2008, the Assembly Commission considered a paper which raised the possibility of filling posts to the Assembly by internal promotion to a permanent position when appropriate. To date this has not been possible, other than on a temporary basis. The Commission has now agreed "in principle" to consider internal promotions on a case by case basis when the circumstances etc are regarded as appropriate and conducive to such an approach.

The deployment of staff in the organisation will continue to be based on a number of factors, including staff development.

Staff Positions in the Assembly

Mr Attwood asked the Assembly Commission what process is used in the (i) review; and (ii) re-grading, of staff positions in the Assembly. (AQW 8555/08)

The Representative of the Assembly Commission: Staff positions in the Assembly may be reviewed by using a number of methods. These include the use of external experts as well as senior management from within the Assembly carrying out reviews when they decide it is appropriate.

At present the Northern Ireland Civil Service Job Evaluation and Grading System (JEGS) (and JESP for senior posts) is being used where necessary to evaluate and consider the grading of posts in the Assembly.

Staff Positions in the Assembly

Mr Attwood asked the Assembly Commission whether it is proposed to establish an Office of the Director General; the staffing structure of the office; how staff positions will be filled within the office; and if the head of the proposed office will be recruited by a public or internal recruitment exercise. (AQW 8556/08)

The Representative of the Assembly Commission: There has always been an Office of the Clerk within the Assembly Secretariat. This has now been recently renamed the Office of the Clerk/Director General to reflect the new title given to the Clerk/Director General.

Following the recent Review of the Secretariat a number of functions and staff have been moved into the Office of the Clerk/Director General. A decision on the staffing structure within this office has yet to be finalised by the Interim Clerk/Director General. A decision on how staff positions in this office will be filled will follow, if required.

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Friday 4 July 2008

Written Answers to Questions

OFFICE OF THE FIRST MINISTER AND DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER

Lagan Valley Projects

Mr Poots asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what projects specific to the Lagan Valley constituency did each Department deliver in 2007-08; and what projects specific to Lagan Valley are due to commence in 2008-09.

(AQW 7945/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister (Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness): Details of those projects delivered in the Lagan Valley constituency by each Department in 2007-08 and of those projects due to commence in the constituency by each Department in 2008-09 have been compiled and are available in the Assembly Library.

Victims and Survivors' Groups Core Funding Scheme

Mr Bresland asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to list (i) each group; and (ii) the amount of funding awarded to each group, under the Victims and Survivors Groups core funding scheme, for each financial year from 2003 to 2008.

(AQW 8222/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

	2003-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08
	Total Award (2 years)	Total Award	Total Award	Total Award
Aisling Centre	50,407.00	27,038.73	27,767.69	28,792.52
Ashton Centre	52,797.00	32,322.93	33,149.25	34,478.26

	2003-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08
	Total Award (2 years)	Total Award	Total Award	Total Award
Ballymurphy Womens Centre	41,239.00	22,624.90	23,254.17	26,113.30
C.A.L.M.S.	82,631.00	46,933.46	48,469.69	50,250.20
Contact Youth	55,065.00	29,702.70	30,519.86	31,607.94
Corpus Christi Services	81,238.00	47,802.56	48,947.47	51,090.62
Cunamh	99,705.00	58,986.23	60,275.06	63,205.06
Derry Well Women	50,960.00	28,654.10	29,326.79	30,642.76
DPOA	1,000.00	-	-	-
F.A.C.T.	69,371.00	38,218.17	39,640.49	-
F.A.I.R.	96,649.00	59,200.42	60,381.24	63,581.48
F.O.D.D.D	46,531.00	35,268.00	35,956.76	37,897.88
Firinne	78,096.00	43,540.39	44,505.80	48,011.18
H.A.V.E.N.	48,838.00	26,754.19	27,257.03	28,774.25
ICPD	41,934.00	29,365.89	29,781.90	31,760.33
Koram Centre	88,654.00	50,757.82	51,847.72	54,413.09
Lenadoon Community Counselling Pjt	51,409.00	27,194.91	27,985.86	28,883.54
Lifeline	12,500.00	6,250.00	6,250.00	6,875.00
Lifeways Psychotherapy/ Counselling Ctre	63,025.00	38,747.17	39,610.48	41,496.69
M.A.S.T.	26,438.00	16,064.06	16,377.76	17,261.62
Make Your Mark	51,836.00	28,832.23	29,565.10	30,760.75
New Life Counselling Service	33,930.00	23,626.86	24,158.83	25,296.20
Nexus Institute	22,392.00	14,173.72	14,524.70	15,133.62
NI Music Therapy Trust	29,284.00	31,749.34	32,645.42	33,756.38
NOVA Project	163,794.00	94,335.02	98,902.04	102,429.93
Regimental Association of UDR	55,552.00	29,576.03	30,674.06	32,256.13
Relatives For Justice	155,758.00	92,434.34	94,601.30	100,453.70
S.A.V.E.R./ N.A.V.E.R.	78,368.00	50,960.18	52,097.48	54,903.89

	2003-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08
	Total Award (2 years)	Total Award	Total Award	Total Award
S.E. Fermanagh Foundation	81,000.00	47,476.99	48,897.55	51,526.83
Shankill Stress and Trauma Group	115,154.00	65,527.44	69,792.19	69,792.19
South Down Action for Healing Wounds	77,900.00	43,899.60	44,858.11	47,040.28
Springhill Community House	61,576.00	32,181.32	33,146.76	34,141.16
Streetbeat Youth Project	58,040.00	34,212.52	35,074.14	36,510.80
Survivors of Trauma	86,714.00	38,353.23	50,022.42	52,537.74
Tara Centre	84,137.00	59,390.89	60,709.18	63,611.82
The Cross Group	8,345.00	4,975.00	4,975.00	5,472.50
The ELY Centre	82,647.00	52,347.26	54,055.92	56,889.30
The Wider Circle	51,054.00	29,735.01	30,467.16	31,754.27
United Services Club Victims Survivors Gp	45,951.00	25,037.70	26,184.83	27,199.97
VAST	79,778.00	43,989.22	44,862.89	47,249.47
WAVE	402,463.00	222,261.37	277,144.61	289,534.68
West Tyrone Voice	104,505.00	63,445.91	64,841.19	67,971.96
Omagh	35,270.00	42,155.52	43,107.29	46,230.61
HURT	40,237.00	52,832.11	53,723.17	56,953.97
Ex-Servicemen	40,820.00	47,276.79	48,303.90	50,665.82
RUC Families	5,000.00	5,000.00	5,000.00	-
Columba	33,350.00	36,185.86	37,148.97	38,549.18

Victims and Survivors' Groups Development Grants Scheme

Mr Bresland asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to list (i) each group; and (ii) the amount of funding awarded to each group, under the Victims and Survivors Groups development grants scheme, for each financial year from 2003 to 2008.

(AQW 8223/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: The information requested is detailed below: -

	2003/4	2004/5	2005/6	2006/7	2007/08
A Peace Cantata			4,430		
Armagh Voluntary Welfare Vol Group	6,830	670	6,100	5,970	9,380
Ashton Community Trust		30,166	22,719	31,345	27,380
Aisling Centre		9,426		1,235	
Ardoyne Commemorative Project		2,550			
Augnacloy Comrades Support Group					1,365
Ballymurphy Women's Centre	14,280	27,030	14,990	29,109	8,250
Banbridge Ulster Special Constables Association			680		
Bannside Community Group	5,000	2,844		4,150	
Barnardos Parenting in a Divided Society	3,500	5,000	5,000		
Belfast Cognitive Therapy Centre	2,400	740			
Breaking the Silence	4,500				
CALMS	8,883	22,360	24,243	68,505	36,472
Care in Crisis				1,964	
Centre for Creative Energy	260	3,920	3,405	2,935	
Cheshire Regiment Association		2,199	290		1,430
Claudy Memorial Group	2,500	6,043			6,686
Cliftonville Community Regeneration Forum				2,590	
Coiste Na N-Iarchimi				2,404	1,969
Colin Community Counselling Project			2,400	1,126	

	2003/4	2004/5	2005/6	2006/7	2007/08
Columba Community		8,043	500	1,146	
Comrade Support		2,272	2,340	2,420	9,930
Conflict Trauma Resource Centre	9,839	382		2,500	
Corpus Christi Services	2,560	3,053	340	8,072	4,260
Cruse	8,227			3,400	
Contact Youth	14,470	13,040	10,700	1,409	
Crossfire Trust		32,958	9,670	7,439	
Cunamh	17,990	8,850	14,980	14,149	3,090
Dairy Farm Job Club					600
Derry Well Woman	13,342	6,460	13,116	31,585	24,497
Disabled Police Officers Association		3,069	7,585	2,200	
Dungannon Ulster Special Constabulary			1,059		
East Belfast Mission		3,450	1,560		
EHSSB TAP	14,500				
Ex-Service Mental Welfare			2,500		
FACT	1,270	480	3,234		
F.O.D.D.D.		980		3,060	2,886
FAIR	48,844	9,145	13,035	59,593	62,277
Falls Community Centre	4,900				
Fermanagh Voluntary Welfare Support Group			2,775	7,138	12,069
Firinne	5,860		614	987	
HAVEN	6,653	12,482	5,140	9,160	2,770
Healing Through Remembering					
Holy Trinity Centre	3,360	13,265	6,900	3,000	2,673
HURT	11,600	3,424	6,600	16,545	
Innocent Victims of the Conflict		2,100			
ICPD	2,641	4,750	11,160	1,365	6,949
Irish Peace Institute		5,000	4,100		

	2003/4	2004/5	2005/6	2006/7	2007/08
Ladies Friendship Group				4,075	2,385
Lansew Association					1,470
Lenadoon Counselling Project	8,360		13,600		
Limavady Welfare Support Group					4,960
Lisburn Community Relationship Network			1,200		
Lurgan Welfare Support Group				4,217	4,180
Loughbrickland USCA			600		
Lifeways Psychotherapy Centre	240		3,225		4,700
Lisburn YMCA			1,200		
MAST	14,200	12,967	28,184	18,038	17,568
Newry and Mourne Vol Welfare Group	4,000	1,910	6,231	5,611	
Newforge Brunch Club		3,960	4,540	464	
New Life Counselling Service	3,475		6,600	22,287	
Newtownards & District Ulster Special Constabulary Association			898		
Nexus Institute				350	1,000
NIACRO	4,000				
North Ulster Victims Support Network			2,500	10,512	
Northern Ireland Terrorist Victims Together	2,500			3,050	
Northern Ireland Music Therapy Trust				1,291	
NOVA	4,686	630		1,340	8,166
Omagh Support & Self Help Group	8,467	19,902	14,061	16,848	21,742
Phoenix					15,760

	2003/4	2004/5	2005/6	2006/7	2007/08
RAFT	15,077	17,842	27,465	6,576	
REACT		5,554			
Regimental Association of the UDR	4,071	4,850	2,261	2,661	19,368
Relatives for Justice	14,652	21,399		11,196	11,864
Royal Artillery Association	410	800	2,861	1,603	
Royal British Legion					3,342
Rural Victim Survivor Network	4,930				
RUC GC Association	2,500	2,125	3,950	25,649	22,834
SAVER/NAVER	26,954	27,015	24,825	42,820	36,527
Shankill Stress & Trauma Group	5,000	13,973	2,840	12,785	2,880
Sligo Presbyterian Church	7,500				
SOLAS	1,780	4,725	8,056	2,066	
St Vincent de Paul	3,135				
South Derry Ex-Prisoners Association				2,500	
South Down Action for Healing Wounds	17,784	14,112	14,384	22,239	25,202
South East Fermanagh Foundation	22,549	15,256	27,526	51,968	34,001
South Tyrone Voluntary Welfare Group			5,350	6,535	3,050
South West Community Victims Initiative	10,000				
Springhill Community House			6,892	15,560	12,258
Streetbeat	8,668	5,188	3,364	8,101	
Stewartstown & District Supp Grp		925		300	4,920
Survivors of Trauma	3,465	1,583	5,314	7,003	
Tar Anall	1,800		2,000		11,350
Tar Anall/Epic					4,470

	2003/4	2004/5	2005/6	2006/7	2007/08
Tara Counselling & Personal Development Centre	4,536	5,000	11,070	4,172	9,125
TEAR		1,476	6,680	4,634	2,020
The Cross Group				1,022	
The Ely Centre		46,079	23,617	22,560	24,054
The Little Paris Club					7,620
The Koram Center	18,727	11,633		21,236	4,475
The Pat Finucane Centre	9,882		3,255		1,353
The Phoenix Group				35,447	22,261
The Strule Association					3,496
Top of the Rock		2,420	3,265		
Trauma Advisory Panel	3,750				
Trauma Recovery Group			1,000	235	
TWN	4,900				
Tides Training					804
Tullycarnet Victims Support Group				5,400	
UDR Association	4,071		4,240	14,427	6,010
UDR Wives					3,000
Ulster Special Constabulary Association			9,063	8,627	42,898
United Services Club			0	29,640	700
Voice		19,652	4,298		
VAST	17,478	10,563	8,440	11,895	9,472
WAVE	83,838	22,600	111,826	72,097	49,601
West Tyrone Voice	12,043	7,523	5,840	1,240	12,884
Wider Circle	7,530	5,471	6,335	13,036	9,829
Widows Mite				4,390	

Inter-Agency Protocol on Flags

Dr Farry asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what plans there are to review the inter-agency protocol on flags. (AQW 8234/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

A review of the inter-agency protocol on flags is currently underway.

Projects in East Derry/Londonderry

Mr McClarty asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what projects specific to the East Derry/Londonderry constituency (i) it delivered in 2007-2008; and (ii) will commence in 2008-2009. (AQW 8290/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

The Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister has identified the following projects specific to the East Derry/Londonderry constituency:

Delivered in 2007-08

None

Due to commence 2008-09

Provision of funding to Kilcranney House

Sustainable Development Strategy

Mrs Long asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) what progress has been made in the rewriting of the Sustainable Development strategy; (ii) what is the timescale for rewriting this; and (iii) what engagement there has been with stakeholders. (AQW 8349/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

- (i) Work is ongoing by officials on the first draft of the Sustainable Development Strategy and good progress is being made.
- (ii) The first draft of the Sustainable Development Strategy is scheduled to be with us before the summer recess.
- (iii) Officials are working with colleagues from other Departments in drafting the Strategy and have also been in discussion with the Sustainable Development Commission. We intend to consult with all interested stakeholders, including the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, as part of the development of the final document.

Sustainable Development Stakeholder Group Meetings

Mrs Long asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) how many Departments have a Sustainable Development champion; (ii) how

many times these champions have met; (iii) what agenda items have been covered in these meetings; and (iv) how many hours and what proportion of their working week is spent on Sustainable Development activity. (AQW 8350/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

- (i) All departments have appointed a sustainable development Champion.
- (ii) Champions have met formally through Sustainable Development Stakeholder Group meetings, of which there were four in 2007. No meetings have been convened during 2008. Informally, Champions have participated in a number of informal and *ad hoc* meetings/events, including the Senior Civil Service Masterclass in Sustainable Development earlier this year and have also chaired or participated in departmental meetings and discussions relating to sustainable development. It is not possible to quantify these precisely.
- (iii) Agenda items for Sustainable Development Stakeholder Group meetings included: Meeting 1 – General update on progress; Statutory Duty guidance; Sustainable Development Indicators. Meeting 2 – Statutory Duty update; Communications Strategy; Sustainable Development Indicators; Sustainable Development Forum. Meeting 3 – General update on progress; Communications Strategy; Implementation Plan 2; Sustainable Procurement Action Plan; NIHE Sustainable Development Management System presentation. Meeting 4 – Draft Programme for Government, Budget and ISNI; Overview of departmental progress against Implementation Plan 1; Implementation Plan 2 stakeholder questionnaire outcomes; Communications and Training update.
- (iv) It is not possible to provide a definitive answer in terms of 'hours spent on sustainable development activity'. Sustainability as a theme is integral to the policies and functions of Departments and, as such, the extent to which Champions engage in work which directly or indirectly leads to, or contributes to, sustainable development will vary considerably over a given period of time.

Sustainable Development Commission

Mrs Long asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what progress has been made in relation to agreeing the memorandum of understanding between the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister and the Sustainable Development Commission, and what are the reasons for the current delay in agreeing this memorandum of understanding. (AQW 8351/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: We are in the process of considering a draft Memorandum of Understanding between our Department and the Sustainable Development Commission (SDC). In doing so, we are looking at this in relation to the proposed status change of the SDC from an Advisory to an Executive Non-Departmental Public Body, and any implications that this change may have in terms of governance, legal or financial issues.

Draft Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration

Mrs Long asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister when it intends to bring forward for consultation the draft Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration; and to outline the reasons for the delay to date. (AQW 8396/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: We are now at an advanced stage of development of the detailed proposals for a 'Programme of Cohesion, Sharing and Integration for a shared and better future,' which was signalled in the Programme for Government. The specific objective (PSA 7.5) commits us to implement the programme during this current year 08/09.

OFMDFM officials briefed the Committee of the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister on the position regarding development of the proposed Programme in early April. The consultation document will be put to the Committee of the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister shortly.

The new programme will tackle the complex and longstanding issue of sectarianism as well as the more recent issue of racism which is affecting both the established communities as well as new arrivals. It will build on the excellent work which is already being done, particularly by district councils and community organisations, to address the challenges which local communities are facing. Action to tackle sectarianism, racism and intolerance will be at the core of these proposals. As this policy is pivotal to achieving 'a peaceful, fair and prosperous society in Northern Ireland with respect for the rule of law' we are ensuring that the Programme proposals will contribute to this aim.

We have repeatedly stated our commitment to working towards building a society at ease with itself, where everyone who lives here is regarded as of equal status and is treated as such – the new programme will work towards this.

Departmental Budgets and Fuel Costs

Mrs Long asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what assessment it has made of the impact of the increase in (i) fuel costs; and (ii) fuel duty on its departmental budget and the realisation of efficiency targets; and what actions it has taken to mitigate against these increased costs. (AQW 8398/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: OFMDFM has made an assessment of the impact of the increase in fuel costs and fuel duty on its departmental budget and the realisation of efficiency targets. This assessment indicated that the increase in fuel costs and fuel duty would have minimal impact on OFMDFM's departmental budget, as OFMDFM's annual fuel costs represent less than 0.05% of total spend. In light of this, we have concluded that the increase in fuel costs and fuel duty, while significant in principle, will have no impact on the realisation of OFMDFM's efficiency targets.

Child Poverty

Ms Anderson asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what steps it is taking to develop a specific plan of action to deal with the issue of rising costs for people on low income, as recommended by the Child Poverty Inquiry. (AQW 8410/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: We fully recognise that rising costs are a particular concern for those on low incomes and in that respect we fully appreciate the concerns raised by the OFMDFM Committee in the context of its Inquiry into Child Poverty. Many of the issues and recommendations are inter-related and will therefore require co-ordinated action across all Departments to address.

We will be making a formal response to the OFMDFM Committee's Child Poverty Inquiry Report in due course and this will require detailed consideration of each of the 47 recommendations in consultation with other departments.

It is therefore not possible, at this point in time, to comment on the specifics of individual recommendations contained within the report of the Inquiry.

Departmental Carbon Footprint

Mr McKay asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to the answer to AQO 3687/08, when it will calculate its carbon footprint. (AQW 8469/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

The OFMDFM Sustainable Development Action Plan contains a commitment to “calculate OFMDFM’s carbon footprint and then more accurately assess the need for additional action”.

It is planned to begin work on calculating the carbon footprint of the Department in the autumn of this year. This work, however, will be dependent upon agreement of a methodology which is capable of being applied uniformly across the NICS and further work by our officials, in liaising with the Department of Finance and Personnel, who are the lead department in this area, will be required. Work is ongoing on this issue.

Team-Building Exercises

Mr Weir asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister the total cost incurred by the Department on away days or team-building exercises in each of the last five years. (AQW 8470/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

The total cost incurred by the Department on away days or team-building exercises in each of the last five complete financial years is provided in the table below. For completeness, information is also provided for the current financial year, from 1 April 2008 to 23 June 2008.

03/04	04/05	05/06	06/07	07/08	08/09 (to date)
£12,118	£17,404	£30,974	£24,584	£30,184	£6,011

Team-Building Exercises

Mr Weir asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister how many away days and team-building exercises have been organised by the Department for departmental staff in each of the last five years. (AQW 8472/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

The number of away days and team building exercises organised by the Department for departmental staff in each of the last five complete financial years is provided in the table below. For completeness, information is also provided for the current financial year, from 1 April 2008 to 23 June 2008.

03/04	04/05	05/06	06/07	07/08	08/09 (to date)
11	24	20	11	17	3

Team-Building Exercises

Mr Weir asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister how many staff hours have been taken up with departmental or cross-departmental away days, or team-building exercises, in each of the last five years. (AQW 8473/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

The number of staff hours taken up with departmental or cross-departmental away days, or team building exercises in each of the last five complete financial years is provided in the table below. For completeness, information is also provided for the current financial year, from 1 April 2008 to 23 June 2008.

03/04	04/05	05/06	06/07	07/08	08/09 (to date)
628	1623	3047	1977	2223	265

Community Relations Council

Mr Moutray asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister for its assessment of the effectiveness of the Community Relations Council in promoting better understanding of the different communities. (AQW 8481/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

Officials in our Department’s Community Relations Unit maintain ongoing contacts with the Community Relations Council (CRC) both at a strategic and operational level by attendance at CRC Board Meetings, Finance Meetings, Audit Committee meetings and as observers at EU and Core Funding Committee meetings.

By closely monitoring the business of the CRC through these arrangements we ensure that both the strategic direction and also delivery of their operational programmes are compliant with the terms and conditions of their annual contract (Letter of Offer) and with the objectives of the Department’s good relations policy.

The work of the Community Relations Council plays a significant part of the delivery of this cross-cutting policy, the effectiveness of which is monitored by the comprehensive set of Good Relations Indicators which were published in January 2007.

Maze/Long Kesh Site

Mrs Long asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline all its expenditure on the redevelopment of the Maze/Long Kesh site. (AQW 8527/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

Expenditure from 2003 to date on the potential Maze/Long Kesh (MLK) regeneration totals £8million.

Of this total, £4.6 million (over 57%) has been spent on site preparation and management which is required irrespective of any specific development on the site.

The expenditure specified does not include costs incurred by the Strategic Investment Board (SIB) or by the Department of Culture Arts and Leisure (DCAL) in relation to the site. OFMDFM staff costs are not included.

A detailed breakdown of OFMDFM expenditure to date on the site is as follows.

MAZE/LONG KESH EXPENDITURE TO DATE (25 JUNE 2008)

	Description	Cost millions
Site Preparation and Management Costs Costs incurred for remediation and removal of contamination, demolition works and maintenance of MLK land and buildings.	Site Management, security and utilities	0.5
	Listed building maintenance and repair	0.3
	Demolition and remediation	2.7
	DFP Central Procurement Directorate advisory fees on works and contracts	0.7
	Initial site feasibility study	0.4
Total (Million)		£4.6

	Description	Cost millions
MLK PROGRAMME COSTS Costs specific to MLK Masterplan and development of proposals.	Consultation Panel/ Monitoring Group	0.1
	DFP Central Procurement Directorate advisory fees; Programme management	0.3
	Preparation of business case	0.5
	Infrastructure design and pre-planning approval & related work	1.9
	Masterplan development	0.6
Total (Million)		£3.4
Overall Total		£8.0 million

Relocation of the Royal Ulster Agricultural Society

Mr Armstrong asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what assessment has been made of the Maze site as a new home for

the Royal Ulster Agricultural Society; and what discussions have taken place with interested parties in relation to this subject. (AQW 8541/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

Officials in OFMDFM have been in discussion with the Royal Ulster Agricultural Society (RUAS) for some time and have worked with them to develop their potential interest in the Maze/Long Kesh development.

The RUAS proposals are consistent with the Masterplan.

Bidders for the development of the site are aware of the RUAS proposals and have incorporated the Society's requirements in their plans.

Local Postal Services

Mr Dallat asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what consideration it has given and progress made to utilise the Post Office as a source, agency or outlet for the delivery of its services as outlined in the 'Report of the Committee's Consideration of, and Proposals for, Partnership that could Enhance the Economic Case for Viable Local Postal Services'. (AQW 8679/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

The Ad Hoc Committee on Local Postal Services' Report made a number of recommendations to the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (DBERR) concerning the future of Postal Services and the Post Office network.

Junior Minister Donaldson and Junior Minister Kelly wrote to Executive Ministers on 21 April asking them to consider whether any further public services could be delivered through post offices. We understand that you have tabled a similar question to all Departments. They will respond to you individually.

Within the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister we have been unable to identify any services that could be delivered through Post Offices.

We will continue to look at opportunities as they arise to consider whether any new public service could be delivered through the Post Office although these would be subject to the appropriate NI procurement policy.

Community Empowerment Network

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister why it will not support the maintenance of the two communications posts in North Belfast despite unanimous support from the Community Empowerment Network that they remain. (AQW 8758/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

Operational responsibility for the North Belfast Community Action Unit which administers the funding for the Community Empowerment Network transferred to the Department for Social Development in September 2005. As this question has also been tabled to the Minister for Social Development and is considered to be an operational issue, it will be for the Minister for Social Development to reply.

AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Post Offices

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, in light of the recent announcement that there are to be a number of post offices closed in rural areas, what measures she has introduced, or plans to introduce, to ensure that further services in rural areas are not lost. (AQW 8146/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew): Access to services in rural areas involves many Government Departments and is therefore not just the responsibility of my Department. The development of a Rural White Paper is an opportunity to develop a clear integrated government approach to rural issues, to demonstrate a commitment to and appreciation of the rural community and its contribution, and to construct a shared vision of the shape of future rural communities. It is also my intention to bring rural needs to the forefront of government policy making through the development of the Rural Champion concept and by enhancing the Rural Proofing process. I am hopeful that these will be key instruments in promoting adequate service provision in rural communities.

Departmental Electrical Equipment

Mr Savage asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many Blackberrys have been purchased by his Department since devolution. (AQW 8170/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Since 8th May 2007, records show that a total of 34 Blackberry devices have been purchased by my Department.

Pomeroy Forest

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (i) if she is aware of the illegal construction of a road way into Pomeroy Forest to facilitate the building of the new units at Pomeroy; and (ii) what action she will take to protect the Forest Service property, including mature trees. (AQW 8225/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: I am aware that construction works, including an access roadway, are ongoing at Pomeroy Forest on a site which was recently sold to Pomeroy Development Projects for business units. The responsibility for works on this land and compliance with all planning requirements, including the access and trees growing on the site, lies with the developer. My Department will ensure that the terms of the sale regarding the site are met.

Expert Group for Alternative Uses of Manure

Mr O'Loan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the view of the Expert Group chaired by her Department that an energy-from-waste technology is the preferred solution to deal with the waste from chicken farms and plants. (AQW 8285/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: I note that the Expert Group for Alternative Uses of Manure (EGAUM) endorsed the technical approach of a single poultry litter fired generator. The EGAUM report on alternatives to landspreading was endorsed in 2006 by the then Minister Jeff Rooker. However, with economic drivers changing, I believe that other options now need to be fully explored. My Department is working with stakeholders to address the poultry sector's compliance with the Nitrates Directive.

2006 Forestry Strategy

Mr Ford asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to AQW 6064/08, how aligning Target 10 of the Sustainable Development Strategy with the goal in the Programme for Government will achieve the doubling of woodland cover over the next 50 years in line with the commitment in the 2006 Forestry Strategy, 'Northern Ireland Forestry - A Strategy for Sustainability and Growth'. (AQW 8319/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The NI Executive Programme for Government 2008-2011, Public Service Agreement 4,

identifies a target of converting an additional 1,650 hectares of agricultural land and non-agricultural land to woodland by March 2011 and represents a modest increase in tree planting targets compared with previous Sustainable Development Implementation Plan, Target 10, you refer to, which identified a target of creating at least 500 hectares of new woodland per year.

The Forest Strategy stated a long term aim of doubling the area of woodland over the next 50 years and commented that the current rates of woodland creation are not sufficient to meet this aim. However, the Strategy acknowledged the strong commitment that farmers had to continuing farming, which meant that forests would only expand slowly at first. It added that as the impact of Common Agricultural Policy reform grew and the advantages of growing trees become more apparent, the demand for woodland creation schemes would increase.

My Department will continue to promote the woodland grant schemes through increasing landowners awareness and understanding of the schemes and the benefits which woodlands have to offer.

Woodland Loss

Mr Ford asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how she intends to measure woodland loss to provide an accurate assessment of the success of afforestation schemes. (AQW 8321/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The Programme for Government 2008-2011, Public Service Agreement (PSA) target for afforestation is stated as “the conversion of an additional 1,650 ha of agricultural land and non-agricultural land to forest and woodland to be achieved by March 2011”.

Loss of woodland will not be assessed as part of this measure because Forest Service has no practical means of measuring all deforestation projects. However, my Department will continue to regulate deforestation projects which falls into the category of a “relevant project” under the Environmental Impact Assessment (Forestry) Regulations (NI) 2006.

I will also seek Executive agreement for authority to draft new legislation to support my Department’s forestry strategy and it is proposed to regulate the felling of trees in woods of not less than 0.2 hectares. This will be by licence and subject to the owner having a management plan which will cover, among other things, the timing of felling and the proposed regeneration of the woodland. The aim is to give greater protection to areas of forest and woodland.

Increasing Fuel Costs

Mrs Long asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what assessment she has made of the impact of the increase in (i) fuel costs; and (ii) fuel duty on the departmental budget and the realisation of efficiency targets; and what action she has taken to mitigate against these increased costs. (AQW 8449/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: No detailed assessment has yet been carried out in respect of the increase of fuel costs on the DARD budget. Arrangements have, however, been put in place to enable all expenditure pressures identified by budget holders to be brought to the attention of the Departmental Board on a monthly basis. The increase in fuel costs, including the impact of fuel duty, will be identified within the General Administration Expenditure (GAE) budgets allocated within the Department. In the immediate term, budget holders are being requested to manage these pressures within the totality of the GAE budgets. As far as the Department’s efficiency savings are concerned, none are directly impacted by the increase in fuel costs.

Constituency Visits

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many visits she made to North Down constituency in her first year of office. (AQW 8459/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: During my first year in office I did not make any visits to the North Down constituency.

Donard Bridge in Newcastle, County Down

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether the Forestry Service or the Rivers Agency has the responsibility to remove an obstruction at Donard Bridge, Newcastle, County Down. (AQW 8524/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: In this particular case, Forest Service has responsibility to remove this obstruction. This work will be carried out shortly.

Tree Population in North Down

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development in which areas of North Down her Department is planning to increase the tree population. (AQW 8549/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: My Department's Forest Service will continue to encourage an increase in tree cover primarily through the forestry grant schemes which are funded under the NI Rural Development Programme 2007-2013. The schemes are available to landowners, including those in North Down, and encourage both conventional broadleaf and conifer woodland as well as short rotation coppice for an energy end use. Additional support is available to those wishing to create new wood close to urban areas and who provide public access for informal recreation.

New woodland creation will enhance and conserve the rural environment as well as produce future wood supplies. However, planting will only take place on suitable sites and will have regard for the environmental value of the site in terms of existing habitats, landscape value, archaeological and historic features. To assist landowners to find forestry solutions consistent with sustainable land management, the Forest Service has published on its web site (www.forestserviceni.gov.uk) indicative maps showing where new woodland is to be encouraged.

UK Marine Bill

Mr Boylan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what action it is taking to develop rationalised and integrated marine legislation through the Assembly to deliver the overarching policies of the UK Marine Bill and to involve the fisheries sector in the development of marine plans. (AQW 8573/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: The Minister of the Environment is responsible for the Marine Bill and it is proposed that several areas within it will be delivered here through an Assembly Bill.

An inter-departmental steering group, that includes DARD, has been established to develop the policy and legislative framework for the draft Assembly Bill. I will ensure that fishing stakeholders are consulted during the development of this Bill.

I am responsible for fisheries matters and am currently reviewing the need to legislate locally for the fisheries measures contained in the Marine Bill, as well the need for additional local fisheries powers, and may if necessary bring forward proposals for an Assembly (Fisheries) Bill later this year.

Agricultural Land

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (i) what is the total acreage of agricultural land set aside from production under EU

regulations; (ii) what this represents as a percentage of total available agricultural land; and (iii) how much of this set-aside land is classified as arable.

(AQW 8581/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: Currently there are 1,744 set-aside entitlements in the North of Ireland under the Single Farm Payment (SFP) scheme. Consequently 1,744 hectares must be set aside from production if all these entitlements are to be claimed. However, due to cereal market conditions, the EU has allowed set-aside entitlements to be claimed on land used for agricultural production in 2008. In effect, this means there is no compulsory set-aside requirement this year, although producers may voluntarily set land aside.

Prior to 2008, the compulsory set-aside requirement represented 0.2% of total agriculture land in the North of Ireland.

All land managed as set-aside is classified as arable use under EU regulations.

Departmental Funding

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what is the total number of rural businesses sponsored or funded by her Department, and how many of these have been established in each of the past five years. (AQW 8583/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: My Department has sponsored or funded 1,453 rural businesses covering the period from 2000 to the present date. Of these rural businesses, 308 have been established in the last five years. For the purposes of answering this AQ, farm businesses receiving Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) payments and other subsidies have been excluded. The information relating to how many businesses have been established in each of the last five years is not readily available and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Government Measures Subject to Rural Proofing

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to list all the government measures, both Bills and Orders, which have been subject to rural proofing over the past five years.

(AQW 8584/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: The first Programme for Government outlined the Executive's commitment to rural proofing to "ensure that the rural dimension is routinely considered

as part of the making and implementation of policy". Part of this commitment included the compilation of an Annual Report on Rural Proofing by the Rural Proofing Steering Group. This report details the number and nature of policies subject to Rural Proofing and the Annual Reports for 2003/4, 2004/5 and 2005/6 are available at: <http://www.dardni.gov.uk/index/strategies-reports-accounts/rural-proofing.htm>.

Over the past year my Department has been reviewing the rural proofing process, including how we will report on rural proofing activity in the future. I will soon be launching a public consultation process on my proposals for reinvigorating the rural proofing process.

Farmers' Markets

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many farmers markets are currently operating and what measures and investment her Department has made to encourage such markets. (AQW 8585/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: My Department has no oversight or regulatory role with regard to Farmers' Markets and so holds no statistics on their number or location. The regulation of farmers' markets is primarily the responsibility of local government. I am therefore unable to provide the breakdown sought.

The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development has provided financial support to a number of farmers' markets under the Leader + and Peace II funding programmes, most notably in Derry, Ballymoney and Strabane.

Opportunities for future support for farmers' markets may exist under the Rural Development Programme 2007 – 2013, although this is dependent upon the priorities set within the local development strategies carrying forward from the Local Action Groups and Council clusters.

Rural White Paper

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if she intends to bring forward legislation to ensure the findings of the Rural White Paper are implemented. (AQW 8592/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The development of a Rural White Paper gives government departments the opportunity to ensure that there is a joined up approach to government policy in rural areas. It will allow government to demonstrate its commitment to rural communities, and provide for the recognition of the contribution that rural communities make to society. It will also provide

an opportunity for issues which most concern rural communities to be identified and incorporated into rural policy making. The issue of legislating for the various of elements of a Rural White Paper will be considered as part of the development process.

Nitrates Directive

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what assessment she has made of the impact on livestock owners who are refused planning permission to build a collection tank in order to comply with the Nitrates Directive. (AQW 8682/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: I am not aware of cases where livestock owners have been refused planning permission to build a slurry tank to comply with the Nitrates Directive. Therefore no assessment has been made of the impact, which will depend on the specific circumstances of each case.

My Department has worked with Planning Service to temporarily extend planning permitted development rights for slurry storage facilities until 31 December 2008. This has removed the need for planning permission for the vast majority of slurry tanks being built to comply with the Nitrates Directive.

However, planning permission for slurry tanks is still required in certain specific circumstances.

CULTURE, ARTS AND LEISURE

Departmental Staff with Disabilities

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how many people with disabilities are currently employed by his Department. (AQW 7244/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr Campbell): My Department currently employs 8 people who have declared a disability.

Waterways Ireland Staff

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what pay discrepancies exist between Northern Ireland staff and Republic of Ireland staff currently working in Waterways Ireland, and for his assessment of the effect this has had on (i) recruitment; (ii) retention; and (iii) motivation, of personnel from Northern Ireland. (AQW 8133/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I am informed that, across the range of professional, technical and administrative staff, the average difference, at present, between maxima of the salary scales paid to Waterways Ireland Staff in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland is of the order of 50%. Salary comparisons are, however, not easy to derive. There is a need to adjust for exchange rate movements, differences in purchasing power and relative labour market conditions.

Waterways Ireland has advised me that it is difficult to say what effect this has had on recruitment. Since 1st January 2007 Waterways Ireland has run seven competitions for staff based in Northern Ireland and had application numbers ranging from 8 to 35.

In relation to retention, 4 staff have resigned from permanent posts since 1st January 2007.

In regards to motivation, I am informed that no specific surveys have been carried out in relation to this issue but that the matter of pay differentials between jurisdictions is a recurring theme in discussions between staff and management in Waterways Ireland.

Promotion of 12 July Celebrations

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much funding was provided for the promotion of (i) the annual Orange Order 12 July celebrations; (ii) the Independent Orange Order 12 July celebrations; (iii) the annual Sham Fight of Scarva; (iv) the Maiden City Festival; and (v) the annual Royal Black Institution Black Saturday celebration, in each of the last three years. (AQW 8276/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Funding allocations are listed in the following tables.

a) Annual Orange Order 12 July celebrations

2006/2007

Festival	Source	Amount
Boyne and Beyond (Gilford District LOL)	Community Festivals Fund	3,000
Centennial Celebrations of Bangor District LOL No 18	Community Festivals Fund	5,000
Coleraine Festival (Coleraine District LOL)	Community Festivals Fund	5,000
Lurgan District Community Festival 2006 (Lurgan District LOL)	Community Festivals Fund	3,000
Orangefest 2006 (Magheragall District LOL)	Community Festivals Fund	2,000
Richhill, Hamiltonsbawn and District July Festival 2006	Community Festivals Fund	3,000

Festival	Source	Amount
Tyrone Orangefest 2006 (Tyrone Orange Vision 2000)	Community Festivals Fund	5,000
Orangefest	Arts Council - Art Of Regeneration Fund (through BCC)	6,333
Orangefest	Ulster Scots Agency	4,400
Annual Orange Order Celebrations	DSD	7,999
Total		44,732

2007/2008

Festival	Source	Amount
Carrickfergus Pageant (Carrickfergus District LOL 19)	Community Festivals Fund	3,900
Moneymore Orangefest (Moneymore Cultural Development Association)	Community Festivals Fund	4,500
12th July Festival (Bann Valley District LOL 20)	Community Festivals Fund	5,000
Orangefest	Arts Council - Art Of Regeneration Fund (through BCC)	18,650
Orangefest	Ulster Scots Agency	8,295.72
Annual Orange Order Celebrations	DSD	35,996
Total		76,341.72

b) Independent Orange Order – no funding allocated

c) Annual Sham Fight of Scarva – no funding allocated

d) Maiden City Festival

2005/2006

Festival	Source	Amount
Maiden City	DCAL (through linguistics)	50,000
Maiden City	Ulster Scots Agency	30,000
Maiden City	DSD	34,150
Total		114,150

e) Royal Black Institution Black Saturday celebration – no funding allocated

NB. Figures given are the amount approved – actual amount claimed/paid may differ.

New Library in Newtownards

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure the estimated costs for the construction of a new library in Newtownards and when construction will commence. (AQW 8372/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The South Eastern Education and Library Board is currently revising an Economic Appraisal for improved library facilities in Newtownards.

My Department is committed to the principle of a replacement library for Newtownards, and was successful in securing funding under ISNI2. However, several matters remain outstanding before approval can be granted. My Department has asked the South Eastern Education and Library Board to expedite this process.

After the completion of the Economic Appraisal it will take a minimum of 12 to 15 months for detailed designs to be developed and planning permission to be secured before construction can commence on site. The likely cost of the project will not be known until the Economic Appraisal is finalised.

Irish and Ulster-Scots Funding

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, in light of the recent award of £6 million by the UK Government for Irish broadcasting, if he will direct a greater percentage of his Department's budget identified for language issues towards reversing the disparity between Irish and Ulster-Scots funding. (AQW 8401/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Following the St. Andrews agreement the Ulster-Scots Agency secured additional funding over the next three years. An Interdepartmental Group is currently developing an Indigenous Minority Languages Strategy to cover both Irish and Ulster-Scots. In light of this strategy and the recently announced £6 million for the Irish Language Broadcast Fund, I will consider what steps should be taken to ensure appropriate development for each language and address the current disparity of funding.

Public Record Office of Northern Ireland

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what consideration he has given to integrating the Ulster Historical Foundation within the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland. (AQW 8440/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The Public Record Office of Northern Ireland is willing to work in partnership with others where there is an opportunity to help deliver improved services. As a

Division of a government Department, PRONI cannot be seen to give one organisation any potential advantage over another. Any proposals for co-operation with fee-charging organisations are on the basis of open competition and applications from such organisations are judged on merit in regard to benefits liable to accrue to PRONI and on a value for money basis.

National Shooting Week

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what assistance his Department gave to National Shooting Week in May 2008. (AQW 8442/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Sport Northern Ireland (SNI) is responsible for the development of sport including the distribution of funding. SNI did not receive any request for assistance in relation to National Shooting Week in May 2008.

Departmental Response to Increasing Fuel Costs

Mrs Long asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what assessment he has made of the impact of the increase in (i) fuel costs; and (ii) fuel duty, on the departmental budget and the realisation of efficiency targets; and what action he has taken to mitigate against these increased costs. (AQW 8450/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: As this is only a small element of the Department's running costs there has been no assessment made of the impact of the increase in (i) fuel costs; and (ii) fuel duty, on the departmental budget and the realisation of efficiency targets. There has been no action taken to mitigate against these increased costs.

Redevelopment of the Maze/Long Kesh Site

Mrs Long asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline all his Department's expenditure on the redevelopment of the Maze/Long Kesh site. (AQW 8529/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I refer the Member to the answer I gave to AQW 8235/08.

Multi-Sports Stadium for Northern Ireland

Mr Armstrong asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what assessment has been made of the suitability of the site of the Royal Ulster Agricultural Society at Balmoral as a potential site for a National Stadium; and what discussions have taken place with interested parties in relation to this subject. (AQW 8540/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: In assessing the viability of a Multi-Sports Stadium for Northern Ireland, an initial site selection exercise was conducted in September 2004 which considered a range of 12 possible sites for a stadium, including 6 in Belfast, from which three were shortlisted (the Maze/Long Kesh near Lisburn, the North Foreshore in Belfast and the Titanic Quarter in Belfast). This initial list did not include the Royal Ulster Agricultural Society grounds at Balmoral.

Ulster Historical Foundation

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what funding has been allocated to the Ulster Historical Foundation in each of the last 5 years. (AQW 8566/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure has provided financial support to the Ulster Historical Foundation for the publishing of historical books that would not readily find a commercial publisher. The funding provided was £33,000 in 2003/2004; £62,000 in 2004/2005; £38,000 in 2005/2006 and £38,000 in 2006/2007. Funding ceased in April 2007.

In addition to this, funding of £7,114 in 2006/2007 and £12,923 in 2007/2008 was provided for the Local and Family History Workshops project.

Northern Ireland Events Company

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure pursuant to AQW 2411/8, whether the Northern Ireland Events Company was contracted into events after 20 September 2007, and if so who authorised such action and for what reason. (AQW 8647/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: After 20 September 2007 the Northern Ireland Events Company signed a contract for one event. This contract was to provide grant funding for the Tennis Legends event to be held in February 2008. Senior officials of the Department authorised the Company to proceed with the contract as negotiations with the event organisers had been at a very advanced stage and a letter of offer had already been issued in June 2007.

Northern Ireland Events Company

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure pursuant to AQW 2411/8, if any financial penalties were incurred by his Department or the Northern Ireland Events Company due to the

cancellation of events; and to outline the events in question and the penalties incurred. (AQW 8648/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: To date neither the Department nor the Northern Ireland Events Company has incurred financial penalties for any cancelled events.

Northern Ireland Events Company

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure pursuant to AQW2947/08, AQW2948/08 and AQW2949/08, for his assessment of the findings of the review. (AQW 8650/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: KPMG were commissioned by the Department to carry out a comprehensive review of all the circumstances surrounding the deficit accumulated by the Company. This report contains matters of a sensitive legal and financial nature. I am unable to comment further on this matter in order to avoid prejudicing further investigations.

Sports Stadiums Health and Safety Assessments

Lord Browne asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure if all Senior Soccer, Rugby and Gaelic Clubs carry out regular Stadium health and safety risk assessments and who is responsible for the monitoring of such risk assessments. (AQW 8688/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Responsibility for carrying out regular stadium health and safety risk assessments at senior soccer, rugby and gaelic clubs rests with the owners and operators of such venues. Responsibility for monitoring these rests with both the owners and operators and the relevant district council.

Departmental Invitations to Events

Mr Butler asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (i) how many invitations he has received to attend (a) Ulster Scots events; and (b) Irish language events; and (ii) how many (a) Ulster Scots events; and (b) Irish language events, he has attended. (AQW 8712/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Since 10 June 2008 I have received 3 invitations to attend Ulster Scots events, one of which I have attended. I have not received any invitations to attend Irish Language events.

Departmental Invitations to Events

Mr Butler asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure if he would intend to attend, if invited, (i) an Irish language event; and (ii) an Ulster Scots event.
(AQW 8713/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I will consider all invitations received.

Halloween Bonfires

Mr Moutray asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how many complaints his Department has received in relation to Halloween bonfires in each of the last five years.
(AQW 8808/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I understand from the Western Trust that, following the incident in question, it carried out an investigation and a number of areas of concern were identified, which it has now addressed.

The Trust was also satisfied that the appropriate staff numbers were available on the ward.

I am satisfied with the Trust's response to this incident.

Ulster Senior Football Championship

Mr Gallagher asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure if he plans to attend the Ulster Senior Football Championship final between Fermanagh and Armagh on 20 July 2008.
(AQW 8841/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I will consider all invitations received.

EDUCATION

Business Class Flights

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the number of times she has flown business class in her capacity as Minister since assuming office in May 2007; and (ii) the cost incurred by her Department for this travel, and to confirm if flying business class is standard practice or whether she is given the option of flying business class.
(AQW 6777/08)

The Minister of Education (Ms Ruane): Since assuming office in May 2007, I have not flown business class on any occasion in my capacity as Minister.

Ní gnáthchleachtas s'agam féin ná mo Roinne eitilt grád gnó.

Flying business class is not my standard practice nor would it be my Departments.

Gaelscoil an Damba

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) when Gaelscoil an Damba was opened; (ii) the number of children attending the school in each year since it opened; (iii) the grant-aid paid to the school in each since it opened; (iv) the current enrolment of the school; and (v) the number of teachers currently employed in the school.
(AQW 6778/08)

The Minister of Education:

- (i) Tá an t-eolas a iarradh sonraithe thíos: The information requested is detailed below: The school opened on 1 September 2003.
(ii) and (iv)

PUPILS AT GAELSCOIL AN DAMBA 2003/04 – 2007/08

	Enrolment
2003/04	17
2004/05	21
2005/06	27
2006/07	27
2007/08	29

Source: school census.

- (iii) In-year grant-aid¹ to Gaelscoil an Damba From Date of Opening to March 08

Year	Total £
2003/04	57,433
2004/05	87,638
2005/06	104,311
2006/07	132,970
2007/08 Provisional	179,891

¹ Funding includes delegated and non-delegated funds, excluding carry-over

- (v) There are 2 teachers employed in the school in 2007/08.

Contracts for Consultancy Services

Mr Kennedy asked the Minister of Education to provide, for each of the last 4 years, (i) how many

contracts for consultancy services her department has awarded, which did not have to go out to public tender; (ii) a brief description and value of each contract; and (iii) to whom these contracts have been awarded.

(AQW 6865/08)

The Minister of Education: The Department does not hold the information requested for 2004/05; however the Department awarded 7 single tender contracts in 2005/06, 9 single tender contracts in 2006/07 and 10 single tender contracts in 2007/08.

Tá sonraí na gconarthaí seo do gach bliain de na trí bliana 2005/06 go 2007/08 sna táblaí thíos.

Details of these contracts for each of the three years 2005/06 to 2007/08 are contained in the tables below.

2005/06

Brief Description of contract	Value of Contract	Consultancy Firm
Review of management support in GMI and IM sectors	£3,494.86	Alan McVeigh
Policy review of teacher education	£4,250.00	Douglas Osler
Security technology	£1,600.00	Newell&Budge
Legal Advice	£660.00	Arthur Cox
Evaluation of nutritional standards pilot scheme	£27,064.95	PWC
Catering advisor	£11,248.20	Patricia McCusker
Review of home to school transport policy	£8,500.00	Queens University

2006/07

Brief Description of contract	Value of Contract	Consultancy Firm
Drafting of Governor Handbook	£6,515.13	Billy Burnison
Drafting of Governor Handbook	£2,834.94	Sheila McCaul
Drafting of Governor Handbook	£6,303.99	John Beatty
Drafting of Governor Handbook	£4,536.30	Arthur Rainey
Facilitation exercise for Mid/South Down post primary provision	£1,767.84	Alan McVeigh
Legal Advice	£3,198.39	Arthur Cox
Legal Advice	£400.00	Arthur Cox
Catering Advice	£8,942.32	Patricia McCusker
Review of home to school transport policy	£4,650.00	Queens University

2007/08

Brief Description of contract	Value of Contract	Consultancy Firm
Development Support	£2,253.00	MR Partnership
Consultation with children, parents and staff in early years setting	£700.00	NIPPA
Legal secretariat services for Middletown Centre	£11,576.58	Arthur Cox
Audit of North/South Exchange Consortium	£15,000.00	Matt Murray
Drafting of IM Report	£3,150.00	Thomas J Shaw
Revised literacy and numeracy strategy	£12,293.89	Dan McCall
Catering Advisor	£9,374.17	Patricia McCusker
Revision of pastoral care in schools policy: child protection	£6,596.20	Betty Robinson
Chartermark Re-assessment	£825.00	EMQC
Improving communication	£5,871.20	Mind Associates

Kilcooley Housing Estate in Bangor

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education what plans she has for addressing educational needs in the Kilcooley Housing Estate, Bangor. (AQW 6947/08)

The Minister of Education: Pupils resident in the Kilcooley area of Bangor, in common with many disadvantaged areas in the North, achieve below average educational outcomes. This reflects the strong correlation between socio-economic status and educational outcomes. There are of course exceptions to this and I pay tribute those pupils, their parents and teachers who have achieved good results despite their disadvantage.

Tacóidh cur i bhfeidhm an churaclaim athbhreithnithe, an creat teidlíochta, ár mbeartas nua i leith feabhsú scoileanna atá beartaithe, ‘Is Scoil Mhaith Gach Scoil’ agus beartais eile atá ag céimeanna éagsúla ulmhaithe, agus an Straitéis Athbhreithnithe Litearthachta agus Uimhearthachta agus Riachtanais Speisialta Oideachais san áireamh, le caighdeán a ardú do dhaltá sa cheantar seo agus i gceantair eile atá faoi mhíbhuntáiste.

The implementation of the revised curriculum, the entitlement framework, our proposed new school improvement policy, ‘Every School a Good School’ and other policies at various stages of development including, the Revised Literacy and Numeracy Strategy and Special Educational Needs will all support improved standards for pupils in this and other disadvantaged areas.

Alongside this, the SEELB continues to provide advice and support to schools and teachers and also has a number of specific youth initiatives being implemented in the area.

Donaghadee High School

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education how many letters of opposition to the closure of Donaghadee High School she has received.
(AQW 6949/08)

The Minister of Education: Go dtí seo tá 866 litir pro forma i gcoinne an mholta seo faighte ag an Roinn.

The Department has to date received 866 pro-forma letters opposing this proposal.

Nursery School Places

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education how many funded nursery school places there are in (i) Bangor; (ii) Holywood; (iii) Donaghadee; and (iv) Millisle.
(AQW 6976/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá 416 áiteanna reachtúla náiolainne i náiscoil agus in aonaid náiolainne a bhfuil ceangal acu le bunscoileanna i mBeannchar.

There are 416 statutory nursery places in a nursery school and nursery units attached to a primary schools in Bangor. In addition, there are 207 funded pre-school places in the voluntary/private sector.

There are 52 statutory nursery places in a nursery school in Holywood. In addition, there are 61 funded pre-school places in the voluntary/private sector.

There are 52 statutory nursery places in a nursery unit attached to a primary school in Donaghadee. There are no funded pre-school places in the voluntary/private sector.

There are 26 statutory nursery places in a nursery unit attached to a primary school in Millisle. There are no funded pre-school places in the voluntary/private sector.

Nursery Places in Ards Borough Council

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of Education how many children have failed to gain a pre-school place in the Ards Borough Council area in each of the last 3 years; what the present position is in relation to shortages of pre-school places; and what steps are being taken to resolve current problems.
(AQW 7067/08)

The Minister of Education: In 2006/07 and 2007/08 respectively, 29 children and 23 children were unplaced.

27 and 17 places respectively remained available in voluntary/private settings. Unfortunately demand cannot always be geographically matched to supply.

In relation to the present position, it is too early to say, as the admissions process to pre-school provision is still ongoing.

Under the Open Enrolment in Nursery Schools: Arrangements for September 2008 Admissions, the initial process of admissions was completed on 2nd May 2008 when parents received a letter notifying them of the setting for which their pre-school child has been accepted.

Parents of pre-school aged children, unplaced in settings of their choice at 2nd May 2008, were advised where alternative provision is still available.

Education and Library Boards, who operate the admissions process, are now going through the re-allocation of places process for those children who were not placed at 2nd May 2008. It is expected that this process will be completed by mid to end June.

Leanfaidh BOLOD le monatóireacht ar sholáthar réamhscoile ina gceantar le tabhairt faoi aon riachtanas le háiteanna breise réamhscoile a shaináithneofar.

The SEELB will continue to monitor pre-school provision in their area in order to address any need for additional pre-school places if identified.

School Football Pitches

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education if she will consider giving schools the power to allow their football pitches to be used by community groups.
(AQW 7090/08)

The Minister of Education: Under the Recreation and Youth Service Order 1986 the responsibility for the provision of adequate facilities for recreational, social, physical and cultural activities lies with District Councils.

Through the Department's Extended School programme almost 400 of our most socially disadvantaged schools have been identified for funding.

Our policy seeks to establish each extended school as the hub of its local community engaging positively and actively with neighbouring schools, statutory, voluntary and community sector organisations in an effort to meet the needs of the pupils in the school. As part of the process of preparing their Extended School action plans, schools were therefore asked to consult with local community and statutory organisations to establish if there are particular community needs which could be met by the school. Greater community use of playing fields would certainly fall into that category.

Of course we cannot expect schools to be able to respond positively to all requests and in the case of playing fields wear and tear and insurance will be important considerations but closer links between the school and its community is a key element of the policy and one which we are seeking to develop

Toisc go bhfuil saincheistean ann maidir le caitheamh agus cuimilt agus árachas, ba é an cur chuige ab fhearr do ghrúpaí pobail, ar mian leo páirceanna imeartha a úsáid, teagmháil a dhéanamh go díreach leis an scoil le plé a dhéanamh ar cibé socruithe a d'fhéadfaí a dhéanamh.

In view of the issues of wear and tear and insurance the best approach would be for community groups wishing to use playing fields to approach the school direct to discuss what arrangements might be possible.

Revised Curriculum

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education for an update on the revised curriculum since its introduction in September 2007. (AQW 7091/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá cur i bhfeidhm an churaclaim athbhreithnithe ag dul ar aghaidh go maith agus leanfar de sa dá scoilbhliain seo romhainn; tabharfar isteach go céimneach é do Bhlianta 2, 6, 9 agus 12 i scoilbhliain 2008/09, agus do Bhlianta 3, 4, 7 agus 10 i 2009/10.

The implementation of the revised curriculum is progressing well and will continue over the next two school years, rolling out to Years 2, 6, 9 and 12 in the 2008/09 school year, and to Years 3, 4, 7 and 10 in 2009/10. The Education & Training Inspectorate (ETI) report into implementation during the 2006/07 year, and the 2007 National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) report, showed the progress made so far and identified areas for improvement, which have helped to inform ongoing developments to ensure the needs of teachers and principals are met. The Partnership Management Board, set up across the education partners to manage curriculum implementation, is continuing to provide a support programme for principals and teachers and its plans have been informed by feedback from principals and the ETI and NFER reports.

From the 2008/09 school year the Foundation Stage of the revised curriculum will be fully in place, providing additional opportunities for teachers to support the learning of our youngest pupils.

As a result of the Budget outcome, I am providing an extra £22 million to support the implementation of the revised curriculum from 2008/09 to 2010/11 and an extra £32 million over this period to support primary schools with the delivery of the Foundation Stage of

the revised curriculum. This includes £7 million in the 2008/09 financial year to provide, for the first time, access to classroom assistance for all Year 1 and Year 2 pupils.

In support of a broad and balanced curriculum I have introduced a Curriculum Sports Programme, which aims to support PE and other areas of the revised curriculum and focuses on developing the physical literacy skills of our youngest pupils, and also a Primary Languages Programme to support those schools who wish to deliver Spanish or Irish.

Millisle Primary School

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Education why the funding for the after-school and breakfast clubs has been withdrawn from Millisle Primary School; and what will replace the funding to ensure that these schemes continue. (AQW 7246/08)

The Minister of Education: I hope you will find it helpful if I provide some background information on the Extended Schools criteria that has operated in the previous two financial years and the changes that have been implemented for the 2008/09 financial year that have impacted on Millisle PS.

In each of the 2006/07 and 2007/08 financial years primary schools were deemed to be in the programme if they met the following criteria;

- **Located** in a Neighbourhood Renewal Area (NRA) **or** from the 30% lowest ranking wards **or** Super Output Areas in the education domain;
- A Free School Meals Entitlement at or above 37%.

Millisle PS was eligible for funding on the basis of being located in an NRA.

For the 2008/09 financial year it has been decided to change the eligibility criteria for primary schools to reflect the fact that we now have more sophisticated data. As outlined above we previously relied on a school's location funding those located in NRAs or the 30% most disadvantaged wards. This had the obvious weakness in that not all pupils attend their nearest primary school and in some cases a school located just outside an eligible NRA drew pupils from it. The Department now collects postcode data which allows us to select primary schools on the same basis as post primaries – with reference to the area from which pupils come as opposed to the area in which the school is located. The FSME eligibility still remains at or above 37% for all schools.

Accordingly the following eligibility criteria applies for primary schools in the 2008/09 financial year;

- 51% or more of their pupils drawn from a NRA **or** from the 30% most deprived wards **or** with a FSME at or above 37%

Millisle PS has no pupils from areas of social disadvantage and 16% FSME and is therefore ineligible for funding in 2008/09.

With regards the issue of replacement funding schools here have been offering extended school activities for many years through a variety of methods – voluntary effort then LMS budget, grants from external sources or parental contributions. The finance available under the Extended Schools Programme enables the most disadvantaged schools to offer activities.

As is the case in any budget process there are never sufficient resources to address all of the issues we would want to address and difficult choices have to be made. I have had to consider very carefully the allocation of the education budget across a range of competing priorities to ensure that

key priority areas were addressed and at the same time core services maintained. In doing so I ensured that the £16m which had been provided direct to schools under the CYPfP was mainstreamed within school delegated budgets. That funding is therefore being maintained on a recurrent basis as part of schools delegated budgets. In addition to this I have made provision for other elements of former CYPfP funding including £8m a year for the early years programmes and counselling services in schools.

As regards the extended schools programme I would have liked to have maintained funding at previous levels but with the resources available I was unable to do so. Despite finding efficiencies from other areas I have only been able to continue funding at 60% of the level available to schools over the last two years meaning a massive cut from £10m to £5.8m.

I have raised the difficulties and registered most strongly my concerns, as far back as 20 September in a meeting with the Finance Minister and through correspondence on 8 separate occasions since, that the shortfall in funding presents and will continue to press at every available opportunity during the year for additional resources, given the endorsement by the Assembly during the motion on 20 May, to restore this important programme. I am very disappointed that to date there has been an inadequate response.

Tá súil agam go dtig leis na scoileanna siúd, nach bhfuil i dteideal maoinithe do Scoileanna Sínte faoi láthair, leanúint ar aghaidh agus leibhéal áirithe gníomhaíochta a sholáthar ar mhaithe le leas a gcuid daltaí go díreach mar atá déanta ag go leor scoileanna eile le roinnt mhaith blianta.

I hope that those schools not now eligible for Extended Schools funding can continue to offer some level of extended schools activity for the benefit of their pupils in the same way as many other schools have done for many years.

Magherafelt High School

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to her answer to AQW 479/07, for an update on the start date of the construction of a new build for Magherafelt High School. (AQW 7574/08)

The Minister of Education: The North Eastern Education and Library Board have advised that planning of the proposed new school for Magherafelt High School is currently being progressed by the Board to detailed design stage. Upon completion, and subject to the detailed design costs being considered satisfactory by the Department it is expected that the project should proceed to tender stage in July 2008. Following the satisfactory completion of this process the NEELB anticipate that construction work on the new school will commence around January 2009.

Tá sin níos moille ná mar a réamh-mheasadh roimh ré. Tá sé sin amhlaidh mar gheall ar an mhoill a baineadh as pleananna sceitse agus costais deiridh a chríochnú. Ba é an rud ba chúis leis an mhoill ná go raibh roinnt obair athdheartha le déanamh, ar iarratas ón tSeirbhís um Bhóithre ionas go dtiocfadh léi tacú leis an Iarratas Pleanála ar scoil úr.

This is later than previously projected but is a result of a delay in completing final sketch plans and costs. This delay was caused by some re-design work having to be undertaken at the request of the Roads Service to enable it to support the Planning Application for the new school.

Primary School Places in Derry/Londonderry

Miss McIlveen asked the Minister of Education how many surplus pupil places there were for each primary school in the city of Derry/Londonderry, for each sector, in each of the last 5 years. (AQW 7609/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá líon measta na n-áiteanna breise i gCathair Dhoire i ngach ceann de na 5 bliana dheireanacha, in aghaidh na hearnála, leagtha síos sa tábla thíos. Ní áiríonn an tábla na scoileanna sin nach bhfuil aon áiteanna breise acu.

The estimated number of surplus places in the City of Derry in each of the last 5 years, by sector, is detailed in the table below. The table does not include those schools that have no surplus capacity.

School Name	Surplus 03/04	Surplus 04/05	Surplus 05/06	Surplus 06/07	Surplus 07/08
Controlled					
Londonderry Model PS	74	82	90	74	64
Ebrington PS	60	80	92	96	97

School Name	Surplus 03/04	Surplus 04/05	Surplus 05/06	Surplus 06/07	Surplus 07/08
Newbuildings PS	69	97	101	106	124
Ashlea PS	90	105	104	111	112
Fountain PS	21	13	27	30	50
Catholic Maintained					
Rosemount PS	115	134	141	149	162
Nazareth House PS	0	0	0	0	8
Holy Child PS	117	134	140	146	148
St John's PS	51	90	104	138	134
St Anne's PS	81	101	125	138	156
Steelstown PS	0	9	9	41	75
St Brigid's PS	173	184	187	179	183
St Oliver Plunkett PS	55	58	59	64	68
St Paul's PS Slievemore	174	204	218	254	259
St Columba's PS	53	62	77	81	90
Trench Road PS	9	29	58	94	113
Good Shepherd PS and NS	25	20	17	9	16
St Therese PS	0	10	28	40	60
Chapel Road PS	77	58	58	59	50
Holy Family PS	65	114	132	130	147
St Eithne's PS	35	0	7	20	35
Longtower PS	216	250	266	272	286
St Eugene's PS	163	181	195	210	232
Bunscoil Cholmcille	80	84	96	106	110
Other Maintained					
*Gaelscoil Eadain Mhoir	26	5	29	29	10
Integrated					
Oakgrove Integrated PS	8	1	7	0	1
Controlled	314	377	414	417	447
Maintained	1489	1722	1917	2130	2332
Other Maintained	26	5	29	29	10
Grant Maintained Integrated	8	1	7	0	1
Total	1,837	2,105	2,367	2,576	2,790

* This is a school located in temporary accommodation – additional mobiles are added as required.

Post-Primary Schools in North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education how many applications for places in post-primary schools in the North Down constituency, for the 2008-09 academic year, were unable to be accepted.

(AQW 7622/08)

The Minister of Education: Soláthraíonn an tábla thíos na figiúirí do líon na n-áiteanna atá ar fáil i mBliain 8 do scoileanna i dtoghcheantar Thuaisceart an Dúin i gcomparáid le líon na n-iarratas ar na háiteanna sin.

The table below provides the figures of the number of places available at year 8 for schools in the North Down constituency against the number of applications for these places. Please note that as young people express preferences on their Transfer Forms for a number of schools, the same children may feature in the applications figure of a number of schools. Therefore an applicant who was unsuccessful at more than one school may be admitted at another school. This explains the fact that whilst the total number of applications that were not accepted is 268, the number of children with addresses in the North Down constituency who currently do not have a post-primary place is 23.

School	Approved Admissions Number	Total Applications
Donaghadee HS	76	10
Bangor Academy & Sixth Form College	242	298
St Columbanus' College	90	131
Priory Integrated College	94	94
Glenlola Collegiate	157	244
Bangor Grammar School	125	173
Sullivan Upper	150	186

Post-Primary School Places in North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education how many year 8 places were available at each post-primary school in the North Down constituency in each of the last 5 years; and in terms of applications, how many schools were (i) over subscribed; and (ii) under subscribed.

(AQW 7623/08)

The Minister of Education: Soláthraíonn an tábla thíos an t-eolas a iarradh. Tabhair faoi deara le do thoil, de réir mar a chuireann daoine óga a sainroghanna in iúl ar a geuid Foirmeacha Aistrithe do scoileanna áirithe, seans go mbeidh ainmneacha na

bpáistí céanna le feiceáil ar na hiarratais a gheobhaidh scoileanna áirithe.

The table below provides the information requested. Please note that as young people express preferences on their Transfer Forms for a number of schools, the same children may feature in the applications figure of a number of schools.

School	School Year	Approved Admissions Number	Total Number of Applications	Under (U) / Over (O) Subscribed
Donaghadee HS	2008/09	76	10	U
	2007/08	76	12	U
	2006/07	76	19	U
	2005/06	76	35	U
	2004/05	76	22	U
Bangor Academy & Sixth Form College	2008/09	242	298	O
	2007/08	242	221	U
	2006/07	242	170	U
	2005/06	242	198	U
	2004/05	242	212	U
St Columbanus' College	2008/09	90	131	O
	2007/08	90	153	O
	2006/07	90	107	O
	2005/06	91	112	O
	2004/05	90	105	O
Priory Integrated College	2008/09	94*	94	-
	2007/08	85	81	U
	2006/07	85	63	U
	2005/06	90	80	U
	2004/05	90	90	-
Glenlola Collegiate	2008/09	157	244	O
	2007/08	158	211	O
	2006/07	157	180	O
	2005/06	157	188	O
	2004/05	160	193	O
Bangor GS	2008/09	125	173	O
	2007/08	137	177	O
	2006/07	136	145	O
	2005/06	136	167	O
	2004/05	136	161	O

School	School Year	Approved Admissions Number	Total Number of Applications	Under (U) / Over (O) Subscribed
Sullivan Upper	2008/09	150	186	O
	2007/08	150	167	O
	2006/07	150	222	O
	2005/06	151	207	O
	2004/05	150	155	O

* Department granted a temporary increase to the admissions number as a consequence of children of Forces Personnel arriving in the area.

Post-Primary School Places in North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education how many (i) year 8 places were available; and (ii) how many applications were received, in each post-primary school in the North Down constituency for the 2008-09 academic year. (AQW 7624/08)

The Minister of Education: Soláthraíonn an tábla thíos an t-eolas a iarradh. Tabhair faoi deara le do thoil, de réir mar a chuireann daoine óga a sainroghanna in iúl ar a gcuid Foirmeacha Aistrithe do scoileanna áirithe, seans go mbeidh ainmneacha na bpáistí céanna le feiceáil ar na hiarratais a gheobhaidh scoileanna áirithe.

The table below contains the requested information. Please note that as young people express preferences on their Transfer Forms for a number of schools, the same children may feature in the applications figure of a number of schools.

School	Approved Admissions Number	Total Applications
Donaghadee HS	76	10
Bangor Academy & Sixth Form College	242	298
St Columbanus' College	90	131
Priory Integrated College	94	94
Glenlola Collegiate	157	244
Bangor Grammar School	125	173
Sullivan Upper	150	186

Criteria for Admission to Nursery Schools

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education what the criteria is for admission to nursery schools; and if there are any planned changes to this criteria.

(AQW 7678/08)

The Minister of Education:

- i. Sonraíonn Rialacháin Réamhscolaíochta i Scoileanna (Critéir Iontrála) 1999 gur chóir do scoileanna tús áite a thabhairt ina gcritéir iontrála san ord tosaíochta seo a leanas do: The Pre-School Education in Schools (Admissions Criteria) Regulations 1999 state that schools should give priority in their admissions criteria in the following order of priority to: children from socially disadvantaged circumstances who will be aged 4 before September in their final pre-school year
- ii. children from socially disadvantaged circumstances who will be aged 3 before September in their final pre-school year
- iii. children not falling within i. or ii. who will be aged 4 before 1 September in their final pre-school year
- iv. children not falling within i. or ii. who will be aged 3 before 1 September in their final pre-school year

There are currently no plans for changes to be made to the above regulations.

Additional criteria for admission to particular nursery schools are the responsibility of the Board of Governors of each school and will reflect the Governors' priorities for admission to their school.

Priory College in Holywood

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education if Priory College, Holywood, is over subscribed for the start of the 2008-09 academic year. (AQW 7680/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá suibscríobh iomarcach déanta ar iontrálacha ar Bhliain 8 don scoilbhliain 2008/09 sna scoileanna seo a leanas: Coláiste na Prióireachta, Ard Mhic Neasca, Coláiste Naomh Columbanus, Beannchar; Acadamh Bheannchair, Scoil Ghramadaí Bheannchair, Coláiste Loch Cuan; Scoil Ghramadaí Choláisteach Glenlola agus Sullivan Upper. Tá suibscríobh easnamhach déanta ar Ardscoil Mhaigh Bhile, Baile Nua na hArda; tá 103 áit ar fáil inti do pháistí atá ag aistriú ón bhunscoil.

Priory College, Holywood; St Columbanus' College, Bangor; Bangor Academy; Bangor Grammar School; Strangford College; Glenlola Collegiate Grammar School and Sullivan Upper are over-subscribed for admissions to year 8 for the 2008/09 school year. Movilla High School, Newtownards is under-subscribed at year 8; it has 103 places available for children transferring from primary school.

St Columbanus College in Bangor

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education if St Columbanus College, Bangor, is over subscribed for the start of the 2008-09 academic year. (AQW 7681/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá suibscríobh iomarcach déanta ar iontrálacha ar Bhliain 8 don scoilbhliain 2008/09 sna scoileanna seo a leanas: Coláiste na Prióireachta, Ard Mhic Neasca, Coláiste Naomh Columbanus, Beannchar; Acadamh Bheannchair, Scoil Ghramadaí Bheannchair, Coláiste Loch Cuan; Scoil Ghramadaí Choláisteach Glenlola agus Sullivan Upper. Tá suibscríobh easnamhach déanta ar Ardscoil Mhaigh Bhile, Baile Nua na hArda; tá 103 áit ar fáil inti do pháistí atá ag aistriú ón bhunscoil.

Priory College, Holywood; St Columbanus' College, Bangor; Bangor Academy; Bangor Grammar School; Strangford College; Glenlola Collegiate Grammar School and Sullivan Upper are over-subscribed for admissions to year 8 for the 2008/09 school year. Movilla High School, Newtownards is under-subscribed at year 8; it has 103 places available for children transferring from primary school.

Bangor Academy

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education if Bangor Academy is over subscribed for the start of the 2008-09 academic year. (AQW 7682/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá suibscríobh iomarcach déanta ar iontrálacha ar Bhliain 8 don scoilbhliain 2008/09 sna scoileanna seo a leanas: Coláiste na Prióireachta, Ard Mhic Neasca, Coláiste Naomh Columbanus, Beannchar; Acadamh Bheannchair, Scoil Ghramadaí Bheannchair, Coláiste Loch Cuan; Scoil Ghramadaí Choláisteach Glenlola agus Sullivan Upper. Tá suibscríobh easnamhach déanta ar Ardscoil Mhaigh Bhile, Baile Nua na hArda; tá 103 áit ar fáil inti do pháistí atá ag aistriú ón bhunscoil.

Priory College, Holywood; St Columbanus' College, Bangor; Bangor Academy; Bangor Grammar School; Strangford College; Glenlola Collegiate Grammar School and Sullivan Upper are over-subscribed for admissions to year 8 for the 2008/09 school year. Movilla High School, Newtownards is under-subscribed at year 8; it has 103 places available for children transferring from primary school.

Bangor Grammar School

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education if Bangor Grammar is over subscribed for the start of the 2008-09 academic year. (AQW 7683/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá suibscríobh iomarcach déanta ar iontrálacha ar Bhliain 8 don scoilbhliain 2008/09 sna scoileanna seo a leanas: Coláiste na Prióireachta, Ard Mhic Neasca, Coláiste Naomh Columbanus, Beannchar; Acadamh Bheannchair, Scoil Ghramadaí Bheannchair, Coláiste Loch Cuan; Scoil Ghramadaí Choláisteach Glenlola agus Sullivan Upper. Tá suibscríobh easnamhach déanta ar Ardscóil Mhaigh Bhile, Baile Nua na hArda; tá 103 áit ar fáil inti do pháistí atá ag aistriú ón bhunscoil.

Priory College, Holywood; St Columbanus' College, Bangor; Bangor Academy; Bangor Grammar School; Strangford College; Glenlola Collegiate Grammar School and Sullivan Upper are over-subscribed for admissions to year 8 for the 2008/09 school year. Movilla High School, Newtownards is under-subscribed at year 8; it has 103 places available for children transferring from primary school.

Movilla High School

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education if Movilla High School is over subscribed for the start of the 2008-09 academic year. (AQW 7741/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá suibscríobh iomarcach déanta ar iontrálacha ar Bhliain 8 don scoilbhliain 2008/09 sna scoileanna seo a leanas: Coláiste na Prióireachta, Ard Mhic Neasca, Coláiste Naomh Columbanus, Beannchar; Acadamh Bheannchair, Scoil Ghramadaí Bheannchair, Coláiste Loch Cuan; Scoil Ghramadaí Choláisteach Glenlola agus Sullivan Upper. Tá suibscríobh easnamhach déanta ar Ardscóil Mhaigh Bhile, Baile Nua na hArda; tá 103 áit ar fáil inti do pháistí atá ag aistriú ón bhunscoil.

Priory College, Holywood; St Columbanus' College, Bangor; Bangor Academy; Bangor Grammar School; Strangford College; Glenlola Collegiate Grammar School and Sullivan Upper are over-subscribed for admissions to year 8 for the 2008/09 school year. Movilla High School, Newtownards is under-subscribed at year 8; it has 103 places available for children transferring from primary school.

Strangford College

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education if Strangford College is over subscribed for the start of the 2008-09 academic year. (AQW 7742/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá suibscríobh iomarcach déanta ar iontrálacha ar Bhliain 8 don scoilbhliain 2008/09 sna scoileanna seo a leanas: Coláiste na Prióireachta, Ard Mhic Neasca, Coláiste Naomh Columbanus, Beannchar; Acadamh Bheannchair, Scoil Ghramadaí Bheannchair, Coláiste Loch Cuan; Scoil Ghramadaí Choláisteach Glenlola agus Sullivan Upper. Tá suibscríobh easnamhach déanta ar Ardscóil Mhaigh Bhile, Baile Nua na hArda; tá 103 áit ar fáil inti do pháistí atá ag aistriú ón bhunscoil.

Scoil Ghramadaí Choláisteach Glenlola agus Sullivan Upper. Tá suibscríobh easnamhach déanta ar Ardscóil Mhaigh Bhile, Baile Nua na hArda; tá 103 áit ar fáil inti do pháistí atá ag aistriú ón bhunscoil.

Priory College, Holywood; St Columbanus' College, Bangor; Bangor Academy; Bangor Grammar School; Strangford College; Glenlola Collegiate Grammar School and Sullivan Upper are over-subscribed for admissions to year 8 for the 2008/09 school year. Movilla High School, Newtownards is under-subscribed at year 8; it has 103 places available for children transferring from primary school.

Glenlola Collegiate Grammar School

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education if Glenlola Collegiate Grammar School is over subscribed for the start of the 2008-09 academic year. (AQW 7743/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá suibscríobh iomarcach déanta ar iontrálacha ar Bhliain 8 don scoilbhliain 2008/09 sna scoileanna seo a leanas: Coláiste na Prióireachta, Ard Mhic Neasca, Coláiste Naomh Columbanus, Beannchar; Acadamh Bheannchair, Scoil Ghramadaí Bheannchair, Coláiste Loch Cuan; Scoil Ghramadaí Choláisteach Glenlola agus Sullivan Upper. Tá suibscríobh easnamhach déanta ar Ardscóil Mhaigh Bhile, Baile Nua na hArda; tá 103 áit ar fáil inti do pháistí atá ag aistriú ón bhunscoil.

Priory College, Holywood; St Columbanus' College, Bangor; Bangor Academy; Bangor Grammar School; Strangford College; Glenlola Collegiate Grammar School and Sullivan Upper are over-subscribed for admissions to year 8 for the 2008/09 school year. Movilla High School, Newtownards is under-subscribed at year 8; it has 103 places available for children transferring from primary school.

Sullivan Upper School

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education if Sullivan Upper, Holywood, is over subscribed for the start of the 2008-09 academic year. (AQW 7745/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá suibscríobh iomarcach déanta ar iontrálacha ar Bhliain 8 don scoilbhliain 2008/09 sna scoileanna seo a leanas: Coláiste na Prióireachta, Ard Mhic Neasca, Coláiste Naomh Columbanus, Beannchar; Acadamh Bheannchair, Scoil Ghramadaí Bheannchair, Coláiste Loch Cuan; Scoil Ghramadaí Choláisteach Glenlola agus Sullivan Upper. Tá suibscríobh easnamhach déanta ar Ardscóil Mhaigh Bhile, Baile Nua na hArda; tá 103 áit ar fáil inti do pháistí atá ag aistriú ón bhunscoil.

Priory College, Holywood; St Columbanus' College, Bangor; Bangor Academy; Bangor Grammar School; Strangford College; Glenlola Collegiate Grammar School and Sullivan Upper are over-subscribed for admissions to year 8 for the 2008/09 school year. Movilla High School, Newtownards is under-subscribed at year 8; it has 103 places available for children transferring from primary school.

Departmental Vehicles

Mr Savage asked the Minister of Education how many cars are currently (i) owned; and (ii) leased, by her Department; what is the (a) make; (b) model; (c) engine size; (d) fuel type; and (e) purpose, of each of these cars; and what the fuel efficiency is of each model. (AQW 7779/08)

The Minister of Education: The Department of Education (DE) does not own or lease any cars. However, DE owns a Ford Transit van with a diesel engine size of 2500cc with fuel consumption of approximately 40mpg. The purpose of the van is to undertake furniture and equipment deliveries/collections to and from School Inspectors home offices.

Chaith an Roinn Oideachais £275 ar bhreosla don veain díosail Ford Transit atá aici, ó cineachadh cumhacht.

The Department of Education has spent £275 on fuel for the diesel Ford Transit van that it owns, since devolution.

Departmental Vehicles

Mr Savage asked the Minister of Education how much her Department has spent on fuel for vehicles (i) owned; and (ii) leased, by the Department since devolution. (AQW 7781/08)

The Minister of Education: The Department of Education (DE) does not own or lease any cars. However, DE owns a Ford Transit van with a diesel engine size of 2500cc with fuel consumption of approximately 40mpg. The purpose of the van is to undertake furniture and equipment deliveries/collections to and from School Inspectors home offices.

Chaith an Roinn Oideachais £275 ar bhreosla don veain díosail Ford Transit atá aici, ó cineachadh cumhacht.

The Department of Education has spent £275 on fuel for the diesel Ford Transit van that it owns, since devolution.

Tamnamore Primary School in Dungannon

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Education what are her plans for the future of Tamnamore Primary School, Dungannon. (AQW 7835/08)

The Minister of Education: Thug Bord Oideachais agus Leabharlann an Deiscirt le fios go leanfar ar aghaidh le háitreabh Bhunscoil an Tamhnaigh Mhóir a úsáid chun críocha oideachais cosúil le soláthar Oideachas Seachas Scolaíocht (EOTAS) i ndiaidh chónascadh Bhunscoil an Tamhnaigh Mhóir le Bunscoil Chill na mBan.

The Southern Education and Library Board has advised that following the amalgamation of Tamnamore Primary School with Killyman Primary School in September 2008 on the Killyman site, the Tamnamore premises will continue to be used for educational purposes as Education Other Than At School (EOTAS) provision.

Team-Building Exercises

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education what is the total cost incurred by the Department on away days or team-building exercises in each of the last five years. (AQW 7840/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá costas iomlán na laethanta amuigh agus laethanta um neartú na foirniúlachta sna cúig bliana airgeadais dheireanacha mar seo a leanas: The total cost of staff away days and staff team building days, in the last five financial years is as follows:

AWAY DAYS & TEAMBUILDING

Year	Cost
2003/04	£58, 109.11
2004/05	£33, 346.16
2005/06	£29, 996.00
2006/07	£42, 124.11
2007/08	£44, 284.49
Total Cost	£207, 859.87

The above are all costs associated with staff away days/team building days. These include costs for the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) which provides inspection services for the Department of Education (DE), the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) and the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL).

Away days in the main are used for Business Planning. As an Investor in People there is a requirement to involve people when developing the organisation's

business plan and when agreeing team and individual objectives. It is not possible to show separately the costs for away days (business planning) and team building exercises. In the Department of Education, however, teambuilding days are generally arranged through Employer Supported Volunteering with Voluntary Service Bureau at nil cost.

Pre-School Education Advisory Group Funding

Mr Kennedy asked the Minister of Education why Pre-School Education Advisory Group (PEAG) funding is not paid to playgroups at the start of the school year. (AQW 7856/08)

The Minister of Education: Voluntary pre-school settings, unlike schools, are not funded under the Common Funding Scheme for the Local Management of Schools.

Is ar bhonn míosúil a thugann gach Bord Oideachais agus Leabharlann maoiniú i ndáil áiteanna réamhscolaíochta san earnáil dheonach/phríobháideach, faoin Chlár um Réamhscolaíocht a Fhorbairt (PSEEP).

Funding in respect of pre-school places in the voluntary/private sector, under the Pre-School Education Expansion Programme (PSEEP), is made by each Education and Library Board on a monthly basis.

In the 2007/08 school year the value of a funded place in the voluntary sector is £1,405. Voluntary settings know that this figure multiplied by the number of children in attendance, is the amount of funding they attract from the Education and Library Board under PSEEP.

Special Needs Assistants

Mr Kennedy asked the Minister of Education why playgroups are not able to secure provision to employ Special Needs Assistants through Education and Library Boards, as occurs for nurseries. (AQW 7858/08)

The Minister of Education: While the Education and Library Boards have a statutory duty to make special educational provision in schools within the grant aided sector, a parent may request the relevant Board to arrange for a statutory assessment of a child's needs, regardless of the child's current placement.

If a statutory assessment is undertaken and it concludes that the child's needs should be met in a playgroup provision, then the Boards have the necessary power to arrange that special educational provision, including a special needs assistant, can be made there.

The Department commenced a Review of Special Educational Needs (SEN) and Inclusion in April 2006 to address a range of issues associated with the current SEN framework.

Tá bunphrionsabail áirithe mar pháirt lárnach de na moltaí atá ag teacht chun cinn .i. comhionannas rochtana agus leanúnachas, ardechaighdeán agus comhsheasmhacht i dtaca le measúnú agus idirghabháil.

Central to the emerging recommendations are the key principles of equality of access and continuity, quality and consistency of assessment and intervention.

Grammar School Figures

Miss McIlveen asked the Minister of Education for (i) the number of children, broken down by gender, from the South Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB) area who obtained a placement in a grammar school in (a) the SEELB area; and (b) the Belfast Education and Library Board area, in each of the last five years; and (ii) the grades obtained by these children to allow them to be granted a place in each of those schools. (AQW 7879/08)

The Minister of Education: Thug Bord Oideachais agus Leabharlann an Oirdheiscirt le fios don Roinn nach bhfuil an t-eolas a iarradh ar fáil go héasca agus go nglacfaidh sé am é a chur le chéile. Scríobhfaidh mé chuig an Chomhalta nuair a bheas an t-eolas ar fáil.

The South-Eastern Education and Library Board have advised the Department that the information requested is not readily available and will take some time to collate. I will write to the Member with the information when it is available.

Criteria for Closure of Schools

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education what criteria is followed for the closure of schools. (AQW 7939/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá gach dúnadh scoile faoi réir fhoilsiú Togra Forbartha reachtúil. Cuireann foilsiú Togra Forbartha tús le tréimhse chomhairliúcháin dhá mhí, rud a thugann deis do na páirtithe leasmhara uile a dtuairimí ar an togra a thabhairt go díreach don Roinn.

All school closures are subject to the publication of a statutory Development Proposal. The publication of a Development Proposal initiates a two-month consultation period during which all interested parties can comment on the proposal directly to the Department. At the end of this period, I make a decision on the proposal following due consideration of all the relevant information.

In making my decisions, I take into consideration a range of factors including intake and enrolment levels, educational experience, budgetary issues, the overall provision within the area and the comments received during the consultation process. Proposals to close schools are considered on a case by case basis and the particular circumstances pertaining to an individual school considered carefully.

Food in Primary Schools

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister of Education what foods are (i) prohibited; and (ii) discouraged, in primary schools. (AQW 7955/08)

The Minister of Education: D'eisigh an Roinn Oideachais caighdeáin úra cothaitheacha do lóin scoile agus do bhia eile i scoileanna do gach scoil dheontaschúnta i Márta 2008.

The Department of Education issued new nutritional standards for school lunches and other food in schools to all grant-aided schools in March 2008. These outline the food and drink which should and should not be provided and are available on the Department's website at www.deni.gov.uk.

- The standards state that: meat or chicken products (such as burgers, sausages, sausage rolls, chicken nuggets etc) should be served a maximum of once a week in primary schools;
- deep-fried foods or other high fat products, such as chips and roast potatoes, must not be offered, in total, more than twice a week;
- the only savoury snacks available should be nuts and seeds with no added salt or sugar;
- confectionery, chocolate and chocolate-coated products should not be available throughout the lunchtime or sold in schools;
- cakes and biscuits can only be provided at lunchtime and as part of a meal;
- the only drinks available should be plain water, milk, pure fruit juices, yoghurt or milk drinks or drinks made from a combination of these (eg smoothies), low calorie hot chocolate, tea and coffee.

I should add that it is recommended that all children eat a balanced diet with a variety of foods. The aim of the nutritional standards is to help pupils make healthy choices by providing a range of healthy meals, to convey the meaning and importance of a healthy diet and to contribute to a reduction in the levels of child obesity.

Ballyduff Primary School

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Education what progress has been made between her Department

and the Department for Social Development in relation to the release of the site of the former Ballyduff Primary School, for the development of a housing scheme.

(AQW 7965/08)

The Minister of Education: Is le Bord Oideachais agus Leabharlann an Oirthuaiscirt (BOLOT) áitreabh Bhunscoil Bhaile Uí Dhuibh agus tá siad á gcur ar fáil anois le díol ar an mhargadh oscailte.

The former Ballyduff Primary School premises are owned by the North Eastern Education and Library Board (NEELB) and are being made available for disposal on the open market.

The NEELB has advised that it has not been approached by the Department for Social Development to express an interest in acquiring these premises for housing.

Priory Integrated College in Holywood

Dr Farry asked the Minister of Education for an update on the timescale for the new building for Priory Integrated College, Holywood. (AQW 7983/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá Bord Oideachais agus Leabharlann an Oirdheiscirt freagrach as Coláiste Imeachta na Prióireachta agus thug sé le fios go dtiocfadh le hobair thógála ar an fhoirgneamh úr tosú ar an suíomh sa bhliain airgeadais 2009/10 agus meastar go gcríochnófar í sa bhliain 2011/12. Tá sé sin ag brath ar na próisis chúí phleanála agus tógála bheith críochnaithe go sásúil agus acmhainní bheith ar fáil in aon bhliain ar leith.

The South Eastern Education and Library Board has responsibility for Priory Integrated College and has advised that construction work on the new building could start on site in the 2009/10 financial year with an estimated completion date in 2011/12. This is subject to the necessary planning and building processes being completed satisfactorily and the availability of resources in any particular year.

Capital Development Schemes

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the new build capital development schemes; and (ii) the capital development schemes which were granted permission in each year for the last 5 years, broken down by Education and Library Board. (AQW 8044/08)

The Minister of Education: Soláthraíonn Tábla A thíos sonraí na scéimeanna forbartha caipitil a bhfuil obair thógála ar siúl iontu i láthair na huaire.

Table A below provides details of capital development schemes where construction work is currently underway.

TABLE A

School	Details of Project
Abbey G.S. Newry	New replacement school on new site
Assumption G.S. Ballynahinch	Extension & Refurbishment
Ballinderry P.S.	New replacement school on existing site
Ballymacrickett P.S.	New replacement school on extended site
Bangor Academy	New replacement school on existing site
Brookefield Special School, Moira	New replacement school on existing site
Burnfoot/Dungiven/Largy P.S.	New replacement school on existing site
Drumragh Integrated College, Omagh	New replacement school on new site
Holy Cross College, Strabane	New replacement school on existing site
La Salle Boys' S.S. Belfast	New replacement school on existing site
Moorfields P.S. Ballymena	New replacement school on existing site
Mount Lourdes G.S. Enniskillen	Extension & Refurbishment
Pond Park P.S. Lisburn	New replacement school on extended site
St Colman's College, Newry	Extension & Refurbishment
St Dominic's H.S. Belfast	Extension & Refurbishment
St Patrick's P.S. Saul	New replacement school on new site
St Peter's P.S. Cloughreagh	New replacement school on existing site
Towerview P.S. Bangor	New replacement school on existing site
Victoria P.S. Ballyhalbert	New replacement school on extended site
Waringstown P.S.	Extension & Refurbishment

There are also a number of major capital projects which are currently at various stages of the planning process prior to the construction stage. The details of these projects are listed in Table B. These projects are being progressed with the relevant education authorities and timescales for doing so will be subject to all statutory approvals being achieved, the necessary planning and building processes being

completed satisfactorily, and the availability of resources in any particular year.

TABLE B

School	Details of Project
Artigarvan PS, Strabane	New replacement school on new site
Arvalee Spec School, Omagh	New replacement school on existing site
Ashfield Girls H.S. Belfast	New replacement school on existing site
BallyKelly PS, Limavady	New replacement school on existing site
Ballymoney H.S.	New replacement school on existing site
Banbridge Academy	Extension & refurbishment
Bangor Grammar	New replacement school on new site
Belfast Boys Model School	New replacement school on existing site
Belfast Model School for Girls	New replacement school on existing site
Belmont Special School	New replacement school on existing site
Carrick P.S. Warrenpoint	New replacement school on extended site
Colaiste Feirste, Belfast	Extension & refurbishment
Coranny & Cornagague P.S.	New replacement school on new site
Cranny Special School, Omagh	New replacement school on existing site
Dean Maguire College, Carrickmore	New replacement school on new site
Devenish College	New replacement school on new site
Dromintee P.S.	New replacement school on extended site
Dromore Central P.S.	New replacement school on new site
Ebrington PS, Derry	New replacement school on new site
Edendork P.S	New replacement school on new site
Eglinton PS, Derry	New replacement school on existing site
Enniskillen Model PS	New replacement school on existing site
Foyle & Londonderry College	New replacement school on new site

School	Details of Project
Glastry College, Ballyhalbert	New replacement school on extended site
Glendhu NS, Belfast	New replacement school on existing site
Glenwood P.S./Edenderry NS, Belfast	New replacement school on existing site
Greenwood Assessment Centre	New replacement school on new site
Grosvenor G.S. Belfast	New replacement school on existing site
Holy Family PS, Magherafelt	New replacement school on extended site
Holy Trinity College, Cookstown	New replacement school on existing site
Hollywood PS	New replacement school on new site
Knockbreda HS, Belfast	New replacement school on existing site
Knockevin Spec School, Downpatrick	New replacement school on existing site
Lagan College, Belfast	Extension & refurbishment
Limegrove / Glasvey Special School	New replacement school on existing site
Lisbellaw P.S.	New replacement school on existing site
Lisnagelvin P.S.	New replacement school on existing site
Little Flower Girls S.S, Belfast	New replacement school on existing site
Loreto College, Omagh	New replacement school on existing site
Lurgan College	New replacement school on existing site
Magherafelt HS	New replacement school on existing site
Magherafelt P.S.	New replacement school on new site
Methodist College, Belfast	Extension & refurbishment
Mitchell House Special School	New replacement school on new site
New Buildings PS, Derry	New replacement school on existing site
Omagh IPS	New replacement school on new site
Orangefield P.S. Belfast	New replacement school on existing site
Our Lady & St Patrick's College, Belfast	New replacement school on existing site

School	Details of Project
Parkhall College, Antrim	New replacement school on existing site
Portadown College	New replacement school on existing site
Priory College, Holywood	New replacement school on new site
Rainey Endowed School, Magherafelt	New replacement school on existing site
Ravenscroft NS, Belfast	New replacement school on existing site
S Joseph's P.S. Carryduff	New replacement school on extended site
Scoil Na Fuisseoige P.S, Belfast	New replacement school on existing site
Springhill P.S. Belfast	New replacement school on existing site
St Bronagh's P.S (Conv of Mercy/ St Mary's Boys P.S) Rostrevor	New replacement school on extended site
St Catherine's College, Armagh	Extension to Irish medium unit
St Cecilia's College, Derry (PPP)	New replacement school on existing site
St Clare's Abbey PS Newry	New replacement school on extended site
St Colman's P.S. Lambeg	New replacement school on extended site
St Columbanus College, Bangor	New replacement school on existing site
St Columba's P.S, Straw, Draperstown	New replacement school on new site
St Columbille's P.S. Carrickmore	New replacement school on extended site
St Conor's P.S, Omagh	New replacement school on extended site
St Joseph's Convent PS, Newry	New replacement school on existing site
St Joseph's P.S Madden, Armagh	New replacement school on existing site
St Louis Grammar, Kilkeel	New replacement school on existing site
St Mary's College, Derry	New replacement school on new site
St Mary's P.S. Portglenone	New replacement school on extended site
St Mary's P.S, Banbridge	New replacement school on existing site
St Mary's P.S, Newcastle	New replacement school on existing site
St Oliver Plunkett P.S. Forkhill	New replacement school on new site

School	Details of Project
St Patrick's & St Brigid's P.S. B'castle	New replacement school on existing site
St Patrick's G.S. Downpatrick	New replacement school on existing site
St Patrick's College, Banbridge	New replacement school on existing site
St Patrick's G.S. Armagh	Extension & refurbishment
St Pat's Boys/Girls Acad, Dgnon	New replacement school on existing site
St Paul's P.S. Irvinestown	New replacement school on new site
St Teresa's PS, Lurgan	New replacement school on extended site
Strand / Sydenham P.S.	New replacement school on existing site
Strandtown PS, Belfast	New replacement school on existing site
Strathearn GS, Belfast	New replacement school on existing site
Tannaghmore P.S, Lurgan	New replacement school on existing site
Taughmonagh P.S. Belfast	New replacement school on existing site
Templepatrick PS	New replacement school on existing site
The High School, Ballynahinch	New replacement school on existing site
Tor Bank Special School, Dundonald	New replacement school on new site
Victoria College, Belfast	Extension & refurbishment
Whitehouse PS, N'Abbey	New replacement school on existing site

Table C below provides a breakdown of all major capital development schemes which were granted new starts approval in each of the last 5 years, broken down by Education and Library Board.

TABLE C

Year Funding Approved	Education & Library Board Area	School	Details of Project
2002	BELB	Bunscoil an tSleibhe Dhuibh P.S. Belfast	New replacement school on existing site
2002	BELB	La Salle Boys' S.S. Belfast	New replacement school on existing site
2002	BELB	Meanscoil Feirste, Belfast	Extension & Refurbishment

Year Funding Approved	Education & Library Board Area	School	Details of Project
2002	BELB	Harberton Special School, Belfast	New replacement school on existing site
2002	BELB	Cedar Lodge Special School, Belfast	New replacement school on existing site
2002	WELB	Bready / Sandville Primary Schools	Amalgamation in a new replacement school on existing site
2002	WELB	Dervaghroy/ Sixmilecross/The Hutton Primary Schools	Amalgamation in a new replacement school on existing site
2002	WELB	Edwards P.S. Castleterg	New replacement school on existing site
2002	WELB	Drumragh Integrated College, Omagh	New replacement school on new site
2002	WELB	St Ninnidh's P.S. Derrylin	New replacement school on extended site
2002	WELB	St Fanchea's College Enniskillen	New replacement school on new site
2002	WELB	Thornhill College, Derry	Final Phase of new school building on existing site
2002	NEELB	Roddensvale Special School, Larne	New replacement school on existing site
2002	NEELB	Loanends P.S, Nutts Corner	New replacement school on new site
2002	NEELB	Millquarter P.S. Toomebridge	New replacement school on extended site
2002	NEELB	Hillcroft Special School, Newtownabbey	New replacement school on existing site
2002	NEELB	Crumlin H.S.	New Gymnasium
2002	NEELB	St Mary's P.S. Portglenone	New replacement school on extended site (PPP)

Year Funding Approved	Education & Library Board Area	School	Details of Project
2002	SEELB	Clough / Downshire Primary Schools	Amalgamation in a new replacement school on an extended site
2002	SEELB	Hillsborough / Newport Primary Schools	Amalgamation in a new replacement school on existing site
2002	SEELB	Dundonald P.S.	New replacement school on existing site
2002	SEELB	Regent House G.S. Newtownards	Final Phase of extension & refurbishment
2002	SEELB	Tor Bank Special School, Dundonald	New replacement school on new site (PPP)
2002	SEELB	Lagan College, Belfast	Extension & Refurbishment (PPP)
2002	SEELB	Our Lady & St Patrick's College, Knock	New replacement school on existing site (PPP)
2002	SEELB	St Patrick's G.S. Downpatrick	New replacement school on existing site (PPP)
2002	SEELB	St Joseph's P.S. Carryduff	New replacement school on extended site (PPP)
2002	SELB	St Patrick's College, Dungannon	New replacement school on existing site
2002	SELB	Fivemiletown H.S.	New replacement school on existing site
2003	BELB	St Dominic's H.S. Belfast	Extension & Refurbishment
2003	BELB	Strathearn G.S. Belfast	New replacement school on extended site
2003	BELB	Springhill P.S. Belfast	New replacement school on existing site
2003	BELB	Orangefield P.S. Belfast	New replacement school on new site (PPP)
2003	BELB	Belfast Boys' Model School	New replacement school on existing site (PPP)

Year Funding Approved	Education & Library Board Area	School	Details of Project
2003	BELB	Belfast Model School for Girls	New replacement school on existing site (PPP)
2003	BELB	Grosvenor G.S. Belfast	New replacement school on existing site (PPP)
2003	BELB	Ashfield Girls H.S. Belfast	New replacement school on existing site
2003	WELB	Lisneal College, Derry	New replacement school on new site
2003	WELB	Omagh Integrated P.S.	New replacement school on new site
2003	WELB	Maguiresbridge P.S.	New replacement school on existing site
2003	WELB	Mount Lourdes G.S. Enniskillen	Extension & Refurbishment
2003	WELB	Kesh P.S.	New replacement school on existing site
2003	WELB	Hutton/ Sixmilecross/The Hutton Nursery School	New replacement nursery school on existing site
2003	WELB	Cranny Special School, Omagh	New replacement school on existing site
2003	NEELB	Creggan P.S. Randalstown	New replacement school on existing site
2003	NEELB	Mossley P.S.	New replacement school on existing site
2003	NEELB	Holy Family P.S. Magherafelt	New replacement school on extended site
2003	NEELB	Camphill P.S. Ballymena	New replacement school on existing site
2003	NEELB	Leaney P.S. Ballymoney	New replacement school on existing site
2003	SEELB	Loughview Integrated P.S.	Extension
2003	SEELB	St Patrick's P.S. Saul	New replacement school on new site

Year Funding Approved	Education & Library Board Area	School	Details of Project
2003	SEELB	Kilmaine P.S. Bangor	New replacement school on existing site
2003	SEELB	Newtownards Model P.S.	Extension & Refurbishment
2003	SEELB	Assumption G.S. Ballynahinch	Extension & Refurbishment
2003	SEELB	Saintfield H.S.	Extension & Refurbishment
2003	SEELB	Ballyholme P.S. Bangor	Extension & Refurbishment
2003	SEELB	Hillsborough Nursery School	New replacement school on existing site
2003	SEELB	Kircubbin Community Nursery School	New school on new site
2003	SELB	St Patrick's Academy Dungannon	New replacement school on existing site
2003	SELB	Annaghmore & Tullyroan Primary Schools	Amalgamation in a new school on existing site
2003	SELB	Windmill Integrated P.S. Dungannon	New replacement school on existing site
2003	SELB	St Teresa's P.S. Lurgan	New replacement school on extended site
2003	SELB	St Joseph's Convent P.S. Newry	New replacement school on existing site
2003	SELB	St Paul's H.S. Bessbrook	Extension & Refurbishment
2003	SELB	Abbey G.S. Newry	New replacement school on new site
2003	SELB	St Colman's College Newry	New Sports Hall
2004	BELB	Strand / Sydenham P.S. Belfast	Amalgamation in new replacement school on existing site
2004	BELB	Greenwood Assessment Centre, Belfast	New replacement school on a new site
2004	BELB	Mitchell House Special School, Belfast	New replacement school on new site

Year Funding Approved	Education & Library Board Area	School	Details of Project
2004	WELB	Burnfoot/ Dungiven/Largy Primary Schools	Amalgamation in a new school on new site
2004	WELB	Coranny & Cornagague P.S.	Amalgamation in a new school on new site
2004	WELB	Enniskillen Integrated P.S.	New replacement school on existing site
2004	WELB	Killen P.S.	New replacement school on existing site
2004	WELB	Lisbellaw P.S.	New replacement school on existing site
2004	WELB	Lisnagelvin P.S. Derry	New replacement school on existing site
2004	WELB	St Paul's P.S. Irvinestown	New replacement school on extended site
2004	WELB	Belmont House Special School	New replacement school on existing site
2004	WELB	Devenish College, Enniskillen	New replacement school on new site
2004	WELB	Limegrove & Glasvey Special Schools	Amalgamation in new replacement school on existing site
2004	WELB	St Columbkille's P.S. Carrickmore	New replacement school on extended site
2004	WELB	Loreto G.S. Omagh	New replacement school on existing site (PPP)
2004	NEELB	Ballymena Maintained Primary Schools	Rationalisation of 4 schools into 2 new schools
2004	NEELB	Carnalridge P.S. Portrush	New replacement school on extended site
2004	NEELB	Fourtowns P.S. Ahoghill	New replacement school on existing site
2004	NEELB	Magherafelt P.S.	New replacement school on new site

Year Funding Approved	Education & Library Board Area	School	Details of Project
2004	NEELB	Moorfields P.S. Ballymena	New replacement school on extended site
2004	NEELB	St Patrick's & St Brigid's P.S. Ballycastle	New replacement school on existing site
2004	NEELB	Ballymoney H.S.	New replacement school on existing site
2004	NEELB	Rainey Endowed School, Magherafelt	New replacement school on existing site
2004	SEELB	Ballinderry P.S.	New replacement school on new site
2004	SEELB	Ballymacrickett P.S.	New replacement school on new site
2004	SEELB	Brookefield Special School, Moira	New replacement school on new site
2004	SEELB	St Colman's P.S. Lambeg	New replacement school on extended site
2004	SELB	Banbridge Academy	Extension & Refurbishment
2004	SELB	Carrick P.S. Warrenpoint	New replacement school on extended site
2004	SELB	Dromintee P.S.	New replacement school on new site
2004	SELB	Dromore Central P.S.	New replacement school on new site
2004	SELB	Maralin P.S.	New replacement school on existing site
2004	SELB	St Colman's College, Newry	Extension & Refurbishment
2004	SELB	St Oliver Plunkett P.S. Forkhill	New replacement school on new site
2004	SELB	St Peter's P.S. Cloughreagh	New replacement school on existing site
2004	SELB	Holy Trinity College, Cookstown	New replacement school on existing site (PPP)
2006	BELB	Colaiste Feirste, Belfast	Extension & Refurbishment

Year Funding Approved	Education & Library Board Area	School	Details of Project
2006	BELB	Glendhu Nursery School	New replacement school on existing site
2006	BELB	Glenwood P.S. & Edenderry Nursery Schools	New replacement schools on existing site
2006	BELB	Little Flower Girl's S.S. Belfast	New replacement school on existing site
2006	BELB	Methodist College Belfast	Extension & Refurbishment
2006	BELB	Ravenscroft Nursery School, Belfast	New replacement school on existing site
2006	BELB	Strandtown P.S. Belfast	New replacement school on existing site
2006	BELB	Victoria College, Belfast	Extension & Refurbishment
2006	WELB	Artigarvan P.S. Strabane	New replacement school on new site
2006	WELB	Arvalee Special School, Omagh	New replacement school on existing site
2006	WELB	Ballykelly P.S.	New replacement school on existing site
2006	WELB	Dean Maguire College, Carrickmore	New replacement school on new site
2006	WELB	Ebrington P.S. Derry	New replacement school on new site
2006	WELB	Eglinton P.S. Derry	New replacement school on existing site
2006	WELB	Enniskillen Model P.S.	New replacement school on existing site
2006	WELB	Foyle & Londonderry College	New replacement school on new site
2006	WELB	New Buildings P.S. Derry	New replacement school on existing site
2006	WELB	St Conor's P.S. Omagh	New replacement school on extended site
2006	NEELB	Magherafelt H.S.	New replacement school on existing site

Year Funding Approved	Education & Library Board Area	School	Details of Project
2006	NEELB	Parkhall College, Antrim	New replacement school on existing site
2006	NEELB	St Columba's P.S. Straw	New replacement school on new site
2006	NEELB	Templepatrick P.S.	New replacement school on existing site
2006	NEELB	Whitehouse P.S. Newtownabbey	New replacement school on existing site
2006	SEELB	Bangor G.S.	New replacement school on new site
2006	SEELB	Glastry College, Ballyhalbert	New replacement school on extended site
2006	SEELB	Hollywood & Redburn Primary Schools	Amalgamation in a new replacement school on a new site
2006	SEELB	Knockbreda H.S.	New replacement school on existing site
2006	SEELB	Knockevin Special School, Downpatrick	Extension & Refurbishment
2006	SEELB	Pond Park P.S. Lisburn	New replacement school on extended site
2006	SEELB	Priory College, Hollywood	New replacement school on new site
2006	SEELB	Scoil na Fuiseoige, Twinbrook	New replacement school on existing site
2006	SEELB	St Columbanus College, Bangor	New replacement school on existing site
2006	SEELB	St Mary's P.S. Newcastle	New replacement school on existing site
2006	SEELB	The High School, Ballynahinch	New replacement school on existing site
2006	SEELB	Towerview P.S. Bangor	New replacement school on existing site

Year Funding Approved	Education & Library Board Area	School	Details of Project
2006	SEELB	Victoria P.S. Ballyhalbert	New replacement school on extended site
2006	SELB	St Bronagh's P.S. Rostrevor	New replacement school on existing site
2006	SELB	Edendork P.S. Dungannon	New replacement school on new site
2006	SELB	Lurgan College	New replacement school on existing site
2006	SELB	Portadown College	New replacement school on existing site
2006	SELB	St Catherine's College, Armagh	Extension to Irish Medium Unit
2006	SELB	St Joseph's P.S. Madden	New replacement school on existing site
2006	SELB	St Louis G.S. Kilkeel	New replacement school on existing site
2006	SELB	St Mary's P.S. Banbridge	New replacement school on existing site
2006	SELB	St Patrick's College, Banbridge	New replacement school on existing site
2006	SELB	St Patrick's G.S. Armagh	Extension & Refurbishment
2006	SELB	Waringstown P.S.	Extension & Refurbishment
2006	SELB	Tannaghmore P.S. Lurgan	New replacement school on existing site

Saintfield Academy

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Education when she was made aware of the proposals by the South Eastern Education and Library Board in relation to a new build project for Saintfield Academy; and why her officials have refused to attend a site meeting at the current site, as part of the process towards the submission of a valid economic appraisal. (AQW 8048/08)

The Minister of Education: Chuir an Bord Dréachtmheastóireacht Eacnamaíoch ar Bhunscoil Academy, Tamhnach Naomh faoi bhráid na Roinne go

mall in Eanáir 2008. Níor dhiúltaigh feidhmeannaigh freastal ar chruinniú ar an suíomh.

A draft Economic Appraisal for Academy Primary School, Saintfield was presented to the Department by the Board in late January 2008. Officials have not refused to attend a site meeting. The SEELB have been informed that following their request for a site visit in May 2008, the Department has requested further information on the position at the school to inform the consideration of the necessity for a capital scheme. This information will be assessed by the Department on receipt and if necessary a site visit would be arranged.

North/South Educational Exchanges

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education what progress has been made in the review of North-South educational exchanges. (AQW 8097/08)

The Minister of Education: The Review of Co-operation on Educational Exchanges and Supporting Mechanisms is complete.

Tá an tuarascáil faighte agam ón fhoireann athbhreithnithe mar aon le moltaí ó fheidhmeannaigh s'agamsa. Beidh ar chontrapháirt s'agamsa sa deisceart agus ormsa na chéad chéimeanna eile a chomhaontú i ndiaidh dúinn deis a fháil leis an tuarascáil a bhreithniú.

I have received the report from the review team along with the recommendations from my officials. My counterpart in the south and I will need to jointly agree next steps after we have had an opportunity to consider the report.

Departmental Unfinished Reviews

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education how many unfinished reviews are ongoing in her Department, and the current position on each. (AQW 8098/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá an t-eolas a iarradh mionsonraithe sa tábla faoi iamh.

The information requested is detailed in the attached table.

Review	Current Position
Empowering Schools Strategy	A draft report is being prepared by officials and will be submitted to the Minister in the Autumn

Review	Current Position
Review of SEN and Inclusion	The policy proposals which have emerged from the review are presently being taken through the required Assembly structures. On current timescales they will issue for public consultation in the autumn term.
Review of Alternative Education Provision	The emerging policy proposals will be presented to the Minister in the coming weeks. The agreed proposals will be the subject of public consultation later this year.
Review of Irish Medium Education	A draft report is being finalised by officials and will be submitted to the Minister shortly.
School Improvement Policy: 'Every School a Good School – A Policy for School Improvement'	Consultation closed on 31 March 2008. A significant number of responses was received. The analysis of these is being used to inform the final version of the policy.
Literacy and Numeracy Strategy: 'Every School a Good School – A Strategy for Raising Achievement in Literacy and Numeracy'	The revised literacy and numeracy strategy issued on 23 June 2008 for consultation
School Library Policy	A new School Library Policy is currently being developed. We hope that it will issue for consultation in early 2009.
Primary School Building Handbook	Suggestions from the education sector for revisions to the Handbook are currently being assessed
Review of Community Relations Policy	The Department of Education is currently reviewing its community relations policy to take into account the introduction of the citizenship element of the curriculum, an increasingly diverse society in the north of Ireland and the key drivers affecting the education system in relation to enhanced collaboration. A Working Group has been established to take forward the review and the first meeting was held on 3 June 2008. and the second meeting took place on 23 June 2008.
Review of 'Priorities for Youth'	The Department of Education has begun a process to develop Priorities for Youth which build on the current Strategy for the Delivery of Youth Work in the north of Ireland 2005-2008. The Priorities for Youth review has been initiated and 3 questionnaires have been issued to 3 groups (children and young people, youth workers, leaders and volunteers and managers in youth or relevant children's services). The questionnaires are to be returned to the Department by 30 September 2008 and the findings will be discussed in a series of focus groups. This will be followed by a formal consultation process.

Review	Current Position
Teacher Education	A joint review of teacher education is being undertaken by DE and DEL and is nearing completion. It is hoped to bring forward proposals to the two ministers and the relevant Assembly Committees by the autumn of 2008.
Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM)	An independent review of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) has been commissioned by DE and DEL. Its final report is expected in summer 2008.
Early Years Strategy	Work is currently underway to formulate a new joined-up strategy for Early Years 0 – 6 which will bring Sure Start, pre-school and the home child care agendas together in a cohesive way to support the integration of service delivery. This 0 – 6 focus will ensure that there is a solid framework in place for early childhood to prepare for life at school whilst not formalising education for young children and recognising the health and wider benefits of early years interventions. Stakeholder consultations ceased in November 2007 and the Department is currently collating stakeholder views and considering recommendations. The Department aims to put a draft strategy to the Education Committee later in the year.
Annual Review of Common Funding Scheme	This is part of the ongoing process of review and refinement of current formula funding arrangements for all grant-aided schools. Consultation will take place with schools in the autumn on any potential variations to existing funding arrangements and, subject to Ministerial approval, any changes would take effect from April 2009.
Review of Financial Management Processes within the Department.	A review of the Department's financial management processes has been commissioned and is being taken forward by Deloitte & Touche. A draft report is expected by the end of July.

Languages in Primary Schools

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education to outline the work conducted by the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment on languages in primary schools. (AQW 8100/08)

The Minister of Education: The Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) has been involved in pilot work looking at languages in primary schools since 2003/04. This work has focused on French, Spanish and Irish and evaluation has highlighted good practice and benefits for young people in learning a language from an early age.

As you know learning a second language at an early age is something I believe strongly can benefit our young people, and is the reason I introduced my curricular Primary Languages Programme in the 2007/08 school year, providing peripatetic tutors to support schools wishing to deliver Spanish and Irish as growing languages in global terms and in terms of post-primary provision.

CCEA has provided guidance materials and enabled sharing of good practice among teachers which complements the work of the peripatetic tutors in primary schools. Feedback from schools on both the curricular programme to date, and the CCEA pilot, is generally positive.

Tá CCEA ina bhall den Ghrúpa um Theangacha i mBunscoileanna, grúpa a bunaíodh le seachadadh chlár curaclaim teangacha s'agamsa a chur chun cinn. Leanfaidh CCEA ar aghaidh le treoirábhair a sholáthar, lena n-áirítear micreashuíomh idirlín le tacaíocht a thabhairt do bhunscoileanna i dtaca le teagasc na dteangacha.

CCEA is a member of the Primary Languages Group, set up to take forward the delivery of my curricular primary languages programme. CCEA will continue to provide guidance materials, including a primary languages microsite to support schools.

Departmental Electrical Equipment

Mr Savage asked the Minister of Education the number of blackberry devices the Department has purchased since devolution. (AQW 8106/08)

The Minister of Education: Ó cineachadh cumhacht, tá 30 gléas Blackberry ceannaithe ag Roinn s'agamsa.

Since devolution my Department has purchased 30 blackberry devices.

Nursery Places in Ballymagee Primary School in Bangor

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education how many (i) fully-funded; and (ii) part-funded, nursery places are available for Ballymagee Primary School, Bangor. (AQW 8134/08)

The Minister of Education: Ballymagee Primary School, Central Primary School and Grange Primary School do not have nursery units.

There are 52 part-time places available for Kilmaine Primary School, Bloomfield Primary School and Rathmore Primary School.

There are 26 full-time places available for Kilcooley Primary School.

Tá na háiteanna ar fad thuas lánmhaoinithe.

All places above are fully-funded.

Nursery Places in Kilmaine Primary School in Bangor

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education how many (i) fully-funded; and (ii) part-funded, nursery places are available for Kilmaine Primary School, Bangor. (AQW 8135/08)

The Minister of Education: Ballymagee Primary School, Central Primary School and Grange Primary School do not have nursery units.

There are 52 part-time places available for Kilmaine Primary School, Bloomfield Primary School and Rathmore Primary School.

There are 26 full-time places available for Kilcooley Primary School.

Tá na háiteanna ar fad thuas lánmhaoinithe.

All places above are fully-funded.

Nursery Places in Bloomfield Primary School in Bangor

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education how many (i) fully-funded; and (ii) part-funded, nursery places are available for Bloomfield Primary School, Bangor. (AQW 8136/08)

The Minister of Education: Ballymagee Primary School, Central Primary School and Grange Primary School do not have nursery units.

There are 52 part-time places available for Kilmaine Primary School, Bloomfield Primary School and Rathmore Primary School.

There are 26 full-time places available for Kilcooley Primary School.

Tá na háiteanna ar fad thuas lánmhaoinithe.

All places above are fully-funded.

Nursery Places in Central Primary School in Bangor

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education how many (i) fully-funded; and (ii) part-funded, nursery places are available for Central Primary School, Bangor. (AQW 8137/08)

The Minister of Education: Ballymagee Primary School, Central Primary School and Grange Primary School do not have nursery units.

There are 52 part-time places available for Kilmaine Primary School, Bloomfield Primary School and Rathmore Primary School.

There are 26 full-time places available for Kilcooley Primary School.

Tá na háiteanna ar fad thuas lánmhaoinithe.

All places above are fully-funded.

Sustainable Schools Policy

Dr Farry asked the Minister of Education for an update on the development of a Sustainable Schools Policy. (AQW 8188/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá mé ag tabhairt na moltaí i leith Pholasaí um Scoileanna Inmharthana chun críche; soláthrófar iad don Choiste Oideachais gan mhoill, lena dtuairimí a fháil, agus foilseofar an polasaí ina dhiaidh sin.

I am finalising the proposals for a Sustainable Schools Policy which will be provided to the Education Committee very soon, for their views, after which the policy would be published.

Bangor Academy

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Education if the new Bangor Academy building has been completed and signed over to the South Eastern Education and Library Board. (AQW 8218/08)

The Minister of Education: Thug Príomhfheidhmeannach Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlann an Oirdheiscirt le fios go bhfuair Acadamh agus Coláiste Séú Bliain Bheannchair lánseirbhís ar 30 Aibreán 2008 de réir an dáta a sonraíodh laistigh den chonradh.

The Chief Executive of the South-Eastern Education and Library Board that Bangor Academy & Sixth Form College achieved service availability on 30 April 2008 as per the day specified within the contract. The facility does not get “signed over” to the SEELB as the operator is contracted to provide facilities management services at the facility for the period of the contract.

Bangor Academy

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Education for the date on which the PPP/PFI company was

contracted to complete work at the new Bangor Academy school building; and the date on which work was actually completed. (AQW 8219/08)

The Minister of Education: Thug Príomhfheidhmeannach Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlann an Oirdheiscirt le fios go bhfuil an obair atá ar siúl ag Acadamh agus Coláiste Séú Bliain Bheannchair á déanamh ar bhonn céimnithe.

The Chief Executive of the South-Eastern Education and Library Board has advised that work at Bangor Academy and Sixth Form College, is on a phased basis. The main body of the school was contracted for service availability on 30 April 2008 which was achieved in accordance with the contract. The element of works which include demolition of the old Castle Campus and creation of parking and sports facilities is programmed for a target service availability date of October 2008.

Early Years Strategy

Ms Anderson asked the Minister of Education for an update on progress on the '0-6 Strategy'. (AQW 8226/08)

The Minister of Education: Within the Department work has begun to formulate a new integrated early years 0 – 6 strategy which will bring Sure Start, pre-school and the home child care agendas together in a cohesive way to support the integration of service delivery. This 0 – 6 focus will ensure that there is a solid framework in place for early childhood to prepare for life at school whilst not formalising education for young children and recognising the health and wider benefits of early years interventions.

I láthair na huaire, tá an Roinn ag dréachtú na straitéise agus ag breithniú moltaí i gcomhar le páirtithe leasmhara, leis an earnáil oideachais ina hiomláine agus leis an Ghrúpa Idir-Rannach atá ag déanamh maoirseachta ar an Straitéis.

The Department is currently drafting the strategy and considering recommendations in association with stakeholders, the wider educational sector and the Inter-Departmental group overseeing the development of the Strategy. An Early Years Strategy will be put to the Education Committee in the coming months. It is too early to say what the outcomes of the strategy will be.

Nursery Places in the Groomsport Area

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education how many (i) fully-funded; and (ii) part-funded, nursery places are available in the Groomsport area. (AQW 8239/08)

The Minister of Education: There are 130 places in statutory nursery units attached to statutory primary schools within a 2 mile radius of Conlig. In addition, there are 34 funded pre-school places in the voluntary/private sector.

There are 104 places in statutory nursery units attached to statutory primary schools within a 2 mile radius of Groomsport. In addition, there are 91 funded pre-school places in the voluntary/private sector.

Tá gach ceann de na háiteanna thuasluaite lánmhaoinithe ag an Roinn.

All of the above-noted places are fully-funded by the Department.

Nursery Places in Rathmore Primary School in Bangor

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education how many (i) fully-funded; and (ii) part-funded, nursery places are available for Rathmore Primary School, Bangor. (AQW 8240/08)

The Minister of Education: Ballymagee Primary School, Central Primary School and Grange Primary School do not have nursery units.

There are 52 part-time places available for Kilmaine Primary School, Bloomfield Primary School and Rathmore Primary School.

There are 26 full-time places available for Kilcooley Primary School.

Tá na háiteanna ar fad thuas lánmhaoinithe.

All places above are fully-funded.

Nursery Places in Grange Primary School in Bangor

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education how many (i) fully-funded; and (ii) part-funded, nursery places are available for Grange Primary School, Bangor. (AQW 8242/08)

The Minister of Education: Ballymagee Primary School, Central Primary School and Grange Primary School do not have nursery units.

There are 52 part-time places available for Kilmaine Primary School, Bloomfield Primary School and Rathmore Primary School.

There are 26 full-time places available for Kilcooley Primary School.

Tá na háiteanna ar fad thuas lánmhaoinithe.

All places above are fully-funded.

Nursery Places in Kilcooley Primary School in Bangor

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education how many (i) fully-funded; and (ii) part-funded, nursery places are available for Kilcooley Primary School, Bangor. (AQW 8243/08)

The Minister of Education: Ballymagee Primary School, Central Primary School and Grange Primary School do not have nursery units.

There are 52 part-time places available for Kilmaine Primary School, Bloomfield Primary School and Rathmore Primary School.

There are 26 full-time places available for Kilcooley Primary School.

Tá na háiteanna ar fad thuas lánmhaoinithe.

All places above are fully-funded.

Nursery Places in the Conlig Area

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education how many (i) fully-funded; and (ii) part-funded, nursery places are available in the Conlig area. (AQW 8245/08)

The Minister of Education: There are 130 places in statutory nursery units attached to statutory primary schools within a 2 mile radius of Conlig. In addition, there are 34 funded pre-school places in the voluntary/private sector.

There are 104 places in statutory nursery units attached to statutory primary schools within a 2 mile radius of Groomsport. In addition, there are 91 funded pre-school places in the voluntary/private sector.

Tá gach ceann de na háiteanna thuasluaite lánmhaoinithe ag an Roinn.

All of the above-noted places are fully-funded by the Department.

Physical Education in Schools

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education if she is satisfied that school children are being given the recommended two hours of physical education per week. (AQW 8252/08)

The Minister of Education: Current guidance encourages schools to offer at least two hours of energetic physical activity in recognition of the importance a healthy, active lifestyle can have for our young people. This can include activities such as those delivered through Physical Education (PE) within the curriculum, extra-curricular activities, structured and unstructured play times, and a range of other activities.

The implementation of the revised curriculum is still at an early stage, and the ETI has not yet evaluated the delivery of PE in schools in this context. Early feedback from the Healthy Schools Initiative indicates an ongoing improvement in the placement and delivery of PE in the curriculum. The majority of the schools visited are embedding physical education and physical activity as part of a healthy, active school and healthy lifestyles for young people.

I place a very high importance on our young people having more opportunities to take part in physical activity and sport, especially in light of the rising levels of childhood obesity. That is why I have introduced my Curriculum Sports Programme, to give our youngest pupils more opportunities to develop their physical literacy skills through Gaelic games or soccer.

Faoi na scoileanna aonair atá sé réimse na n-imeachtaí spóirt a sholáthróidh siad a chinntiú agus tá mé sásta go bhfuil deis ag daltaí sult a bhaint as réimse leathan gníomhaíochta fisiciúla agus spóirt ar scoil; tá go leor deiseanna taobh amuigh de scoil fosta a chuireann lena gcuid roghanna.

It remains a matter for individual schools to determine the range of physical activities they provide and I am satisfied that pupils have the opportunity to enjoy a wide range of physical activity and sports in school, supplemented in many cases by opportunities outside school.

Area-Based Planning

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education if area-based planning will be in operation by 2010. (AQW 8253/08)

The Minister of Education: Area-based planning covering pre-school, primary and post-primary sectors will inevitably take time to develop but I expect it to be in operation by 2010. The proposed new Education and Skills Authority would have a central role in producing such plans.

Tá tús curtha agam cheana le hobair ar phleanáil cheantarbhunaithe i dtaca le soláthar na hiarbhunscolaíochta sa mhéid is gur bhunaigh mé Grúpaí Pleanála Ceantarbhunaithe agus go mbím ag díriú ar an Chreat Teidliochta a sheachadadh. Táthar ag súil go dtabharfaidh an LárGhrúpa Pleanála tuairisc faoi mhí Feabhra 2009.

I have already initiated work on area planning of post-primary provision with the setting up of Area Planning Groups and focussing on the delivery of the Entitlement Framework.

Primary-Languages Programme

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education if all tutors fully employed in the primary languages programme will be fully qualified teachers.

(AQW 8254/08)

The Minister of Education: Níl cáilíocht mhúinteoireachta riachtanach do theagascóirí, ar an ábhar go bhfuil rannpháirtíocht an mhúinteora ranga ina gné thábhachtach den chlár. Beidh múinteoirí ag obair in éineacht le teagascóirí le ceachtanna teanga a theagasc; cinnteoidh sé sin ardchaighdeán agus eispéireas foghlama fiúntach do dhaltaí.

A teaching qualification is not essential for tutors, since the participation of the classroom teacher is an important aspect of the programme. Teachers will be working alongside tutors in delivering language lessons, thus ensuring high standards and quality learning experiences for pupils.

However, I have always recognised that this programme provides opportunities for teachers looking for work to build up their experience and I am pleased to note that, of the 65 tutors appointed to the primary languages programme, 22 are fully qualified teachers, including 11 qualified teachers of Spanish and 3 qualified teachers of Irish.

Practising Educational Psychologists

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education how many practising educational psychologists there are in each Education and Library Board area.

(AQW 8279/08)

The Minister of Education: Dhíreoinn aird an Chomhalta ar an fhreagra a thug mé do AQW 5148/08, ceist a chuir Alasdair McDonnell síos ar an chlár; foilsíodh na sonraí sa Tuarascáil Oifigiúil ar 18 Aibreán 2008.

I would refer the Member to my reply to AQW 5148/08, tabled by Alasdair McDonnell, and published in the Official Report on 18 April 2008.

Ballymoney High School

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education for an update on the provision of a new build for Ballymoney High School.

(AQW 8280/08)

The Minister of Education: An Outline Business Case for a new build scheme for Ballymoney High School is currently with the Department for approval.

Faoi réir fhaomhadh an Cháis Ghnó, ba é an chéad chéim eile den tionscadal ná é a fhógairt don mhargadh.

Subject to the approval of the Business Case the next stage would be to advertise the project to the market.

Early Years Strategy

Mr Kennedy asked the Minister of Education for an update on the publication of the Early Years Strategy, and the timescales involved. (AQW 8283/08)

The Minister of Education: Within the Department work has begun to formulate a new integrated early years 0 – 6 strategy which will bring Sure Start, pre-school and the home child care agendas together in a cohesive way to support the integration of service delivery. This 0 – 6 focus will ensure that there is a solid framework in place for early childhood to prepare for life at school whilst not formalising education for young children and recognising the health and wider benefits of early years interventions.

I láthair na huair, tá an Roinn ag dréachtú na straitéise agus ag breithniú moltaí i gcomhar le páirtithe leasmhara, leis an earnáil oideachais ina hiomláine agus leis an Ghrúpa Idir-Rannach atá ag déanamh maoirseachta ar an Straitéis.

The Department is currently drafting the strategy and considering recommendations in association with stakeholders, the wider educational sector and the Inter-Departmental group overseeing the development of the Strategy. An Early Years Strategy will be put to the Education Committee in the coming months. It is too early to say what the outcomes of the strategy will be.

Dundonald High School

Miss McIlveen asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to her answer to AQO 3490/08, if a meeting has taken place between her Department's building advisory branch and the South Eastern Education and Library Board, to assess the condition of the existing school buildings at Dundonald High School; and what was the outcome of any such meeting. (AQW 8295/08)

The Minister of Education: A meeting between officials from the Department's Building Branch, Building Advisory Branch and the South Eastern Education and Library Board took place on Thursday, 26 June 2008.

Tá mé ag déanamh socruithe ionas go gcuirfear ar an eolas thú maidir le toradh an chruinnithe in am is i dtráth.

I am arranging for you to be advised of the outcome of the meeting in due course.

Education and Skills Authority

Mr O'Dowd asked the Minister of Education what the financial implications are for frontline education services if there is a delay in the establishment of the Educational Skills Authority. (AQW 8305/08)

The Minister of Education: I láthair na huaire, tá sé beartaithe go dtiocfaidh an tÚdarás um Oideachas agus Scileanna (ESA) i bhfeidhm ar 1 Aibreán 2009.

Currently it is planned that Education and Skills Authority (ESA) will come into operation on 1 April 2009. Any delay will have significant financial implications for frontline services across the education sector and also potentially in other public services. It would mean that it would not be possible to secure the significant efficiency improvements, which it is intended ESA will deliver, for reallocation to front line public services. The education budget is predicated on securing savings from ESA in the first two years of its operation of more than £21 million. If these cannot be secured then there will be an impact directly on our schools and children in terms of service delivery and provision. In addition there is the possibility of further pressure on the education budget if the new Libraries Authority is established in advance of ESA, leaving the existing authorities to cover fixed overheads from a smaller budget.

11-Plus Grades

Mr O'Dowd asked the Minister of Education for a breakdown, by percentage, of pupils' 11-plus grades accepted by the following schools in the last 3 year academic years: (i) Belfast Royal Academy; (ii) Bloomfield Collegiate; (iii) Grosvenor Grammar; (iv) Hunterhouse College; (v) Methodist College; (vi) Royal Belfast Academical Institution; (vii) Strathearn School; (viii) Bangor Grammar; (ix) Down High, Downpatrick; (x) Friends' School, Lisburn; (xi) Glenlola Collegiate; (xii) Regent House; (xiii) Sullivan Upper; (xiv) Wallace High, Lisburn; (xv) Antrim Grammar; (xvi) Ballyclare High; (xvii) Belfast High; (xviii) Cambridge House Grammar; (xix) Carrickfergus Grammar; (xx) Coleraine Academical Institution; (xxi) Dalriada School, Ballymoney; (xxii) Larne Grammar; (xxiii) Banbridge Academy; (xxiv) The Royal School, Armagh; (xxv) The Royal School, Dungannon; (xxvi) Collegiate Grammar, Enniskillen; (xxvii) Foyle and Londonderry College; (xxviii) Limavady Grammar; (xxix) Omagh Academy; and (xxx) Strabane Grammar. (AQW 8309/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá an t-eolas a iarradh mionsonraithe sa tábla faoi iamh.

The information requested is detailed in the attached table.

School Name	Breakdown, by percentage, of pupils' 11 plus grades accepted 2007/08							
	A	B1	B2	C1	C2	D	Others	Boarders
(i) Belfast Royal Academy	63	13	12	4	2	2	4	-
(ii) Bloomfield Collegiate	32	7	29	26	2	4	0	-
(iii) Grosvenor Grammar	92	4	1	0	0	1	2	-
(iv) Hunterhouse College	22	21	29	24	3	1	0	-
(v) Methodist College	70	2	5	7	5	4	5	2
(vi) Royal Belfast Academical Institution	46	19	27	5	2	0	1	-
(vii) Strathearn School	58	21	11	3	3	1	3	-
(viii) Bangor Grammar	50	20	19	7	1	2	1	-
(ix) Down High, Downpatrick	79	9	8	2	1	0	1	-
(x) Friends' School, Lisburn	96	0	0	0	0	0	4	-
(xi) Glenlola Collegiate	49	15	22	10	2	1	1	-
(xii) Regent House	90	8	1	0	0	0	1	-
(xiii) Sullivan Upper	88	9	1	0	0	0	2	-
(xiv) Wallace High, Lisburn	91	5	1	1	0	0	2	-
(xv) Antrim Grammar	52	13	18	13	3	0	1	-
(xvi) Ballyclare High	69	14	15	2	0	0	0	-
(xvii) Belfast High	69	18	9	1	1	1	1	-
(xviii) Cambridge House Grammar	18	10	15	23	19	13	2	-

School Name	Breakdown, by percentage, of pupils' 11 plus grades accepted 2007/08							
	A	B1	B2	C1	C2	D	Others	Boarders
(xix) Carrickfergus Grammar	65	16	14	4	1	0	0	-
(xx) Coleraine Academical Institution	25	7	16	13	15	21	3	-
(xxi) Dalriada School, Ballymoney	82	15	1	0	0	0	2	-
(xxii) Larne Grammar	50	9	14	11	14	0	2	-
(xxiii) Banbridge Academy	85	12	1	1	0	0	1	-
(xxiv) The Royal School, Armagh	47	12	15	11	8	7	0	-
(xxv) The Royal School Dungannon	43	16	12	9	11	8	1	-
(xxvi) Collegiate Grammar, Enniskillen	62	10	17	6	4	1	0	-
(xxvii) Foyle and Londonderry College	50	12	10	11	9	6	2	-
(xxviii) Limavady Grammar	56	12	13	12	5	2	0	-
(xxix) Omagh Academy	65	13	13	5	4	0	0	-
(xxx) Strabane Grammar	46	16	18	7	7	2	4	-

School Name	Breakdown, by percentage, of pupils' 11 plus grades accepted 2006/07							
	A	B1	B2	C1	C2	D	Others	Boarders
(i) Belfast Royal Academy	72	14	9	2	1	1	1	-
(ii) Bloomfield Collegiate	43	14	30	7	3	2	1	-

School Name	Breakdown, by percentage, of pupils' 11 plus grades accepted 2006/07							
	A	B1	B2	C1	C2	D	Others	Boarders
(iii) Grosvenor Grammar	91	7	0	0	0	0	2	-
(iv) Hunterhouse College	11	18	24	31	12	3	1	-
(v) Methodist College	91	3	1	0	0	0	2	3
(vi) Royal Belfast Academical Institution	38	20	32	5	4	0	1	-
(vii) Strathearn School	66	20	7	2	2	1	2	-
(viii) Bangor Grammar	58	15	16	7	2	2	0	-
(ix) Down High, Downpatrick	85	12	2	0	0	0	1	-
(x) Friends' School, Lisburn	98	1	0	0	0	0	1	-
(xi) Glenlola Collegiate	48	18	20	12	1	1	0	-
(xii) Regent House	93	4	0	1	0	0	2	-
(xiii) Sullivan Upper	98	0	0	0	0	0	2	-
(xiv) Wallace High, Lisburn	83	13	3	0	0	0	1	-
(xv) Antrim Grammar	59	12	20	7	1	0	1	-
(xvi) Ballyclare High	77	17	4	0	0	0	2	-
(xvii) Belfast High	75	20	3	1	0	0	1	-
(xviii) Cambridge House Grammar	14	8	25	18	22	12	1	-
(xix) Carrickfergus Grammar	60	26	12	1	1	0	0	-
(xx) Coleraine Academical Institution	32	9	13	15	12	19	0	-

School Name	Breakdown, by percentage, of pupils' 11 plus grades accepted 2006/07							
	A	B1	B2	C1	C2	D	Others	Boarders
(xxi) Dalriada School, Ballymoney	67	13	6	9	2	0	3	-
(xxii) Larne Grammar	52	8	21	15	3	1	0	-
(xxiii) Banbridge Academy	93	4	1	0	0	0	2	-
(xxiv) The Royal School, Armagh	57	23	11	4	0	0	0	5
(xxv) The Royal School Dungannon	53	15	12	7	8	3	2	-
(xxvi) Collegiate Grammar, Enniskillen	61	13	14	11	0	0	1	-
(xxvii) Foyle and Londonderry College	45	9	15	12	11	7	1	-
(xxviii) Limavady Grammar	59	13	13	12	0	3	0	-
(xxix) Omagh Academy	78	21	0	0	0	0	1	-
(xxx) Strabane Grammar	63	20	13	4	0	0	0	-

School Name	Breakdown, by percentage, of pupils' 11 plus grades accepted 2005/06							
	A	B1	B2	C1	C2	D	Others	Boarders
(i) Belfast Royal Academy	73	13	8	1	2	1	2	-
(ii) Bloomfield Collegiate	45	21	23	7	1	2	1	-
(iii) Grosvenor Grammar	88	8	2	0	1	0	1	-
(iv) Hunterhouse College	17	29	25	22	6	1	0	-

School Name	Breakdown, by percentage, of pupils' 11 plus grades accepted 2005/06							
	A	B1	B2	C1	C2	D	Others	Boarders
(v) Methodist College	80	8	3	1	2	1	5	-
(vi) Royal Belfast Academical Institution	30	12	37	10	6	4	1	-
(vii) Strathearn School	72	15	10	2	0	0	1	-
(viii) Bangor Grammar	65	18	12	3	0	1	1	-
(ix) Down High, Downpatrick	81	16	1	0	0	0	2	-
(x) Friends' School, Lisburn	93	1	1	0	0	0	5	-
(xi) Glenlola Collegiate	55	11	27	6	0	0	1	-
(xii) Regent House	82	15	1	0	0	0	2	-
(xiii) Sullivan Upper	86	11	1	0	0	0	2	-
(xiv) Wallace High, Lisburn	81	14	2	0	1	0	2	-
(xv) Antrim Grammar	49	19	13	8	9	0	2	-
(xvi) Ballyclare High	70	12	11	4	2	0	1	-
(xvii) Belfast High	73	13	13	0	0	0	1	-
(xviii) Cambridge House Grammar	19	21	22	24	7	5	2	-
(xix) Carrickfergus Grammar	71	21	6	0	0	1	1	-
(xx) Coleraine Academical Institution	42	10	20	13	8	6	1	-
(xxi) Dalriada School, Ballymoney	73	22	2	0	0	0	3	-
(xxii) Larne Grammar	50	13	17	12	4	0	4	-

School Name	Breakdown, by percentage, of pupils' 11 plus grades accepted 2005/06							
	A	B1	B2	C1	C2	D	Others	Boarders
(xxiii) Banbridge Academy	78	16	3	1	1	0	1	-
(xxiv) The Royal School, Armagh	52	18	17	5	0	1	3	4
(xxv) The Royal School Dungannon	58	21	13	3	2	0	3	-
(xxvi) Collegiate Grammar, Enniskillen	82	4	13	0	0	0	1	-
(xxvii) Foyle and Londonderry College	51	12	14	10	7	5	1	-
(xxviii) Limavady Grammar	59	15	9	12	2	2	1	-
(xxix) Omagh Academy	58	17	14	10	0	0	1	-
(xxx) Strabane Grammar	69	21	9	1	0	0	0	-

Nursery Places at Ballyholme Primary School in Bangor

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education how many (i) fully-funded; and (ii) part-funded, nursery places are available for Ballyholme Primary School, Bangor. (AQW 8313/08)

The Minister of Education: Níl aonaid náiscolaíochta ag na scoileanna seo a leanas; dá bharr sin, níl aon áiteanna ar fáil: The following schools do not have nursery units; therefore there are no places available: Ballyholme Primary School;

- Crawfordsburn Primary School;
- Redburn Primary School
- Holywood Primary School and
- Glencraig Primary School.

Nursery Places at Crawfordsburn Primary School

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education how many (i) fully-funded; and (ii) part-funded, nursery places are available for Crawfordsburn Primary School. (AQW 8324/08)

The Minister of Education: Níl aonaid náiscolaíochta ag na scoileanna seo a leanas; dá bharr sin, níl aon áiteanna ar fáil: The following schools do not have nursery units; therefore there are no places available: Ballyholme Primary School;

- Crawfordsburn Primary School;
- Redburn Primary School
- Holywood Primary School and
- Glencraig Primary School.

Nursery Places at Redburn Primary School

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education how many (i) fully-funded; and (ii) part-funded, nursery places are available for Redburn Primary School. (AQW 8326/08)

The Minister of Education: Níl aonaid náiscolaíochta ag na scoileanna seo a leanas; dá bharr sin, níl aon áiteanna ar fáil: The following schools do not have nursery units; therefore there are no places available: Ballyholme Primary School;

- Crawfordsburn Primary School;
- Redburn Primary School
- Holywood Primary School and
- Glencraig Primary School.

Nursery Places at Holywood Primary School

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education how many (i) fully-funded; and (ii) part-funded, nursery places are available for Holywood Primary School. (AQW 8327/08)

The Minister of Education: Níl aonaid náiscolaíochta ag na scoileanna seo a leanas; dá bharr sin, níl aon áiteanna ar fáil: The following schools do not have nursery units; therefore there are no places available: Ballyholme Primary School;

- Crawfordsburn Primary School;
- Redburn Primary School
- Holywood Primary School and
- Glencraig Primary School.

Nursery Places at Glencraig Primary School

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education how many (i) fully-funded; and (ii) part-funded, nursery places are available for Glencraig Primary School. (AQW 8328/08)

The Minister of Education: Níl aonaid náiscolaíochta ag na scoileanna seo a leanas; dá bharr sin, níl aon áiteanna ar fáil: The following schools do not have nursery units; therefore there are no places available: Ballyholme Primary School;

- Crawfordsburn Primary School;
- Redburn Primary School
- Holywood Primary School and
- Glencraig Primary School.

Area-Planning Groups

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education if area planning groups will be in a position to report by the end of October 2008. (AQW 8336/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá sé beartaithe gurb é an toradh a bheas ar an chleachtadh pleanála cheantarbhunaithe i gcomhair iar-bhunscolaíochta ná cúig phlean cheantarbhunaithe, ag críochnú le plean réigiúnach agus cuirfidh na moltaí leis an phróiseas pleanála cheantarbhunaithe níos cuimsithí in am is dtráth.

The outcome of the area based planning exercise for post primary education is intended to be five area plans, feeding into a regional plan and the recommendations will feed into the fuller area based planning process in due course. The Department will seek an interim report by the end of October and recommendations from the area groups by December 2008 and from the central group by February 2009.

Sustainable Schools Policy

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education what discussion she has had with the teachers' union about the Sustainable Schools Policy. (AQW 8337/08)

The Minister of Education: Teachers' unions were included in the consultation exercise on the draft policy on Sustainable Schools which was issued by the previous administration last year. Responses to the consultation were received from five teachers' unions.

Bhí deis agam fosta an tsaincheist a phlé ag cruinnithe le NASUWT ar 31 Bealtaine 2007 agus le ICTU (Comhdháil na gCeardeumann) ar 28 Samhain 2007.

I also had the opportunity to discuss the issue at meetings with the NASUWT on 31 May 2007 and

with the ICTU (Irish Congress of Trade Unions) on 28 November 2007.

Seymour Hill Primary School in Belfast

Mr Poots asked the Minister of Education what plans her Department has to enhance the educational facilities in the Seymour Hill area of Dunmurry. (AQW 8353/08)

The Minister of Education: The planning of the school estate is initiated in the first instance by the relevant school authorities. The South Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB) has undertaken a strategic review of provision of the Dunmurry area in which Seymour Hill Primary School is located.

Cé go n-admhaíonn BOLOD go mb'fhéidir go bhfuil gá le deireadh a chur le cóiríocht nach bhfuil ag an chaighdeán chuí agus roinnt bunscoileanna áitiúla sa cheantar seo a chóiriú, níl chuir siad aon mholtaí daingne faoi bhráid na Roinne go dtí seo.

Whilst the SEELB has identified the potential need for some removal of sub-standard accommodation and refurbishment of local primary schools in this area they have not as yet approached the Department with any firm proposals.

Nursery Places in Clondeboye Road Primary School in Bangor

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education how many (i) fully-funded; and (ii) part-funded, nursery places are available for Clondeboye Road Primary School, Bangor. (AQW 8362/08)

The Minister of Education: Níl aonaid náiscolaíochta ag Bunscoil Chlann Aodha Buí ná ag Bunscoil Naomh Comgall.

Neither Clondeboye Road Primary School nor St Comgall's Primary School have nursery units.

There are 52 part-time places available at St Malachy's Primary School, all of which are fully-funded.

Costello Report on Post-Primary Education

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Education whether, given her declared ideas on post primary education, the Costello report on post-primary education still has relevance and, if so, (i) whether her Department has undertaken any infrastructural audit of current educational facilities outside the Greater Belfast area; (ii) what the audit has indicated in relation to the estimated average hours per week that pupils and teachers will spend travelling between

schools; (iii) what the estimated costs are per annum of providing transport and supervisory support over the 10 years 2010 -2020; and (iv) when the audit will be made public. (AQW 8379/08)

The Minister of Education: Ghlac réamhtheachtaí s'agamsa, Jane Kennedy MP, go hiomlán le Tuarascáil Costello agus rinneadh na moltaí sin, a bhfuil clúdach reachtúil de dhíth orthu, a ionchorprú isteach san Ordú Oideachais 2006. Tá obair ar siúl ar bhonn leanúnach le roinnt mhaith de na moltaí sin a chur i bhfeidhm, mar shampla an Creat Teidlíochta.

The Costello Report was accepted in full by my predecessor, Jane Kennedy MP and those recommendations requiring legislative cover were incorporated into the Education Order 2006. Work has been ongoing to implement many of these such as the Entitlement Framework.

I have initiated an area based planning exercise for Post Primary education to look at the issues surrounding the future delivery of post-primary provision and a fuller picture will become clearer when the groups report back later this year. Implications for transport, supervisory and other related costs can only be determined when the full extent of the proposals is known.

E-Learning and Distance Learning in Post-Primary Schools

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Education what provision she has put in place for structured e-learning and distance learning in relation to post-primary education and if she will publish these details. (AQW 8380/08)

The Minister of Education: I recognise the potential of e-learning to broaden the curricular offer to pupils particularly from age 14 onwards. In support of the implementation of the Entitlement Framework, my Department sponsored places for over 50 teachers on the Online Learning for Teachers and Educators (OLTE) course in 2007/08, through the Regional Training Unit (RTU). The training will ensure that there is the appropriate level of understanding and expertise in the school system to maximise the use of new and existing resources and most importantly that e-learning has a positive impact on young people's education. Furthermore, a coordinated programme of online learning projects will emerge from the OLTE training which will allow those teachers to explore a range of areas for development and the findings will be disseminated across the system.

Tá an Roinn ag obair leis an Chigireacht Oideachais agus Oiliúna fosta le cuid den obair atá déanta ag

scoileanna sa réimse seo cheana a mheas, d'fhonn dea-chleachtas a shainaitheint agus a scaipeadh.

The Department is also working with the Education and Training Inspectorate to evaluate some of the work which schools have already taken forward in this area, with a view to identifying and disseminating good practice.

Primary Education Figures

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Education how many children are in primary education (i) in total; and (ii) broken down by (a) state sector schools; (b) Catholic maintained schools; (c) integrated schools; and (d) Irish language schools; and (iii) what is the average annual cost per pupil in each of these sectors. (AQW 8381/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá an t-eolas a iarradh i gcodanna (i) agus (ii) leagtha amach thíos: The information requested in parts (i) and (ii) is detailed below:

PRIMARY¹ SCHOOL PUPILS BY MANAGEMENT TYPE – 2007/08

Management type	No. of pupils
Controlled ²	78,108
Catholic maintained ³	76,480
Other ⁴	2,529
Irish medium ⁵ - Other maintained	1,902
Controlled integrated	2,259
Grant maintained integrated	5,361
Total	166,639

Source: school census.

- Note: Figures include nursery, reception and year 1 – 7 classes.
- Includes one Irish Medium school with an enrolment of 71 pupils.
- Includes one Irish Medium school with an enrolment of 159 pupils.
- The Other category includes preparatory departments of voluntary grammar schools and 'other maintained' non Irish medium schools.
- Excludes one Irish Medium Controlled school and one Irish Medium Catholic Maintained school.

(iii) Costs per pupil in the format requested are not available. Budget only figures for identified sectors have been provided.

PRIMARY SCHOOL COMMON FUNDING FORMULA (CFF) PER CAPITAS - 2008/09

Primary Sector	Average Per Capita for each sector (£)
Controlled	2,600
Catholic Maintained	2,669

Primary Sector	Average Per Capita for each sector (£)
Other Maintained	2,816
Irish-medium - Other Maintained	3,035
Controlled Integrated	2,716
Grant Maintained Integrated	2,793
Overall	2,646

Notes:

- Figures represent average delegated BUDGET per pupil for each sector under the Common Funding Formula allocations 2008/09 based on pupils as recorded against the school Census 2007-08
- Variations in average per pupil figures may reflect relatively smaller school sectors, and in the case of Grant Maintained Integrated schools, funding includes additional delegated resources for costs and services otherwise met by Education & Library Boards for their schools.
- All funding figures reflect Full Time Equivalent (FTE) pupils and include Nursery Class pupils - the costs for which cannot be disaggregated from the overall budgets delegated to primary schools with Nursery class units.
- Figures exclude Special Schools, and the statemented costs of pupils in schools - met separately from centre funds.

Violence in Schools

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to her answer to AQW 6237/08, for a breakdown of the figures provided by parliamentary constituency.
(AQW 8383/08)

The Minister of Education: Mar a léirigh mé sa fhreagra a thug mé cheana, ní bhailíonn an Roinn Oideachais an t-eolas sonraithe a iarradh.

As noted in my previous answer, the Department of Education does not collect the specific information requested.

However, statistics on the reasons for suspension and expulsion are gathered each school year from Education and Library Boards. The table below provides the number of suspensions for physical attacks on staff by pupils in the 2006/07 school year. These statistics relate to the number of occasions where pupils were suspended and not the number of pupils suspended.

Constituency	Number of occasions where pupils were suspended for physical attacks on school staff (Key stage 1 and 2)	Number of occasions where pupils were suspended for physical attacks on school staff (Key stage 3 and 4)
Belfast East	14	#
Belfast North	*	17
Belfast South	*	13

Constituency	Number of occasions where pupils were suspended for physical attacks on school staff (Key stage 1 and 2)	Number of occasions where pupils were suspended for physical attacks on school staff (Key stage 3 and 4)
Belfast West	*	21
East Antrim	*	17
East Derry	*	15
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	*	11
Foyle	*	32
Lagan Valley	*	7
Mid Ulster	*	*
Newry And Armagh	0	14
North Antrim	*	10
North Down	*	*
South Antrim	6	*
South Down	*	8
Upper Bann	*	7
West Tyrone	13	7
Total	70	196

Notes:

* relates to fewer than 5 cases.

means figure ≥ 5 has been treated under rules of disclosure.

Information collected on expulsions cannot be broken down into constituency area.

Similar statistics for 2007/08 will not be collected until the end of the current school year.

Integrated Places in Primary and Post-Primary Schools

Dr Farry asked the Minister of Education further to her answer to AQW 7233/08, the number of integrated places at (i) primary; and (ii) post-primary, schools for each academic year since 1997/1998, in each Education and Library Board area.
(AQW 8391/08)

The Minister of Education: The Department only holds records for the school years 2002/03 – 2007/08.

Tá an t-eolas a iarradh mionsonraithe sa tábla faoi iamh.

The information requested is detailed in the attached tables.

(I) INTEGRATED PRIMARY SCHOOLS

	Boards	Approved Integrated Places (Year 1)	Overall Number of Integrated Places
2002/03	BELB	123	859
	WELB	115	847
	NEELB	209	1452
	SEELB	284	1910
	SELB	155	1088
	Total	886	6156
2003/04	BELB	123	859
	WELB	115	847
	NEELB	213	1502
	SEELB	299	1958
	SELB	155	1085
	Total	905	906
2004/05	BELB	123	859
	WELB	115	850
	NEELB	338	2436
	SEELB	307	2105
	SELB	199	1166
	Total	1082	7416
2005/06	BELB	123	859
	WELB	130	908
	NEELB	339	2464
	SEELB	357	2436
	SELB	200	1208
	Total	1149	7875
2006/07	BELB	123	859
	WELB	147	1029
	NEELB	343	2470
	SEELB	364	2496
	SELB	203	1258
	Total	1180	8112
2007/08	BELB	123	859
	WELB	147	1055
	NEELB	343	2480
	SEELB	364	2500
	SELB	203	1270
	Total	1180	8164

(II) INTEGRATED POST-PRIMARY SCHOOLS

	Boards	Approved Integrated Places (Year 8)	Overall Number of Integrated Places
2002/03	BELB	250	1500
	WELB	330	1830
	NEELB	354	1710
	SEELB	645	3430
	SELB	260	1410
	Total	1839	9880
2003/04	BELB	250	1500
	WELB	330	1830
	NEELB	350	1810
	SEELB	640	3540
	SELB	260	1410
	Total	1830	906
2004/05	BELB	250	1500
	WELB	330	1830
	NEELB	360	1910
	SEELB	670	3620
	SELB	320	1510
	Total	1930	10370
2005/06	BELB	270	1540
	WELB	300	1800
	NEELB	360	2010
	SEELB	670	3660
	SELB	320	1570
	Total	1920	10580
2006/07	BELB	270	1560
	WELB	300	1780
	NEELB	360	2100
	SEELB	665	3700
	SELB	320	1630
	Total	1915	10770
2007/08	BELB	270	1590
	WELB	300	1780
	NEELB	360	2160
	SEELB	665	3740
	SELB	320	1690
	Total	1915	10960

Young People with Learning Disabilities

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Education what progress has been made in meeting the needs of young people with learning disabilities during the period of transition from schooling to the workforce. (AQW 8404/08)

The Minister of Education: I am advised by the Chief Executives of the Education and Library Boards (ELBs) that all ELBs have made permanent appointments to the post of Education Transition Co-ordinators to strengthen the transition planning process in school and provide a co-ordinated approach with other statutory agencies and advice givers. In addition life skills training programmes to improve self-help and independent living are being delivered in schools.

Chumasaigh BOL níos mó ná 370 dalta le páirt a ghlacadh i gcláir oiliúna um scileanna saoil sa bhliain 2006/07, agus lean na cláir sin ar aghaidh sa bhliain 2007/08.

ELBs enabled over 370 pupils to participate in life skills training programmes in 2006/07, and these programmes continued in 2007/08. The programmes included a wide variety of school based programmes for independent living and link courses with local FE colleges. The school based programmes included practical work skills. Other programmes included learning new life skills in catering and woodwork which has raised pupils' self-esteem and equipped them with skills which are easily transferred from school to FE to work placements.

From 2005/06 to the current financial year, DE has provided the ELBs with £1.460m to improve the transitions planning process as outlined above. A further £100k per annum was secured from the Children and Young People Funding Package in 2006/07 and 2007/08 to further enhance the life skills training.

Nursery Places in St Comgall's Primary School in Bangor

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education how many (i) fully-funded; and (ii) part-funded, nursery places are available for St Comgalls Primary School, Bangor. (AQW 8412/08)

The Minister of Education: Níl aonaid náiscolaíochta ag Bunscoil Chlann Aodha Buí ná ag Bunscoil Naomh Comgall.

Neither Clondeboyne Road Primary School nor St Comgall's Primary School have nursery units.

There are 52 part-time places available at St Malachy's Primary School, all of which are fully-funded.

Nursery Places in St Malachy's Primary School in Bangor

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education how many (i) fully-funded; and (ii) part-funded, nursery places are available for St Malachy's Primary School, Bangor. (AQW 8413/08)

The Minister of Education: Níl aonaid náiscolaíochta ag Bunscoil Chlann Aodha Buí ná ag Bunscoil Naomh Comgall.

Neither Clondeboyne Road Primary School nor St Comgall's Primary School have nursery units.

There are 52 part-time places available at St Malachy's Primary School, all of which are fully-funded.

Anti-Bullying Policies in Schools

Dr Farry asked the Minister of Education what requirement there is on schools to have in place anti-bullying policies specifically to deal with homophobic bullying. (AQW 8426/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá ceangal dlí ar gach scoil bearta bheith acu le gach cineál bulaíochta idir daltaí a chosc.

All schools are required by law to have measures in place to prevent all forms of bullying among pupils.

The Department's publication 'Pastoral Care in Schools: Promoting Positive Behaviour' offers detailed guidance, practical initiatives and case studies to support schools to tackle bullying. However, the detail of each school's policy and their approach to tackling bullying of any type is a matter for each school to determine in consultation with pupils and parents.

Anti-Bullying Policies in Schools

Dr Farry asked the Minister of Education what training is given to teachers to deal with homophobic bullying. (AQW 8427/08)

The Minister of Education: In-service teacher training is provided by each of the Education and Library Boards (ELBs) and I understand that anti-bullying training focuses on the needs of all children and young people and is not specific to homophobic bullying. The aim of the training is to encourage and facilitate a whole-school approach to the development of an anti-bullying culture.

Training is followed up with school-based advice from ELB staff and on-going telephone guidance and support in relation to specific anti-bullying issues and on the content of a school's anti-bullying policy. Advice on preventative strategies including Positive

Behaviour Management, Circle Time, training of ancillary staff and awareness raising sessions for parents is also available to schools.

I mbliana, d'éascaigh an Grúpa Frithbhulaíochta Idir-Bhord, a bhfuil dluthcheangail aige leis an Fhóram áitiúil Frithbhulaíochta, clár oiliúna frithbhulaíochta do mhúinteoirí a fhorbairt lena cinntiú go mbeadh comhsheasmhacht ann sa chur chuige ar fud na Sé Contae.

This year the Inter-Board Anti-bullying Group, which has close links with the local Anti-Bullying Forum, facilitated the development of an anti-bullying teacher training programme to ensure consistency of approach across the North.

Computer Equipment and Software in Schools

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education what investigations she has undertaken into the use of free and open source software instead of expensive proprietary products in schools; and the estimated potential savings to her Department this would provide. (AQW 8458/08)

The Minister of Education: Soláthraíonn an tseirbhís Seomra Ranga 2000 (C2K) trealamh ríomhaireachta do gach scoil dheontaschúnta mar aon le gréasán inmheánach agus ceangal le gréasán ar fud thuaisceart na hÉireann le rochtain ar an idirlíon agus ríomhphost.

The Classroom 2000 (C2k) service provides every grant-aided school here with computer equipment, an internal network and a link to a north of Ireland-wide network with access to the internet and e-mail. Schools have access to curricular software on their internal networks and through Learning NI, C2k's on-line virtual learning environment. The service is managed by the suppliers of the equipment and connectivity, so that schools and teachers do not have to concern themselves with maintenance and support issues.

C2k is a Public Private Partnership, funded by the Department through the Western Education and Library Board. The 5-year contracts which together make up the service are procured according to EU Procurement Regulations through a European-wide competitive procurement process. The result of the process is that the design risk lies with the private sector bidders for the contracts. Since invitations to tender do not specify the nature of the software, it is up to bidders to assemble the most economical solutions, and in doing so they may choose to offer proprietary or open source products, or a combination of both.

Departmental Visits to North Down

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education how many visits she made to North Down constituency in her first year of office. (AQW 8460/08)

The Minister of Education: Le linn mo chéad bhliana mar Aire Oideachais, thug mé trí chuairt ar thoghcheantar Thuaisceart an Dúin.

In my first year of office, I made 3 visits to North Down constituency.

EMPLOYMENT AND LEARNING

Belfast Metropolitan College

Mr Newton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what is the projected total cost of the Belfast Metropolitan College new educational campus being constructed at the Titanic Quarter, Belfast. (AQW 8190/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning (Sir Reg Empey): The Belfast Metropolitan College facility at Titanic Quarter is being developed through a design, build, finance and operate Public Private Partnership arrangement. Under this arrangement the private sector operator provides the service, in this case for twenty five years, and is funded for the service by way of an annual unitary payment. Negotiations are well advanced but the final unitary payment has not yet been agreed and has therefore to be treated as commercial in confidence at this stage. It is anticipated the contract will be signed in August 2008.

University Places in Northern Ireland

Dr Farry asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many university places per capita there are in Northern Ireland, compared to (i) England; (ii) Scotland; (iii) Wales; and (iv) the Republic of Ireland. (AQW 8241/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: The number of full – time undergraduate enrolments at higher education institutions in 2006/07 per thousand of population aged 18 to 24 is as follows.

	Population aged 18 to 24 (thousands) Note 1	Full-time Under-graduate enrolments in 2006/07 Note 2	Full – time Under-graduate enrolments per thousand of population aged 18 to 24
Northern Ireland	179.6	30,720	171

	Population aged 18 to 24 (thousands) Note 1	Full-time Under-graduate enrolments in 2006/07 Note 2	Full – time Under-graduate enrolments per thousand of population aged 18 to 24
England	4,706.3	985,810	209
Scotland	473.7	126,115	266
Wales	278.5	66,005	237
Republic of Ireland	461.1	62,991	137

Notes:

- Office for National Statistics Mid-2006 Population Estimates
Central Statistics Office Ireland Population by Age 2006
- Higher Education Statistics Agency, Statistical First Release 10
January 2008
Higher Education Authority

It is important to note that the full-time undergraduate enrolment figures quoted above in respect of Northern Ireland reflect enrolments at Northern Ireland higher education institutions only. In 2006/07 some 30% of Northern Ireland domiciled undergraduates chose to study outside Northern Ireland and these students will be reflected in the enrolment figures for the region in which their institution is situated.

The number of full-time undergraduate places at the Northern Ireland universities is subject to a cap, known as the Maximum Student Number Cap (MaSN), as a means of controlling the cost to Government of Higher Education. The cap does not apply to full-time undergraduates from outside the European Union (who pay fees which are based on recovery of full - costs), to part-time undergraduates or to post-graduate students.

In 2005, my Department issued a position paper to inform debate on the optimum number of full-time undergraduate places in Northern Ireland and invited comment from interested parties. The exercise did not provide compelling evidence that the policy on MaSN should be changed when considered against other competing demands.

The MaSN is often cited as a reason for students choosing to study outside Northern Ireland resulting in a “brain drain” effect, however research indicates that the reasons underlying this are much more complex. On 30 June 2008, my Department published a study led by Professor Bob Osborne, University of Ulster, which indicates that students, rather than being reluctant leavers, in fact migrate for reasons which are predominantly positive. The report indicates that students are most heavily influenced by their desire to go to the best place for their chosen course, rather than a strong desire to leave Northern Ireland. These and

other research findings are welcome in contributing to the evidence base for future policy decisions.

I am committed to keeping the MaSN under review and my Department continues to engage with the universities on options such as targeted expansion in areas of strategic importance to the economy, within the context of the Comprehensive Spending Review outcome for Higher Education

English as a Second Language

Mr Simpson asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what financial support his Department has given towards English classes for non-English speakers in each of the last 3 years. (AQW 8335/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: Expenditure, funded by the Department for Employment and Learning, on English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses in Further Education colleges in each of the last 3 years for which validated data is available, was as follows:

2006/07	£1,469,297
2005/06	£865,059
2004/05	£691,628

Funding was also available within the New Deal programmes. However, it is not possible to identify this funding separately.

North West Regional College

Mr McCartney asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what action he is taking to intervene in the dispute over lecturers’ pay, following recent developments at the North West Regional College, which could lead to the suspension of lecturers without pay. (AQW 8352/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: This dispute is a matter between the college employers, the FE lecturers, and their unions. As such my Department is not in a position to intervene.

I am pleased to note, however, that agreement has been reached by Further Education college employers and the University & College Union (UCU) on an immediate suspension of industrial action by college lecturers and the proposed action, by college employers, against staff who are not fulfilling contractual obligations as a result of industrial action.

The suspension will last until December 2008 to allow employers and unions to agree a pay deal for 2008/09, and to address longer term pay and conditions issues with the assistance of the Labour Relations Agency.

Departmental Underspend

Mr Ross asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what steps his Department is taking to ensure that it does not continue to underspend its budget. (AQW 8376/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

I take very seriously my responsibility to manage our finances efficiently and effectively but this underspend has to be seen in the context of some significant programmes where the demand for resources is difficult to predict. These include Student Finance, Training for Success and New Deal.

- The specific action I am taking to address this issue includes: Reviewing the forecasting models used for these three specific programmes;
- Reviewing the Estimates structure for my Department to establish whether it remains fit for purpose or could be improved; and
- Examining internal financial management and monitoring procedures to implement a more risk based approach to balancing the risks of underspends and excess votes.

Training for Success

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what measures he has taken to ensure the views and concerns of people with learning disabilities are reflected in the design, delivery and evaluation of mainstream departmental programmes including, but not limited to, Training for Success. (AQW 8400/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

The Department for Employment and Learning meets its obligations under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act (1998) to consult with named disability organisations when required. A working group, that includes representation from learning disability organisations, has been formed to carry out a review of the needs of people with disabilities in Training for Success. Consultation included young people with learning disabilities. A wide range of other engagements have taken place that involved people with disabilities, including learning disabilities. These include the Disablement Advisory Service 'My Job, My Support' consultation workshops for over 100 people with learning disabilities during the development of Workable (NI) and direct contact with students with learning disabilities during the drafting of Special Educational Needs and Disability Order (NI) 2005.

Young People with Learning Disabilities

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what progress has been made in meeting the needs of young people with learning disabilities during the period of transition from schooling to the workforce. (AQW 8406/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

Following the Report of the Transitions Inter-Departmental working group in February 2006, my Department has taken a range of actions to address the needs of young people with learning disabilities.

The Department's Careers Service has been restructured and a number of Careers Advisers have been specifically trained to work with clients who have Statements of Special Educational Need. In addition all Careers Advisers are being provided with basic training in this area. Careers Advisers are invited to attend Transition Plan Meetings of Year 10 pupils and subsequent Annual reviews. This meeting assists young people and their parents make informed decisions about all the options available on leaving school.

The Department has established a Disability Working Group to carry out a review, focused on the needs of people with disabilities in the context of its Training for Success provision. The Group consulted with a range of stakeholders and is due to report at the end of June.

In co-operation with the Education and Training Inspectorate and the Association of Northern Ireland Colleges, the Department, is currently undertaking a review of the nature and extent of special needs provision throughout the Further Education (FE) Sector, to determine how this provision might be improved.

My Department has also provided a further £1.5 million during 2007/08, to assist Further Education Colleges with the additional costs of delivering discrete provision for students unable to access mainstream courses.

My Department's Disablement Advisory Service (DAS) also provides a range of programme support to help people with disabilities, including young people with learning disabilities, find suitable employment e.g. Access to Work (NI), Job Introduction Scheme (JIS), New Deal for Disabled People (NDDP) and the Workable (NI) programme.

Departmental Response to Increasing Fuel Costs

Mrs Long asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what assessment he has made of the impact of the increase in (i) fuel costs; and (ii) fuel duty, on the departmental budget and the realisation

of efficiency targets; and what action he has taken to mitigate against these increased costs. (AQW 8453/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

No direct assessment has been made of the impact of fuel costs or fuel duty, although this will be kept under review as part of the Department's ongoing financial management regime. My Department is seeking to make sure that it continues to use energy efficiently in line with broader Northern Ireland Civil Service policy.

The educational institutions for which my Department has responsibility are either incorporated bodies or autonomous organisations. As such they are responsible for managing all aspects of their business, including energy usage, within the resources made available to them by the Department and any additional income they may earn directly from other sources. They are expected to operate in a manner which is both sustainable and energy efficient and I have no plans to provide additional resources at this time.

Departmental Visits to Constituencies

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many visits he made to North Down constituency in his first year of office. (AQW 8461/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

During the period 8th May 2007 to 8th May 2008, in my capacity as Minister for Employment and Learning I attended three engagements in the Borough of North Down.

Peace III Applications

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what plans he has to match fund (i) community groups; and (ii) the women's sector, for Peace III applications. (AQW 8550/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

The Department for Employment and Learning is not an Accountable Department for any of the expenditure within the Peace III Programme and hence has no plans to provide match funding to any projects within Peace III.

North West Regional College

Mr Bresland asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what plans he has to replace the existing building at the Strabane Campus of the North West Regional College. (AQW 8602/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

The former North West Institute had submitted proposals for new build and refurbishment of its

accommodation at a number of campuses, including a new build at its Strabane campus.

Following the merger of the Institute with Limavady College, on 1 August 2007, the newly appointed North West Regional College's Senior Management Team and Governing Body are reviewing these proposals, which were submitted by their predecessors. Further decisions will be made when the College has updated its Estates Strategy, the objective of which is to clarify accommodation needs across all campuses.

Suspension of College Lecturers

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what assessment he made of the threat by colleges to suspend lecturers without salary for an indefinite period during the recent lecturers' dispute. (AQW 8681/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

Disciplinary action in Further Education (FE) Colleges is solely a matter for the college employers.

However, I am pleased to note that, following discussions, the University & College Union (UCU) has agreed an immediate suspension of industrial action by college lecturers and college employers have halted proposed disciplinary proceedings against those members of staff who were not fulfilling their contractual obligations as a result of that industrial action.

Belfast Metropolitan College

Ms J McCann asked the Minister for Employment and Learning if the Belfast Metropolitan College will be running the Learner Access Engagement Strategy; and if not, to where the funding for this strategy will now be allocated. (AQW 8689/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: I can confirm that Belfast Metropolitan College will participate in the Learner Access and Engagement Pilot Programme.

Local Postal Services' Report

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what consideration has been given and what progress has been made by his Department to utilise the Post Office as a source, agency or outlet for the delivery of its services as outlined in the May 2008 report of the Assembly's Ad Hoc Committee, 'Report of the Committee's Consideration of, and Proposals for, Partnership that could Enhance the Economic Case for Viable Local Postal Services'. (AQW 8693/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: The Ad Hoc Committee on Local Postal Services'

Report made a number of recommendations to the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (DBERR) concerning the future of Postal Services and the Post Office network. Junior Minister Donaldson and Junior Minister Kelly wrote to Executive Ministers on 21 April asking them to consider whether any further public services could be delivered through post offices.

My Department has been unable to identify any services which could be delivered through Post Offices. It will, however, continue to keep this matter under review.

ENTERPRISE, TRADE AND INVESTMENT

Funding for Signature Projects

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (i) how much money has been provided so far to each of the following signature projects: (a) the Mournes; (b) Causeway Coast; (c) Walls of Derry/Londonderry; (d) Titanic Centre; and (e) Armagh Cathedral Trail; and (ii) how much money is projected to be delivered to each of these signature projects in 2008-2009 and 2009-2010. (AQW 7993/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mrs Foster): The breakdown of investment to date for each Signature Project is detailed in the table below.

In the Programme for Government, £60million has been allocated to the five signature projects for the period 2008 -2011. Financial approval for specific projects has not yet been determined and discussions are ongoing with project promoters.

Signature Project:	Investment to date:
The Mournes	£250,000
The Causeway Coast & Glens	£1,025,905
Giant's Causeway Visitor Facilities	£1,470,399
The Walled City	£3,994,789
Titanic Centre	£58,700
St. Patrick's & Christian Heritage	£313,774
Total	£7,113,567

Team-Building Exercises

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment the total cost incurred by the

Department on away days or team-building exercises in each of the last five years. (AQW 8064/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The total cost incurred by the Department, including its *NDPBs, on away days or team-building exercises in each of the last five years is detailed in the table below.

	Total cost incurred (£)
2003/04	43,644
2004/05	57,493
2005/06	57,052
2006/07	34,523
2007/08	42,881

The away days/team building exercises covered a variety of subjects but most were related to organisational and staff development.

* DETI NDPBs: Invest NI; NI Tourist Board; Health & Safety Executive NI; General Consumer Council NI

Team-Building Exercises

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many away days and team-building exercises have been organised by her Department for departmental staff in each of the last five years. (AQW 8066/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The amount of away days and team-building exercises that have been organised by the Department for departmental staff, and its * NDPBs, in each of the last five years, are detailed in the table below.

	Amount of away days and team-building exercises
2003/04	26
2004/05	43
2005/06	38
2006/07	21
2007/08	27

The away days/team building exercises covered a variety of subjects but most were related to organisational and staff development.

* DETI NDPBs: Invest NI; NI Tourist Board; Health & Safety Executive NI; General Consumer Council NI

Team-Building Exercises

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many staff hours have been taken up with departmental or cross-departmental away days, or team-building exercises, in each of the last five years. (AQW 8068/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The amount of hours that have been taken up with departmental or cross-departmental away days, or team-building exercises, in each of the last five years, are detailed in the table below.

	Amount of hours
2003/04	8,983
2004/05	7,047
2005/06	7,662
2006/07	2,865
2007/08	4,518

The away days/team building exercises covered a variety of subjects but most were related to organisational and staff development.

Invest NI Office Space

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what office space Invest NI is currently leasing in the North Antrim constituency. (AQW 8330/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: In the North Antrim Constituency Invest NI leases office space at one location, Mill Street in Ballymena. The office space leased by Invest NI in this property is occupied by Invest NI's North Eastern Regional Office on the basis of a 15 year lease, effective from September 2004.

In the interests of clarity, information on all the property Invest NI pays or makes contribution to rental on, within Northern Ireland's Parliamentary Constituencies, can be found in the answer to AQW 7988 08.

Invest NI Office Space

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how much has been paid to date on contracts for vacant office space held by Invest NI in the North Antrim constituency. (AQW 8331/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Invest NI does not lease any vacant office space in the North Antrim constituency.

In the interests of clarity, information on all the property Invest NI pays or makes contribution to rental on, within Northern Ireland's Parliamentary Constituencies, can be found in the answer to AQW 7988 08.

Invest NI Office Space

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment if any of the office space leased by Invest NI in the North Antrim constituency is vacant; if so, for how long and at which locations; and to detail (i) the length of each contract; and (ii) for how long each contract has been in place. (AQW 8332/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: None of the office space leased by Invest NI in the North Antrim constituency is vacant. The only office space leased by Invest NI in the constituency is at Mill Street, Ballymena, and is occupied by Invest NI's North Eastern Regional Office.

In the interests of clarity, information on all the property Invest NI pays or makes contribution to rental on, within Northern Ireland's Parliamentary Constituencies, can be found in the answer to AQW 7988 08

Invest NI Office Space

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment if any of the office space being leased by Invest NI in the North Antrim constituency is currently occupied by Invest NI client companies; and if so at which locations. (AQW 8333/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: In the North Antrim Constituency Invest NI leases office space at one location, Mill Street in Ballymena. The office space leased by Invest NI in this property is occupied by Invest NI's North Eastern Regional Office. Within the constituency Invest NI has a land holding of c100 acres of which c35 remain available to client companies with economic development projects. Figures are correct as at 31 March 2008.

In the interests of clarity, information on all the property Invest NI pays or makes contribution to rental on, within Northern Ireland's Parliamentary Constituencies, can be found in the answer to AQW 7988 08.

Invest NI 'Go For It' Scheme

Mr Bresland asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many businesses have started up with assistance from Invest NI under the 'Go For It' scheme, in each of the last 3 years, broken down by parliamentary constituency. (AQW 8348/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and

Investment: ‘Go for It’ is a marketing campaign which seeks to boost levels of entrepreneurial activity and raise the standing of Northern Ireland in the international business start-up league. As such, it is not a vehicle through which businesses are directly assisted to start-up.

The volume start-up market in Northern Ireland is served by the Start-a-Business Programme (SABp). SABp has been very successful in supporting many local businesses to start up. The figures below indicate business start ups, in each of the last 3 years, under SABp, broken down by parliamentary constituency:

START UPS ASSISTED UNDER THE START A BUSINESS PROGRAMME BY PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY

TIME PERIOD: 2005/06 TO 2007/08

Pca	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	Total
Belfast East	85	71	108	264
Belfast North	114	74	109	297
Belfast South	124	115	115	354
Belfast West	134	118	133	385
East Antrim	159	168	152	479
East Londonderry	196	179	236	611
Fermanagh And South Tyrone	292	300	328	920
Foyle	250	221	275	746
Lagan Valley	165	153	138	456
Mid Ulster	279	229	271	779
Newry And Armagh	225	184	222	631
North Antrim	180	204	243	627
North Down	146	111	91	348
South Antrim	157	139	127	423
South Down	300	182	231	713
Strangford	200	156	154	510
Upper Bann	229	137	177	543
West Tyrone	192	197	238	627
Total	3,427	2,938	3,348	9,713

Note

1. Figures for 2007/08 are Provisional and may be Subject to Amendment

Departmental Response to Increasing Fuel Costs

Mrs Long asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what assessment she has made of the

impact of the increase in (i) fuel costs; and (ii) fuel duty on the departmental budget and the realisation of efficiency targets; and what action she has taken to mitigate against these increased costs. (AQW 8454/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and

Investment: The Department of Enterprise Trade and Investment, including its *NDPBs, spent approximately £474K on various fuels in the financial year 2007/08. It is currently estimated that departmental expenditure on fuels will increase by approximately 25% to £592k in this financial year.

DETI's targeted efficiencies are not impacted by the increase in fuel costs and monitoring systems are in place to ensure their delivery.

The Department continues to work closely with the Department of Finance and Personnel, Energy Conservation Unit and other agencies to minimise its energy consumption. Actions taken to mitigate increasing energy costs include improving the efficiency of building heating systems, installation of intelligent lighting controls and the replacement of electrical appliances with fewer more energy efficient models.

* DETI NDPBs: Invest NI; NI Tourist Board; Health & Safety Executive NI; General Consumer Council NI

Derry/Londonderry Lighting Strategy

Ms Anderson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on the 2007 lighting strategy for the city of Derry/Londonderry. (AQW 8525/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and

Investment: The Lighting Strategy for the Walled City of Derry/Londonderry was completed in February 2007. An implementation plan is being developed for the lighting of the City Walls, Craigavon Bridge and other key buildings.

Women's TEC in North Belfast

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what support her Department has given to the Women's Tec in North Belfast; and what action her Department is taking to promote women in enterprise, trade and investment. (AQW 8548/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and

Investment: The Womens Tec based in Duncairn Gardens, Belfast has been supported by the Social Entrepreneurship Programme delivered by Invest Northern Ireland. The group has received a Social Entrepreneurship Programme Grant of £5,000 as a contribution towards start-up costs, start-up capability

mentoring and post-start operational aftercare for a Tradeswomen NI project.

Invest Northern Ireland has been working in partnership with Women's TEC from June 2006 until May 2008 on the Pathfinding element of the Pathways to Female Entrepreneurship Programme. This was a pre-enterprise awareness programme which was part-funded by Invest Northern Ireland and the Department for Employment and Learning through the European Social Fund under the Northern Ireland Programme for Building Sustainable Prosperity.

Benchmarking the Economy

Dr Farry asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, further to AQW 7339/08, what plans she has to mirror the exercise conducted by the National Competitiveness Council in the Republic of Ireland to benchmark its economy against 16 other economies and the OECD and European Union averages.

(AQW 8575/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Establishing an independent Competition Board was one of a number of recommendations made by Sir David Varney in his recent report into the competitiveness of the Northern Ireland economy. Once the Executive has concluded its consideration of the report, the Finance Minister, Nigel Dodds, will issue a response to Sir David and HM Treasury. This will include the Executive's position on the recommendation to establish a NI Competitiveness Board.

That said, I recognise the importance of measuring and promoting competitiveness in Northern Ireland, and as with many of Sir David's recommendations, we are already working to achieve this. DETI, in conjunction with other Departments, has previously worked with the Economic Research Institute for Northern Ireland (ERINI) to produce a competitiveness report (Measurement and Benchmarking of the Competitiveness of Northern Ireland) – published October 2006. ERINI will shortly be updating this work with publication expected in the autumn.

UK Marine Bill

Mr Boylan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what involvement her Department will have in the development of the UK Marine Planning Policy Statement under the UK Marine Bill; what implications this will have on the drawing up of objectives that will influence the positioning of renewables at sea; and the discussions that she has had to date with the UK Government on this matter.

(AQW 8576/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Under the draft UK Marine Bill, it is the Department of the Environment (DOE) that is defined as the relevant policy authority with responsibility for preparation of the Northern Ireland contribution to the Marine Policy Statement (MPS). However, Schedule 4 of the draft Bill requires that in so doing, DOE must consult other relevant Northern Ireland departments with functions in relation to the marine area during the preparation of the consultation draft and during the settling of the final text: the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment is a relevant department.

It is intended that the MPS will set out a framework of high level objectives for the marine environment, rather than set out the detail of the positioning of renewable energy generation at sea. However, the MPS is expected to support the development of renewable energy.

It was in my previous role as Environment Minister that I had dealings with the UK Government on the UK Marine Bill. The Environment Minister is coordinating the Executive's response to the consultation on the UK Marine Bill, so it is appropriate that liaison should remain with that department.

Citizens Advice Bureau

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what assistance she can provide to the Citizens Advice Bureau or other advice centres for a debt officer in the Ards and Strangford area in April 2009.

(AQW 8577/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: On 3 July 2008 I announced an extra £400,000 for the provision of free face to face debt advice across Northern Ireland for two years starting in April 2009. My Department will be carrying out a post project evaluation of the debt advice service during 2006/07, in order to identify any gaps in provision. It is too early to say whether the extra funding will result in a debt adviser being located in the Ards and Strangford areas at April 2009.

Biofuels Market

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what market there is for Bio-Fuels.

(AQW 8595/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The biofuel market is a global one with many countries using biofuels in blends with fossil fuels. There is a market for biofuel in the UK and sales of biofuel, from UK and imported sources, made up

approximately 1% (530 million litres) of total fuel sales for road transport in 2007.

The UK market will be encouraged further by the Renewable Transport Fuel Obligation (RTFO) which came into effect on 15 April 2008 and which includes Northern Ireland. This requires large scale suppliers of fossil-based road and transport fuels in the UK to ensure that a specified percentage of their total road transport fuel sales are made up of renewable transport fuels. The current RTFO target is 5% biofuels by 2010/11, which in broad terms, is likely to equate to around 2.5 billion litres.

Citizens Advice

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment why her Department did not fund or assist a debt officer in the Ards and Strangford areas, within the Citizens Advice Bureau or other advice centres. (AQW 8597/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: My Department currently provides funding to Citizen's Advice for 12 debt advisers located across Northern Ireland for the period 2008-2011. A contract was awarded to Citizens Advice following a public tender exercise where proposals were sought as to how best to meet demand and provide a free face to face service aimed at the most disadvantaged areas. None of the proposals received sought to locate a debt adviser in the Ards and Strangford areas. My Department continues to provide ongoing advice and assistance to all advice centres in Northern Ireland through training, workshops and seminars on many aspects of dealing with debt.

Invest NI

Ms J McCann asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what projects or programmes were affected by Invest NIs reduced requirement of approximately £6 million in its inward investment budget. (AQW 8622/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Invest NI operates in a demand-led business environment and reacts to the requirements of its client base. Client's development projects, and in particular the nature and speed of their implementation, largely drives Invest NI's in-year budgetary needs. As client requirements are so closely linked to macro economic conditions it is not unusual that there will be some fluctuation in the number and value of projects requiring funding in any one year.

This proposed early release of budget has been determined following a detailed analysis of work in progress and existing commitments. This has indicated

that there is a reduced requirement for funding under existing Letters of Offer. As such, there is no one single project or programme that is affected but rather there is an overall lessening in business demand as a consequence of a number of global factors, including the credit crunch and uncertainty of economic conditions overall. These issues are affecting the timing of investment decisions and, therefore, the draw down of financial assistance by clients.

The proposed early release will enable government to redistribute funding to other priorities early in-year.

Transport Costs

Dr Farry asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what measures are being taken to address additional transport costs that are a result of Northern Ireland's relative peripherality within the European Union. (AQW 8634/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: My department has no policy levers to address additional transport costs. Matters relating to additional transport costs, such as fuel duty, are matters which fall outside the transferred field.

ENVIRONMENT

Unauthorised Quarrying at Spring Road in Omagh

Mr Doherty asked the Minister of the Environment if he will take immediate steps to introduce injunction proceedings to stop unauthorised quarrying at Spring Road, Drumnakilly, Omagh. (AQW 7921/08)

The Minister of the Environment (Mr S Wilson): My Department is continuing to pursue all avenues open to it to prevent unauthorised quarrying continuing at Spring Road, Drumnakilly, Omagh. Officers from Planning Service met Counsel earlier this month on the issue of seeking injunctive proceedings and Planning Service is currently awaiting legal advice.

Departmental Electrical Equipment

Mr Savage asked the Minister of the Environment how many Blackberrys have been purchased by his Department since devolution. (AQW 8168/08)

The Minister of the Environment: My Department has purchased 260 Blackberrys since devolution.

Enforcement Section of the Planning Service

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of the Environment (i) the total number of people working in the enforcement section of the Planning Service; (ii) the total cost of running the section; (iii) the total number of complaints received over the past 12 months and (iv) the number of complaints which have resulted in action being taken by the enforcement section. (AQW 8246/08)

The Minister of the Environment: Information available is as follows:

- (i) Each Divisional Planning Office and Planning Service Headquarters (in dealing with minerals, extraction and waste disposal) have dedicated enforcement teams. In total, 62 members of staff work in enforcement sections within Planning Service.
- (ii) The total cost of running the six Divisional enforcement sections in 2007/2008 was £1,396,292. This figure relates to salaries and general administrative expenses.
- (iii) My Department receives a significant number of complaints in relation to unauthorised development each year. The total number of complaints (i.e. cases opened) from 1 July 2007 to 30 June 2008 was 2,826.
- (iv) In terms of formal action, from April 2007 to March 2008, 218 formal notices were served.

The majority of complaints come from members of the public and Planning Service has a duty to fully investigate each and decide on the appropriate course of action. However, I must stress that a relatively small number require the Department to take formal enforcement action.

Many cases are successfully resolved without the need for formal action, for example because there is no breach of control i.e. the works complained about are permitted development and no action is necessary, or matters are resolved satisfactorily through negotiation leading to the submission of an application or compliance by removing unauthorised works. Indeed over 3000 cases are satisfactorily resolved every year. However, where significant development takes place which is unacceptable, my Department is committed to taking the appropriate enforcement action and pursuing the individuals through the courts.

Corncrake Numbers

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment what steps he is taking to increase Corncrake numbers. (AQW 8271/08)

The Minister of the Environment: EHS has been involved in the drafting and delivery of UK and all-Ireland corncrake species action plans. Specifically EHS supports the Corncrake Grant Scheme which encourages farmers to adopt suitable grass-cutting practices where corncrakes occur. In addition, land acquisition and habitat management for corncrake on Rathlin Island by the RSPB has been grant-aided by the EHS.

Light Pollution

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of the Environment if any strategies are in place to tackle light pollution. (AQW 8299/08)

The Minister of the Environment: At the moment there are no strategies in place to tackle light pollution.

Light pollution is one of a number of local environmental quality issues my officials have considered under the Clean Neighbourhoods Agenda remit which aims to bring forward stronger and more effective legislation and guidance to help district councils to improve the environmental quality of our local neighbourhoods and public spaces throughout Northern Ireland.

One option to help tackle the light pollution problem is to extend statutory nuisance laws to include artificial light. This would allow district councils and members of the public to take action for statutory nuisance from artificial light where appropriate.

We intend to consult on Clean Neighbourhoods Agenda proposals in due course.

Planning Approval on Bogland

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of the Environment if any policies are in place in respect of granting planning approval on bogland. (AQW 8300/08)

The Minister of the Environment: Planning Policy Statement 2 'Nature Conservation' sets out the Department's land-use planning policies for the conservation of our natural heritage, including any bogland designated for its nature conservation value.

Draft PPS 18 'Renewal Energy' also provides for the protection of active peatland in relation to wind energy development.

Planning Policy Statement 14

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment when Planning Policy Statement 14 will be concluded. (AQW 8320/08)

The Minister of the Environment: I expect to submit a revised draft PPS 14 to the Executive Committee very soon with a view to issuing for public consultation.

Belfast City Airport

Dr Farry asked the Minister of the Environment the rationale behind the Planning Service agreeing to a new draft Planning Agreement in relation to Belfast City Airport. (AQW 8322/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The rationale behind the revised draft Planning Agreement was the request by the Belfast City Airport authorities in July 2004 to review the existing 1997 Planning Agreement, as recommended in the 2003 White Paper, "The Future of Air Transport".

Salmonid Rivers

Mr Simpson asked the Minister of the Environment what work his Department is currently undertaking to ensure that salmonid rivers and their tributaries are safeguarded. (AQW 8334/08)

The Minister of the Environment: My Department's Environment and Heritage Service (EHS) has a statutory duty under the Environment (Northern Ireland) Order 2002 to designate and protect rivers as Areas of Special Scientific Interest (ASSIs) if they are considered to be of special interest by reason of their flora, fauna, geological, physiographical or other features, which would include Atlantic Salmon. It is also required to designate and protect rivers as Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), if they merit such designation under Habitats Directive for their Atlantic Salmon interests.

To date EHS has designated three ASSIs that have salmonoid interests and two SACs that are coincident with these ASSIs. One additional ASSI, and a coincident SAC, that embrace this interest will be designated by September 2008.

The Freshwater Fish Directive aims to protect or improve the quality of those running or standing freshwaters which support or which, if pollution were reduced or eliminated, would become capable of supporting fish life.

Some 4,500 km of river length have been designated under this legislation. In addition, the Newry, Lagan and Coalisland canals along with 17 reservoirs and lakes have also been designated. These designations assist in maintaining and improving water quality, reducing pollution in rivers and creating the right habitat to encourage healthy fish populations.

The Water Framework Directive also requires the monitoring and classification of fish regarding species, age and abundance in freshwaters. This will be undertaken at various monitoring stations comprising around 90 river stations and 27 lakes throughout Northern Ireland.

Planning Pre-Application Enquiries

Mr Poots asked the Minister of the Environment what timescale his Department accepts as reasonable to deal with major planning pre-application enquiries. (AQW 8354/08)

The Minister of the Environment: My officials have published guidance for prospective developers and applicants on pre-application discussions. This will assist in the development of procedures for meaningful pre-application engagement between the Planning Service, our key consultees – and applicants. As part of the pre-application discussions, an indicative timescale for processing the application will be provided. However, the timescale for dealing with the pre-application discussion process, from start to finish, will clearly be dependent on a number of factors including, the nature and complexity of the proposal, the key issues that need to be addressed such as, environmental or economic impacts and the time taken by the prospective developer to provide the necessary information to inform the discussions. Pre-application discussions will be dealt with by my officials as quickly as it is possible to do so.

Nuisance Trees and Hedges

Mrs Long asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on proposed legislation in relation to nuisance trees and hedges. (AQW 8358/08)

The Minister of the Environment: I am keen to bring forward legislation to address this problem, starting with a policy consultation on the detailed operation of the legislation. However, the timing will be subject to consideration of the other competing priorities facing my Department.

Belfast City Airport

Dr Farry asked the Minister of the Environment what representations have been made by Belfast City Airport in relation to the relaxation of the existing Planning Agreement. (AQW 8363/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The review of the existing Planning Agreement has been ongoing since 2004 and all interested parties have had the opportunity to make representations both

in writing and orally, through the Examination in Public (EIP). The City Airport authorities have made representations on all the key issues.

Belfast City Airport

Dr Farry asked the Minister of the Environment how economic, financial and environmental arguments made by Belfast City Airport in favour of relaxation of the Planning Agreement have been assessed by the Planning Service. (AQW 8364/08)

The Minister of the Environment: All representations by interested parties in relation to the key issues have been carefully considered by the Planning Service in the context of the EIP panel's report which assessed the relevant matters and made recommendations. The draft revised Planning Agreement represents the outcome of this lengthy consultation process which is still ongoing with the Belfast City Council, North Down Borough Council and the Airport Forum Group.

Belfast City Airport

Dr Farry asked the Minister of the Environment why the proposed 'community fund', in relation to the relaxation of the existing Planning Agreement with Belfast City Airport, is only being deployed within the East Belfast constituency. (AQW 8365/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The proposed Community Fund is linked directly to the number of late flights which the Airport Authorities are expected to keep to an absolute minimum. The quantum of funds available is therefore likely to be limited and the intention was to focus funds in the area most affected, namely the greater East Belfast area. However any representations about extending the eligible area will be carefully considered.

Belfast City Airport

Dr Farry asked the Minister of the Environment what controls and penalties will be enforced in relation to the use of Belfast City Airport by 'delayed aircraft' under the terms of a new Planning Agreement with the airport. (AQW 8366/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The Department and the Airport Authorities are committed to keeping the number of "delayed aircraft" post 9.30 pm to a minimum. Control measures are kept under review and penalties will be introduced under the proposed Community Fund as part of an agreement with Belfast City Airport on changes for late flights. Consultation on this is ongoing.

Quarry Extraction in Omagh

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the conditions of the planning application submitted by the gold mine company in Omagh for quarry extraction. (AQW 8390/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The 'Gold Mine' site at Cavanacaw outside Omagh was granted planning permission on 23 May 1995 (Ref. No. K/1992/0713). The proposal was deemed a major planning application under Article 31 of the Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1991.

In order to consider representations made in respect of the application, the Department caused a local public inquiry to be held by the Planning Appeals Commission. The application was accompanied by an Environmental Statement in accordance with the Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1989.

A copy of the conditions attached to the decision notice granting planning permission has been placed in the Assembly Library.

Gold Mine Quarry in Omagh

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister of the Environment what assessment has been carried out into (i) the environmental impact; (ii) the impact on roads infrastructure; and (iii) noise pollution, as a result of the extraction of material at the gold mine quarry in Omagh. (AQW 8392/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The 'Gold Mine' at Cavanacaw outside Omagh is owned by Omagh Minerals Ltd and the site was granted planning permission 23 May 1995 (Ref. No. K/1992/0713).

In accordance with the Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1989 the planning application was accompanied by an Environmental Statement to address environmental concerns.

The proposal was deemed a major planning application under Article 31 of the Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1991. In order to consider representations made in respect of the application, the Department requested the Planning Appeals Commission (PAC) to hold a public local inquiry.

The Commission's report to the Department carefully examined all the topics considered in the various reports submitted to it and confirmed its agreement with the conclusions reached. The topics considered included those raised by Thomas Buchanan MLA, namely, the environmental impact; the impact on roads infrastructure; and noise pollution.

Following consideration of the report the Department agreed with the recommendation of the Commission that full planning permission should be granted.

A significant number of conditions were attached to the permission to control activity at the mine, and these are monitored by Planning Service.

My colleague, Conor Murphy MP MLA, Minister for Regional Development, has informed me that the recent increase in vehicular activity around the gold mine quarry area in Omagh has caused substantial damage to the Botera Upper and Corlea Roads.

Local officials from Roads Service have pursued the haulage contractor, under Article 11 of the Roads Order, as it is considered to be "Extraordinary Traffic". The contractor has accepted his responsibilities and is currently engaged in re-constructing and resurfacing approximately 300 metres of the Botera Upper and Corlea Roads.

Recycling of Domestic Waste

Mr Simpson asked the Minister of the Environment what percentage of domestic waste was recycled in each of the last 5 years, broken down by District Council area. (AQW 8411/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The figures for the last five years available are set out in the table below.

The 2007/08 figures will be published in November 2008 following final verification.

District Council	Percentage of Household Waste Recycled				
	2002	2003	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07
Antrim BC	19.1	22.4	38.39	44.02	47.11
Ards BC	9.6	9.0	20.40	24.02	25.45
Ballymena BC	21.0	18.0	23.39	26.87	28.15
Belfast CC	4.0	4.6	8.86	14.36	18.95
Carrickfergus BC	8.2	10.5	17.20	17.41	21.89
Castlereagh BC	5.0	12.1	22.24	32.53	34.91
Down DC	13.5	13.3	19.17	33.69	32.16
Larne BC	6.0	9.6	16.49	25.00	31.63
Lisburn CC	9.0	9.2	12.25	19.83	25.08
Newtownabbey BC	16.5	17.0	19.90	22.54	24.79
North Down BC	11.1	12.6	17.21	24.63	32.97
ARC21 Total	9.7	10.6	16.70	22.90	26.80
Ballymoney BC	10.2	9.9	24.02	24.44	24.75

District Council	Percentage of Household Waste Recycled				
	2002	2003	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07
Coleraine BC	6.8	11.6	18.60	24.26	25.67
Derry CC	2.7	7.2	13.72	28.07	24.37
Limavady BC	2.5	10.9	27.33	35.88	28.51
Magherafelt DC	4.9	18.1	31.42	35.66	35.26
Moyle DC	2.1	4.6	11.32	25.51	26.53
Strabane D C	4.1	8.6	17.32	21.30	22.81
NWRWMG Total	4.6	10.1	19.30	27.60	26.30
Armagh City & DC	16.5	21.0	23.30	26.70	32.83
Banbridge DC	29.5	33.3	39.21	40.99	45.13
Cookstown DC	17.3	16.2	20.06	28.14	31.57
Craigavon BC	16.1	19.3	23.35	29.29	29.96
Dungannon & South Tyrone BC	10.9	13.4	20.13	19.54	24.93
Fermanagh DC	10.6	17.5	21.04	20.77	27.83
Newry & Mourne DC	9.3	13.4	20.03	24.86	27.83
Omagh DC	9.1	12.2	19.62	17.77	27.95
SWAMP	14.3	18.0	23.00	25.90	30.50
NI Total	10.0	12.5	18.9	24.5	27.7

Illegal Dumping

Mr Simpson asked the Minister of the Environment for an estimate of the amount of waste originating from the Republic of Ireland that was illegally dumped in Northern Ireland, in each of the last 5 years.

(AQW 8414/08)

The Minister of the Environment: Waste from the Republic of Ireland was tipped in Northern Ireland as a result of criminal activity. As such, it is not possible to accurately quantify the true amount of waste and the time of its deposit. However, my officials have established that there are 20 illegal sites in Northern Ireland containing approximately 200,000 – 250,000 tonnes of waste from the Republic of Ireland. Other sites exist which contain a proportion of such waste.

Recycling Domestic Waste

Mr Gallagher asked the Minister of the Environment what percentage of domestic waste is recycled and

what percentage of non-hazardous construction and demolition waste is recycled. (AQW 8431/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The latest figures available indicate that 27.7% of domestic waste was recycled in Northern Ireland during 2006-7. The 2007/08 figures are currently being compiled and should be available in November 2008.

An estimated 34.7% of non-hazardous construction and demolition waste, comprising aggregate and soil, was recycled during 2005/06.

Recycling Waste

Mr Gallagher asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of Northern Ireland's capacity to meet the binding targets for re-use and recycling of waste agreed by the European Parliament in plenary session on 17 June. (AQW 8432/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The targets for re-use and recycling of waste agreed by the European Parliament in plenary session on 17 June are not binding on Member States until the revised Waste Framework Directive has been adopted by the European Council. Member States will then have a further two years in which to transpose and implement the Directive. For the time being, my Department is working towards the targets for recycling and recovery set out in the Northern Ireland Waste Management Strategy. These are:

- 60% of Commercial and Industrial Waste to be recycled by 2020
- 75% of Construction, Demolition and Excavation Wastes to be recycled or reused by 2020
- Recycling and Composting of Household Wastes to be at:
 - 35% by 2010
 - 40% by 2015
 - 45% by 2020

There has been a steady increase in Northern Ireland's recycling rate for municipal waste in recent years from 8.9% in 2002 to 25.5% in 2006/07. In view of this I am confident that continuing progress can be made towards achieving the targets set in the Strategy.

Recycling Waste

Mr Gallagher asked the Minister of the Environment what measures he is considering to ensure that Northern Ireland achieves the targets for re-use and recycling of waste agreed by the European Parliament in plenary session on 17 June. (AQW 8433/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The targets for re-use and recycling of waste agreed by the European Parliament on 17 June have yet to be adopted by the Environment Council. It is therefore too early to consider what measures might be necessary to achieve these targets.

Belfast City Airport

Mr B Wilson asked the Minister of the Environment whether any proposal to extend George Best Belfast City Airport would be subject to a full public inquiry. (AQW 8444/08)

The Minister of the Environment: Pre-application discussions have taken place and remain ongoing. A planning application has not yet been submitted.

Any forthcoming application to extend the runway is likely to be designated as one of major importance under Article 31 of the Planning (NI) Order 1991. One option open to the Department through the Article 31 process is to hold a public inquiry.

Until such times as a planning application is made and consideration of the proposal has taken place the Department is not in a position to confirm whether or not the application would be subject to a public inquiry.

Belfast City Airport

Mr B Wilson asked the Minister of the Environment how many flights took place at George Best Belfast City Airport after 9.30pm in each month over the past two years. (AQW 8445/08)

The Minister of the Environment: Details are attached showing the delayed flights by month over the past 2 years plus by time band. The majority of delayed flights occur between 9.30 – 10.00pm. Late flights in 2006 and 2007 represent 1.5% and 1.8% respectively of the total annual number of flights.

2006 Total		Percentage Extensions By Time Band (2006)			
Time	Total		ARR	DEP	Total
	Arr	Dep			
2131-2200	233	113	59.74%	63.13%	60.81%
2201-2230	84	40	21.54%	22.35%	21.79%
2231-2300	46	16	11.79%	8.94%	10.90%
2301-2359	27	10	6.93%	5.59%	6.50%
Totals	390	179	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%
Total	569				

2007 Total		Percentage Extensions By Time Band (2007)			
Time	Total				
	Arr	Dep	ARR	DEP	Total
2131-2200	451	69	70.91%	61.61%	69.52%
2201-2230	124	31	19.50%	27.68%	20.72%
2231-2300	42	9	6.60%	8.04%	6.82%
2301-2359	19	3	2.99%	2.68%	2.94%
Totals	390	179	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%
Total	748				

DELAYED ATM'S AFTER 21.30

	2006	2007
January	20	46
February	31	35
March	52	43
April	27	27
May	56	64
June	46	106
July	57	100
August	66	63
September	42	68
October	68	54
November	40	65
December	64	77
Totals	569	748

1997 Planning Agreement

Mr B Wilson asked the Minister of the Environment what enforcement action he intends to take to implement the 1997 Planning Agreement, preventing flights after 9.30pm at George Best Belfast City Airport. (AQW 8447/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The review of the 1997 Planning Agreement is ongoing and a revised draft Agreement is currently the subject of consultation. As part of the review it is proposed to introduce a Community Fund linked to penalty charges for flights delayed after 9.30pm. In the circumstances no enforcement action is presently anticipated.

Incidents of Noise Pollution

Mr Ross asked the Minister of the Environment how many incidents of noise pollution (i) have been reported; and (ii) have led to prosecutions, in each of the last 5 years, broken down by District Council area. (AQW 8448/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The Department of the Environment reports the number of noise complaints received and legal action taken by district councils between 01 April and 31 March annually.

Statistics are available for the last 4 annual reporting periods only. Statistics for the 2007/08 period are currently being collated and this report will be published in autumn this year. The table below has been derived using statistics relating to all 26 council areas, from the last four noise complaint statistics reports.

The outcome of each prosecution is not recorded by the Department and may be sought from the individual councils concerned.

The Noise Complaint Statistics for Northern Ireland reports are available from the Assembly Library, or may be viewed in full at: http://www.doeni.gov.uk/index/protect_the_environment/local_environmental_issues/noise/complaint_statistics_for_ni.htm

Incidents of Dog Fouling

Mr Ross asked the Minister of the Environment how many incidents of dog fouling have been reported in each of the last 5 years, broken down by District Council area. (AQW 8464/08)

The Minister of the Environment: My Department does not hold information on the number of incidents of dog fouling which have been reported in each of the last 5 years. However, details in relation to the number of dog fouling fixed penalty notices issued by each district council have been compiled since 1 April 2004. Detailed below are these figures for the periods 2004/2005, 2005/2006 and 2006/2007. My Department has recently requested the figures for 2007/08 and I will let you have these as soon as they become available.

Council	No. of fixed penalty notices issued for dog fouling 1 April 04 to 31 March 05	No. of fixed penalty notices issued for dog fouling 1 April 05 to 31 March 06	No. of fixed penalty notices issued for dog fouling 1 April 06 to 31 March 07
Antrim BC	1	2	1
Ards BC	4	14	5

Council	No. of fixed penalty notices issued for dog fouling 1 April 04 to 31 March 05	No. of fixed penalty notices issued for dog fouling 1 April 05 to 31 March 06	No. of fixed penalty notices issued for dog fouling 1 April 06 to 31 March 07
Armagh City & DC	0	0	0
Ballymena BC	3	2	3
Ballymoney BC	1	0	0
Banbridge DC	0	0	2
Belfast CC	73	234	143
Carrickfergus BC	3	1	4
Castlereagh BC	1	3	2
Coleraine BC	15	10	10
Cookstown DC	2	1	0
Craigavon BC	0	5	9
Derry CC	0	0	0
Down DC	16	6	4
Dungannon & South Tyrone BC	0	0	0
Fermanagh DC	0	0	0
Larne BC	5	10	14
Limavady BC	0	2	0
Lisburn CC	2	2	1
Magherafelt DC	0	0	4
Moyle DC	0	1	0
Newry & Mourne DC	0	0	0
Newtownabbey BC	50	7	90
North Down BC	8	14	6
Omagh DC	0	0	14
Strabane DC	0	0	0
Totals	184	314	312

Illegal Dumping

Mr Ross asked the Minister of the Environment how many incidents of illegal dumping have been reported in each of the last 5 years, broken down by parliamentary constituency. (AQW 8465/08)

The Minister of the Environment: My Department records details of illegal dumping by District Council, but not by Parliament Constituency. That being the

case, I refer my Honourable Friend to the answer he received to AQW4748/08 on 19 March 2008.

Pollution Incident in Six Mile Water River

Mr Burns asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the latest pollution incident in the Six Mile Water River and to provide an update on the investigation into the source of the pollution. (AQW 8495/08)

The Minister of the Environment: It is my assessment that this was a serious incident, which has been classified by the Environment and Heritage Service (EHS) as being of 'High Severity'. The Six Mile Water has been severely impacted and initial assessments were that in excess of 2000 game fish and thousands of coarse fish were killed as a result of the pollution which occurred on 18 June.

Investigations point to the likelihood that this fishkill was caused by a 'plug' of pollution which passed down the Ballymartin Water and into the Six Mile Water. However, to date, no definitive source has been identified.

EHS staff lifted a number of samples with a view to identifying the nature and source of the pollution and a biological survey is underway. Since the start of this year EHS has undertaken 205 pollution prevention visits, 38 water pollution risk assessments and issued 7 enforcement notices in relation to premises within the Mallusk Industrial Estate. Immediately following the fish kill incident, 6 of these premises were checked by EHS staff.

Planning Appeals Commission

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of the Environment if, during the review of the planning service, he will investigate opportunities to enable individuals and local concerned residents rights of appeal to the Planning Appeals Commission (PAC) and also following any decisions made by the PAC, in order to balance opportunities currently afforded to developers/applicants. (AQW 8502/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The programme of planning reform which I am currently taking forward aims to bring about improvements in the efficiency and effectiveness of the planning system and to create a planning system that provides transparency in decision making, and gives confidence to its users. I am considering the issue of third party planning appeals in this context and against the background of the Review of Public Administration announcement which will see the transfer of significant planning functions to District Councils. I intend to issue a consultation paper on planning reform later this year.

Planning Appeals Commission

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of the Environment what steps he will take after the review of the planning process to encourage developers/applicants to use all the avenues available to them when submitting a planning application instead of opting to go directly to the Planning Appeals Commission, since this approach puts genuine objectors at a disadvantage on several issues, including affordability of legal and specialist expertise. (AQW 8503/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The programme of planning reform which I am currently taking forward aims to bring about improvements in the efficiency and effectiveness of the planning system and to create a planning system that provides transparency in decision making, and gives confidence to its users. I am considering the appeals process in this context and against the background of the Review of Public Administration announcement which will see the transfer of significant planning functions to District Councils. I intend to issue a consultation paper on planning reform later this year.

Unapproved Landfill Sites

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of the Environment to outline his policies to remove illegal and toxic waste from unapproved landfill sites; and to list where these policies have been successful and where they have failed. (AQW 8508/08)

The Minister of the Environment: My Department does not have the legislative authority to require landowners to remove illegally deposited waste. This power lies with District Councils (DCs) through notices issued under Article 28 of the Waste and Contaminated Land (NI) Order 1997, which also allows them to remove the waste and recoup the costs from the landowner. Costs associated with remediation of larger scale sites can, and often do, run into tens, if not hundreds, of thousands of pounds; in relation to the much larger sites, remediation costs can exceed £1 million.

DCs also have powers under the Litter (NI) Order 1994 and public health legislation to deal with illegally deposited waste.

EHS concentrates its efforts in an efficient and effective manner in dealing with large scale commercial dumping, particularly where hazardous and toxic waste is concerned. Its enforcement policy is currently being revised following the report by the Criminal Justice Inspectorate in October 2007.

In relation to waste from the Republic of Ireland illegally dumped in Northern Ireland, my Department's policy is to seek its removal and repatriation. My officials are currently engaged with the relevant Irish

authorities in respect of the repatriation of waste from 20 sites in Northern Ireland. Repatriation of such waste from one site, in South Armagh, took place last year.

On-the-Spot Motor Vehicle Checks

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of the Environment to state the frequency, within the past year, in which test centres have been involved with the PSNI in carrying out on-the-spot checks on motor vehicles suspected of being modified illegally and not conforming to approved road standards. (AQW 8509/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The Driver & Vehicle Agency has undertaken 2 private car enforcement operations during the past 12 months in which test centres have been utilised for the purposes of carrying out on-the-spot checks on motor vehicles suspected of being modified illegally and not conforming to approved road standards.

During these operations 30 motor cars were inspected resulting in 15 vehicles subjected to immediate prohibition action as a result of serious mechanical defects. A further 3 vehicles were subjected to delayed prohibition action on grounds of minor non compliances.

Pollution Incident in Six Mile Water River

Mr McLaughlin asked the Minister of the Environment (i) for a progress report in relation to the Environment and Heritage Service investigation into the recent pollution incident at Six Mile Water that resulted in a massive fish kill; (ii) what measures he will introduce to prevent a recurrence; and (iii) for an assurance that appropriate sanctions will be imposed on anyone deliberately or negligently polluting rivers. (AQW 8513/08)

The Minister of the Environment:

- (i) Environment and Heritage Service (EHS) staff lifted a number of samples with a view to identifying the source of the pollution. Premises in the Mallusk Industrial Estate have been checked, and a biological survey is underway. To date, no definitive source has been identified.
- (ii) I have instructed my officials to complete a water pollution risk assessment on all industrial premises on the Mallusk Industrial Estate within the next 3 months and to ensure that mitigation measures are put in place at any premises deemed to be of high or medium risk of causing water pollution.

- (iii) I agree that a prosecution would be warranted in the case of the incident referred to. In order to submit a case to the Public Prosecution Service, for consideration as to the instigation of a prosecution, EHS must clearly identify the source of a pollution incident and produce relevant evidence. In any instance where a prosecution is taken, the question of what sanctions are appropriate rests with the Courts and is outwith the remit of my Department.

Planning Applications

Mr McKay asked the Minister of the Environment whether every applicant for a site receives notification that the application has been approved or rejected. (AQW 8514/08)

The Minister of the Environment: On receipt of a planning application, Planning Service will send any necessary correspondence to either the applicant or appointed agent.

In cases whereby agents have been appointed on behalf of applicants to prepare and submit planning applications, the agent is the point of contact and all correspondence regarding the planning application including the decision notice will be sent to the appointed agent.

In every case the applicant directly, or through their appointed agent, is informed, through the issue of a decision notice, of the outcome of their planning application.

Registered Taxi Drivers

Mr Ross asked the Minister of the Environment how many taxi drivers are registered. (AQW 8543/08)

The Minister of the Environment: There were 19604 licensed taxi drivers in Northern Ireland at 25 June 2008.

Planning Policy Statement 5

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of the Environment when the draft version of Planning Policy Statement 5 was published; the date on which consultation ended; and when Planning Policy Statement 5 will be published. (AQW 8560/08)

The Minister of the Environment: Draft PPS5 (revised) was issued by the Department for Regional Development for public consultation in July 2006. The consultation period ended on 3 November 2006. Draft PPS 5 is currently subject to Judicial Review and will be published as soon as possible.

Driver and Vehicle Agency

Mr Ross asked the Minister of the Environment what plans he has to ensure that the Driver and Vehicle Agency is automatically informed where a taxi driver has been convicted of a criminal offence. (AQW 8565/08)

The Minister of the Environment: Before granting a taxi driver licence, the Department must be satisfied that the applicant is a fit and proper person. This is carried out by means of a repute check on the applicant's criminal record, if any. This check is carried out on first application and then at every renewal which is a 5 year interval.

It is also a condition of the licence that taxi drivers inform the Department of any convictions arising during the currency of the licence. Furthermore applicants for annual PSV licences (taxi vehicles) are legally required to declare any further conviction.

The Department is regularly informed by the PSNI of conviction details relating to licensed taxi drivers.

I have no plans to change the current procedures.

Areas of Special Scientific Interest

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the establishment of Areas of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI); and what plans he has to extend or speed up the rolling out of this programme. (AQW 8598/08)

The Minister of the Environment: To date 257 ASSIs have been designated. These cover some 94,602 hectares, which represents approximately 6.63% of the total landmass of Northern Ireland.

The Northern Ireland Environment Agency has put in place measures that will increase the rate of designation. A priority, risk-based list of 200 sites for designation by 2016 has been established, and the target for 2008/09, and each of the two successive years of the current Programme for Government, is set at 25 sites.

This list of 200 possible ASSIs is not exhaustive and others will be declared after 2016, but it is not possible to provide information on all other additional sites at this stage.

Departmental Response to Increasing Fuel Costs

Mrs Long asked the Minister of the Environment what assessment he has made of the impact of the increase in (i) fuel costs; and (ii) fuel duty on the departmental budget and the realisation of efficiency

targets; and what action he has taken to mitigate against these increased costs. (AQW 8626/08)

The Minister of the Environment: Fuel costs relating to DOE are primarily in respect of vehicle usage. Most of the expenditure relating to the fuel costs associated with the Department's buildings is paid by the Department of Finance and Personnel.

No formal assessment has been made yet regarding the impact of higher vehicle fuel costs/duty on the departmental budget. However, although these additional costs will be minimal, my Department will continue to monitor non-salary running costs during the year with a view to taking necessary action. This could, for example, lead to a reduction in the number and re-prioritisation of journeys made by my officials.

There will be no real impact on the realisation of departmental efficiency targets as savings in respect of these actions have already been removed from the Department's baselines as part of the Budget 2008-11 process.

Tree Preservation Orders

Mr B Wilson asked the Minister of the Environment if he will compel the developer who felled trees subject to a Tree Preservation Order at Myrtle Lodge, Newcastle, to replace the felled trees. (AQW 8670/08)

The Minister of the Environment: It would be inappropriate to make detailed comment on the case until the matter has either been before the court or the Department has determined that no case can be taken.

A breach of a Tree Preservation Order is a summary offence and the penalty, which may include the necessity to replace any trees felled, is a matter for the courts.

Tree Preservation Orders

Mr B Wilson asked the Minister of the Environment what action has been taken to enforce the Tree Preservation Orders on the trees felled at Myrtle Lodge, Newcastle. (AQW 8673/08)

The Minister of the Environment: It would be inappropriate to make detailed comment on the case until the matter has either been before the court or the Department has determined that no case can be taken.

A breach of a Tree Preservation Order is a summary offence and the penalty, which may include the necessity to replace any trees felled, is a matter for the courts.

Illegal Waste

Mr Gallagher asked the Minister of the Environment further to AQW 7034/08, the nature of

the liaison with Dublin City Council on a contract for the removal of the illegal waste, and what progress has since been made towards the removal and return of the waste from the sites specified. (AQW 8677/08)

The Minister of the Environment: My officials are currently in the process of agreeing a date for a further meeting with Dublin City Council to progress the contract for the removal of the waste from a number of sites, including Slattinagh in Fermanagh and Trillick in Tyrone.

Under EU rules, a tendering process must be instigated. This will involve obtaining expressions of interest from potential contractors and then drawing up a shortlist of contractors qualified to carry out the task. The tendering process will involve drawing up a framework agreement. This however will provide a panel of approved contractors from which to draw for a number of years.

Rose Energy

Mr Butler asked the Minister of the Environment how many letters of objection he has received in relation to Rose Energy's plans to build an incinerator on the shores of Lough Neagh. (AQW 8711/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The planning application for a Biomass Fuelled Power Plant at Ballyvannon Road Glenavy was submitted by Rose Energy to the Planning Service Headquarters on 4th June 2008. To date 1317 letters of objection have been submitted to the Planning Service in respect of this planning application.

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Mr Doherty asked the Minister of the Environment if it is his intention to designate the Sperrins region as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and to provide a timescale and steps involved for this process. (AQW 8742/08)

The Minister of the Environment: My officials in the Northern Ireland Environment Agency will complete the Order for designation of the Sperrin Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty under the Nature Conservation and Amenity Lands Order (NI) 1985 in August 2008.

Notification of the Department's intention to designate has been published in local papers and the Belfast Gazette. An event to announce the designation is being planned for September.

Reducing Dust from Quarries

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment what steps he is taking to control and reduce the dust from quarries situated close to homes. (AQW 8784/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) regulates quarries carrying out crushing or screening of rock under the Industrial Pollution Control (NI) Order 1997.

Authorisations issued to quarry operators require them to use the ‘best available techniques not entailing excessive cost’ (BATNEEC) to prevent or minimise releases of dust to air.

Typical techniques employed to control dust releases include effective plant enclosure, dust suppression, dust extraction and abatement, hard surfaced internal roads that are dampened in dry weather and vehicle wheel cleaning devices. The presence of residential property close to a quarry is taken into consideration in setting authorisation conditions.

NIEA staff carry out inspections of regulated quarries to assess compliance. Any complaints received about dust emissions are investigated.

Prosecutions for Violation of Preservation Orders

Mr Adams asked the Minister of the Environment how many prosecutions have been initiated by her Department in relation to breaches of Preservation Orders on (i) buildings; (ii) trees; and (iii) ancient landmarks, in the past three years. (AQO 3659/08)

The Minister of the Environment: My Department has initiated 11 prosecutions in respect of offences relating to Listed Buildings in the past three years. These include demolition of a listed building, Unauthorised replacement of windows in a listed building and the erection of a sign on a listed building.

In the last three years my Department has investigated a number of cases where it was alleged that trees protected by a TPO had been damaged or destroyed without the required consent of my Department and has initiated prosecutions in 4 cases.

VACANCIES (FULL TIME EQUIVALENT BASIS) IN THE ELEVEN NI DEPARTMENTS AND THEIR AGENCIES IN GRADES: AO; EO2; EO1; SO, AT 17 JUNE 2008

Department	AO		EO2		EO1		SO	
	Number	Location (posts)	Number	Location (posts)	Number	Location (posts)	Number	Location (posts)
Agriculture & Rural Development (DARD)	13	Belfast(10), Ballymena(1), Omagh(2)	9.5	Belfast(5), Antrim(1.5), Ballymena(1), Dungannon(1), Londonderry(1)	5.8	Belfast(5), Londonderry(0.8)	5	Belfast

The felling of trees covered by a TPO is only illegal if it can be demonstrated to the court that the person or persons involved has wilfully destroyed or wilfully damaged a tree in a manner likely to destroy it.

My Department’s approach in such cases however is to attempt to reach a resolution through negotiation without the need for formal court action.

In the past three years my Department has initiated one prosecution in relation to damage at a Scheduled Historic Monument, under the provisions of the Historic Monuments and Archaeological Objects (NI) Order 1995

FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

Somme Memorial

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel when the Somme Memorial was erected in the grounds of Parliament Buildings. (AQW 7911/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr N Dodds): The Somme Memorial is a group of Cedar trees within the Stormont Estate that were planted in December 1932. A Mourne granite memorial was added in 1976.

Current Vacancies in the Civil Service

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel the number and location of current vacancies in the Civil Service at (i) Administrative Officer; (ii) Executive Officer II; (iii) Executive Officer I; and (iv) Staff Officer, in each Department. (AQW 8096/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The location and number of vacancies in permanent posts in each Northern Ireland Civil Service department at the grades of (i) Administrative Officer; (ii) Executive Officer 2; (iii) Executive Officer 1; and (iv) Staff Officer are set out in the table attached.

Department	AO		EO2		EO1		SO	
	Number	Location (posts)	Number	Location (posts)	Number	Location (posts)	Number	Location (posts)
Culture, Arts & Leisure (DCAL)	6	Belfast(5) Castlewellan(0.5) Ballinamallard(0.5)	0		2	Belfast	1	Belfast
Education (DE)	6.5	Bangor(5), Londonderry(1.5)	3	Bangor	0		10	Bangor
Employment & Learning (DEL)1	30.8	Belfast(17.9), Antrim(1), Carrickfergus(0.9), Coleraine(2.5), Enniskillen(1.6), Foyle(1), Lisburn(1.8), Lisnagelvin(1), Newcastle(0.6), Newry(0.7), Newtownabbey(1) Omagh(0.8)	24.4	Belfast(17.1), Carrickfergus(1), Coleraine(1), Dungannon(0.9), Foyle(1), Lurgan(1), Newry(1.4), Omagh(1),	51.3	Belfast(26.8), Dungannon(2.7), Limavady(0.5), Newry(1) 1Throughout NI (20.3)	13	Belfast
Enterprise, Trade & Investment (DETI)	8.7	Belfast	3	Belfast	3	Belfast	0	
Finance & Personnel (DFP) 2	32	Belfast(30), Ballymena(1), Craigavon(1)	23	Belfast	31	Belfast	25	Belfast
Health, Social Services & Public Safety (DHSSPS)	7.9	Belfast(6.9) Londonderry(1)	3	Belfast	6.5	Belfast	6	Belfast

Department	AO		EO2		EO1		SO	
	Number	Location (posts)	Number	Location (posts)	Number	Location (posts)	Number	Location (posts)
Environment (DOE)	59.5	Belfast(19), Armagh(1), Ballymena(3), Coleraine(30), Downpatrick(1.5), Enniskillen(2), Lisburn(1), Omagh(2)	16.5	Belfast(14), Coleraine(2.5)	24	Belfast(20), Coleraine(3), Londonderry(1)	28.5	Belfast(24.5), Armagh(1), Ballymena(1), Coleraine(2)
Regional Development (DRD)	30	Belfast(14), Ballymena(7), Coleraine(1), Craigavon(3), Downpatrick(5)	10	Belfast(4), Ballymena(3), Coleraine(1), Downpatrick(1), Omagh(1)	18	Belfast(13), Antrim(1), Ballymena(1), Coleraine(2), Omagh(1)	11	Belfast(10), Craigavon(1)
Social Development (DSD) 3	155	Belfast(139), Banbridge(1), Coleraine(1), Limavady(1), Londonderry(6), Newry(1), Newtownabbey(1), Newtownards(1), Omagh(1), Portadown(3)	97	Belfast(86), Antrim(2), Ballymena(1), Downpatrick(1), Larne(1), Limavady(1), Lisburn(1), Londonderry(2), Portadown(2)	51	Belfast(42), Antrim(1), Bangor(1), Coleraine(1), Cookstown(1), Downpatrick(1), Dungannon(1), Londonderry(1), Magherafelt(1), ewry(1),	55	Belfast(51), Antrim(1), Ballymoney(1), Londonderry(2)

Department	AO		EO2		EO1		SO	
	Number	Location (posts)	Number	Location (posts)	Number	Location (posts)	Number	Location (posts)
Office of the First & Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM)	0		3	Belfast	1	Belfast	5	Belfast
Total	349.4		192.4		193.6		159.5	

- 1 DEL: The locations of the EO1 (Careers Advisors) vacancies listed as "throughout NI" are still to be determined.
- 2 DFP Figures at 1 June 2008 except: Land and Property Services, latest figures available at 30 March 2008
- 3 DSD figures at 17 June 2008 except: Social Security Agency, latest figures available at 31 May 2008; and Child Maintenance and Enforcement Division (previously the CSA), latest figures available at 20 May 2008.

Use of Recyclable Ink and Laser Cartridges

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the procurement policies that exist within the Civil Service to encourage the use of recyclable ink and laser cartridges; how many (i) ink cartridges; and (ii) laser cartridges, were purchased in 2007-08; and what proportion of these cartridges were purchased from a recycling cartridge source.

(AQW 8292/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The purchase of ink and laser cartridges are procured from the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) Office Consumables Framework which commenced on the 1st February 2006.

Procurement policy allows for the integration of social, economic and environmental consideration into procurement. In line with this policy the Framework currently has sustainable alternatives included to provide departments with a choice of new or remanufactured cartridges and all suppliers offer a free of charge recycling service.

The table below provides information relating to cartridge purchases for the period 1 April 2007 to 31 March 2008.

	Quantity	% of Total
Laser Toner Cartridge		
Original (OEM)	25836	84
Remanufactured	4816	16
Total	30652	100
Inkjet Toner Cartridges		
Original (OEM)	23087	94
Remanufactured	1559	6
Total	24646	100

* OEM = Original Equipment Manufacturer

Departmental Response to Increasing Fuel Costs

Mrs Long asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what assessment he has made of the impact of the increase in (i) fuel costs; and (ii) fuel duty on the departmental budget and the realisation of efficiency targets; and what actions he has taken to mitigate against these increased costs. (AQW 8399/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The recent increase in fuel costs have been substantial. If prices remain at current levels, or higher, for the remainder of the financial year, there will be pressure on this area of departmental expenditure. The extent of that pressure will be dependent on fuel price movements over the next 9 months.

However, for a number of years the Department has actively been pursuing good housekeeping policies in order to increase the energy efficiency of its buildings and reduce expenditure on fuel. In addition, recent staff moves have been to more modern, fit for purpose accommodation with lower running costs.

These efficiencies will help to limit the financial impact of the current fuel price rises.

In addition, the Department operates within a net VAT regime, whereby its budget is provided net of VAT and subsequent expenditure is reported net of VAT. As such fuel duty does not impact on the departmental budget.

Cost of Equal Pay Settlements

Mr O'Loan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel the cost of the recent equal pay settlement for Departments, broken down by Department or Agency. (AQW 8490/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The extent of the potential costs for the settlement of the equal pay claim will ultimately depend on the outcome of discussions between officials and the trade unions

and on the approach approved by the Executive. Details of any potential settlement will be progressed over the coming months and an exact figure will not be available until this process has concluded.

Departmental Underspend

Mr Moutray asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what measures are being put in place to reduce the level of underspend in Departments. (AQW 8497/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: Although primarily responsibility for the level of underspend rests with individual Accounting Officers, my officials continue to work with all departments in seeking to improve financial management across the Northern Ireland public sector, including a programme of actions over the short and medium term to ensure that the recommendations from the independent PKF review were being implemented.

Although the steps that have been taken so far to improve financial management skills and raise the priority given to financial issues may not yet have had sufficient time to impact on the outturn figures for 2007-08, the expectation is that they will have a greater impact on the level of underspend for 2008-09 and beyond. However, these may not be enough and further options need to be considered to provide a stronger incentive for improved performance.

Redevelopment of the Maze/Long Kesh site

Mrs Long asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline all his Department's expenditure on the redevelopment of the Maze/Long Kesh site. (AQW 8528/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: While the Department of Finance and Personnel has, in the normal course of business, had a role in considering the proposals for the redevelopment of the Maze/Long Kesh site, it has not incurred any additional expenditure in order to do so.

Civil Service Staff Specialisms

Mr Burnside asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel (i) what processes are used to establish the areas of expertise required within the Northern Ireland Civil Service over the next ten years; (ii) what strategies are in place to better match departmental requirements to specialisms among existing staff, through retraining and secondment; and (iii) how the profile of specialisms required over the next ten years is matched to recruitment planning. (AQW 8588/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: Responsibility for identifying the needs of specialisms

falls mainly to Heads of Profession (including nominated Professional Representatives), who work closely with Central Personnel Group in the Department of Finance and Personnel in considering appropriate mechanisms for meeting those needs.

Through the NI Civil Service response to the recently published Sector Skills Strategy for Central Government, Heads of Profession have been challenged to accept and deliver on a substantial new set of accountabilities, setting professional skills standards for their members, working with departments to understand supply and demand and to influence professional career progression, support their members in professional development, and linking attainment to standards and qualifications recognised in the wider labour market.

The process and period over which needs are identified varies across each of the specialisms. For example, fluctuations in demand across the ICT specialism has varied over the last decade and as the pace of technology change is rapid, identifying needs over a 10 year period would not be appropriate. For other specialisms, where the level of change would be less marked, a longer period may be more appropriate. Heads of Profession work closely with their Whitehall counterparts to identify trends and keep a close watch on the local market through various means such as the Department for Employment and Learning's Labour Market Survey.

Heads of Profession also have a key role in determining appropriate strategies to match departmental needs to specialisms amongst existing staff. In undertaking this role, Heads of Profession work closely with departments to determine their requirements and using this information develop appropriate recruitment responses.

All Departments provide annual forecasts of their future staffing needs as part of the planning of external and internal competitions which includes the highlighting of any particular specialist areas which will require staff in the coming year.

For example, the Financial Management Head of Profession identified a need for accountants which was not being met due to local demand. Working closely with departmental Finance Directors and Central Personnel Group, a trainee accountant scheme was developed which provides the opportunity for existing staff to qualify as accountants. Entry numbers for the scheme are determined in line with forecast needs.

In common with general service grades, secondment opportunities for specialist staff are administered through the existing secondment policy.

Peace II Funding

Ms J McCann asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what steps his Department is taking to carry out an evaluation of the services that will be lost in the

community and voluntary sector as a result of Peace II funding coming to an end. (AQW 8623/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: DFP is not accountable for any measure of the PEACE II Programme directly implemented by the Community and Voluntary Sector. It therefore has no plans to undertake an evaluation of the kind proposed.

All groups assisted under PEACE II were required to specify how, if at all, they intended to continue their projects when their PEACE funding ended. All groups that have received PEACE II funding for a project should therefore be clear on the future of that project and the activities it supports.

Maze/Long Kesh Outline Business Case

Ms J McCann asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel if his Department's officials had access to all the relevant information when considering the value for money case in relation to the Maze/Long Kesh outline business case. (AQW 8624/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: When considering the Maze/Long Kesh (MLK) Outline Business Case (OBC), DFP officials had access to a range of information including the overall MLK OBC, supporting OBCs for the International Centre for Conflict Transformation (ICCT), the stadium and the associated infrastructure; the business plans for the ICCT and the stadium; further exchanges of correspondence between DFP and the two Departments seeking clarification of matters arising from the DFP analysis; and further information relating to the assessment of the MLK site valuations and market tested bids.

DFP officials would expect Departments to provide all the information relevant to a proposal which they are submitting to DFP for consideration and, in this case, DFP sought clarification and further information on a range of issues. However, it was and remains the responsibility of the lead Departments concerned to provide DFP with all relevant information when submitting a business case and DFP officials can assess a proposal only on the basis of the information provided.

Corporation Tax for Northern Ireland

Dr Farry asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the current policy on a differential rate of corporation tax for Northern Ireland. (AQW 8630/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: Responsibility for corporation tax lies with the UK Government. The first Varney Report ruled out a differential rate of corporation tax for Northern Ireland and the second Varney report rejected further proposed fiscal measures. The Varney conclusions have been accepted by the UK Government. The Northern Ireland Executive will continue to press for a lower rate of

corporation tax for Northern Ireland however there is also a need to focus attention on what the Executive can do, within its own policy remit, to promote economic development within Northern Ireland.

Corporation Tax for Northern Ireland

Dr Farry asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the representation made to the UK Treasury in relation to a differential rate of corporation tax for Northern Ireland, since the publication of the Varney I report. (AQW 8631/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The first Varney Report rejected the case for a differential rate of corporation tax for Northern Ireland. The Northern Ireland Executive responded to the Varney Report and made representations to the second review in the area of fiscal measures however Sir David's second report ruled out additional fiscal measures relating to R&D and skills. The two Varney Reports have now been accepted by the UK Government. While we will continue to press for a lower rate of corporation tax we should also focus on the policy levers directly available to the Executive.

Civil Service Childcare Voucher Scheme

Mr Gallagher asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what progress has been made on the Northern Ireland Civil Service Child Care Voucher Scheme. (AQW 8675/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The Northern Ireland Civil Service is committed to introducing a salary sacrifice childcare voucher scheme and work has been underway for sometime to ensure that it can be delivered as part of the new payroll system which will become operational later this year.

HEALTH, SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC SAFETY

Departmental Policies

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to list the policies produced by his Department since taking up his Ministerial post. (AQW 7837/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Mr M McGimpsey): My Department has introduced policies on the following issues: Exclusion of cleaning services from the scope of PFI project procurements in health and social care services;

- Car parking guidance for Trusts;
- Policy on Recruitment of doctors in training;
- Oral Health Strategy for NI;
- Local Decontamination Policy for General Practice Dentists;
- School Dental Screening;
- Student Nursing Bursaries;
- Nursing care standards for patient food in hospitals;
- Clinical supervision of nurses;
- Nursing response to children with complex physical healthcare needs;
- Improving cleanliness in hospitals and reducing healthcare acquired infections, including specific hand hygiene, hospital visiting and regional dress strategies;
- Improved workforce productivity;
- Equality, Good Relations and human rights strategy and action plan;
- The future of Pathology Services in NI;
- Transport Strategy for Health & Social Care Services in NI;
- Single Rooms Policy;
- Improving Stroke services in NI;
- Immunisation against papilloma virus which causes cervical cancer;
- Introduction of bowel cancer screening;
- Introduction of screening for abdominal aortic aneurysm;
- Screening of newborns for Medium Chain Acetyl Co A Dehydrogenase Deficiency;
- Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups;
- Families Matter – supporting families in NI;
- Sexual Violence;
- Care Standards for Nursing & Residential Care homes;
- Review of Public Administration – Reform of Health & Social Care Services;
- New hospital for South West to be built near Enniskillen;
- Enhanced local hospital to be built at Omagh;

- Zero Tolerance to attacks on Health & Social Care staff;
- Nurses pay;
- Junior Doctors Recruitment;
- Recruitment of learning disability nurses;
- Suicide Prevention – introduction of help line;
- Cardiovascular Framework;
- All Island Mental Health Promotion;
- Dental Contract;
- Integrated Clinical Assessment and Treatment Service;
- Diabetic Retinopathy Screening; and
- Tobacco: Age of Sale

In addition, to inform policy production the Department has established the following reviews:

- Autism
- Heart Screening
- Free Prescriptions
- Artwork
- Brain Injury Unit Admissions

Adult Training Centres

Mr Bresland asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the Adult Training Centres funded by his Department which cater for people with learning difficulties; and (ii) the amount of funding received by each centre, in each of the last 4 years. (AQW 8095/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department does not make funding allocations directly to Adult Training Centres (ATCs). The responsibility for operational matters rests with the Health and Social Care Trusts and any funding allocations to ATCs is made by them.

The table below details the ATCs by HSCT area and the funding allocated by financial year 2005/2006 to 2008/2009.

Trust	Adult Training Centres	05/06 £	06/07 £	07/08 £	08/09 £
Northern	Mountfern	494,026	514,414	550,471	667,632
	Millbrook	793,233	838,475	752,124	799,557
	Cookstown	388,796	376,083	410,138	471,550
	Magherafelt	388,843	388,532	415,923	480,525
	Antrim	433,204	442,697	478,042	470,336
	George Sloan	436,501	440,745	463,371	495,132
	Broadway	243,390	243,549	239,425	263,790
	Drumross	493,006	498,616	543,153	582,081
	Hawthorns	383,656	385,057	404,197	430,539
Larne	476,332	497,262	532,741	540,008	

Trust	Adult Training Centres	05/06 £	06/07 £	07/08 £	08/09 £
Western	Willow Group	53,066	65,117	67,107	69,598
	Greenhaw	68,026	89,615	91,053	96,017
	Lilliput	67,076	63,522	63,934	69,794
	Benbradagh	304,904	377,515	419,140	481,652
	Valley Centre	141,520	156,441	158,383	165,890
	Pilot Row	67,874	82,118	94,770	110,520
	Sow & Grow	68,108	59,684	77,413	67,451
	Evergreen	163,740	180,510	170,929	217,295
	Glenside	314,001	371,001	404,097	432,204
	Maybrook	566,944	628,379	681,206	701,518
	Lackabuoy (inc. Sat. Units)	1,075,824	1,106,614	1,172,715	1,204,153
Omagh Centre (inc. Sat. Units)	879,213	861,283	899,852	923,994	
Southern	Newry SEC	439,564	443,972	446,630	529,262
	Crossmaglen SEC	37,358	38,687	38,648	46,339
	Laurels Day Care Centre	231,199	238,562	239,041	275,134
	Newry Horticulture Centre	80,864	81,455	83,368	97,837
	Bannvale SEC	721,261	753,171	812,670	872,280
	Zest Coffee Shop	64,005	63,634	67,463	78,853
	Eden SEC	261,592	273,890	291,572	321,306
	Bannvale Horticulture Centre	62,123	57,799	58,205	64,672
	Banbridge SEC	164,568	167,056	176,859	193,297
	Appleby SEC	646,209	658,170	703,364	741,674
	Oakridge SEC	411,713	413,581	495,720	543,191
	Satellite Units: Unit 2/16	6,436	7,185	7,185	7,659
	Aughnacloy	132,675	134,891	137,088	142,913
	Coalisland	77,738	76,272	79,741	84,803
Belfast ¹	Orchardville	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Edgecumbe	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Suffolk	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Fortwilliam	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Everton	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Mica Drive	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Fallswater	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Mount Oriel	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
South Eastern ²	Mountview ARC	1,000,691	1,043,018	N/A	N/A
	Lisburn ARC	977,361	1,030,038	N/A	N/A
	Ravara TRC	386,799	400,675	N/A	N/A
	Ards TRC	197,056	212,651	N/A	N/A
	Balloo TRC	363,279	388,139	N/A	N/A

Source: HSCTs

Notes:

SEC - Social Education Centre

ARC – Assessment and Resource Centre

TRC – Training and Resource Centre

N/A1 – Data not available within the timescale available

N/A2 – Budgetary information is not yet available

The definition of ATCs may vary between HSCTs.

Departmental Underspends

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, given the underspend of £54.8 million by his Department, what measures will be put in place to ensure that such large underspends do not occur again. (AQW 8113/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I refer the member to the answer I gave to AQ 7944/08.

Community Carers in Ards

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why community carers

have been removed from people living in Ards who previously benefited from this service. (AQW 8118/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Health and Social Care Trusts are responsible for assessing and prioritising needs within the resources available to them. The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust has advised that the Trust is systematically reviewing community care services provided in order to ensure consistency of approach for service provision across the new Trust area and to ensure that the time of care workers is focused on clients whose needs and risks are greatest. According to the Trust, in the Ards locality 52 people have had a reduction in services since the review commenced in May 2008 and 32 new domiciliary care packages have commenced.

Waiting Time for Hearing Aids

Mr Attwood asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety the current average time for a new adult patient to receive a hearing aid from the time of referral by the GP, in each Health and Social Care Trust area. (AQW 8128/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information on (1) the current average time for a new adult patient to receive a hearing aid from the time of referral by the GP, in each Health and Social Care Trust area (AQW 8128/08), (2) the number of people waiting for a first fitting for a hearing aid in each Health and Social Care Trust area (AQW 8129/08), (3) the current average waiting time for an adult to be re-assessed and to have their hearing aid fitting reviewed in each of the Health and Social Care Trust areas (AQW 8130/08), and (4) the number of adults waiting for re-assessment for a hearing aid in each of the Health and Social Care Trust areas (AQW 8131/08) is not available centrally.

Waiting Time for Hearing Aids

Mr Attwood asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people are waiting for a first fitting for a hearing aid in each Health and Social Care Trust area. (AQW 8129/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information on (1) the current average time for a new adult patient to receive a hearing aid from the time of referral by the GP, in each Health and Social Care Trust area (AQW 8128/08), (2) the number of people waiting for a first fitting for a hearing aid in each Health and Social Care Trust area (AQW 8129/08), (3) the current average waiting time for an adult to be re-assessed and to have their hearing aid

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Breast Cancer Care

Mr Attwood asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what measures are in place to review breast cancer care and the effectiveness of

mammogram tests, particularly given the evidence produced last year of a significant number of errors that occurred in mammogram tests in the Republic of Ireland. (AQW 8132/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: In Northern Ireland a breast cancer clinical network has been established under the auspices of the Northern Ireland Cancer Network, which is responsible for progressing key priorities within symptomatic breast cancer services, keeping up to date with new policies and guidelines and the monitoring and evaluation of the service to ensure quality.

The breast screening service which routinely uses mammography to screen women with no symptoms for early signs of disease also has a robust quality assurance system in place; each mammogram is read by two individuals and by a third if there is a difference of opinion.

Results of the screening programme in Northern Ireland are quality assured through the comparison of results elsewhere in the UK. In addition, the quality assurance reference centre monitors data from the breast screening service on a regular basis and publishes results annually. It also organises regular external quality assurance visits.

Waiting Times for Dermatology Out-Patient Appointments

Mr Attwood asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety the average waiting times for dermatology out-patient appointments for (i) suspected melanomas; (ii) extreme forms of eczema; and (iii) skin disorders. (AQW 8154/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information on average waiting times for dermatology outpatient appointments for (i) suspected melanomas; (ii) extreme forms of eczema; and (ii) skin disorders is not available.

Prosecution Figures Following the Smoking Ban

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many (i) individuals; (ii) bars/restaurants; and (iii) other buildings, have been prosecuted since the introduction of the smoking ban. (AQW 8158/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Provisional figures up to 31 March 2008 show that prosecutions have been brought against two individuals for smoking in a smoke-free place.

In addition, 34 fixed penalty notices and 350 written warnings have been issued in respect of this offence.

No prosecutions have been brought against the owners/managers of bars, restaurants or other buildings. However, 1 fixed penalty notice and 386 written warnings have been issued for failing to display no smoking signage and 355 written warnings issued for failing to prevent smoking in a smoke-free place.

Team-Building Exercises

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety the total cost incurred by the Department on away days or team-building exercises in each of the last five years. (AQW 8159/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The total cost incurred by the Department on away days and team building exercises in DHSSPS in each of the last five years is as follows:

	2003/ 04	2004/ 05	2005/ 06	2006/ 07	2007/ 08
Total cost of staff away days	£19,735	£14,719	£30,082	£31,799	£21,260
Total cost of team building exercises	£17,000	£7,516	£11,037	£3,122	£8,339
Total	£36,735	£22,235	£41,119	£34,921	£29,599

Team-Building Exercises

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many staff hours have been taken up with departmental or cross-departmental away days, or team-building exercises, in each of the last five years. (AQW 8161/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The number of staff hours taken up with departmental or cross – departmental away days, or team – building exercises, in each of the last five years is as follows:

	2003/ 04	2004/ 05	2005/ 06	2006/ 07	2007/ 08
Away Days Staff Hours	1417	1479	3124	3069	2718
Team Building Exercises Staff Hours	1083	690	807	539	473

Team-Building Exercises

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many away days and team-building exercises have been organised by his Department for departmental staff in each of the last five years. (AQW 8162/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The number of away days and team building exercises organised by DHSSPS for departmental staff in each of the last five years is as follows:

	2003/ 04	2004/ 05	2005/ 06	2006/ 07	2007/ 08
Total number of away days	19	20	20	28	27
Total number of team building exercises	8	5	4	4	5

Colorectal Consultants at Altnagelvin Hospital

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many colorectal consultants were based at the Altnagelvin Hospital in each of the last 10 years; and for how much of this time there was only one surgeon within this specialty located at Altnagelvin Hospital. (AQW 8173/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information on the number of Colorectal Consultants based at the Altnagelvin Hospital in each of the last ten years is given in the table below.

TABLE 1: NUMBER OF COLORECTAL CONSULTANTS BASED AT THE ALTNAGELVIN HOSPITAL OVER THE LAST TEN YEARS.

Year	Headcount	WTE
2008 (June)	2	2.0
2007*	2	2.0
2006	1	1.0
2005	1	1.0
2004*	2	2.0
2003	2	2.0
2002	2	2.0
2001	2	2.0
2000*	2	2.0
1999	1	1.0

Source: Western Health & Social Care Trust

Note: WTE = Whole-Time Equivalent.

* There was only one Colorectal Consultant employed at Altnagelvin Hospital prior to 1 August 2000, and between February 2004 and October 2007. Currently there are two Colorectal Consultants employed at Altnagelvin Hospital.

Colorectal Consultants at Altnagelvin Hospital

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, given the difficulties of recruiting colorectal surgeons to Altnagelvin Hospital in the past, what action he is taking to ensure that a new team can be recruited at the hospital in time to prevent a diminution of the service; and what plans there are for the treatment of patients within the Altnagelvin catchment area, pending the establishment of a new team. (AQW 8174/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The recruitment and retention of staff is a matter for individual Health and Social Care Trusts.

The Western HSC Trust has advised that a recruitment exercise is underway to replace the two colorectal surgeons who recently resigned from their positions at Altnagelvin Hospital. In the interim two locum consultant surgeons will be employed and any further arrangements necessary to maintain care for patients during this transitional period will be addressed by the Western HSC Trust.

Colorectal Consultants at Altnagelvin Hospital

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is considered the minimum number of whole time equivalent consultants in colorectal surgery required at Altnagelvin Hospital, to create the necessary critical mass to reduce risk and workload, and to provide the necessary spread of expertise in order to maintain a safe and effective long term service. (AQW 8175/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The number of staff required to maintain a particular service is a matter for individual Health and Social Care Trusts.

There is no definitive statement on the minimal number of colorectal consultants required. In assessing the need for staffing, trusts will take account of the service requirements, caseloads, patient safety, quality standards and working conditions.

The Western HSC Trust has advised that a total of two colorectal surgeons are an appropriate critical mass to provide services within this speciality at Altnagelvin.

Colorectal Consultants at Altnagelvin Hospital

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to make a statement on the resignation of two colorectal consultants from Altnagelvin Hospital; and given that the resignations coincide with the resignation of a haematology consultant, whether his Department intends to conduct an inquiry into their reasons for leaving and the intentions of the remaining consultants at the hospital. (AQW 8176/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: It would not be appropriate for me to comment on the employment matters of individual members of staff. I understand that the Western Trust has initiated arrangements for the recruitment of two consultant surgeons. The Department has no plans to conduct an inquiry into their reasons for leaving and the intentions of the remaining consultants at the hospital.

Colorectal Consultants at Altnagelvin Hospital

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether any of the consultant colorectal surgeons at Altnagelvin Hospital had discussions with senior Health and Social Care Trust management, during which management was urged to recruit additional consultants to the speciality; and what was the response of the Health and Social Care Trust. (AQW 8177/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Western Health and Social Care Trust has advised that it did have discussions with the consultant colorectal surgeons prior to their resignations, however the recruitment of additional consultants to the speciality was not the focus of these discussions.

Home-Help Service

Mrs McGill asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to his answer to AQW 7239/08, what changes and/or reduction, there has been in the profile of services previously provided by Home Helps to clients in the district; and (ii) how many clients have had their Home Help Service completely withdrawn because of the Home Help job description changes in the district. (AQW 8178/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Western Health and Social Care Trust have advised that all clients are assessed/reassessed applying the WHSSB Domiciliary Care Access Criteria and services are provided according to the level of assessed need. In addition the Trust has confirmed that there has been no change in the profile of services provided by the Trust to clients who have an identified assessed need. The Trust has a duty to use resources effectively and manage within the allocations for the provision of Domiciliary Care services.

The Trust has further advised that no one, who has an assessed need, has had their services terminated as a result of change in Home Help job description and indeed there has been no change to the Home Help job description.

HIV Figures

Mr Burns asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many cases of HIV have been diagnosed in people under the age of 16, in each of the last 5 years, broken down by Health Board. (AQW 8206/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Less than 5 people under the age of 16 were recorded as being newly diagnosed with HIV over the last 5 years for which information is available (2003 to 2007).

In order to protect the confidentiality of individuals this information cannot be further disaggregated to Health Board or Individual year of diagnosis level.

Departmental IT Equipment

Mr Burns asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much money has been spent on IT equipment and services by his Department in each of the last 5 years; and what percentage of his Department's budget these figures represent for each year. (AQW 8207/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The table below shows the expenditure on IT equipment and services by the Department in each of the last 5 years, and the percentage of the Department's total budget (revenue and capital spend) in those years that this represented.

Year	Expenditure on IT equipment & services	Percentage of total DHSSPS budget
2003-2004	£8,251,000	0.3%
2004-2005	£12,626,000	0.4%

Year	Expenditure on IT equipment & services	Percentage of total DHSSPS budget
2005-2006	£11,047,000	0.3%
2006-2007	£15,433,000	0.4%
2007-2008	£17,474,000	0.4%

Minor Injuries Unit at Ards Community Hospital

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when he will make a decision in relation to the future of the Minor Injuries Unit at Ards Community Hospital. (AQW 8264/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I refer the member to the answers I gave to AQW 4357/08 and 6452/08.

A final decision on the South Eastern Trust's proposal in respect of the minor injuries unit at Ards Community Hospital will not be taken until all the implications are clearly established.

Adolescent Psychiatric Unit at the Forster Green Hospital

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when he first became aware of concerns relating to the security and public safety associated with the proposed Adolescent Psychiatric Unit at the Forster Green Hospital; and when the Health Committee brought the matter to his attention. (AQW 8265/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I became aware of concerns about possible security and public safety issues with the proposed Adolescent Unit at Forster Green Hospital in August 2007.

The Health Committee brought these matters to my attention in your letter of 28 March 2008.

Funding for the Enler Project

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for a list of people who were officially invited to Ballybeen on Monday 10 March 2008 for the announcement of funding for the Enler Project. (AQW 8267/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: DHSSPS did not issue any formal invitations to the event in Ballybeen on the 10 March,

however the Mayor of Ards and local MLA's were informed about the visit.

Colorectal Consultants at Altnagelvin Hospital

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what other medical specialties and services will be affected as a result of the future loss of the 2 colorectal consultants at Altnagelvin Hospital. (AQW 8274/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: At this stage the Western Health and Social Care Trust does not anticipate that other specialties or services will be affected by the resignation of the two colorectal consultants.

Bed Occupancy Rate at Altnagelvin Hospital

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is the target bed occupancy rate; and what the (i) peak; and (ii) average, bed occupancy rate was for each of the last 12 months at Altnagelvin Hospital. (AQW 8275/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: There is currently no official target relating to bed occupancy rates in hospitals in Northern Ireland. However, in planning for future hospital-based activity, Trusts are required to apply a number of efficiency assumptions. In relation to bed occupancy levels, Trusts are asked assume 83% occupancy for all specialties except critical care (75%), obstetrics (75%), paediatrics (65%), and assessment and rehabilitation (95%).

The peak and average bed occupancy rates for each of the last 12 months, at Altnagelvin Hospital, are shown in the table below.

Month	Average Available Beds ^{1,2}	Peak Occupancy Rate (%)	Average Occupancy Rate (%)
Jun-07	504.3	89.8	84.1
Jul-07	505.3	93.2	82.9
Aug-07	502.9	88.9	82.0
Sep-07	503.2	88.8	82.0
Oct-07	502.3	90.2	84.3
Nov-07	510.7	89.7	84.1
Dec-07	499.5	90.3	80.7
Jan-08	511.4	95.4	87.9
Feb-08	506.9	91.7	84.5

Month	Average Available Beds ^{1,2}	Peak Occupancy Rate (%)	Average Occupancy Rate (%)
Mar-08	503.7	93.9	86.6
Apr-08	506.5	93.4	82.5
May-08	499.4	86.3	79.7

Source: Western Health and Social Care Trust

- 1 Available and Occupied Beds includes cots occupied by healthy babies.
- 2 Average available beds are the number of beds in wards open overnight, measured at midnight. Day case beds and those for regular day admission are not included.

Day Case Beds at Altnagelvin Hospital

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many (i) beds are in the day case unit at Altnagelvin Hospital; and (ii) day case beds are occupied by in-patients; and what the impact is on day cases. (AQW 8277/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: During May 2008, there were on average 30 available beds in the day case unit at Altnagelvin Hospital. There was one inpatient occupying a day case bed for one night during May 2008. This had no impact on day case services.

Source: Western Health and Social Care Trust

Capitation Formula Review Group

Mr O'Loan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether the large influx of holidaymakers and those attending special events is reflected in the Capitation Formula award to the Northern Health Board area and whether this is expressed in the Fifth Report of the Capitation Formula Review Group. (AQW 8284/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Regional Capitation Formula assesses the health and social care needs of long-term residents of each area of Northern Ireland. Data on short term population changes, of less than a single year's duration, is not deemed robust enough to amend the formula. As such no changes have been recommended as part of the current review.

For holidaymakers and short stay visitors to Northern Ireland from elsewhere, international agreements are in place.

Waiting Times for Laboratory Results in the Causeway Hospital

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what are the turnaround times for laboratory results in the Causeway Hospital, and how do these compare to their allocated timescales. (AQW 8288/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information requested is not available.

Eye Operations at the South Tyrone Hospital

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the future for eye operations at the South Tyrone hospital. (AQW 8289/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: South Tyrone Hospital currently provides an ophthalmology day case service and will continue to do so.

Altnagelvin Hospital Accident and Emergency Unit

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the protocol at Altnagelvin Hospital Accident and Emergency Unit for patients presenting with symptoms of stroke; and what the recommended timescales are for commencement of appropriate treatment. (AQW 8301/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: All patients presenting at Altnagelvin Accident and Emergency Department are triaged according to clinical need.

Those with symptoms suggestive of Stroke are seen urgently and, after stabilisation, where possible will be transferred to the Stroke Unit for further management.

Urgent CT scanning will also be performed on the basis of clinical status.

Alcohol and Drug-Related Injuries in Accident and Emergency Units

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many (i) alcohol; and (ii) drug, related injuries have been presented in accident and emergency units in each of the last 12 months. (AQW 8306/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information on the number of alcohol

and drug related injuries that have been presented in accident and emergency units in each of the last 12 months is unavailable.

Craigavon Area Hospital

Mr O'Dowd asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what actions are being taken to raise hygiene standards in Craigavon Area Hospital following the findings of an unannounced inspection by the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) on 7 March 2008.
(AQW 8311/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The programme of unannounced inspections is one element of a package of measures which I set out in January, along with an additional investment of £9 million. This package also includes funding for rapid response cleaning teams for hospitals across Northern Ireland.

Following the unannounced inspection of Craigavon Area Hospital, the Southern Trust has developed an action plan to address issues raised. For each of the RQIA's findings the Trust has identified the lead person responsible and a timescale to action recommendations.

Arrangements have been put in place to further improve the communication and understanding between nursing and cleaning staff on the infection control status of any given ward at the start of each shift.

The Trust continues to monitor the standard of cleaning in all areas using the Environmental Cleanliness Tool Kit. All areas are audited in accordance with their agreed risk status. Following every audit any areas of concern are highlighted and actioned by appropriate staff. The Trust also undertakes managerial audits and this audit team includes a member from the Southern Health Council.

Waiting Times for Restorative Dentistry

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety the average waiting time for people requiring restorative dentistry in each of the last 3 years.
(AQW 8314/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information on the number of patients waiting for an outpatient appointment in the restorative dentistry specialty at 31 March 2006, 31 March 2007 and 31 March 2008, broken down by timeband is shown in the table. The median (average) timeband at 31 March 2006 was 9-11 months and was 0-2 months at 31 March 2007 and 31 March 2008.

	Date	31-Mar-06	31-Mar-07	31-Mar-08
Months waiting	0-2	316	970	861
	03-May	292	487	0
	06-Aug	283	0	0
	09-Nov	169	0	0
	Dec-14	83	0	0
	15-17	77	0	0
	18-20	75	0	0
	21-23	57	0	0
	24+	445	0	0
	Total	1,797	1,457	861

Underage Drinking

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people aged 17 and under have been admitted to hospital with an alcohol-related condition in each of the last 3 years, broken down by parliamentary constituency.
(AQW 8329/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The number of people aged 17 and under who have been admitted to hospital with an alcohol-related condition in the last 3 years, by parliamentary constituency is detailed below:

Parliamentary Constituency	2004/ 2005	2005/ 2006	2006/ 2007
Unassigned	<5	<5	<5
Belfast East	14	17	<5
Belfast North	10	14	16
Belfast South	14	21	12
Belfast West	20	14	23
East Antrim	<5	<5	5
East Londonderry	5	8	<5
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	9	10	19
Foyle	13	9	6
Lagan Valley	<5	5	5
Mid Ulster	20	6	8
Newry And Armagh	19	15	20
North Antrim	13	7	8
North Down	8	11	<5
South Antrim	10	7	15
South Down	19	8	19

Parliamentary Constituency	2004/ 2005	2005/ 2006	2006/ 2007
Strangford	16	11	7
Upper Bann	28	24	30
West Tyrone	16	12	12
Total	244	205	215

Source: Hospital Inpatient System

Individuals are approximated by matching cases on date of birth and postcode and have been calculated on a yearly basis. These figures should not be added together to give total individuals across the years as an individual may have been admitted in more than one year.

Lagan Valley Hospital

Mr Poots asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what requirement he will place on the South Eastern Trust to compensate the adjoining Trusts for the proposed displacement of services from the Lagan Valley Hospital.

(AQW 8356/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The allocation of funding for health and social care services, including maternity services, is a matter for Health and Social Services Boards. I would expect Boards and Trusts to assess the financial and other implications of any proposed changes to the current provision of maternity services at Lagan Valley Hospital before any decisions are taken.

Prescription Charges

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to explain why (i) repeat prescription charges have been reduced to 2 months from 3 months; and (ii) a cost of £8 per prescription is being charged.

(AQW 8359/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: (i) The Department does not have a policy on the length of time for which a repeat prescription may be issued. However it is considered good practice for a GP surgery to put in place a repeat prescription protocol. Some GPs have chosen 56 days for the default length of treatment for each repeat prescription. In other situations, for example, as part of the repeat dispensing scheme, the interval is reduced to 28 days. For some drugs, this may be even shorter. This interval is entirely at the discretion of the GP and no regional policy exists for length of treatment.

(ii) There are no prescription items that currently cost £8. As you are aware I have undertaken a review

of prescription charges in Northern Ireland and pending the outcome of the review I decided to freeze charges at £6.85 for a single item from 1 April 2008. As I advised in the Assembly in 2 June 2008 I will shortly make an announcement on the way forward.

Prescription Charges

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what discussions he has had with his Welsh counterpart in relation to the reduction of prescription charges; and what action he is taking to introduce similar changes in policy.

(AQW 8360/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I met with Edwina Hart, the Welsh Minister for Health and Social Services, on 3 April 2008. The issue of the abolition of prescription charges and the subsequent health benefits to patients was discussed at this meeting. Officials from my Department have also been in contact with their counterparts in Wales on a regular basis on this issue.

Ambulances in the Strangford Constituency

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what steps he is taking to ensure that funding is secured to replace ambulances in the Strangford constituency.

(AQW 8361/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I refer the member to the answer I gave to AQW 7737/08 on 19 June 2008. The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service fleet is managed as a regional resource and it is for NIAS to determine where they base new ambulances having regard to the age and condition of existing ambulances and operational requirements.

Attacks on Fire Appliances

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many attacks there have been on (i) fire appliances; and (ii) fire fighters, in the North Antrim constituency in (a) 2005; (b) 2006; and (c) 2007; and the financial cost of the damage.

(AQW 8368/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The numbers of reported attacks on fire appliances in the North Antrim constituency over the last 3 financial years are:-

2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
1	2	1

The total cost of the damage is estimated at approximately £2,200.

There have been no reported attacks which resulted in an injury to a firefighter in the last 3 years in the North Antrim constituency.

Mileage for Ambulances

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety the average mileage of currently operational ambulances. (AQW 8377/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service has a total fleet of 237 ambulances. The average mileage of an ambulance is 117,604.

Average Age of Ambulances

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety the average age of currently operational ambulances. (AQW 8378/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The average age of the 237 ambulances within the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS) fleet is 5.22 years.

Impact of Increasing Fuel Costs

Mrs Long asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the impact of fuel cost rises on the running costs and budgets of healthcare facilities. (AQW 8394/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I recognise that it is important that all practicable steps are taken to ensure that the recent increases in fuel and duty costs have minimal impact on the provision of health and social care services. My Department is currently considering the impact of the recent increases on the Departmental budget.

It is an integral part of the financial management of health and social care facilities and services that all cost increases, whether or not they are foreseeable, are managed within available resources.

Similarly all organisations will be expected to achieve the levels of efficiencies to which they have committed, irrespective of fluctuations in particular cost categories. I am determined that, when delivering these efficiencies, the quality of services to patients and clients is to be maintained or improved and targeted to those most in need.

Impact of Increasing Fuel Costs

Mrs Long asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what he is doing to address the differential impact of fuel cost increases on community-based healthcare workers, particularly those with high mileage. (AQW 8395/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: As an interim measure, from 1 January 2008 I have increased by 3p per mile the mileage rate payable to health and social care staff that are classified as regular users. My officials are also engaged in a four country review of the mileage rates which is currently being carried out in partnership with the nationally recognised health unions. This group is due to make recommendations shortly and I will consider these recommendations in due course.

Sexually-Transmitted Infections

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people aged (i) 16-19; (ii) 20-24; (iii) 25-34; (iv) 35-44; and (v) 45 and over, were diagnosed with a sexually transmitted infection in each of the last 3 years. (AQW 8402/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The number of people aged (i) 16-19; (ii) 20-24; (iii) 25-34; (iv) 35-44; and (v) 45 and over who were diagnosed with a sexually transmitted infection in each of the last 3 years is given in the table below.

	2004	2005	2006
16-19	682	723	755
20-24	1545	1742	1868
25-34	1195	1367	1414
35-44	379	408	412
45+	116	135	150

Source: CDSC (NI)

Notes: This is the number of new diagnoses, not the number of people with a new diagnosis of an STI, as multiple diagnoses can be made in individual patients.

This is the number of new diagnoses for the five main conditions in Northern Ireland combined; which includes chlamydia, gonorrhoea, syphilis, genital herpes and genital warts.

Young People with Learning Disabilities

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what progress has been made in meeting the needs of young people with

learning disabilities during the period of transition from schooling to the workforce. (AQW 8405/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department invested £0.9m through the Children and Young People Funding Package from 2006 to 2008 in support of transitions services for young people. Arrangements are now in place for that investment to continue, through the Department's normal budgetary mechanisms, with effect from April 2008. A range of transition services have been developed across all 5 Health and Social Care Trust areas.

My Department continues to liaise with the Department for Education and the Department for Employment and Learning in further developing transition services for young people.

Ambulance Fleet

Mr Simpson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety on how many occasions the number of available vehicles in the total ambulance fleet was less than the number required by planned crews at any time in each of the last 5 years. (AQW 8421/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS) do not maintain records for the information requested.

Where a particular ambulance is not available at any time another ambulance is called up from within that ambulance division or from another division.

Ambulance Service Response Targets

Mr Simpson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to his answer to AQW 101/07, for his assessment of the level of improvement by the Ambulance Service in meeting its response targets. (AQW 8424/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS) had been set a target for 2007/08 year of 62.5% with respect to responding to category A (life-threatening calls) within 8 minutes. In 2008/09 the target for NIAS has been raised to 70%.

Performance against target is being monitored on a weekly basis. The table below details comparable monthly figures over the 3 year period ending with May 2008.

Month	Percentage of Category A Calls Responded to Within 8 Minutes
May 05	48.4%
May 06	52.4%
May 07	59.6%
May 08	69.5%

The percentage achieved for the month ending May 2008 is 69.5% representing a rise of almost 10% on the same period last year and more than 20% on the 2005 position. This represents significant and continuous improvement year on year.

Teleneurology Service at Tyrone County Hospital

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans he has for the retention of the Teleneurology service at Tyrone County Hospital. (AQW 8452/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: It is the responsibility of the Western Health and Social Services Board to commission health and social care services for the people of its area.

I understand that the Board is currently in the process of assessing the provision of neurology services to determine the most effective means of providing a high quality, sustainable neurology service for people living in the Board area. This will include consideration of teleneurology services.

Independent Transport Network

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in light of increasing fuel prices, what action he is taking to ensure that the independent transport network, which supports day care services, remains viable. (AQW 8457/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department does not have a role in funding the independent transport network. However, whilst the majority of transport in support of day care services is provided internally either by the Health Trust concerned or by the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service I am nonetheless aware that there is a valued contribution from the independent and voluntary sectors.

The Minister for Regional Development has informed me that his Department will continue to provide support to the Rural Transport Fund and the Door-to-Door Transport Scheme. While not their

primary function, both these schemes transport passengers to day care services on a regular basis.

My Department is currently considering the impact of the recent increases in fuel prices and I recognise that it is important that all practicable steps are taken to ensure the continued viability of independent transport networks and so ensure that there is no reduction in the quality and breadth of day service provision.

Gynaecology Patients at Daisy Hill Hospital

Mrs Hanna asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action he is taking to ensure that the conduct of the member of staff, who treated more than 300 gynaecology patients who are now being reviewed at Daisy Hill Hospital, is thoroughly investigated, and that lessons are learned from this episode. (AQW 8567/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Southern Health and Social Care Trust is undertaking a detailed review of the records of all patients seen by the member of staff in question. When that investigation has completed, it will be for the trust to determine the appropriate course of action. They have logged the case formally with my Department, in line with serious adverse incident reporting procedures. These procedures, together with guidance on conducting "look back" exercises, require the investigators to determine lessons learned from the incident.

Senior Staff in Craigavon and Banbridge Community Health and Social Services Trust

Mrs Hanna asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether senior II staff at the Craigavon and Banbridge Community Health and Social Services Trust, who have been banded with the podiatrist profile Band 5, can be reassessed for a profile Band 6. (AQW 8568/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: If an individual or a group of staff can demonstrate that the Agenda for Change grading they have been assigned to is incorrect they may request their employer to undertake a review of the grading. There are regionally agreed procedures in place for staff who wish to seek a review. These procedures are designed to ensure that such review requests are dealt with in a fair and objective manner and on a partnership basis. I understand that there have been no requests to the Southern HSC Trust for such a review from Senior II Podiatrists employed in the former Craigavon and Banbridge HSS Trust and that the deadline for making such a request closed on 20 June 2008.

Neurological Patients at Musgrave Park Hospital

Mrs Hanna asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the facility for patients with neurological disorders at the Musgrave Park site; and if there are any plans to transfer patients with a neurological disorder from Forster Green Hospital to the Musgrave Park site. (AQW 8569/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: A business case for an interim facility to treat patients with neurological disorders at Musgrave Park Hospital was approved in May 2006. The design of the new facility was agreed in February 2008 and a contract is expected to go out to tender soon. I am advised by Belfast Health and Social Care Trust that the plan to transfer neurology patients to the new interim unit at Musgrave Park Hospital is on schedule and due to take place in June 2009.

Replacement Surgeons in Altnagelvin Hospital

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline his strategy and timescale for replacing the 2 colorectal surgeons who recently resigned from the Altnagelvin Hospital. (AQW 8572/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The recruitment and retention of staff is a matter for individual Health and Social Care Trusts.

The Western HSC Trust has advised that a recruitment exercise is underway to replace the two colorectal surgeons who recently resigned from their positions at Altnagelvin Hospital. In the interim two locum consultant surgeons will be employed and any further arrangements necessary to maintain care for patients during this transitional period will be addressed by the Western HSC Trust.

Chronic Fatigue Syndrome/ME

Mrs O'Neill asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what training GPs receive on chronic fatigue syndrome/ME. (AQW 8613/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Northern Ireland Medical and Dental Training Agency (NIMDTA) deliver, as part of the expanded curriculum for Northern Ireland, training for GP trainees in chronic fatigue syndrome. In their specialist training year 2 (ST2) there will be a case discussion specifically on patients with chronic fatigue syndrome.

In their specialist training year 3 (ST3) in a GP training practice, they will also encounter patients with chronic fatigue syndrome. GPs can also request NIMDTA to arrange to deliver specific training on chronic fatigue syndrome as part of Continuous Practice Development (CPD). It is also available as part of the British Medical Journal (BMJ) e-learning.

Specialist ME Clinics

Mrs O'Neill asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of specialist ME clinics. (AQW 8614/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: There is one specialist ME/CFS clinic in Northern Ireland based in the Belfast City Hospital.

ME Figures

Mrs O'Neill asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people have been diagnosed with ME and are (i) under the age of 18; and (ii) over the age of 18. (AQW 8615/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The number of people who have been diagnosed with ME is not currently available.

Belfast Chronic Fatigue Syndrome Clinic

Mrs O'Neill asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why the Belfast chronic fatigue syndrome clinic is based in a psychiatric unit. (AQW 8616/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The specialist management and treatment of chronic fatigue syndrome/myalgic encephalomyelitis (CFS/ME) depends on those health professionals with a special interest and expertise in the condition. A medical 'gatekeeper' from a relevant specialty is required for the clinic. In the case of the Belfast City Hospital CFS clinic, this is a consultant psychiatrist and the clinic is held in the mental health facility in Windsor House. People with CFS/ME will of course access different specialties within the health and social care services, including GP care, community care and support, neurology and mental health services depending on their individual needs and severity of their illness.

Chronic Fatigue Syndrome/ME

Mrs O'Neill asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans the Department

has for biomedical research into chronic fatigue syndrome/ME. (AQW 8617/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Department has no immediate plans to fund biomedical research into chronic fatigue syndrome/ME.

Omagh Centre for People with Severe Learning Difficulties

Mrs Long asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what alternative provisions will be put into place for those people that use the Omagh Centre for People with Severe Learning Difficulties, after the fire that occurred on Tuesday 24 June 2008. (AQW 8625/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Since Thursday 26th June, on a temporary basis, staff from the day care centre have been providing community and domiciliary services to those clients where the need for those services has been expressed. Two alternative locations for temporary day care services which are appropriate to meet the needs of clients have been secured by the Western Health and Social Care Trust, Strathroy Community Centre and the Larch 'C' facility at the Tyrone and Fermanagh Hospital. These temporary venues will be phased into operation during week commencing Monday 30th June and families will be notified of the appropriate arrangements in the coming days.

The Trust's Estates Department is working vigorously to identify the period of time the Omagh Centre will be unavailable and will do everything possible to have the service fully reinstated as soon as possible.

Departmental Response to Increasing Fuel Costs

Mrs Long asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what assessment he has made of the impact of the increase in (i) fuel costs; and (ii) fuel duty on the departmental budget and the realisation of efficiency targets; and what action he has taken to mitigate against these increased costs. (AQW 8627/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I recognise that it is important that all practicable steps are taken to ensure that the recent increases in fuel and duty costs have minimal impact on the provision of health and social care services. My Department is currently considering the impact of the recent increases on the Departmental budget.

It is an integral part of the financial management of health and social care facilities and services that all cost increases, whether or not they are foreseeable, are managed within available resources.

Similarly all organisations will be expected to achieve the levels of efficiencies to which they have committed, irrespective of fluctuations in particular cost categories. I am determined that, when delivering these efficiencies, the quality of services to patients and clients is to be maintained or improved and targeted to those most in need.

Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority

Mrs O'Neill asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority has the power to carry out the same type of inspection and impose the same sanctions in both the independent and statutory sectors. (AQW 8654/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Yes, in relation to the regulation of establishments and agencies such as: children's homes; day care settings for adults; nursing homes; residential care homes; residential family centres; domiciliary care agencies; nursing agencies and adult placement agencies.

Independent clinics, independent hospitals and independent medical agencies are also regulated by the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA), and are subject to similar inspections, monitoring and sanctions.

- The RQIA does not regulate or impose sanctions on statutory bodies such as Health and Social Services Trusts. However it has the power to: carry out reviews for the purpose of monitoring and improving the quality of the HPSS;
- investigate the management, provision or quality of the HPSS;
- inspect both statutory bodies and providers of services for which the HPSS has responsibility, in respect of the management, provision, quality or access to, or availability of, particular types of services; and
- report and make recommendations to the Department where services are of an unacceptably poor quality or there are significant failings.

Consultant Appointments at Altnagelvin Hospital

Mr Gallagher asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety pursuant to AQW

8293/08, to provide details for the years 2006-2007 and 2007-2008 of the numbers of patients who (i) had consultant appointments at Altnagelvin hospital; and (ii) of those patients, how many had further surgery or appointments at the hospital; and (iii) the total cost to the Western Health and Social Care Trust of providing those appointments/treatments. (AQW 8674/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The number of new outpatient appointments with a consultant at Altnagelvin Area hospital during 2006-07 and 2007-08 are contained in the table below.

Year	Number of new outpatient attendances	Number of new outpatient appointments which the patient did not attend (DNA)	Total number of new outpatient appointments
2006/07	52,070	5,862	57,932
2007/08 ¹	51,085	4,640	55,725

Source: Departmental Return KH09 (Part 1)

1 2007/08 data are provisional

It is not possible to identify the number of patients who attended a first outpatient appointment at Altnagelvin Area Hospital that subsequently had further surgery or appointments at the hospital. Consequently, it is not possible to identify the cost incurred by the Western Health and Social Care Trust in providing such appointments/treatments.

Erne Hospital in Enniskillen

Mr Gallagher asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, further to his January 2008 investment of £9 million to reduce the spread of infections, (i) how much of this money has been invested in Erne Hospital, Enniskillen; (ii) what measures were in place at the Erne Hospital on and since 20 June 2008 to encourage staff and visitors to wash their hands; (iii) if a dress code for healthcare staff was in place at the Erne Hospital on and since 20 June 2008; and (iv) when unannounced inspections have been carried out at the Erne Hospital since January 2008. (AQW 8772/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:

(i) **How much of the £9 million has been invested in Erne Hospital?**

The £9 million investment I announced on 25 January 2008 for patient safety including infection control was for the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) period 2008/09, 2009/10 and 2010/2011 with the allocation broken down as follows;

2008/09	£2million
2009/10	£2 million
2010/11	£5 million
Total	£9 million

Of the £2 million available in 2008/09 the Department has reserved £570k for items that need to be commissioned and paid for centrally, including the regional hand hygiene campaign, and the unannounced inspections. The amounts to be allocated in year 2 and 3 have yet to be determined.

The remaining £1.43 million has been allocated to the Boards according to the Capitation Formula, with the exception of funding for the antimicrobial pharmacist posts which have been distributed equally between the Trusts.

The Western HSC Board received an allocation of £215,000 for distribution amongst the Trusts, of which £120,000 has been allocated to the Erne Hospital.

(ii) What measures were in place at the Erne Hospital on and since 20 June 2008 to encourage staff and visitors to wash their hands?

The Erne Hospital has implemented the Cleanyourhands Campaign sponsored by the Department of Health Social Services and Public Safety on 25 June 2008. Prior to joining this regional campaign the Trust have run hand hygiene campaigns annually to encourage staff and visitors to use the alcohol gel on entering and departing the wards

- Alcohol gel dispensers have been and are available for staff and visitors to all wards and departments.
- Prompts in the form of posters have been placed in wards and corridors.
- A staff leaflet advising on the how and when to clean hands has been distributed to all staff with their pay slips (25 June 2008)
- Electronic alert reminders have been placed on all PC's within the Trust.
- Observational hand hygiene audits are carried out by staff on wards.
- Ward managers are responsible for ensuring foam hand sanitiser (alcohol hand rubs) are replenished, cleaned and recorded.

(iii) Implementation of a Dress Code Policy

On receipt of the Regional Dress Code Policy issued by the DHSSPS. The Western Trust is in the process of establishing a Steering Group to look at the implementation and impact of the policy. This group will develop an action plan to address the key standards and recommendations within the policy.

(iv) Unannounced Inspections

No unannounced inspections by RQIA have been carried out at the Erne Hospital, during the first round of unannounced inspections in the Western Trust Altnagelvin.

However, local unannounced inspection's (Bug watch) are conducted by the Western Health & Social Services Council. The first inspection was carried out on 16th October 2007 in the Erne Hospital. Following the outcome of this inspection, an action plan was developed and implemented. A follow up inspection was carried out on 13th February 2008 by the Health Council and a positive report was received showing improvements since the initial inspection.

Newtownards Ambulance Station

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) if an ambulance has been removed from day time service at the Newtownards Ambulance station; and (ii) the reasons behind this decision. (AQW 8804/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS), along with other Health and Social Care Trusts, is asked to identify realistic efficiency savings measures to allow additional resources to be recycled to front line services.

As part of the measures to deliver these savings in 2006/07, NIAS replaced a two-person emergency ambulance based at Newtownards Ambulance Station, which operated during the day from Monday to Friday, with a solo paramedic rapid response vehicle (RRV), operating 12 hours a day, seven days a week in the same area.

In addition to contributing to NIAS's efficiency savings, the introduction of the RRV also improved paramedic response to emergency 999 calls by getting potentially life saving treatment to patients quickly before an A&E ambulance arrives to transport the patient to hospital, if necessary.

Independent Review of Autism

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the Independent Review of Autism. (AQO 4266/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: In September 2007, I announced an Independent Review of Autism Services. The Independent Review Team, chaired by Lord Maginnis, has now completed a report outlining a series of recommendations on how autism services for people of all ages across Northern Ireland might be improved.

In my announcement on 26th June 2008, I outlined plans to urgently develop an Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Action Plan, which will promote service development in this important area of care. The Independent Review of Autism Services will make a significant contribution to the development of the ASD Action Plan. The action plan will go out for consultation at the end of August 2008.

I wish to convey my thanks to Lord Maginnis and all the members of the Independent Review Team for their leadership and the commitment they have shown to the development of this important report.

Annual Cost of Negligence Claims

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety the annual cost of negligence claims against the Department; and what action he is taking to reduce such claims.
(AQO 4190/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Annual Costs of Negligence Claims

The annual cost of negligence claims against Health and Social Care bodies in recent years has been:

2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07
£13.6 million	£20.3 million	£14.2 million	£14.2 million	£13.6 million

Action taken to reduce claims

Health and Social Service Boards and Health and Social Care Trusts have responsibility for the management, processing, settlement and outcome of clinical negligence claims. The Department will continue to meet the costs of these claims as they arise, which, given the unpredictable nature of these incidents, can vary substantially from one year to the next. However, I expect these Health and Social Care organisations to actively manage the risk of incidents occurring that may give rise to negligence claims and take appropriate action to ensure lessons are learned so that costs are reduced in the future.

- In policy terms my Department is working to reduce negligence claims by: Improving complaints procedures;
- Improving claims management skills and processes;
- Driving forward quality improvements in service delivery across the Health and Social Care Service;
- Promoting learning from adverse incidents, complaints and claims; and
- Promoting a more pro-active approach in HSC Trusts to the early identification of areas of major risk in healthcare.

Report on the Inquiry into the Prevention of Suicide and Self-Harm

Ms J McCann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action he will take to implement all the recommendations of the Report on the Inquiry into the Prevention of Suicide and Self-Harm produced by the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety.
(AQO 4263/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I welcome the Health, Social Services and Public Safety Committee's support for our efforts to tackle the high rates of suicide and self-harm in our local communities. The recommendations contained within the Report on the Committee's Inquiry into the Prevention of Suicide and Self-Harm will make an important contribution in this regard.

The Committee's report was debated in the Assembly on 19 May 2008. The Assembly approved the motion "... that the Executive bring forward, before the summer recess, a timeframe for implementing the recommendations in the Report". I presented a draft timeframe to the Ministerial Co-ordination Group on Suicide Prevention at its meeting on 23rd June and it is now my intention to present this to the Executive on 3rd July. Following due consideration by my Executive colleagues, I then intend to bring forward an implementation plan in relation to all 26 recommendations contained in the Committee's Report.

Mesothelioma

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans he has to introduce the drug Alimta to help those who suffer from Mesothelioma.
(AQO 4189/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: In January of this year the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) endorsed the use of Alimta in treating advanced malignant pleural mesothelioma in people who are relatively active and for whom surgery is considered inappropriate.

My Department reviewed the NICE guidance for its applicability to Northern Ireland, and endorsed the guidance for implementation here. A circular formally advising the HSC of this decision was issued on 15 February, giving a two month timescale for implementation. HSC organisations have confirmed that funding has been allocated to support the delivery of this treatment and the NICE guidance on the use of Alimta is fully implemented.

PFI Hospital at Enniskillen

Mr Gallagher asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the communication between his Department and Planning Service in relation to the new PFI hospital at Enniskillen. (AQO 4265/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Health Estates Agency has been the formal link between the DHSSPS and the Strategic Projects Division of the Planning Service. Regular meetings regarding the new hospital at Enniskillen have taken place between both bodies since early 2005.

Health Estates as procurement advisors to the Western Trust (formally Sperrin Lakeland Trust) was responsible for the management of the Outline Planning application which was submitted in August 2005.

Outline Planning approval was obtained on 13 September 2006 and this approval was shared with each of the 3 PFI bidders when the PFI Competitive Dialogue process commenced in October 2006.

Since then Health Estates has facilitated regular meetings between Planning Service and each Bidder's Design Team.

All bid teams have now submitted a full/reserved matters planning application and each bid team is liaising directly with Planning Service.

Alcohol-Related Ill Health

Mr Burns asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for her assessment of the significant increase in the number of young people being treated for alcohol-related ill health. (AQO 4226/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I refer to the answer to AQW 7057/2208 which set out the number of admissions for people aged 17 years and under, to Health and Social Care Hospitals in Northern Ireland, with a diagnosis of an alcohol-related illness/condition over the last 5 years. These figures show that alcohol-related admissions have remained relatively constant over the period, and may have in fact fallen slightly.

However, alcohol misuse can significantly impact on young people's individual physical and mental health, and it also has a wider impact on families, friends, communities, and society. Addressing young people's drinking is therefore a key priority for my Department. However, this is not an issue that my Department can effectively address in isolation, and consequently we are in the process of developing a cross-Departmental, cross-sectoral, integrated action

plan to address this issue, under the remit of the New Strategic Direction for Alcohol and Drugs.

The action plan will focus on enforcing and restricting access to alcohol, improving education and information for young people and their parents, and providing effective treatment and support services for those who require additional help.

Patient Complaints System

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what steps are being taken to monitor the effectiveness of the patient complaints system. (AQO 4223/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Under the Health and Personal Social Services Complaints Procedures Directions (Northern Ireland) 1996 HSS Boards and Trusts are required to monitor the arrangements for dealing with complaints, consider the nature and volume of complaints, take remedial action following investigation of complaints and publish an annual report on the handling of complaints.

Within health and social care there is a Controls Assurance Standard relating to complaints, which requires an agreed process for reporting, managing, analysing and learning from complaints in accordance with Departmental guidance.

The Department also monitors the volume and nature of complaints raised under the HPSS Complaints Procedures, in addition to the compliance with target response times.

A review of the current HPSS Complaints Procedures is now complete. A revised health and social care complaints procedure, effective from 1 April 2009, will be issued shortly. These new guidelines and standards for complaints handling will strengthen monitoring arrangements and help ensure the effectiveness of the patient complaints system.

Autism Review

Ms Anderson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when he will publish his response to the autism review. (AQO 4262/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: In my announcement on 26th June 2008, I outlined plans to urgently develop an Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Action Plan, which will promote service development in this important area of care. The Independent Review of Autism Services will make a significant contribution to the development of

the ASD Action Plan. The action plan will go out for consultation at the end of August 2008.

Waiting Times for Cancer Treatment

Rev Dr Robert Coulter asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of waiting times for cancer treatment. (AQO 4273/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I am pleased to say that the latest figures indicate that the targets set last March to improve access to cancer services have been achieved on a regional basis. The targets were that by March of this year

- 98% of patients diagnosed with cancer would begin treatment within a maximum of 31 days of the date of their diagnosis
- 75% of patients with suspected cancer referred urgently by a GP would begin their first definitive treatment within a maximum of 62 days.
- All women requiring an urgent assessment for suspected breast cancer would be seen at a specialist breast clinic within 14 days of referral.

NHS Dentists

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans there are to increase the number of people registered with an NHS dentist. (AQO 4225/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My officials are currently negotiating a new, stand alone, Health Service dental contract for Northern Ireland with the British Dental Association. The aim of the contract will be to provide access to high quality health service dental care for all our citizens. In addition, I have given approval for procurement of additional dental services from the independent sector. This will deliver an additional 36 dentists, providing access to health service dentistry some 54,000 people across the four Health Boards.

Travel Reimbursement Rates for Healthcare Staff

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he has any plans to adjust travel reimbursement rates, in line with recent fuel price rises, for healthcare staff that work in the community. (AQO 4275/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: As an interim measure, I have

increased the mileage rates for most staff classified as regular users by 3p per mile from 1 January 2008. A four country review of the mileage rates is currently being carried out in partnership with the nationally recognised health unions at national level. I will consider the recommendations of this review in due course.

Agenda for Change

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why the Agenda for Change process has not yet been completed. (AQO 4258/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I am pleased to announce that the 30 June deadline which I set for employers to have all HSC staff on Agenda for Change rates of pay has been met. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of those involved in this process for all their efforts in meeting this deadline.

Banbridge Health Village

Mr Simpson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety pursuant to his answer to AQW 7849/08, (i) which matters in relation to Banbridge Health Village are outstanding; (ii) what action he has taken to resolve these matters; (iii) what factors were responsible for the delay; and (iv) what steps he has taken to ensure that this delay is not repeated. (AQW 8812/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The current business case proposals are for a new Health and Care Centre along with a new Learning Disability Day Centre within the Banbridge Community Health Village.

- (i) A substantial number of issues were raised by my Department during initial assessment and in order to address those issues a fully updated business case has been requested from the Southern Trust. My Department still awaits receipt of that updated business case.
- (ii) My Department has provided direction on what areas of the business case need revised and staff are available to provide further advice if sought by the Trust.
- (iii) The development of investment proposals through to an approved business case involves a significant volume of work for both my Department and the HSC Trusts. Following submission of the original business case for the Banbridge proposals the Trust have made changes to the design for the buildings which will now be built as a single building. This change required revision to schedules of accommodation, design elements and costs

within the business case and may add further to the time required to finalize the business case.

- (iv) Any business case is developed to help inform decision making on the best ways to deliver health care and changes are frequently necessary as discussions take place and more up to date information becomes available. It is not possible to ensure that changes do not happen during the development of business cases for health care proposals.

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Residents' Parking Scheme

Mr Spratt asked the Minister for Regional Development if he has any alternative strategies outside the current proposals to tackle the parking difficulties in areas currently being considered for residents' parking scheme. (AQW 7001/08)

The Minister for Regional Development (Mr C Murphy): With regard to AQW 6999/08, the estimated consultancy costs for the three named schemes are approximately £25,500.

As regards AQW 7001/08, my Department's Roads Service has, in response to numerous and on-going requests from residents and their elected representatives, established a policy to allow the introduction of residents' parking schemes to address the problems associated with all-day commuter car parking in the worst-affected residential areas.

I would hope that the residents in at least some of the first five areas already consulted about scheme designs for their areas, will recognise the benefits that these schemes can bring to them so that we may make progress. However, I do not intend to carry on with scheme development and implementation in individual areas where local communities do not support them. My officials in Roads Service are actively working on preliminary scheme designs for a number of other areas where a need has been identified – and indeed have a list of other areas awaiting survey and assessment. Should residents in any of the first five areas reject the proposals, it would be with regret, but Roads Service would have to move on to these other areas.

The only practical way to deal with all-day commuter parking in residential areas is through residents' parking schemes. There is no workable alternative. I would be happy to proceed with schemes in all five of the areas consulted on to date, as long as they have the support of the local communities. Without that support, my Department's resources will regrettably be deployed elsewhere.

Road Surfacing Schemes

Mr Ross asked the Minister for Regional Development what road surfacing schemes are planned for the (i) Larne; (ii) Carrickfergus; and (iii) Newtownabbey areas, over the next 3 years. (AQW 8148/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: Details of road re-surfacing schemes planned by my Department's Roads Service for the Larne, Carrickfergus and Newtownabbey areas, over the next 3 years, are provided in the tables below.

LARNE

Road	Year
Millbay Road, Islandmagee	2008/09
Ballywillan Road, Glenoe	2008/09
Ballymena Road, Carnlough	2009/10
Portmuck Road, Islandmagee	2009/10
Ballyboley Road, Larne	2009/10
Browns Bay Road, Islandmagee	2009/10
Mark Street, Glenarm	2009/10
Shore Road, Larne	2010/11
Ballyrickard Road, Larne	2010/11
Drumnageagh Road, Cairncastle	2010/11
Moss Road, Larne	2010/11
Middle Road, Islandmagee	2010/11

CARRICKFERGUS

Road	Year
Upper Road/Woodburn Road (Stage 3), Carrickfergus	2008/09
Castle Road, Carrickfergus	2008/09
Oakfield Drive, Carrickfergus	2008/09
Dunluskin Gardens, Carrickfergus	2008/09
Larne Road, Kilroot	2009/10
Dalway's Bawn, Kilroot	2009/10
Drumhoy Drive, Carrickfergus	2009/10
Larne Road, Eden	2010/11
Ransevyn Drive, Whitehead	2010/11

NEWTOWNABBEY

Road	Year
Park Road, Mallusk	2008/09
Burnside Road, Doagh	2008/09

Road	Year
Ballyclare Road (Service Road), Glengormley	2008/09
Carwood Park South, Glengormley	2008/09
Templepatrick Trunk Road, Ballyclare	2008/09
Larne Road Trunk Road, Ballynure	2008/09
Mill Road, Ballyclare	2009/10
Richmond Area, Glengormley	2009/10
Main Street/ Station Road, Doagh	2009/10
Shore Road, Whiteabbey Village	2009/10
Ballycraigy Road, Newtownabbey	2010/11
Ballypallady Road, Ballyrobert	2010/11
Hydepark Road, Mallusk	2010/11
Mallusk Road, Mallusk	2010/11

Trunk road schemes are allocated on the basis of a structural assessment, which is carried out each year during August and September for inclusion in the following year's programme. Therefore, there are no trunk road schemes shown for 2009/10 and 2010/11.

The resurfacing programmes planned for 2009/10 and 2010/11 are considered provisional until they are finalised in April of that year, when funding allocations have been confirmed.

In addition, any late 'in-year' funding my Department may receive can result in schemes being brought forward or additional schemes being carried out.

Traffic-Calming Measures in Belfast

Mr Attwood asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the traffic calming measures for (i) North; (ii) South; (iii) East; and (iv) West Belfast, for (a) 2005-06; (b) 2006-07; and (c) 2007-08; and to further detail the 2008-09 programme of works for each area. (AQW 8157/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service develops its annual work programmes on a District/City Council area basis. Details of the locations and the type of features implemented, as part of Roads Service's traffic calming programme of works in the Belfast City Council area, for the last three financial years, are provided in the table below.

Traffic Calming Schemes for Belfast City Council		
Location	Type of features	Year
Inverary Area – Road Hump Scheme	Road Humps	2005/2006
Sprinfeld Park	Road Humps	2005/2006
Cavehill Road	Central Islands, formalised lay-bys and associated road markings.	2005/2006
Upper Whiterock Road	Road Humps	2005/2006
Ballygomartin Road (West Circular to Springmartin Road)	Formalised lay-bys and road humps	2005/2006
Knockeden/Flush	Road Humps	2005/2006
La Salle/St. James Area	Road humps and priority junctions	2005/2006
Highbury Gardens –	Road Humps	2005/2006
Salisbury/Hughenden	Range of measures including road humps, chicanes, road narrowing and change in road priority	2005/2006
Highfield Drive Area	Road Humps	2005/2006
Duncairn Gardens -	Narrowing lane width by providing formalised longitudinal lay-bys.	2006/2007
Erinvale Avenue - Road hump scheme	Road humps	2006/2007
Looiland Park area	Road humps	2006/2007
Harberton Park area	Road humps	2006/2007
Cupar Street Upper	Road humps	2006/2007
Dunraven Park area	Formalised lay-by with central traffic island in conjunction with raised table and series of road humps.	2006/2007
Benmore Drive area	Road hump scheme with mini roundabout and build outs.	2006/2007
Ardenlee Avenue -	Road humps	2007/2008
Holland Drive area - Road hump scheme.	Road humps	2007/2008
Ballymurphy Street area - Road hump scheme.	Road humps	2007/2008
Lemberg Street area - Road hump scheme.	Road humps	2007/2008

Traffic Calming Schemes for Belfast City Council		
Location	Type of features	Year
Lockview Road-Deramore Drive area – Road hump scheme	Road humps	2007/2008
Irwin Avenue area – Road hump scheme	Road humps	2007/2008

Details of the locations and the type of traffic calming features proposed for Roads Service's 2008/09 programme of works for the Belfast City Council area are provided in the table below.

Proposed Traffic Calming Schemes for Belfast City Council in 2008/09	
Location	Type of features
Maryville Park – Road hump scheme	Proposed road hump scheme
Bilston Road – Formalised lay-by and road humps	Proposed road humps scheme with formalised lay-by.
Lepper Street area	Proposed road hump scheme
North Boundary Street	Proposed road hump scheme
Cabin Hill Park – Road hump scheme	Proposed road hump scheme
Euston Street area- Road hump scheme	Proposed road hump scheme
Tamar Street/Witham Street – Road hump scheme	Proposed road hump scheme

It is important to note that implementation of these proposed schemes is subject to availability of funding and the successful completion of consultative and legislative processes.

Departmental Electrical Equipment

Mr Savage asked the Minister for Regional Development how many Blackberrys have been purchased by his Department since devolution. (AQW 8167/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: Since the date of devolution the Department for Regional Development has purchased 48 Blackberry devices at a cost of £4,135.

Team-Building Exercises

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development the total cost incurred by the Department on away days or team-building exercises in each of the last five years. (AQW 8227/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department's spend on away days or team building exercises in each of the last five years is set out in the table below:

Financial Year	Total Cost (excluding VAT) spent on away days or team building exercises
2003/04	£29,741.51
2004/05	£39,791.50
2005/06	£35,719.99
2006/07	£40,048.12
2007/08	£16,309.66

This includes expenditure by Roads Service and the Core and also Water Service up to 31 March 2007.

Team-Building Exercises

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development how many away days and team-building exercises have been organised by his Department for departmental staff in each of the last five years. (AQW 8228/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department has organised the following number of away days or team building exercises in each of the last 5 years as set out in the table below:

Financial Year	Number of away days or team building exercises
2003/04	22
2004/05	32
2005/06	34
2006/07	41
2007/08	11

This includes figures from Roads Service and the Core and also Water Service up to 31 March 2007.

Team-Building Exercises

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development how many staff hours have been taken up with departmental or cross-departmental away days, or team-building exercises, in each of the last five years. (AQW 8231/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department has taken up the following staff hours with Departmental or cross-departmental away days, or team building exercises in each of the last 5 years as set out in the table below:

Financial Year	Number of staff hours taken up with departmental or cross - departmental away days or team building exercises.
2003/04	3,038
2004/05	4,987
2005/06	4,221
2006/07	8,595
2007/08	1,830

This includes figures from Roads Service and the Core and also Water Service up to 31 March 2007.

Parking Permit Schemes

Mr McCartney asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline the criteria for Parking Permit Schemes. (AQW 8255/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service finalised a policy for the introduction of Residents Parking Schemes in January 2008, this is the only type of Parking Permit Scheme in the North. The criteria for the introduction of these schemes are included within this policy.

- There are two specific criteria which must be satisfied before a scheme can be considered: the level of local support from residents; and
- the degree of difficulty which residents experience when trying to park near their homes.

Local support means that at least two thirds of households who respond to a questionnaire, issued by Roads Service, favour the introduction of a scheme. In addition, a minimum 50% response rate to the questionnaire is required, otherwise a scheme could be 'voted in' by a small minority of residents.

- The degree of difficulty in parking is measured by conducting surveys. While some flexibility will necessarily apply, it is likely that a scheme to relieve parking difficulties during the working day would be justified where: more than 60% of the available kerbside space is estimated to be occupied by non-residents' vehicles for more than 5 hours; and
- more than 80% of the available kerbside space is occupied in total for the same 5 hours.

Generally, 50% of the streets in a zoned area must meet these criteria.

Northern Ireland Water

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development the average time for Northern Ireland Water to respond to breaks in the water system in the

Ards Borough Council area, in each of the last 3 years. (AQW 8273/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that they do not hold records based on council areas so are unable to provide a detailed response for the Ards Borough Council area.

The Customer Charter states the response time to incidents is 4 hours if during normal working hours and within 6 hours outside normal working hours. The introduction of a new fully automated work management system will improve the accuracy of reporting and Northern Ireland Water are on target with their objective to halve supply interruptions between 2006 and 2009 to improve service delivered to customers.

National Speed Limit

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister for Regional Development what consideration has been given to reducing the National Speed Limit on rural roads. (AQW 8298/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: Speed limits are a key source of information to road users and while effective speed management has a fundamental role within speed management policies, influencing driver behaviour also has an important role to play in encouraging road users to adopt appropriate and safe speeds.

All speed limits in the North, other than those on Restricted Roads, are made by order under Article 38 of the Road Traffic Regulation (Northern Ireland) Order 1997. The vast majority of the single carriageway rural road network is subject to the national speed limit of 60 mph, for cars, with reduced limits for HGVs and other vehicle types. The majority of drivers on this network never reach or exceed the speed limit on many of these roads. This is especially evident on C Class and Unclassified roads, which include many single track roads, where their geometric characteristics often make it difficult to drive at high speeds.

The National Speed Limit for the North is set under Schedule 2 of the Motor Vehicle (Variation of Speed Limits) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1989. Although it would be theoretically possible to set different national speed limits from those currently operating in Britain, it is important that there is consistency in the application of speed limits across the UK to prevent driver confusion and consequent road safety implications.

However, as speed is one of the major contributory factors in collisions here, my Department's Roads Service is continually looking at ways of reducing excessive or inappropriate speeds across the whole network. In April 2005, the Agency initiated a review of its speed management policies, following on from a similar process by the Department for Transport in England and the regional assemblies in

Scotland and Wales. This review was completed in the autumn of 2007 and I submitted this to the Regional Development Committee on 5 November 2007 for scrutiny, as part of the wider consultation process. I am still awaiting the Committee's comments.

The draft speed management policy contains a speed assessment framework that has been developed, to achieve an appropriate and consistent balance between safety and mobility objectives, on single carriageway rural roads. Lower speed limits would, therefore, be appropriate on lower tier single carriageway roads passing through a community, or having a local access or recreational function.

I would stress that, while my Department's Roads Service will continue to do as much as it practically can to make our roads safer, the key fact remains that driver behaviour is responsible for over 95% of collisions. It is important, therefore, to keep reinforcing the message that drivers must learn to take more responsibility for their driving behaviour on the roads, if we are to continue to reduce the numbers of people killed, or seriously injured as a result of road traffic collisions caused by excess speed.

Repairs on Buses and Trains

Mr Ross asked the Minister for Regional Development how much money has been spent on repairs to (i) buses; and (ii) trains, in each of the last 12 months. (AQW 8303/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: Translink has supplied the following details of spend on repairs to (i) buses; and (ii) trains, for each of the periods of account in the last financial year commencing on the 26 March 2007 and ending 30 March 2008.

ANNEX A

Council	Number Of PCNs Issued In Each Month											
	Jun 07	Jul 07	Aug 07	Sep 07	Oct 07	Nov 07	Dec 07	Jan 08	Feb 08	Mar 08	Apr 08	May 08
Antrim	303	210	257	216	140	147	127	135	122	109	87	129
Ards	436	388	400	364	423	451	336	341	313	304	250	366
Armagh	268	310	288	238	484	532	403	347	321	204	270	230
Ballymena	679	505	628	473	447	423	540	356	327	316	345	365
Ballymoney	273	246	227	200	184	143	115	97	133	158	118	120

TABLE 1 COST OF TRANSLINK BUS REPAIRS 2007/08 FINANCIAL YEAR BY PERIOD.

Period	1	2	3	4	5	6
£k	1,330	1,400	1,743	1,403	1,424	1,480
Period	7	8	9	10	11	12
£k	1,444	1,527	1,705	1,497	1,499	2,772

Total £19.224m

TABLE 2 NIR COST OF TRAIN REPAIRS 2007/08 FINANCIAL YEAR BY PERIOD.

Period	1	2	3	4	5	6
£k	709	930	1,121	515	719	1,195
Period	7	8	9	10	11	12
£k	849	828	1,086	1,067	1,100	1,016

Total £11.135m

Translink accounting periods are based on two four-week periods followed by a five-week period and thus do not correspond exactly to a calendar month. NI Railways figures are for all repairs (scheduled and unscheduled) including the costs of scheduled examinations and engineering overheads. The repair figures for the Translink bus companies include maintenance spend and accident costs.

Parking Tickets

Mr Ross asked the Minister for Regional Development how many parking tickets have been issued in each of the last 12 months, broken down by parliamentary constituency. (AQW 8307/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service does not hold the information you requested by Parliamentary Constituency. However, I am able to provide you with details of the number of tickets that have been issued in each of the last 12 months broken down by Council Area. This information is set out at Annex A.

Banbridge	120	200	248	176	123	158	116	87	134	128	129	123
Belfast*	3951	3902	4027	3909	4464	4274	3329	3404	4702	4500	4463	4283
Carrickfergus	279	247	302	297	247	222	213	195	170	140	109	111
Coleraine	609	862	934	717	576	431	456	368	470	556	480	464
Cookstown	182	272	236	231	219	252	212	218	187	178	237	244
Craigavon	578	662	757	619	627	370	424	352	334	344	471	475
Derry	2166	1617	1855	2321	2250	1747	1609	1207	1145	1018	1070	1079
Down	558	499	405	304	592	527	491	366	298	327	478	498
Dungannon	289	328	350	372	312	366	299	237	237	130	270	305
Fermanagh	599	572	1091	1075	1075	936	892	724	476	586	658	774
Larne	105	68	69	84	75	68	64	41	59	59	101	56
Limavady	164	206	204	188	237	163	115	140	126	107	123	115
Lisburn	551	461	454	441	486	470	665	429	463	553	552	540
Magherfelt	379	370	534	373	356	325	223	341	308	337	378	317
Moyle	13	40	125	8	26	26	9	15	12	12	12	12
Newry & Mourne	454	527	543	447	469	482	295	327	411	363	387	380
Newtownabbey	166	155	187	181	152	184	92	101	124	103	128	119
North Down	656	664	552	471	383	401	334	320	391	376	317	416
Omagh	516	522	539	426	459	576	444	433	408	422	380	503
Strabane	338	386	337	306	337	251	218	249	250	205	217	269
Total	14632	14219	15549	14437	15143	13925	12021	10830	11921	11535	12030	12293

Note: details of parking tickets issued in the Castlereagh Council area are included in the figures provided for the Belfast Council area.

Clamped Cars Figures

Mr Burns asked the Minister for Regional Development how many cars have been clamped since 1 January 2008, broken down by parliamentary constituency. (AQW 8347/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: I can confirm that my Department has not been involved in vehicle clamping operations. However, my Department's Roads Service officials are currently working on the operational details required to introduce the clamping and removal of vehicles as part of the parking enforcement contract with NCP Services Ltd. It is intended that, for debt recovery purposes, vehicle clamping and removing will be introduced in the near future.

The Minister for Environment has advised that his Department's Driver Vehicle Agency has clamped or seized 2941 unlicensed vehicles during the period 1 January 2008 to 19 June 2008. Details of these operations are not maintained by parliamentary constituency area.

Cycling Demonstration Town Scheme

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister for Regional Development what consideration has been given to introducing a scheme similar to the Cycling Demonstration Town scheme operating presently in England. (AQW 8367/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has no plans to introduce a Cycling Demonstration Town scheme in the North. However, Roads Service is committed to improving cycling facilities across the North to encourage more people to cycle.

The Regional Transportation Strategy (RTS) 2002-2012 established strategic transportation investment priorities across a range of travel modes. Making it easier to cycle is a key theme of the RTS. Following on from this strategy, detailed cycling proposals for cities and towns are contained in the Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan and the technical supplement of the Sub-Regional Transport Plan. The Sub-Regional Transport Plan prioritises 29 of the largest towns and

cities outside Belfast and identifies cycling infrastructure improvements in these towns and cities.

Traffic Calming Measures in the Rosevale/Beverly Area of Newtownards

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister for Regional Development when construction will commence on traffic calming measures in the Rosevale/Beverly area of Newtownards. (AQW 8369/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: As I advised in my response to the Member's recent Assembly Question (AQW 5658/08), all proposals for Traffic Calming schemes which might be undertaken by my Department's Roads Service are assessed, scored and prioritised within each Council area. Roads Service then draws up a two-year rolling programme, which is published each year in the Autumn Roads Service Report presented to Councils.

In relation to AQW 8369/08, I can confirm that the assessment for the Rosevale/Beverly area of

Newtownards has shown that this area does not have sufficient priority to be included in the current two-year programme, when compared with other proposed schemes in the Ards Council area.

With regard to AQW 8370/08, I can confirm that the assessment for East Street and West Street, Newtownards has placed these proposed schemes in the 2009/10 Ards Council programme, subject to the availability of adequate resources and the assessed priority of new requests for traffic calming.

Expenditure on the Larne Railway Line

Mr Ross asked the Minister for Regional Development how much money has been spent on the Larne railway line over the last 5 years; and on what the money was spent. (AQW 8384/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: Translink have provided the details below of the money spent on the Larne railway line over the last five years and what it has been spent on:

Revenue Works	2003/04 £	2004/05 £	2005/06 £	2006/07 £	2007/08 £	Totals £
Permanent Way Including Structures						
Labour	196,220	193,784	199,468	260,516	382,092	1,232,081
Materials	121,452	119,944	123,462	161,248	103,015	629,121
Signalling						
Labour	386,764	381,963	393,166	513,496	467,798	2,143,187
Materials	20,564	20,309	20,904	27,302	19,053	108,132
Revenue Work Total:	725,000	716,000	737,000	962,562	971,958	4,112,520
Capital Works						
Bleach Green to Whitehead Relay	563,999	5,158,933	17,967,724	726,748		24,417,404
Whitehead To Larne Life Expired Sections			2,159,144			2,159,144
Sea Defences		408,304				408,304
Fencing				42,266	126,828	169,094
Train Protection Warning System				700,000		700,000
Disability Discrimination Act Works					1,250,000	1,250,000
Capital Works Total:	563,999	5,567,237	20,126,868	1,469,014	1,376,828	29,103,946
All Works Total:	1,288,999	6,283,237	20,863,868	2,431,576	2,348,786	33,216,466

Departmental Visits to North Down

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development how many visits he paid to North Down constituency in his first year of office. (AQW 8415/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: During the period 8 May 2007 to 7 May 2008, I made one visit to the North Down constituency.

Antrim Bus and Train Station

Mr Burns asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the work to upgrade Antrim bus and train station. (AQW 8494/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: Translink are currently completing a Feasibility Study and Economic Appraisal for this project, which on

completion will be submitted to the Department and DFP for approval. The building of a new integrated station is not contained within Translink's Corporate Plan for 2008-11 and subject to approval, additional funding would therefore need to be sought to fund this project.

Park and Ride Facility at Ballymartin in Templepatrick

Mr Burns asked the Minister for Regional Development when the first phase of the proposed rail/bus station and 'park and ride facility at Ballymartin, Templepatrick is due to open. (AQW 8496/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: The first phase of the proposed Ballymartin Bus and Rail park and ride facility, which is bus based, has an indicative opening date of 2012. This phase will provide between 150 and 200 spaces.

Northern Ireland Water

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister for Regional Development the budget allocation breakdown within the individual departments of Northern Ireland Water. (AQW 8506/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that the table below illustrates the operational and capital expenditures for the draft 2008/09 budget broken down by the individual Directorates and Departments of Northern Ireland Water. These figures are exclusive of costs such as depreciation, tax and interest.

Directorate/ Department	Operating Expenditure (£000s)	Capital Expenditure (£000s)	Total Expenditure (£000s)
Finance & Regulation	22,662	2,657	25,319
Customer Services	17,942	2,361	20,303
Asset Management	13,195	14,216	27,411
Human Resources	25,546	500	26,046
Business Transformation	3,928	656	4,584
Procurement	935	0	935
Engineering & Procurement	4,109	240,087	244,196
Operations	111,798	19,108	130,906
Public Private Partnership	20,335	385	20,720
Chief Executive	2,408	0	2,408
Total	222,858	279,970	502,828

Tursallagh Road and Maginn Road in Co Tyrone

Mr Doherty asked the Minister for Regional Development what action he is taking to repair and upgrade the Tursallagh Road and Maginn Road, Sixmilecross, Co Tyrone. (AQW 8562/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has no plans to upgrade the Tursallagh Road and Maginn Road, Sixmilecross. However, there are plans to surface dress the Tursallagh Road within the next two months.

Belfast City Airport

Dr Farry asked the Minister for Regional Development what is the designation of Belfast City Airport under European Union legislation. (AQW 8656/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: Belfast City Airport is designated as a "city airport" under Directive 2002/30/EC which is implemented into law by the Aerodromes (Noise Restrictions) (Rules and Procedures) Regulations 2003.

Belfast City Airport

Dr Farry asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans there are to change the designation of Belfast City Airport under European Union legislation. (AQW 8657/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: Although the Commission has announced that it proposes to review the operation of Directive 2002/30/EC during 2008, I am not aware of any plans to change the designation of Belfast City Airport.

Airport Policy

Dr Farry asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline his policy on airports. (AQW 8658/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: Airport policy is set out in the White Paper "The Future of Air Transport" published in December 2003 (a copy has been placed in the Library or the document can be consulted on the following link: <http://www.dft.gov.uk/about/strategy/whitepapers/air/thefutureofairtransportwhite5694>). The relevant chapter dealing with the North was amended in December 2004 and includes an assessment of the key issues affecting the North in addition to a summary of each of the local airports.

Airport Policy

Dr Farry asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the role played by Belfast City Airport within the overall airport strategy. (AQW 8659/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: The Northern Ireland chapter of the White Paper “The Future of Air Transport” gives an assessment of the role played by Belfast City Airport.

Street Lighting in Rural Areas

Mr Burns asked the Minister for Regional Development when he will be in a position to review the criteria for the provision of street lighting in rural areas. (AQO 4317/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department’s Roads Service use two main criteria when considering the provision of street lighting in rural areas. These are:

- the density of housing within a community, including public buildings with significant night time use; and
- road safety, where street lighting would contribute to a reduction of night-time accidents.

Roads Service last reviewed the policy for provision of road lighting in rural areas in 2002, to take greater account of public buildings with significant night time use.

The demand for more rural lighting has to be balanced against environmental impact of night sky light pollution, and the financial costs of providing and maintaining additional public lighting installations.

There are no plans for a further review of rural public lighting criteria at this time.

Departmental Offices

Mr Molloy asked the Minister for Regional Development if he will consider relocating some of his Department’s offices to rural areas, including the Mid-Ulster constituency. (AQO 4301/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: I fully appreciate that the location of public sector jobs has important implications for rural communities, and in supporting sustainable development. For operational reasons, around 65% of DRD staff are already dispersed to locations outside Greater Belfast.

I have recently written to Professor Sir George Bain, who is chairing the current review in this area, to express my strong support for the decentralisation

of jobs. This key principle will be borne in mind by my Department when formulating any future operational planning proposals.

Independent Water Review Panel’s Recommendations

Mr McCartney asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the implementation of the Independent Review Panel’s recommendations. (AQO 4298/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: Following publication of the Independent Water Review Panel’s Strand 1 report in October 2007, the Executive agreed to introduce additional payments for water and sewerage services provided to households and to extend non-domestic payments. It also agreed that full recognition would be made of the existing domestic contributions to the cost of these services through the Regional Rate. However, the Executive decided to defer decisions on way in which household will pay until it had considered the Strand 2 report.

Since publication of the Strand 2 report in January, the Executive Sub-Committee has considered options for a household payment methodology. The results of this work were outlined to the Executive on 22nd May 2008 and further work is being undertaken before the matter is brought back to the Executive.

The Executive is committed to a public consultation on the payment methodology and other Strand 2 issues. Work on the Executive’s consultation proposals is ongoing and I hope to be able to make an announcement shortly.

Irish-Language Road Signage

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Regional Development the proportion of his budget earmarked for Irish Language Road signage over the next three years. (AQO 4203/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: There is no budget set aside by my Department for the provision of Irish language road signage over the next three years.

My Department has prepared a draft policy for the introduction of a range of bilingual road signs in response to the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages.

The issue of bilingual signing cuts across the responsibility of my Department, as well as the Department for Culture Arts and Leisure, which has responsibility for the charter and the Department for Enterprise, Trade and Investment, which has responsibility for tourism.

Currently I am considering the draft policy and in discussion with Departmental officials with regard to taking the proposals to the Executive Committee.

When this process concludes I will then address any budgetary issues.

Glenmonagh Site

Mr Adams asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the proposed inter-departmental group for the Glenmonagh and adjacent site in West Belfast; and to outline his engagement with Ministerial colleagues in working to establish such a group. (AQO 4285/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: I wrote to the Ministers for Social Development, Enterprise Trade and Investment, and Environment on 29 May asking them for views on establishing a cross-departmental group of officials to guide the development of Glenmonagh. All three Ministers support this approach.

I will be meeting with the Minister for Social Development to discuss the proposal and am hopeful that the group can be established quickly.

Blaris Development in Lisburn

Mr Poots asked the Minister for Regional Development what engagement his Department has had with the Blaris development in Lisburn; and when work will commence on the Knockmore/Sprucefield link road. (AQO 4314/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: In 2006, my Department's Roads Service was consulted by Planning Service on a planning application for lands between Sprucefield and Knockmore and the proposed link road at Blaris. Roads Service assessed and responded to the Traffic Impact Assessment, submitted in conjunction with that proposal, but the application did not progress any further at that time.

Roads Service has now been requested to attend a pre-application meeting in July 2008, in relation to a new planning application for the area.

The current draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan requires construction of the Knockmore/Sprucefield link road in conjunction with the development of the adjacent lands. Therefore, as the link road will be a developer-led scheme and subject to planning permission, I am unable to advise as to when the work may commence.

Hybrid Buses in Belfast

Mrs Hanna asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline his discussions, plans and timescale for the introduction of hybrid buses in Belfast and other centres of high population.

(AQO 4227/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department has been liaising with Translink who are seeking funding for the purchase of seven new Environmentally Enhanced Vehicles for deployment in Belfast. Translink have submitted an Economic Appraisal to my Department and officials have been working closely with Translink in reviewing it before it is forwarded to DFP for approval. If approved, the buses would be introduced to service as soon as possible, five operating in the Belfast area and two servicing Coleraine and the Giants Causeway. Depending on their success, funding for more such vehicles would be considered as part of Translink's bus replacement programme.

Public Transport

Mr McLaughlin asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans he intends to bring forward in relation to the governance and operational delivery of public transport in the future. (AQO 4289/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: I recently asked the Regional Development Committee for its views on the proposal to create a three tier system involving a top, Government, tier responsible for broad policy, legislation and regulation, including the regulation of operators; a middle tier responsible for specifying and funding services and securing their provision; and a third tier comprising transport operators. I have recently approved a Strategic Business Case which examined a number of possible options for a proposed new middle tier institution.

The next step is to develop an Outline Business Case for the reforms to examine in more detail the possible options identified in the Strategic Business Case.

Bridge Repairs in West Tyrone

Mr Bresland asked the Minister for Regional Development how much funding has been provided in the current financial year for bridge repairs in the West Tyrone constituency. (AQO 4198/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has allocated £800k to the maintenance and strengthening of bridges in the West Tyrone constituency during the 2008/09 financial year.

Water Charges

Mrs O'Neill asked the Minister for Regional Development what policy changes he will implement, as part of the water reform consultation, to address the financial burden on rural dwellers when connecting to the mains water supply. (AQO 4315/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: It is my intention to keep under review policy in relation to rural and urban dwellings not connected to the mains water supply.

The Executive has given a commitment to consult on the Independent Water Review Panel's Strand 2 report and the issue of water and sewerage connections for existing households could be included in this consultation. This could be used to inform decisions on the way forward in terms of reviewing existing properties that are currently not connected to mains water.

The Executive are yet to conclude its proposals for consultation but I hope it will be in a position to do so shortly. In the meantime, levels of assistance for making connections here remain higher than in England, Wales or Scotland.

Development of Towns Damaged During the Troubles

Mr Simpson asked the Minister for Regional Development what priority he will give, as part of the Regional Development Strategy, to the development of towns whose commercial hearts have been affected by IRA bombings during the Troubles and have subsequently struggled to re-establish their economies. (AQO 4255/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: The RDS already recognises the importance of our main towns in providing a range of functions, services and economic development opportunities. As part of the major review of the RDS I have initiated an economic assessment of the main towns. This study is due to be completed by the end of August and it will provide important information for the review work. I am committed to ensuring that all our towns develop to their maximum potential and want this to be reflected in a revised Strategy.

Railway Line Closure in Ballymoney

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he will ensure that the bus substitution service, put in place during the railway line closure at Ballymoney, will not significantly increase journey times. (AQO 4253/08)

The Minister for Regional Development:

Translink have informed me that NI Railways are at the preliminary planning stages for bus substitution requirements for the work between Coleraine and Ballymena for the period March to June 2009.

Unfortunately it is anticipated that bus substitution may add up to 30 minutes to the scheduled journey time, with the bus link expected to take up to 20 minutes longer than the rail link, plus additional time allowed at each end for passenger transfers.

Free Travel for Over 60s

Mr Brady asked the Minister for Regional Development what progress is being made in introducing free travel this year for people aged 60 years and over. (AQO 4280/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: I formally launched the 60+ SmartPass application process at Stormont on Monday, 23 June. Since then, application forms for the scheme have been available. From today, 30 June, people can take their completed forms to one of 25 application centres throughout the north. Correctly completed application forms submitted before the end of August will receive a 60+ SmartPass in time for the scheme's commencement in early October 2008.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Staff Warnings and Disciplinary Procedures

Mr Savage asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of staff in her department who, since 8 May 2007, have (i) received official warnings; and (ii) faced disciplinary procedures. (AQW 6144/08)

The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie): The number of employees in the Department for Social Development including its Agencies who have (i) received official warnings; and (ii) faced disciplinary procedures since 8 May 2007 are 744 and 183 respectively.

Housing Executive Land

Mr Ford asked the Minister for Social Development how much land is held by the Department or the Housing Executive for future housing development in the following areas: (i) Antrim; (ii) Armagh; (iii) Ballyclare; (iv) Ballymena; (v) Bangor; (vi) Coleraine; (vii) Cookstown; (viii) Donaghadee; (ix) Downpatrick; (x) Enniskillen; (xi) Lisburn; (xii) Larne; (xiii) Derry/

Londonderry; (xiv) Newcastle; (xv) Newry; (xvi) Omagh; (xvii) Portadown; (xviii) Portstewart; and (xix) Strabane. (AQW 8094/08)

The Minister for Social Development: My Department holds land for regeneration purposes that may include potential use for social or affordable housing as follows:-

Antrim	284 acres
Ballymena	371 acres
Bangor	0.5 acres
Enniskillen	20 acres
Newry	2.3 acres
Craigavon	355 acres
Londonderry	64 acres

The Housing Executive has land which it is in the process of transferring to housing associations for social housing as follows:-

Antrim	6.4 acres
Armagh	24.6 acres
Ballymena	9.3 acres
Bangor	5.2 acres
Coleraine	2.3 acres
Downpatrick	0.9 acres
Fermanagh	11.9 acres
Lisburn	5.4 acres
Londonderry	25.0 acres
Newry	14.9 acres
Strabane	0.5 acres

Housing Executive Maintenance Budget

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development why there was a reduction of almost £4 million in the Housing Executive maintenance budget from 2006-07 to 2007-08, which remains unchanged in 2008-09. (AQW 8119/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The Housing Executive is required to prioritise its funding allocation from central government on an annual basis to address areas of greatest need. However, programmes for maintenance and improvement have been allocated with a target to bring all properties up to Decent Homes standard by 2010.

Housing and Community Projects in East Antrim

Mr Ross asked the Minister for Social Development what projects her Department has delivered in the East Antrim constituency in the last 12 months; and what projects in the East Antrim constituency are due to commence in the next 12 months. (AQW 8147/08)

The Minister for Social Development: My Department has previously supported and delivered a range of regeneration, housing and community projects in the East Antrim constituency during the past year. Details of these projects and others which are due to commence in this year are listed below.

REGENERATION

Projects delivered in the last 12 months

Carrickfergus Maritime area Public Realm Scheme
Carrickfergus Marine Highway Public Realm Scheme
Larne Town Centre Promotions & Marketing Scheme
Urban Development Grant – 41-43 Main St, Larne

Projects due to commence in the next 12 months

Larne Town Centre Masterplan
Carrickfergus Town Centre Masterplan
Carrickfergus Maritime area – final site under development consisting of office and residential use.

HOUSING

Projects delivered in the last 12 months

Victoria St, Carrickfergus Social Housing Project (8 dwellings)
Beechlands, Carnlough Social Housing Project (6 dwellings)
Social Housing Adaptations for the Disabled – Abbeyfield
Social Housing Adaptations for the Disabled – Abode Housing Association
Social Housing Adaptations for the Disabled – Wesley Housing Association

Projects due to commence in the next 12 months

Glenarm Social Housing Project (13 Dwellings)
Carrickfergus Social Housing Project (11 dwellings)
Social Housing Adaptations for the Disabled – Abbeyfield
Social Housing Adaptations for the Disabled – Wesley Housing Association

COMMUNITY

Projects delivered in the last 12 months
Areas at Risk - Dunclug Action Plan – Parents and Kids Together
Youth Outreach Programme – Seacourt Community Council
Dunclug PAKT Project – Larne YMCA
Core Funding – Carrickfergus Community Forum
Core Funding – Larne Community Development Project
CVS Small Grants – Antville Community Group
CVS Small Grants – Carrickfergus Citizens Advice
CVS Small Grants – Carrickfergus Women’s Forum
CVS Small Grants – Larne Community Care Centre
CVS Small Grants – The Open Door Centre
Educational Trips – Alive and Well Walking Group
Capacity Training Programmes – Antville Community Group
Community Enrichment Programme – Carrick Rangers Football Development Centre
Committee Skills Training – Carrickfergus Community Forum
Community Activities Programme – Carrickfergus Neighbourhood Development Group
Castlemara PAKT Programme – Carrickfergus YMCA
Positive Parenting in the Community – Carrickfergus YMCA
Active Citizenship and Media Skills – Carrickfergus Young Citizens Forum
IMPACT in Monkstown Parents and Children – Church of the Good Shepherd/Hard Gospel
Linn Road Community Festival – Craigyhill Community Association
Outdoor Adventure – Craigyhill Community Association
Glenfield and Castlemara – The Way Forward – Glenfield Community Association
Community Leaders Programme – Larne Borough Council
Midnight Soccer – Larne Borough Council
Active Learning 2 – Monkstown Community Association
Community Intergenerational Project – New Mossley Presbyterian Youth Club
NORSUN Community Programme – Norsun Community Group
Social Activities Programme – Northlands Pensioners Group
ICT in the Community – Sunnyslans Youth Centre
East Antrim Community Transformation Strategy – Monkstown Community Resource Group
SPOD Programme – Refurbishment of Community Flat - Dixon Park residents Association
SPOD Programme – Inver River Art Work – Larne Borough Council
SPOD Programme – Community Flat Running Costs – Riverdale and District Residents Association

Projects delivered in the last 12 months

SPOD Programme – Development of Action Plan and Refurbishment of Glynn Road Playground – Tullygarley Community Development Group

Projects due to commence in the next 12 months

Youth Outreach Programme – Seacourt Community Council

Employment of Project Worker – Larne YMCA

Running Costs – Carrickfergus Community Forum

Running Costs – Larne Community Development Project

Areas at Risk - Craigyhill

Areas at Risk - Antville

Housing Executive Waiting List

Mr Ross asked the Minister for Social Development how many people are currently on the waiting list for Housing Executive properties in each area of (i) Larne; (ii) Carrickfergus; and (iii) Newtownabbey. (AQW 8151/08)

The Minister for Social Development: At 31 March 2008, the waiting list was as follows:

Larne	518 of which 195 were in housing stress
Carrickfergus	1,073 of which 561 were in housing stress
Newtownabbey	1,825 of which 1,011 were in housing stress

North West Development Office

Mrs McGill asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the current involvement of the North West Development Office in driving forward urban regeneration and development projects in (i) Derry/Londonderry; (ii) Limavady; and (iii) Strabane. (AQW 8180/08)

The Minister for Social Development: My Department’s North West Development Office has statutory responsibility for urban regeneration and community development across Derry, Limavady and Strabane. My Department, therefore, plays a key role in delivering the services and facilities that local people in these areas need by enhancing the physical, economic, social and community environment of the towns and neighbourhoods in which they live.

In Derry city centre the Guildhall Square/Waterloo Place public realm improvement scheme costing up to £8m is about to begin while a similar scheme in Newmarket Street costing £1m is nearing completion.

My Department is the main provider of funding towards the £3.69m refurbishment and extension of

the Northern Counties building, which is an important part of Derry's built heritage. In addition work is ongoing with a private sector developer to bring forward a £23m contemporary development on the former City Hotel site at Foyle Street.

DSD is also working closely with the Urban Regeneration Company Ilex to facilitate the regeneration of the former military site at Fort George, now in the Department's ownership. The redeveloped site will contain a mix of knowledge based industry, office, education, leisure and retail.

In addition, in the Waterside area of Derry work is ongoing to redevelop the Clooney site as a new educational campus while the potential to develop the former Clondermott school site for a mix of community, health and FE uses is being actively explored.

The new £8m Health and Social Care Centre at Distillery Brae which I officially opened in December 2007 was developed and delivered by my Department in association with a consortium of local GPs. As well as revitalising the economy of the surrounding streets and providing greater access to vital health services the centre has recently been formally recognised by the RSUA for its design excellence.

In Strabane, my Department is continuing to work with Strabane District Council and the private sector to deliver a range of regeneration projects. Current examples of this include the facilitation of the new £15m ASDA development, the provision of some £1.04m towards the construction of the award winning £3.36m Arts and Conference Centre and the upgrading of Canal Street at a cost of some £260k.

Urban Development Grant assistance of some £200k is now being provided towards two projects at Abercorn Square and Lower Main Street. Furthermore, work is ongoing with Strabane District Council to prepare a master plan for the town centre, which will guide future regeneration activities in the town.

In Limavady, the Department continues to work with Limavady Borough Council to identify suitable projects. Recent work has included environmental improvements to Connell Street and Newtown Square car parks at a cost of some £390k and the £3m restoration of the former Roe Valley Hospital in partnership with Limavady Community Development Initiative and the International Fund for Ireland. Work is currently underway on a £150k environmental improvement scheme on the town's Lower Main Street.

Neighbourhood Renewal Partnership Areas

Mrs McGill asked the Minister for Social Development (i) how much funding has been allocated to; and (ii) how many people have been employed in, each of the 36 Neighbourhood Renewal Partnership Areas since 2003. (AQW 8181/08)

The Minister for Social Development: Table 1 provides details of the initial allocations of the Neighbourhood Renewal Investment Fund to each of the 36 Neighbourhood Renewal areas. Some flexibility is required in these initial allocations to ensure that the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund can be fully spent in any one year.

The information requested in part (ii) is not routinely collected and would involve disproportionate costs to secure for the whole of the period. However, information on the numbers of people employed in each of the areas as a result of support from the Neighbourhood Renewal Investment Fund is available for 2007/08 financial year. Details are set out in Table 2.

	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
Neighbourhood Renewal Area	£000s	£000s	£000s	£000s	£000s
BRO					
Outer West Belfast - Colin	435	457	859	1,270	1,219
Upper Ardoyne	53	56	105	155	149
Ligoniel	66	70	131	194	186
Greater Shankill	524	550	1,035	1,530	1,469
Inner East Belfast	545	572	1,075	1,590	1,527
Outer West Belfast - Lenadoon	240	252	474	701	673
Upper Springfield/Whiterock	307	322	606	895	860
South West Belfast	172	180	339	500	481
Inner North Belfast	363	381	717	1,059	1,017
Inner South Belfast	172	181	340	503	483
Lower Falls/Clonard	437	459	863	1,276	1,225
Tullycarnet	58	61	115	170	164
Crumlin/Ardoyne	376	394	742	1,096	1,053
Rathcoole	207	218	409	605	581
Andersonstown	199	209	393	582	559
BRO Total	4,156	4,362	8,202	12,126	11,646
NWDO					
Triax	467	490	922	1,364	1,310
Outer North	410	430	809	1,196	1,149

	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
Neighbourhood Renewal Area	£000s	£000s	£000s	£000s	£000s
Outer West	247	260	488	722	693
Strabane	187	196	369	545	524
Waterside	235	246	463	685	658
Limavady	76	80	151	223	214
NWDO Total	1,622	1,703	3,202	4,734	4,547
RDO					
Coleraine East (Ballysally)	100	105	198	293	281
Coleraine West (Churchlands)	68	71	133	197	189
Ballyclare	26	27	51	75	72
Downpatrick	139	146	275	407	391
Newry	271	284	534	790	759
Bangor	76	80	150	222	213
Armagh	122	128	241	357	343
Omagh	75	79	148	219	210
Dungannon	21	22	41	61	59
Lurgan	261	273	514	760	730
Portadown	70	74	139	206	197
Ballymena	124	131	245	363	348
Brownlow	178	187	352	521	500
Coalisland	49	52	98	144	139
Enniskillen	79	83	156	231	221
RDO Total	1,660	1,743	3,277	4,845	4,653
Total	7,438	7,807	14,682	21,705	20,846

TABLE 2

Neighbourhood Renewal Area	Number of People Employed
Belfast Regeneration Office	
Inner East Belfast	46
South West Belfast	30
Greater Shankill	36
Greater Falls	51
Upper Springfield/Whiterock	39
Crunlin/Ardoyne	37
Tullycarnet	7
Inner South	13
Lenadoon	10
Colin	28

Neighbourhood Renewal Area	Number of People Employed
Inner North	31
Upper Ardoyne/Ballysillan	14
Ligoniel	7
Rathcoole	2
Andersonstown	12
North West Development Office	
Triax	35
Outer North	50
Outer West	21
Waterside	34
* All 4 Derry/Londonderry NRAs	39
Strabane	7
Limavady	5
Regional Development Office	
Armagh	3
Ballyclare	11
Ballymena	29
Bangor	4
Brownlow	1
Coleraine (East & West)	27
Downpatrick	13
Dungannon	3
Lurgan	2
Newry	9
Omagh	2
North West Portadown	2
Coalisland	3
Enniskillen	2

* Citywide projects that also provide services for the 4 Neighbourhood Renewal Areas in Derry/Londonderry, namely Triax, Outer North, Outer West and Waterside.

Modernisation Fund Capital Programme

Mrs McGill asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) all the groups that submitted an application to the Modernisation Fund Capital Programme; (ii) the groups that were deemed unsuccessful at the initial assessment stage; and (iii) the groups that have been informed that their application has been successful, subject to economic appraisal.

(AQW 8182/08)

The Minister for Social Development: There were 475 applications made to the three schemes within the

Modernisation Fund Capital Programme and they will be held in the assembly library.

All initial assessments have now been completed on applications to the programme and those that are not being taken forward to economic appraisal will be listed in the assembly library.

The applicants that have been informed that their projects are being taken forward to economic appraisal or have been placed on reserve will be listed in the assembly library.

Housing Association Homes

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Social Development to detail, for the 2007-08 and 2008-09 financial years, the (i) number; (ii) location; (iii) cost per unit; and (iv) completion dates, of (a) new units already purchased directly from developers by Housing Associations; and (b) units identified for purchase from developers; and to stipulate which of these were as a result of a pre-planned scheme.
(AQW 8192/08)

The Minister for Social Development: Table 1 details the new units already purchased directly from developers for 2007/08 and 2008/09. Table 2 details the new units scheduled for purchase in 2008/09.

These purchases, known as off the shelf purchases, are not pre-planned but arise where an opportunity presents itself in an area of identified need when it has proved difficult to secure land to build on.

The average cost per unit for those properties already purchased is £174,744.

TABLE 1 - NEW UNITS PURCHASED 2007/08 AND 2008/09

Housing Association	Scheme	Units	Actual/ Anticipated Completion Date
BIH	Bellevue Manor, Lisburn	19	Jun 08
BIH	1-3 Thorndale Avenue, Belfast	6	Mar 08
Clanmil	Beechlands, Carnlough	6	Jun 08
Clanmil	Causeway Meadows, Lisburn	22	Jun 08
Clanmil	Springfield Road, Belfast	16	Mar 08
Clanmil	Springfield Mill, Belfast	9	Mar 08
Dungannon	Millview, Manor, Dungannon	29	May 08
Fold	162-172 Antrim Road, Belfast	16	Aug 09

Housing Association	Scheme	Units	Actual/ Anticipated Completion Date
Fold	293 Antrim Road, Belfast	8	Aug 09
Fold	34 Cliftonville Road, Belfast	9	Jun 09
Fold	45 Cliftonville Road, Belfast	15	Jun 09
Fold	Carvill Site, Annadale, Belfast	50	Jun 10
Habinteg	Lawnbrook Avenue, Belfast	6	Jun 08
Habinteg	Mill Road, Bawnmore	8	May 08
Habinteg	23 Thorndale Avenue, Belfast	3	May 08
Habinteg	8 Glandore Avenue, Belfast	5	May 08
South Ulster	Springtown, Martins Lane, Newry	23	Jul 08
South Ulster	Gilpin Mews, Lurgan	20	Apr 08

TABLE 2 – NEW UNITS SCHEDULED FOR PURCHASE 2008/09

Housing Association	Scheme	Units	Anticipated Completion Date
BIH	Village Overspill Phase 2, Belfast	16	Not Yet Known
Clanmil	Foxhill, Londonderry	5	Jun 08
Clanmil	The Bush, Dungannon	6	Jun 08
Clanmil	Wolfhill Manor, Belfast	8	Jun 08
Newington	124-126 Antrim Road, Belfast	6	Jun 08
Oaklee	7a Glen Road, Londonderry	6	May 09
Rural	Aghagay Meadows, Newtownbutler	5	Jun 08
Rural	Eglis Road, Eglis, Armagh	6	Aug 08
Rural	7&8 Beech Tree Lane, Tempo	2	Dec 08
South Ulster	Mark Street, Lurgan	22	Jul 08
South Ulster	The Hollows, New Mills, Dungannon	9	Jun 08

Team-Building Exercises

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development how many away days and team-building exercises have been organised by her Department for departmental staff in each of the last five years. (AQW 8229/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The Department for Social Development, including the Social Security Agency and Child Maintenance and Enforcement Division, organised away days and team-building exercises, in the last five years, as shown in the table below.

Year	Event	Number of Events
2003/04	Away Days	79
	Team Building	6
2004/05	Away Days	76
	Team Building	6
2005/06	Away Days	91
	Team Building	9
2006/07	Away Days	89
	Team Building	9
2007/08	Away Days	103
	Team Building	7

Team-Building Exercises

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development how many staff hours have been taken up with departmental or cross-departmental away days, or team-building exercises, in each of the last five years. (AQW 8232/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The number of staff hours taken up with departmental or cross-departmental away days, or team-building exercises in the Department for Social Development, including the Social Security Agency and Child Maintenance and Enforcement Division is shown in the table below.

Year	Event	Staff Hours	Hours per staff member
2003/04	Away Days	6,324	0.72
	Team Building	2,597	0.30
2004/05	Away Days	4,554	0.54
	Team Building	1,095	0.13

Year	Event	Staff Hours	Hours per staff member
2005/06	Away Days	4,772	0.57
	Team Building	1,733	0.21
2006/07	Away Days	5,755	0.69
	Team Building	3,224	0.39
2007/08	Away Days	7,201	0.88
	Team Building	970	0.12

Housing Executive Replacement Grants

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development how many Replacement Grants have been approved in each of the last three years, broken down by parliamentary constituency; and what plans she has to change the present criteria in relation to Replacement Grants. (AQW 8272/08)

The Minister for Social Development: In respect of plans to change existing criteria I would refer the Member to the answer I gave him in AQW 8117/08. The information on the number of replacement grants is not readily available by constituency. However, I can report at District Council level the number of Replacement Grants was as follows:-

HOUSING EXECUTIVE REPLACEMENT GRANT APPROVALS

	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	Total
Antrim	0	1	1	2
Ards	1	2	0	3
Armagh	7	5	9	21
Ballymena	2	1	1	4
Ballymoney	2	0	2	4
Banbridge	7	5	9	21
Belfast	0	1	0	1
Carrickfergus	2	0	0	2
Castlereagh	0	0	0	0
Coleraine	2	2	0	4
Cookstown	9	5	3	17
Craigavon	5	6	3	14
Derry	1	7	1	9
Down	6	12	5	23
Dungannon	14	8	9	31
Fermanagh	61	40	39	140
Larne	1	2	2	5
Limavady	4	4	3	11

	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	Total
Lisburn	4	2	2	8
Magherafelt	6	8	6	20
Moyle	2	1	0	3
Newry and Mourne	13	11	12	36
Newtownabbey	0	0	0	0
North Down	0	0	0	0
Omagh	17	8	5	30
Strabane	4	5	4	13
Total	170	136	116	422

St Patrick's Barracks Site in Ballymena

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Social Development if her Department has given a commitment to purchase the St Patrick's Barracks site in Ballymena.
(AQW 8374/08)

The Minister for Social Development: My Department has expressed an interest in acquiring the site. However, the Department has not given a commitment to purchase the site and does not currently have the necessary budgetary cover to meet the cost.

Extensions for the Disabled

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development how many extensions for the disabled have been carried out on Housing Executive properties in (i) the Ards Borough Council area; and (ii) other District Office areas, in each of the last three years.
(AQW 8403/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The table below details the number of extensions completed for each of the last three years. Newtownards District Office equates to the Ards Borough Council area.

District Name	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
Antrim	5	2	1
Armagh	3	1	3
Ballycastle	1	0	2
Ballymena	3	5	4
Ballymoney	0	2	1
Banbridge	3	3	4
Bangor	8	4	10
Carrickfergus	2	1	1

District Name	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
Castlereagh	4	9	2
Coleraine	6	4	2
Collon Terrace	8	9	18
Cookstown	5	3	5
Downpatrick	2	6	15
Dungannon	9	9	4
East Belfast	1	9	13
Fermanagh	1	5	7
Larne	3	3	0
Limavady	7	8	10
Lisburn Antrim Street	4	6	6
Lisburn Dairyfarm	11	1	4
Lurgan Brownlow	12	15	11
Magherafelt	4	5	7
Newry	14	9	9
Newtownabbey 1	1	0	0
Newtownards	22	19	15
North Belfast	5	9	6
Omagh	7	2	3
Portadown	3	5	3
Shankill	9	9	6
South Belfast	8	9	2
Strabane	8	10	12
Waterloo Place	7	11	12
Waterside	10	14	8
West Belfast	15	16	8
Total	211	223	214

Child Poverty

Ms Anderson asked the Minister for Social Development (i) what steps she is taking to implement the recommendations of the Child Poverty Inquiry and in particular how she intends to tackle the current crisis for people on low-income created by spiralling fuel costs; and (ii) what consideration she has given to providing additional payments or special tariffs for vulnerable groups.
(AQW 8409/08)

The Minister for Social Development: Child Poverty is primarily the responsibility of the First and Deputy First Ministers. However, in response to the increasing cost of fuel, I have established a Task Force on Fuel Poverty which is focusing work across

Government and the wider energy sector. The Task Force will report to me before the end of the summer. It is my intention to then seek Executive support for a package of measures that will assist those most in need this winter. I have already written to James Purnell, Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, on a number of issues, including the winter fuel payment.

Departmental Visits to North Down

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how many visits she paid to North Down constituency in her first year of office. (AQW 8416/08)

The Minister for Social Development: In my first year of office I have visited the North Down constituency on 4 occasions.

National Strategy for Carers

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Social Development (i) what progress has been made on the review of carers support; and (ii) what is the Department's initial response to the National Strategy for Carers. (AQW 8455/08)

The Minister for Social Development: (i) Following the review of the National Carers' Strategy, my Department and the Department for Health, Social Services and Public Safety are working together to take forward the review of support for carers in Northern Ireland.

(ii) Carers at the heart of 21st-century families and communities is a comprehensive document and I welcome the recognition it gives to the responsibilities undertaken by carers. We will be considering the document carefully as part of the Northern Ireland review.

Team-Building Exercises

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development the total cost incurred by her Department on away days and team-building exercises in each of the last five years. (AQW 8471/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The total costs incurred by the Department for Social Development, including the Social Security Agency and Child Maintenance and Enforcement Division, on away days and team-building exercises in each of the last five years are detailed in the table below.

Year	Event	Cost (£)	Cost per head of staff (£)
2003/04	Away Days	24,108.08	2.76
	Team Building	43,051.92	4.92
2004/05	Away Days	59,015.46	7.01
	Team Building	4,805.00	0.57
2005/06	Away Days	63,076.63	7.49
	Team Building	22,896.14	2.72
2006/07	Away Days	63,511.18	7.61
	Team Building	16,486.34	1.97
2007/08	Away Days	46,988.62	5.76
	Team Building	5,625.72	0.69
Total		349,565.09	41.50

Derelict Houses in Craigavon

Mr Moutray asked the Minister for Social Development what action her Department is taking to address the negative social impact of derelict houses on local communities in the central Craigavon area. (AQW 8480/08)

The Minister for Social Development: I am concerned about the impact empty and derelict homes have right across our community and that is why I commissioned an Empty Homes Strategy. The aim of this strategy is to identify how many empty homes can be brought back into use and I have made £40m in private sector grants available this year that may help further encourage and support this objective.

In respect of the central Craigavon area itself, the Housing Executive's Brownlow Strategy Review was launched in 2004 with the aim of re-energising the housing market in Brownlow and removing the blight of vacant and derelict properties. A total of 193 void and derelict dwellings have been demolished and two major portions of Housing Executive land in the central area of Brownlow have been sold to private developers to assist with regeneration.

Cost of Funerals

Mr O'Loan asked the Minister for Social Development (i) what is the average cost of a funeral; and (ii) what plans she has to increase the social security funeral benefit from the current maximum of £700 and to include (a) the cost of council fees where a funeral is held in a council cemetery; and to match these costs where a funeral is held in a church cemetery. (AQW 8489/08)

The Minister for Social Development: (i) The Department does not collect details of the average cost of a funeral.

(ii) In keeping with the principle of parity in social security matters the amount of the funeral payment is the same in Northern Ireland as it is in Britain and there are no plans to increase the payment for funeral expenses from the current maximum of £700.

In Social Fund legislation a funeral payment can cover any relevant expenditure. This can include the costs of purchasing a new burial plot and the fees levied in respect of a burial by the authority responsible or by a private grave-digger in respect of a church cemetery. An additional amount up to the maximum of £700 is paid to provide for any other funeral expenses. These expenses are unspecified in legislation but are intended to cover costs such as, undertaker's fees, Minister's fees or flowers.

New Shared Space Initiatives

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Social Development what action she is taking to ensure that any new shared space initiatives being considered or introduced in town centres and other public spaces do not have a negative effect on the road safety of blind, partially sighted and other disabled people. (AQW 8507/08)

The Minister for Social Development: My Department is responsible for town and city centre regeneration which includes public realm and environmental improvement schemes. As part of the design aspect of these schemes, there is an undertaking to consult widely including Disability Group representatives. Each scheme must also be Disability Discrimination Act compliant on completion and an Equality Impact Assessment is normally carried out to ensure that the scheme meets guidelines on addressing disability and other equality issues.

The Department for Regional Development's Roads Service manages the implementation of a significant proportion of the public realm and environmental improvement schemes funded by my Department.

They ensure that the project is designed and implemented to conform to the required specifications including road safety for the blind, partially sighted and other disabled people.

In order to assist the visually impaired, Roads Service has an ongoing programme of installing tactile paving, tactile cones and also the use of audible signals, at pedestrian crossings, where this is deemed appropriate.

People in Housing Stress in Cookstown and Magherafelt

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Social Development the current number of people in housing stress in Cookstown District Council area and Magherafelt District Council area; and to outline the current Housing Association new build programme for these district council areas. (AQW 8511/08)

The Minister for Social Development: At 31 March 2008, the number of people in housing stress in Cookstown District Council area was 147 and in Magherafelt District Council the number was 310.

The tables below detail the social housing programme for each council area for the period 2007/08 to 2112/13. Those in 2007/08 have already started on site.

COOKSTOWN DISTRICT COUNCIL AREA

Provider	Location	Units	Need
2007/08			
Triangle	Old Rectory Park, Cookstown	3	General Needs
2008/09			
Habinteg	Ballyronan, Cookstown	7	General Needs
2011/12			
To be confirmed	Cookstown, South	25	General Needs
To be confirmed	Stewartstown, Cookstown	6	General Needs
2012/13			
To be confirmed	Cookstown North	10	General Needs
To be confirmed	The Rock, Cookstown	6	General Needs
To be confirmed	Cookstown South	25	Elderly

MAGHERAFELT DISTRICT COUNCIL AREA

Provider	Location	Units	Need
2007/08			
North & West	56 Highfield Road, Magherafelt	1	General Needs
North & West	31 Sunnyside Park, Maghera	1	General Needs
2010/11			
BIH	Magherafelt Town Phase 1	39	General Needs

Provider	Location	Units	Need
To be confirmed	Gulladuff	6	General Needs
To be confirmed	Knockloughrim	10	General Needs
2011/12			
To be confirmed	Bellaghy	10	General Needs
To be confirmed	Maghera	30	General Needs
To be confirmed	Swatragh	6	General Needs
North & West	Draperstown	12	General Needs
2012/13			
To be confirmed	Ballymaguigan, Magherafelt	6	General Needs
To be confirmed	Clady, Portglenone	6	General Needs
To be confirmed	Draperstown	18	General Needs
To be confirmed	Inishrush, Magherafelt	6	General Needs
To be confirmed	Magherafelt Town Phase 2	80	General Needs
To be confirmed	Magherafelt	25	Elderly
To be confirmed	Magherafelt	10	Young people/ care

Development Site at Foyle Street in Derry/Londonderry

Ms Anderson asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on her plans for the development site at Foyle Street in Derry/Londonderry, and what plans her Department has to utilize the new procurement guidelines as part of its redevelopment of this site. (AQW 8526/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The selected developer, Big Picture, is currently working with the Department's North West Development Office and DOE Planning Service to finalise detailed design proposals for the Foyle Street site. Construction work is expected to commence on site later this year/early 2009 following completion of a Development Agreement between the Department and the developer.

In relation to the application of the new procurement guidelines, the Department will dispose of this site to Big Picture, who will appoint a contractor to carry out the construction phase

of the project. Therefore the Department has no responsibility for procurement in this case.

Neighbourhood Renewal

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Social Development the outcome of the Equality Impact Assessment carried out in relation to the introduction of grading of posts as part of Neighbourhood Renewal. (AQW 8544/08)

The Minister for Social Development: Posts funded through the Neighbourhood Renewal Investment Fund are not subject to specific Neighbourhood Renewal grading arrangements.

Budget Allocation for Social Housing

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Social Development how the additional budget allocation for social housing has been spent, broken down by parliamentary constituency; and whether any of the money allocated for the building of social housing has been used for other programmes. (AQW 8546/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The additional £205m allocation for the Social Housing Development Programme will help deliver 5,250 new social houses over the next three years and none of this allocation has been diverted to other programmes.

Upper Long Streets Residents' Committee

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Social Development to explain why she has not met the Upper Long Streets Residents' Committee, which is a Constituted Housing Group, to discuss the proposed Urban Renewal Area Plan for that area. (AQW 8547/08)

The Minister for Social Development: I have already met with the Upper Long Streets Homeowners Association. I have not yet received a request for a meeting from the Upper Long Streets Residents' Committee. However my officials met with representatives from the group as recently as 19 June.

Peace III Applications

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development what plans she has to match fund community groups for Peace III applications. (AQW 8551/08)

The Minister for Social Development: DSD is the Accountable Department for Priority 2.1 of the Peace III Programme and will provide match funding through the Special EU Programmes Body for applications approved under this Priority.

North Down Alternatives

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development when she will consider funding for North Down Alternatives. (AQW 8587/08)

The Minister for Social Development: Northern Ireland Alternatives has submitted an application to my Department, for funding under the Neighbourhood Renewal Initiative. The application, which includes the organisation's North Down office, is currently under consideration.

North Down Alternatives

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development if she is aware that North Down Alternatives have met the Northern Ireland Office protocols. (AQW 8604/08)

The Minister for Social Development: Yes.

Action on Disability Project

Ms J McCann asked the Minister for Social Development what negotiations her Department has had with other Departments on the sustainability of the 'Action on Disability' project in the West Belfast constituency. (AQW 8655/08)

The Minister for Social Development: My officials met with 'Action on Disability' on 02 July 2008 to discuss future support for the project.

Local Postal Services

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Social Development what consideration has been given and what progress has been made by her Department to utilise the Post Office as a source, agency or outlet for the delivery of its services as outlined in the May 2008 report of the Assembly's Ad Hoc Committee, 'Report of the Committee's Consideration of, and Proposals for, Partnership that could Enhance the Economic Case for Viable Local Postal Services'. (AQW 8739/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The Ad Hoc Committee on Local Postal Services' Report made a number of recommendations to the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (DBERR) concerning the future of Postal Services and the Post Office network. Junior Minister Donaldson and Junior Minister Kelly wrote to Executive Ministers on 21 April asking them to consider whether any further public services could be delivered through post offices.

Within the Department for Social Development we have been unable to identify any further services that could be delivered through Post Offices at this time. We will continue to look at opportunities as

they arise to consider whether any new public service could be delivered through the Post Office although these would be subject to the appropriate competitive process in accordance with EU procurement policy.

New Housing Agenda

Dr Farry asked the Minister for Social Development for her assessment of the problems encountered in providing suitable public housing for persons in mixed marriages or relationships within a segregated system. (AQW 8815/08)

The Minister for Social Development: I have made the provision of more shared future housing a central theme of the New Housing Agenda. In addition to providing more shared future developments, I plan to extend the shared future concept to 30 existing neighbourhoods over the next three years and will announce details of this on 19th August.

I am encouraged by the number of neighbourhoods that have already expressed an interest in our plans and this housing will be enjoyed and welcomed by many, particularly those from a mixed marriage or relationship.

Warm Homes Scheme

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development what steps she is taking to encourage those people over 60 years of age and in receipt of benefits to have their homes upgraded under the Warm Homes Scheme. (AQW 8834/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The Warm Homes Scheme has in some ways been a victim of its own success as it is now oversubscribed. I have instructed Eaga to prioritise applications to ensure that those most in need get help first. Applicants aged 70 and over or those over 60 who have no central heating, solid fuel or Economy 7 heating will be treated as a priority. I am also keen to identify further ways to help those in greatest need this winter through the Fuel Poverty Taskforce I established in May. Based on the recommendations of the Task Force, I will seek Executive support, in Autumn, for a package of measures to assist the most vulnerable.

Winter Fuel Allowance

Mr P Maskey asked the Minister for Social Development if she will consult with the Minister of Finance and Personnel to consider increasing the winter fuel allowance for people aged 60-79 to match that awarded to people aged 80 years and over, given the rise in oil fuel heating. (AQO 4311/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The Winter Fuel Payment Scheme was introduced in January 1998

with the aim of providing specific help to those aged 60 or over with their winter fuel bills. In keeping with the principle of parity in social security matters the amount of the payment and the eligibility criteria are the same here as in Britain.

An additional £100 has been paid to those aged 80 or over since the winter of 2003/2004, as people within this age bracket are recognised as being more likely than younger pensioners to live on a lower income and to spend a greater proportion of that income on fuel.

I have no plans to write to the Minister for Finance and Personnel because this issue falls outside his remit. I have written, however, to James Purnell, the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, seeking a meeting to discuss the Winter Fuel Payment and the potential for further assisting those people in most need this winter.

North/South Co-operation

Mr Attwood asked the Minister for Social Development for an overview of the work she has been undertaking to promote North/South co-operation. (AQO 4234/08)

The Minister for Social Development: If there is to be the progress I want across the range of issues for which I am responsible, and indeed across the range of issues that face the Executive as a whole, it is vital among other things to learn from the experience of others.

That is why I place great importance on working with the Irish government where there are opportunities for mutual benefit through the sharing of lessons and experience. Opportunities through the workings of the North South Ministerial Council and the British Irish Council are important in helping to further this shared agenda.

In the coming weeks and months I look forward to a further round of engagement with my Ministerial counterparts in the Irish Government to discuss our common interests on matters like tackling disadvantage, the social and physical regeneration of communities and on practical responses to the housing crisis.

Reform of Liquor Licensing

Mr O'Loan asked the Minister for Social Development when she will bring forward proposals for the reform of liquor licensing. (AQO 4236/08)

The Minister for Social Development: I intend to bring policy proposals to the Social Development Committee for comment in September and to present a paper to the Executive for consideration as soon as possible thereafter.

Orange Community Network

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Social Development to outline her discussions with the Orange Community Network on 6 June 2008.

(AQO 4209/08)

The Minister for Social Development: My meeting of 6 June with the Orange Community Network and Brookmount Cultural and Education Society was an opportunity for the Orange Community Network to outline the work they have been engaged over the last two years and for me to hear, first hand, the positive impact the organisation has had on Brookmount Cultural and Education Society.

Unoccupied Homes

Mr Armstrong asked the Minister for Social Development the total number of empty homes and what action she is taking on this issue. (AQO 4300/08)

The Minister for Social Development: Following examination of the original figures it is now evident that there are approximately 20,000 empty properties, not the 40,000 first estimated. If we discount those going through the normal churn of the housing market that number reduces to 4,900. I have established a dedicated unit within the Housing Executive to identify just how many of these 4,900 homes could potentially be used. The staff are currently visiting many of these properties and tracing owners as part of our Action Plan to bring such homes back into the housing market. To help encourage owners to bring these empty homes back into use they will be subject to 100% rating liability from 1 April 2009, subject to the Assembly passing the proposed amended rates legislation currently being consulted on.

Housing Reallocation

Dr Deeny asked the Minister for Social Development to confirm whether letters of support from GPs and health professionals may accompany applications for housing reallocation on medical grounds.

(AQO 4277/08)

The Minister for Social Development: I can confirm that letters of support from General Practitioners and health professionals may accompany applications for housing reallocation on medical grounds but are not usually necessary.

Public-Sector Jobs

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the discussions she has had

with Sir George Bain on the relocation of public sector jobs. (AQO 4208/08)

The Minister for Social Development: I met with Sir George Bain on 12 June 2008 for a general discussion on the relocation of public sector jobs. I will be meeting with him again prior to the publication of his report.

Dunclug Action Plan

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Social Development to give an update on the timescale for the Dunclug Action Plan. (AQO 4284/08)

The Minister for Social Development: Phase One of the Housing Executive's work in Dunclug is scheduled to start in November 2008. The Housing Executive is finalising its plans for Phase Two, which will be completed by April 2010.

Affordable Housing

Mr Cobain asked the Minister for Social Development if she will explore with private developers the potential for an 'easy start' scheme for affordable homes, with 75% payable initially and 25% in ten years time through an interest free loan, similar to a scheme developed by Taylor Wimpey. (AQO 4207/08)

The Minister for Social Development: My officials are already exploring a range of developer led affordable housing opportunities with private developers. Schemes similar to those developed by Taylor/Wimpey are already available across a number of private developments in Northern Ireland.

Disabled Extensions in Ards Borough and Strangford Constituency

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development what steps she is taking to address the delay in disabled extensions in (i) Ards borough; and (ii) Strangford constituency. (AQO 4215/08)

The Minister for Social Development: Delays in disabled adaptation work are caused by the lack of suitable decant accommodation, issues associated with the planning process, and the availability of specialist contractors who can handle the work. The Housing Executive will seek to effectively manage its existing stock, to better facilitate those tenants affected by adaptations. It will also continue to liaise closely with the relevant Planning Offices in an effort to resolve the outstanding issues

Environmental Improvement Schemes in the Markets Area in Belfast

Mr A Maskey asked the Minister for Social Development to clarify the current position of proposed environmental improvement schemes in the Markets area, South Belfast. (AQO 4291/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The scheduled commencement dates for the Markets Environmental Improvement Scheme are detailed in the table below.

Scheme	*Estimated start date	Estimated Cost
Markets Phase 4 (project no.2636707)	Feb 2009	£827,000
Scheme includes Welsh Street, McAuley Street, Stewart Street and Eliza Street Close.		
Markets Phase 3 (project no. 2636685)	Jan 2010	£907,100
Scheme includes Friendly Street, Friendly Row, Friendly Way and Friendly Place		

Local Councils

Mr Kennedy asked the Minister for Social Development, in relation to her dealings with local councils, what assessment she has made of any loss of operational efficiency with a 15-council model compared to an 11-council model. (AQO 4206/08)

The Minister for Social Development: In July 2007 my Department assessed that, in addition to existing resources, carrying out urban regeneration and community development functions at local Government level would require an estimated additional 55 staff at a cost of £1,923k per annum in a 15 Council model as opposed to an additional 43 staff at a cost of £1,501k in an 11 Council model. This represents a difference of 12 staff and costs of £422k. Whilst the urban regeneration and community development functions transferring to Councils under Devolution remain largely unchanged, a more detailed analysis will be required to more accurately determine the extent of additional resources required, once the operational models for the new Councils are developed.

Any information held relating to housing functions to be transferred to Councils would no longer be relevant as there has been substantial change to those functions earmarked for transfer, following the work of the Executive Sub-committee on RPA.

New Housing Agenda

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister for Social Development what progress is being made on the Shared Future element of her new housing agenda. (AQO 4237/08)

The Minister for Social Development: As part of my New Housing Agenda, I have already made it clear that I want to deliver housing that brings people together rather than keeping them apart.

Over the next three years, in addition to identifying new shared future housing developments, I plan to roll out a Shared Future Neighbourhood Programme to 30 existing neighbourhoods and I will be announcing details of this when I launch this Programme on 19 August.

Funding for Urban Regeneration

Mr Poots asked the Minister for Social Development what funding is available for urban regeneration in the period of the comprehensive spending review. (AQO 4304/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The figures requested are as follows –

TABLE 1. URBAN REGENERATION FUNDING FROM 2008 TO 2011

	2008/09 £m	2009/10 £m	2010/11 £m
(i) Urban Regeneration	73.677	55.86	113.627

Social Housing in Rural Areas

Mr Burns asked the Minister for Social Development the steps she is taking to provide more social and affordable housing in rural areas. (AQO 4244/08)

The Minister for Social Development: I am particularly concerned about the lack of social and affordable housing in rural communities. I have been engaged in the Ministerial Sub-Group on Rural Planning and have been negotiating for a relaxation in the restrictions on social and affordable housing development on rural settlements. Good progress has been made and I am confident this will sustain and invigorate many rural communities.

ASSEMBLY COMMISSION

Staff Figures in Parliament Buildings

Mr K Robinson asked the Assembly Commission how many staff in total, including (i) civil servants;

(ii) Assembly secretariat staff; (iii) Assembly Members' staff; (iv) catering staff; (v) security staff; and (vi) ancillary staff, are employed in Parliament Buildings. (AQW 8183/08)

The Representative of the Assembly Commission (Rev Dr Robert Coulter): At 25 June 2008, up to a total of 735 staff were located in Parliament Buildings. I have attached details of the staff numbers by category as requested.

STAFF LOCATED IN PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

Category	Number
(i) Civil Servants (NICS employees)	7
(ii) Secretariat Staff	261
(iii) Assembly Members' staff:- Members' Support Staff	302
Party Support Staff	17
(iv) Catering (and cleaning) Staff	73
(v) Doorkeepers/Security Staff	58
(vi) Ancillary Staff TSO staff in Stationery Office	4
Assembly Broadcasting	11
Handymen / Contract	2

- (i) Civil Servants - staff employed and working for the NICS.
- (ii) Secretariat Staff – This includes staff employed by the NI Assembly Commission, staff seconded to the Assembly from NICS Departments, NIO and Agency workers. This figure does not include 48 Assembly Secretariat staff located in Annexe C.
- (iii) Assembly Members' staff - This includes:-
Members' Support Staff - work location is determined by the Member and can be in Parliament Buildings or the Constituency office or part time in each location.
Party Support Staff - work location is determined by the Party and can be in Parliament Buildings or a Party office or part time in each location.
- (iv) Catering Staff - Provided by Eurest and based in Parliament Buildings. The figure also includes cleaning staff.
- (v) Security Staff – There are currently 58 Doorkeepers/Security Guards in Parliament Buildings.
- (vi) Ancillary Staff - This has been taken to refer to non-Secretariat staff based in Parliament Buildings. There are four staff in the Stationery

Office (TSO), 11 in Assembly Broadcasting and two tradesmen from H&J Martin.

Team-Building Exercises

Mr Weir asked the Assembly Commission the total cost incurred by the Commission on away days or team-building exercises in each of the last five years.
(AQW 8474/08)

The Representative of the Assembly Commission:
In reply to your question the Assembly Commission has held a total of three planning events from their appointment on the 9 May 2007. The total cost incurred for these events was £4,587.37.

Security Review

Mr W Clarke asked the Assembly Commission what procurement and tendering process was used for contracts that were awarded in relation to the security review.
(AQW 8520/08)

The Representative of the Assembly Commission: The construction related work carried out following the review of security was managed by Properties Division, an agency within the Department of Finance and Personnel and was carried out under the terms of their measured term contract (MTC).

Specialist items that cannot be measured under the terms of the MTC contract are procured either from the Office of Government Commerce Buying Solutions (OGC) framework, as was the case for the prefabricated search hut or by means of specialist quotations through the MTC contractor. The upgrade of the public address system and the supply and installation of the hydraulic gates were procured by means of such specialist quotations.

The search equipment (x-ray scanners and magnetometers) were procured by means of an open tender exercise.

In furtherance of a recommendation contained in the security review a formal written service level agreement was entered into with the Police Service of Northern Ireland in order to provide security services to the Assembly.

The overall purpose of the agreement is to ensure a safe environment for Members, employees and the public.

Security Review

Mr W Clarke asked the Assembly Commission if an equality impact assessment was carried out in relation to the security review.
(AQW 8521/08)

The Representative of the Assembly Commission:
The Northern Ireland Assembly Commission submitted a draft Equality Scheme to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland on 14 February 2008 and this was subsequently approved on 27 February 2008.

Under the terms of the Equality Scheme the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission committed to undertaking a systematic screening process of all policies within the Assembly.

The initial screening process on policies has just been completed and a report will be presented to the Assembly Commission for approval in due course. The outcome of the process and the final report will be made available through a full public consultation with Members, staff and interested organisations. Included within this report will be a draft timetable outlining when the Assembly Commission proposes to undertake equality impact assessments that are determined necessary during the screening process.

In the meantime, if you wish to raise any particular concerns in relation to the implementation of the Security Policy, prior to the publication of this report, I would encourage you to provide further details and I can assure you that they will be fully considered.

The nominated official charged with the implementation and review of the Equality Scheme is:

- Mr T Logue
Clerk to the Assembly Commission
Room 107
Parliament Buildings
Stormont
Belfast BT4 3XX

Security Review

Mr W Clarke asked the Assembly Commission pursuant to AQW 7472/08, when the full costs of the implementation of the review of security and the proposed annual running costs will be made available.
(AQW 8522/08)

The Representative of the Assembly Commission:
The only areas where there remains dispute in respect of the costs are those associated with the construction elements of the security review. These work items were managed by Properties Division, an agency within Department of Finance and Personnel, and it is anticipated that negotiations with PD and the contractors will take place in the next few weeks.

The costs provided in AQW7472/08 are the current estimates supplied by PD and it is not expected that negotiations will result in any increase to these costs.

Security Review

Mr W Clarke asked the Assembly Commission when the increase in security, as part of the security review, will be reviewed. (AQW 8523/08)

The Representative of the Assembly Commission: All of the elements of the security review are kept under constant review.

The Assembly Commission receives regular feedback from the PSNI and all security measures are subject to change to meet an increase or decrease in the perceived threat.

Access to Parliament Buildings

Mr McKay asked the Assembly Commission what doors visitors and pass holders are allowed to use to access Parliament Buildings; and what plans there are to review these arrangements. (AQW 8579/08)

The Representative of the Assembly Commission: All Assembly pass holders can access Parliament Buildings through the east or west doors while Members can access the building through all doors.

Visitors pass through security at the search unit and then access the building through the front door. However, where a visitor is travelling with an upper car park permit holder (Member or senior management) they can access the building through the east or west doors.

Disabled pass holders and visitors are permitted access to the upper car parks and can enter the building through the east or west door.

In addition arrangements can be made for access at any time at the 'slope' entrance at the north side of the building. This is usually used at off peak times when the other doors are not open or by service personnel.

These arrangements have been in place since 16 April 2008 and are continually kept under review.

Office of the Clerk /Director General

Mr Attwood asked the Assembly Commission further to AQW 8554/08, if it considers that the head post in the Office of the Clerk /Director General is considered to be a new post and if so, if it will be filled by public recruitment. (AQW 8783/08)

The Representative of the Assembly Commission: You will recall that in response to AWQ 8556/08 I explained that a decision on the staffing structure within the Office of the Clerk/Director General had yet to be finalised. No decision has yet been taken as to whether there will be such a position as the Head of

the Office of the Clerk/Director General in the revised organizational structure.

Office of the Clerk/Director General

Mr Attwood asked the Assembly Commission further to AQW 8556/08 (i) when a decision of the staffing structure of the Office of the Clerk/Director General is anticipated; and (ii) if the Commission has agreed in principle, or senior management has recommended, that the position of Head of Office shall be recruited by (a) public competition; (b) internal competition; or (c) internal promotion.

(AQW 8785/08)

The Representative of the Assembly Commission: The Clerk/Director General will be seeking the views of the Commission shortly on the matter of a post of Head of Office of the Clerk Director General. No decisions have been taken or recommendations made on any recruitment methodology.

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Friday 1 August 2008

Written Answers to Questions

OFFICE OF THE FIRST MINISTER AND DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER

Hate Crime

Mr Elliott asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the action the department is taking to reduce the incidents of hate crime. (AQW 4967/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister (Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness): The Executive is committed to tackling hate crimes wherever and however they occur.

While criminal justice matters remain to be transferred, we will work closely with the police service and criminal justice agencies to tackle all aspects of hate crime.

We are engaged with a wide range of partners to tackle hate crime and its causes. We support actions including promoting respect for rights for people with disabilities, youth projects, community bonfire initiatives, flags protocols, conflict resolution, research and reducing sectarian and racist tensions by summer diversionary actions, maintenance of mobile phone network for interface workers. We also support groups working to help minority ethnic people and migrant workers integrate with host communities. We are also currently working on a strategy to deal with discrimination and hate crime on the basis of sexual orientation.

We will shortly bring forward detailed proposals for the ‘Programme of Cohesion, Sharing and Integration for a shared and better future’ which was detailed in the PfG. At the core of these proposals will be action primarily to tackle sectarianism, racism and intolerance. The programme will build on some of the excellent work, particularly at the local level, to address the challenges which local communities are facing.

Sexual Orientation Strategy

Dr Farry asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the development of a sexual orientation strategy. (AQW 8237/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: Officials are currently working on a draft Equal Opportunity and Anti-discrimination Strategy on Sexual Orientation to be presented to Ministers and the Assembly Committee for consideration in Autumn 2008.

Sexual Orientation Strategy

Dr Farry asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what plans it has to link the sexual orientation strategy with the programme for cohesion, sharing and integration. (AQW 8238/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: The Programme of Cohesion, Sharing and Integration (CSI) is currently being considered by Ministers and we plan to present our proposals in the near future. The CSI strategy for a shared and better future will deal primarily with sectarianism and racism. The strategy will however cover all groups in our society with an overarching aim to achieve a shared and secure future for all.

Post-Primary Transfer Arrangements

Dr Farry asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister for its assessment of whether matters relating to the issue of post-primary transfer arrangements are significant and controversial in accordance with Article 2.4 of the Ministerial Code. (AQW 8317/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: In relation to whether matters relating to the issue of post-primary transfer arrangements are significant and controversial in accordance with Article 2.4 of the Ministerial Code, we would refer you to the provisions of Assembly Standing Order 19(3).

In addition, the Minister of Education brought a paper to the Executive on a range of issues relating to post-primary transfer for consideration at its meeting on 15 May 2008. The Executive has not yet taken a decision on these issues.

Post-Primary Transfer Arrangements

Dr Farry asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what aspects of post-primary transfer arrangements need to be considered and

agreed by the Executive, on the basis of Article 2.4(v) of the Ministerial Code, given that the issue was not addressed within the Programme for Government.
(AQW 8318/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

In relation to whether matters relating to the issue of post-primary transfer arrangements are significant and controversial in accordance with Article 2.4 of the Ministerial Code, we would refer you to the provisions of Assembly Standing Order 19(3).

In addition, the Minister of Education brought a paper to the Executive on a range of issues relating to post-primary transfer for consideration at its meeting on 15 May 2008. The Executive has not yet taken a decision on these issues.

Employment Opportunities for People with Learning Disabilities

Ms S Ramsey asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what action it is taking to ensure that Departments and public bodies are providing equality of employment opportunity to people with learning disabilities.
(AQW 8397/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA 1995, as amended), requires all public authorities when carrying out its functions to have due regard to the need to:

- promote positive attitudes towards disabled people; and
- encourage participation by disabled people in public life ('the disability duties').

The DDA 1995, as amended, further required all public authorities, by 30 June 2007, to submit to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (ECNI) a Disability Action Plan showing how it proposed to fulfil these duties in relation to its functions. In support of this, each public authority is required to report on progress achieved to date (July 2007 to March 2008). ECNI has requested that this should be done via the Section 75 Annual Progress Report. This is currently being completed by all designated public authorities.

Further, Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 places a statutory obligation on all designated public authorities to ensure that they carry out their various functions having due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity across 9 social categories, including: persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation; men and women generally; persons with a disability and persons without; and persons with dependants and persons without.

The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland is required to keep under review the effectiveness of the duties imposed by Section 75, including the requirement to investigate complaints of failure to comply with Section 75; and, in certain circumstances, to make referrals to the Secretary of State.

As an employer, the Northern Ireland Civil Service is subject to the DDA 1995. In addition to its statutory objectives, it regularly reviews its employment policies and practices to ensure they provide equal opportunity for employment and advancement to all, including those with a disability. Departments make reasonable adjustments across the range of employment practices including recruitment and selection, training and development, and working arrangements, to ensure people with disabilities are not disadvantaged compared to non-disabled people. Such adjustments are agreed on a case by case basis to meet the specific needs of individuals, including those with learning disabilities.

Representation in EU Structures

Mrs Long asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the level and nature of representation of Northern Ireland within the various structures of the European Union, in addition to the three MEPs; and the level of engagement of Ministers of the Executive with the European Union in the last six months.
(AQW 8530/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: Northern Ireland's representation, excluding MEPs, within the European Union is:

European Body	Northern Ireland Representatives
Committee of the Regions	Councillor Edwin Poots MLA Councillor Lord Morrow MLA Councillor Sue Ramsey MLA* Councillor Bernice Swift
European Economic and Social Committee	Jane Morrice Michael Smyth

* Sue Ramsey has been nominated to replace Conor Murphy MP, MLA

The level of engagement of Executive Ministers with the European Union over the last six months is:

Date	Details
10 January	Minister Gildernew met with Commissioner Fischer Boel and President Barroso in Brussels.
14 March	Minister Gildernew met with Commissioner Fischer Boel in Brussels.
1 April	Minister Gildernew met with Commissioner Joe Borg in Brussels.

Date	Details
23 June	Minister Gildernew attended an Agriculture and Fisheries Council meeting in Luxembourg and met with Commissioner Vassilou.
24 January	Minister Dodds attended a reception to promote Aerospace NI in Brussels.
14 April	Minister Robinson and Commissioner Hübner launched the 2007-13 European Regional Development Fund Programmes in Belfast.
23 April	Minister Empey addressed the European Commission's Employment and Social Policy Seminar in Belfast.
5 June	Minister Empey delivered the opening address at the 5th Annual Anti-Discrimination Conference "Communicating Equality and Non-Discrimination in the EU" in Belfast.
9/10 January	First Minister and deputy First Minister met with President Barroso in Brussels to discuss the Commission's Northern Ireland Task Force. The visit also included meetings with Commissioners Hübner and Fischer Boel.
14 April	Commissioner Hübner formally launched the Northern Ireland Report of the Task Force in Belfast with the First Minister and deputy First Minister.
28 April	The First Minister and deputy First Minister in conjunction with the European Economic and Social Committee paid tribute to the PEACE Programme founders in the University of Ulster, Jordanstown. This event preceded an evidence gathering session by the EESC for an 'own initiative opinion' on the PEACE Programmes.

In addition, the Junior Ministers within OFMDFM have engaged with the European Union as follows:

Date	Details
9/10 January	Both Junior Ministers accompanied the First Minister and deputy First Minister when meeting President Barroso and Commissioners Hübner and Fischer Boel in Brussels.
14 March	Junior Minister Donaldson accompanied Minister Gildernew when meeting Commissioner Fischer Boel in Brussels.
2 April	Both Junior Ministers met with Commissioner Hübner in advance of the publication of the Barosso Taskforce report
14 April	Both Junior Ministers attended the formal launch of the Northern Ireland Report of the Task Force in Belfast with Commissioner Hübner.

Definition of Cohesion

Dr Farry asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what is its understanding of the concept of 'cohesion' within the context of the forthcoming programme for cohesion, sharing and integration. (AQW 8531/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: The Programme for Government's overarching aim is 'to build a peaceful, fair and prosperous society in Northern Ireland, with respect for the rule of law and where everyone can enjoy a better quality of life now and in years to come'.

In support of this aim one of PfG's cross cutting themes is 'A shared and better future for all with equality, fairness, inclusion and the promotion of good relations' as the watchwords for policies and programmes across government. The Programme of Cohesion, Sharing and Integration (CSI) will be the overarching strategy to provide a good relations, good race relations and racial equality policy context to achieve the aim.

Development of the CSI Programme is at an advanced stage and will be published for consultation as soon as possible. It will explain in more detail what we mean by the terms 'cohesion', 'sharing' and 'integration'. This Strategy aims to build on very significant work, which has been ongoing for a long time, to develop cohesion within and between communities to enhance the already growing mutual respect and to foster integration of new communities.

The terms are used in a manner fully consistent with their dictionary definition.

Definition of Sharing

Dr Farry asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what is its understanding of the concept of 'sharing' within the context of the forthcoming programme for cohesion, sharing and integration. (AQW 8532/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: The Programme for Government's overarching aim is 'to build a peaceful, fair and prosperous society in Northern Ireland, with respect for the rule of law and where everyone can enjoy a better quality of life now and in years to come'.

In support of this aim one of PfG's cross cutting themes is 'A shared and better future for all with equality, fairness, inclusion and the promotion of good relations' as the watchwords for policies and programmes across government. The Programme of Cohesion, Sharing and Integration (CSI) will be the overarching strategy to provide a good relations, good

race relations and racial equality policy context to achieve the aim.

Development of the CSI Programme is at an advanced stage and will be published for consultation as soon as possible. It will explain in more detail what we mean by the terms 'cohesion', 'sharing' and 'integration'. This Strategy aims to build on very significant work, which has been ongoing for a long time, to develop cohesion within and between communities to enhance the already growing mutual respect and to foster integration of new communities.

The terms are used in a manner fully consistent with their dictionary definition.

Definition of Integration

Dr Farry asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what is its understanding of the concept of 'integration' within the context of the forthcoming programme for cohesion, sharing and integration. (AQW 8533/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: The Programme for Government's overarching aim is 'to build a peaceful, fair and prosperous society in Northern Ireland, with respect for the rule of law and where everyone can enjoy a better quality of life now and in years to come'.

In support of this aim one of PFG's cross cutting themes is 'A shared and better future for all with equality, fairness, inclusion and the promotion of good relations' as the watchwords for policies and programmes across government. The Programme of Cohesion, Sharing and Integration (CSI) will be the overarching strategy to provide a good relations, good race relations and racial equality policy context to achieve the aim.

Development of the CSI Programme is at an advanced stage and will be published for consultation as soon as possible. It will explain in more detail what we mean by the terms 'cohesion', 'sharing' and 'integration'. This Strategy aims to build on very significant work, which has been ongoing for a long time, to develop cohesion within and between communities to enhance the already growing mutual respect and to foster integration of new communities.

The terms are used in a manner fully consistent with their dictionary definition.

Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration

Dr Farry asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what factors have contributed

to the delay in publishing a draft report of the programme for cohesion, sharing and integration.

(AQW 8534/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: We are now at an advanced stage of development of the detailed proposals for a 'Programme of Cohesion, Sharing and Integration for a shared and better future', which was signalled in the Programme for Government. The specific objective (PSA 7.5) commits us to implement the programme during this current year 08/09.

OFMDFM officials briefed the Committee of the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister on the position regarding development of the proposed Programme in early April. The consultation document will be put to the Committee of the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister shortly.

The new programme will tackle the complex and longstanding issue of sectarianism as well as the more recent issue of racism which is affecting both the established communities as well as new arrivals. It will build on the excellent work which is already being done, particularly by district councils and community organisations, to address the challenges which local communities are facing. Action to tackle sectarianism, racism and intolerance will be at the core of these proposals. As this policy is pivotal to achieving 'a peaceful, fair and prosperous society with respect for the rule of law' we are ensuring that the Programme proposals will contribute to this aim.

We have repeatedly stated our commitment to working towards building a society at ease with itself – a society that is integrated, cohesive and where everyone who lives here is regarded as of equal status and is treated as such – the new programme will work towards this.

Painting of Flags and Kerbstones

Dr Farry asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister for its assessment of the proliferation of flags and kerbstone painting during the summer on attracting investment to (i) Northern Ireland as a whole; and (ii) particular localities where the displays occur. (AQW 8709/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: Reports on the nature and quantum of flag flying in the summers of 2006 and 2007 were published by OFMDFM in January 2007 and March 2008 respectively. The research is currently being conducted on behalf of OFMDFM, by Queen's University of Belfast, for July and September of this year. The initial findings should be available in November 2008.

The public display of flags and emblems remains a very widespread issue. However, it is not possible to fully quantify the potential impact that the proliferation of flags and kerbstones painted during the summer has on the economy, or in particular localities where displays occur.

Deprivation and Segregation Linkage in Society

Dr Farry asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister for its assessment of the correlation between high levels of deprivation and poverty, and high levels of sectarian tensions and segregation in society. (AQW 8743/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: The Programme for Government recognises that continuing evidence of sectarianism; racism and intolerance are blights on our economic prospects and have a corrosive effect on our society. In order to achieve the PfG aim of “a peaceful, fair and prosperous society” it is the goal that “everyone can enjoy a better quality of life now and in years to come”

OFMDFM continues to be committed to addressing the issues of deprivation and poverty and of sectarian tension and segregation. The forthcoming Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration will set out proposals for good relations and good race relations

In addition, in line with the statutory commitment under Section 28 E of Northern Ireland Act 1998 the Executive Committee will shortly consider and agree the adoption of an overall strategy to tackle poverty, social exclusion and patterns of deprivation here based on objective need.

Relocation of Revenue and Customs Jobs

Mr McGlone asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what representation has been made to Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs in relation to the proposed downsizing and relocation of jobs from their offices in Craigavon, Newry and Banbridge. (AQW 8801/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: Changes to the HMRC estate are an internal matter for HM Revenue and Customs. However, following representations from local HMRC employees we have written to the Treasury Minister, the Rt Hon Jane Kennedy MP, raising their concerns.

Halloween Bonfire Complaints

Mr Moutray asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister how many complaints it has

received in relation to the possible adverse effect on community relations of Halloween bonfires in each of the last five years. (AQW 8807/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: The Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister has no record of any complaints relating to the possible adverse effect on community relations of Halloween bonfires.

Equality Legislation and the Right to Religious Expression

Mr Storey asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to his answer to AQO 4118/08, if it will consider amending all existing equality legislation to include guaranteeing the right to religious expression. (AQW 8823/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: There are no plans to amend current equality legislation to provide for such a right. The Human Rights Act 1998 provides certain rights in relation to freedom of religion and freedom of expression. In addition, considerable anti-discrimination legislation currently protects the right not to be discriminated against on the basis of religious belief.

Planning Appeals Commission

Mr Weir asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister how many cases were submitted to the Planning Appeals Commission on the grounds of non-determination in each of the last five years. (AQW 8828/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: The Planning Appeals Commission is a tribunal Non-Departmental Public Body. Given its independent tribunal status, it is appropriate for its Chief Commissioner to provide a response directly to you, and we understand she has written to you in the following terms:

“I have provided in the table below, figures for the intake of appeals which were submitted to the Planning Appeals Commission on the grounds of non-determination in each of the last five financial years.

Year	03/04	04/05	05/06	06/07	07/08
Appeals received	111	261	250	416	35

I would be happy to provide any further information you require arising out of this response or to meet with you to discuss the matter if that would be more suitable.”

Changing Times Stormont Magazine

Mrs D Kelly asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister how much money has been spent on the Changing Times Stormont magazine.

(AQW 8848/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

The Executive Information Service has not incurred any expenditure in relation to this document to date. However the indication is that the cost of the preparatory work is likely to be between £7,000 and £8,000. The exact figure has yet to be agreed with the service provider and we will be invoiced accordingly.

2008 Belfast Gay Pride Parade

Mr Kennedy asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister how much funding it is allocating to the 2008 Belfast Gay Pride Parade.

(AQW 8860/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

The Coalition on Sexual Orientation (CoSO) has contributed to the 2007 and 2008 Belfast Gay Pride Parade, awarding £5,750 and £5,000 respectively, from a short term fund of £230,000 which was awarded by the previous Direct Rule administration.

The broad purposes of the fund include improving community relations, helping build capacity, and helping others understand the issues faced by lesbian, gay and bisexual people, such as social exclusion and marginalisation. The Fund is administered by the Coalition on Sexual Orientation, an umbrella group for the sector.

Emerald Fund

Mr O'Loan asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister if it is encouraging Departments and their Agencies to seek funding from the Emerald Fund.

(AQW 8907/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

While we very much welcome the creation of the Fund, it is important to note that it would not be an additional source of funds that Departments can simply access to top-up public expenditure allocations contained in the Budget.

The precise operation of the Emerald Fund is still under development, but we understand that this could also include areas of infrastructure provision that fall within the private sector such as energy and telecommunications.

Emerald Fund

Mr O'Loan asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister if the Executive has taken a decision on the merits of Departments bidding for additional resources from the Emerald Fund.

(AQW 8908/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

While we very much welcome the creation of the Fund, it is important to note that it would not be an additional source of funds that Departments can simply access to top-up public expenditure allocations contained in the Budget.

The precise operation of the Emerald Fund is still under development, but we understand that this could also include areas of infrastructure provision that fall within the private sector such as energy and telecommunications.

Emerald Fund

Mr O'Loan asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister if it has issued guidelines to other Departments in relation to bidding for additional resources from the Emerald fund.

(AQW 8909/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

While we very much welcome the creation of the Fund, it is important to note that it would not be an additional source of funds that Departments can simply access to top-up public expenditure allocations contained in the Budget.

The precise operation of the Emerald Fund is still under development, but we understand that this could also include areas of infrastructure provision that fall within the private sector such as energy and telecommunications.

Planning Appeals Commission

Mr Shannon asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what action it is taking to expedite extensions and dwelling applications for disabled people, referred to the Planning Appeals Commission, to ensure that these cases are dealt with as soon as possible.

(AQW 8927/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

The Planning Appeals Commission is a tribunal Non-Departmental Public Body. Given its independent tribunal status it is appropriate for its Chief Commissioner to provide a response directly to you, and we understand she has written to you in the following terms:

“I have been asked to provide you with information requested in the above Assembly Question.

The Planning Appeals Commission deals with appeals in the order in which they are received. By adopting this approach it ensures that all appellants are treated equally and fairly. The procedures used by the Planning Appeals Commission are available via the Commissions website at www.pacni.gov.uk.

I would be happy to provide any further information you require arising out of this response or to meet with you to discuss the matter if that would be more suitable”.

Cost of Living Subcommittee

Mr Shannon asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister for its assessment of the role a Cost of Living Subcommittee would play in eradicating child poverty. (AQW 8931/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: We recognise that recent, well publicised increases in fuel and energy costs are having an impact on the cost of living for all of us. We also recognise that it is to be expected that those most vulnerable and less well-off in our society will feel the effects of these price increases more acutely.

The Executive will soon consider proposals in respect of its adoption of a strategy to tackle poverty and social exclusion and patterns of deprivation, in line with its statutory obligation. These considerations will take account of the recommendations of the OFMDFM Committee following its inquiry into child poverty here.

The proposals include the establishment of an Executive Sub-Committee to agree and monitor key actions in relation to poverty. These actions will be taken forward in a co-ordinated way across Departments to deliver our commitments within the Programme for Government, to eliminate poverty.

Within its considerations the Executive will look at any proposals to establish a sub-committee.

Mixed Workplaces

Dr Farry asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister the proportion of (i) Protestants; and (ii) people from mixed or other backgrounds, who would avoid working or applying for a job in an area perceived as Catholic/Nationalist, based on the Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey and other reports. (AQW 8951/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: In the results of the Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey, 9% of Protestants said that, if applying for a

job they would definitely avoid workplaces situated in a mainly Catholic area and a further 20% said that they would probably avoid such workplaces. The figures for Catholics who said that they would avoid workplaces situated in a mainly Protestant area were 9% (definitely) and 25% (probably).

It is not possible to provide figures for the second part of either of these questions because firstly, the number of respondents falling into the mixed or other background is too small for meaningful analysis.

Figures are available for those respondents who described themselves as having no religion; 3% within this group said that when applying for a job they would definitely avoid workplaces situated in a mainly Catholic area and a further 16% said that they would probably avoid such workplaces. The equivalent figures for workplaces situated in a mainly Protestant area were 3% and 5%, respectively.

We are unaware of any other reports that have specifically investigated the likelihood of the general public to avoid working or applying for a job in areas that are perceived to be Protestant/Unionist or Catholic/Nationalist.

Mixed Workplaces

Dr Farry asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister the proportion of (i) Catholics; and (ii) people from mixed or other backgrounds, who would avoid working or applying for a job in an area perceived as Protestant/Unionist, based on the Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey and other reports. (AQW 8952/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: In the results of the Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey, 9% of Protestants said that, if applying for a job they would definitely avoid workplaces situated in a mainly Catholic area and a further 20% said that they would probably avoid such workplaces. The figures for Catholics who said that they would avoid workplaces situated in a mainly Protestant area were 9% (definitely) and 25% (probably).

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We are unaware of any other reports that have specifically investigated the likelihood of the general public to avoid working or applying for a job in areas that are perceived to be Protestant/Unionist or Catholic/Nationalist.

Mixed Workplaces

Dr Farry asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister for its assessment of the desire for mixed workplaces, based on the Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey and other reports.
(AQW 8953/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: The Programme for Government commits us to “A shared and better future for all”. It also makes the commitment that “equality, fairness, inclusion and the promotion of good relations will be watchwords for all of our policies and programmes across Government”. It is our policy to promote a society that is integrated and one that is based on tolerance and respect for cultural diversity. Successful integration in the workplace would go some way toward achieving such a society.

Land and Property Vested at the Maze Site

Mr Gardiner asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail all the land vested in 1941 and 1942 by the Secretary of State for Air and administered by the then Northern Ireland Ministry of Finance, to build the airfield at Long Kesh/Maze, including (i) names of the previous owners; (ii) acreages vested; (iii) details and references of the land registry folios; (iv) the date of vesting; and (v) the compensation paid in each case.
(AQW 8976/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: Only limited information is available within the Department in relation to the land and property vested at the Maze/Long Kesh site. The majority of the detailed information requested is held at the Land Registry Office (LRO).

Folio No 28613 County Down contains the details of all registered and unregistered land vested between 7 October 1941 and 18 November 1942 to create the Maze/Long Kesh site.

Details of the previous owners, acreage vested, and compensation paid is held on the Land Certificates and Transfer Deeds which are available from the Land Registry Office (LRO) at a small cost. There were 48 vestings and upward of 56 transfer deeds involved in the process.

Concerning land vested after 1942, Folio No 29420 County Down and Folio No 30155 County Down respectively contains details of a north western corner

of the site acquired by the Ministry of Supply on 16 November 1950 and two very small pieces of land acquired by the Ministry of Supply in 1951.

All buildings and structures currently on the site form part of the vested property.

Some of the original land vested has been resold and Folio Numbers DN 62786, 29420 and 30155 County Down specify the current land holding for the Maze/Long Kesh site.

Land and Property Vested at the Maze Site

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(AQW 8977/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: Only limited information is available within the Department in relation to the land and property vested at the Maze/Long Kesh site. The majority of the detailed information requested is held at the Land Registry Office (LRO).

Folio No 28613 County Down contains the details of all registered and unregistered land vested between 7 October 1941 and 18 November 1942 to create the Maze/Long Kesh site.

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Some of the original land vested has been resold and Folio Numbers DN 62786, 29420 and 30155 County Down specify the current land holding for the Maze/Long Kesh site.

Land and Property Vested at the Maze Site

Mr Gardiner asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail any land vested by any Northern Ireland or Whitehall Government Department, subsequent to 1942, which was incorporated into the Long Kesh/Maze site, including (i) names of the previous owners; (ii) acreages vested; (iii) details and references of the land registry folios; (iv) the date of vesting; and (v) the compensation paid in each case.

(AQW 8978/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

Only limited information is available within the Department in relation to the land and property vested at the Maze/Long Kesh site. The majority of the detailed information requested is held at the Land Registry Office (LRO).

Folio No 28613 County Down contains the details of all registered and unregistered land vested between 7 October 1941 and 18 November 1942 to create the Maze/Long Kesh site.

Details of the previous owners, acreage vested, and compensation paid is held on the Land Certificates and Transfer Deeds which are available from the Land Registry Office (LRO) at a small cost. There were 48 vestings and upward of 56 transfer deeds involved in the process.

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All buildings and structures currently on the site form part of the vested property.

Some of the original land vested has been resold and Folio Numbers DN 62786, 29420 and 30155 County Down specify the current land holding for the Maze/Long Kesh site.

Land and Property Vested at the Maze Site

Mr Gardiner asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail all properties, with relevant folio references, which make up the entirety of the Long Kesh/Maze site.

(AQW 8979/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

Only limited information is available within the Department in relation to the land and property vested at the Maze/Long Kesh site. The majority of the detailed information requested is held at the Land Registry Office (LRO).

Folio No 28613 County Down contains the details of all registered and unregistered land vested between 7 October 1941 and 18 November 1942 to create the Maze/Long Kesh site.

Details of the previous owners, acreage vested, and compensation paid is held on the Land Certificates and Transfer Deeds which are available from the Land Registry Office (LRO) at a small cost. There were 48 vestings and upward of 56 transfer deeds involved in the process.

Concerning land vested after 1942, Folio No 29420 County Down and Folio No 30155 County Down respectively contains details of a north western corner of the site acquired by the Ministry of Supply on 16 November 1950 and two very small pieces of land acquired by the Ministry of Supply in 1951.

All buildings and structures currently on the site form part of the vested property.

Some of the original land vested has been resold and Folio Numbers DN 62786, 29420 and 30155 County Down specify the current land holding for the Maze/Long Kesh site.

Land and Property Vested at the Maze Site

Mr Gardiner asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail any facilities vested in 1941 and 1942 by the Secretary of State for Air and administered by the then Northern Ireland Ministry of Finance, to build the airfield at Long Kesh/Maze.

(AQW 8982/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

Only limited information is available within the Department in relation to the land and property vested at the Maze/Long Kesh site. The majority of the detailed information requested is held at the Land Registry Office (LRO).

Folio No 28613 County Down contains the details of all registered and unregistered land vested between 7 October 1941 and 18 November 1942 to create the Maze/Long Kesh site.

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All buildings and structures currently on the site form part of the vested property.

Some of the original land vested has been resold and Folio Numbers DN 62786, 29420 and 30155 County Down specify the current land holding for the Maze/Long Kesh site.

AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Biofuel Production

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what acreage of the total agricultural land available is under cultivation for bio-fuels and what does this represent as a percentage of the total available agricultural land. (AQW 8582/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew): In relation to liquid bio-fuel production, agriculture within the North is predominantly grass based, with only 3 per cent devoted to cereal and oilseed crops in 2007. However, areas of both cropping and oilseed rape have been considerably higher in the past than at present.

The last two Farm Census Surveys indicate that 470 hectares of oilseed rape was planted in June 2006 and this dropped slightly to 397 hectares in June 2007. A very small proportion of this will have been used for the production of bio-fuel and mainly used to fuel on farm vehicles.

Current market conditions are more attractive to the arable sector for the growing of cereal crops rather than energy crops.

In the absence of any significant change in land use patterns, the quantities of cereals and oilseeds grown in the North could not support significant biodiesel/ bio-ethanol production.

In relation to biomass production, DARD estimates that in the region of 800 hectares of SRC willow have been established. This represents less than 0.1% of the total available agricultural land.

Flood Defence Programme

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline her flood defence programme; how the programme will be extended over the next ten years; on what evidence her plans are based; and what budgetary provision she has made, or plans to make, to meet these obligations. (AQW 8596/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Rivers Agency's Flood defence programme within its current Business Plan includes the following main activities:-

- Undertaking a prioritised programme of viable capital works to provide accepted standards of flood protection;
- Planned inspection of all designated man made flood and sea defences and culverts;
- Assessment of the adequacy of rivers, streams and culverts to carry increased flows where new housing, industrial or commercial development is proposed;
- Emergency response to watercourse-related flooding incidents as part of co-ordinated Government response;
- The development of Asset Management Plans relating to the condition of culverts, flood defences etc.

The Agency has a detailed 5 year programme of Capital expenditure, with current funding at £6m, per year which contains projects associated with the main elements mentioned above. The Agency has a prioritised programme of capital works schemes which comprise River and Coastal Flood Defence, Drainage infrastructure and Repair Schemes.

The Agency's programme also encompasses broader Flood Management – the requirement for more sustainable approaches to managing flood risk. These include production of strategic Flood Mapping for use in the identification of areas at risk from flooding and, as a consultee of DOE Planning Service, the prevention of development taking place in such areas.

The EU Directive on the Assessment and Management of Floods (Floods Directive) has been adopted and is creating a significant impact and new obligations for Rivers Agency as the competent authority under the Directive as transposed in Northern Ireland. These include assessment of areas at risk of flooding, mapping and the production of Management Plans by 2015. This Directive is key to the future direction of the Agency's management of flooding and its constituent parts. Appropriate budgetary provision will be made to meet these obligations.

Environmental protection and adaptation to climate change are also important issues for the Agency in taking forward its flood defence programme.

Rural White Paper

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development when will she initiate the Rural White Paper and when will the consultation process be completed. (AQW 8668/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: On 24 April, the Executive agreed my proposal to develop a Rural White Paper. I am in the process of establishing a Rural Policy Committee, chaired by myself and made up of senior officials from all Departments, to develop the Rural White Paper. A new team is also being established in DARD to progress this important piece of work. I am also currently considering how best to involve stakeholders in the development of this paper.

Preparation of the paper will take time if we are to aim for a meaningful outcome, and it is my intention to produce initial proposals for the Executive by the end of 2008. If agreed, these proposals will then be developed during 2009 into a wide ranging Rural White Paper with subsequent full public consultation on the document.

Cycle Trail at Cairn Wood

Mr B Wilson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if the Forestry Service allows access to cyclists at Cairn Wood near Bangor. (AQW 8671/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: No access is permitted at Cairn Wood for cyclists. This is a small area of forest that has not been developed for cycling. Cairn Wood has not been considered suitable for development for cycling due to its small size, existing levels of public access, steep slopes and limited infrastructure.

Cycle Trail at Cairn Wood

Mr B Wilson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if she will direct the Forestry Service to investigate the possibility of providing a family cycle trail at Cairn Wood near Bangor. (AQW 8672/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: Considerable work has already been undertaken by interested parties and government agencies, including Forest Service, to establish a strategic approach to the development of off-road cycling, including the provision of family cycle trails.

This work has considered a wide range of factors relating to the suitability of sites for development. Family cycle trails have been constructed within three of the Department's forests, taking account of these factors, which offered sufficient scope to accommodate a suitable trail of reasonable length, whilst avoiding safety issues arising from steep slopes. Cairn Wood, due to its size and topography and lack of general infrastructure, is considered to be not suitable and Forest Service has no further plans for such provision.

Rural Childcare Opportunities

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what action she is taking to ensure that rural childcare opportunities are widely available across Northern Ireland. (AQW 8678/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: In July 2007 I initiated the Rural Childcare Stakeholder Group and was pleased to present its report "Rural Childcare, Investing in the Future" to the Ministerial Sub Committee on Children and Young People in March 2008. This Sub-Committee is considering the cross cutting recommendations of this report.

My officials are developing a Rural Childcare Programme to be open for applications before the end of 2008. This will be funded from the Department's budget for Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Measures.

Further childcare funding opportunities will be available from the NI Rural Development Programme, 2007-2013 under Axis 3 "quality of life in rural areas and diversification of the rural economy" measures. It will be open to the Local Action Groups in developing strategies for their areas to propose appropriate childcare measures.

Local Postal Services

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what consideration has been given and what progress has been made by her Department to utilise the Post Office as a source, agency or outlet for the delivery of its services as outlined in the May 2008 report of the Assembly's Ad Hoc Committee, 'Report of the Committee's Consideration of, and Proposals for, Partnership that could Enhance the Economic Case for Viable Local Postal Services'. (AQW 8690/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: The Ad Hoc Committee on Local Postal Services' Report made a number of recommendations to the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (DBERR) concerning the future of Postal Services and the Post Office network. Junior Minister Donaldson and Junior Minister Kelly wrote to Executive Ministers on 21 April asking them to consider whether any further public services could be delivered through post offices.

Within the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development we have been unable to identify any services that could be delivered through Post Offices. We will continue to look at opportunities as they arise to consider whether any new public service could be delivered through the Post Office although these would be subject to the appropriate NI procurement policy.

Grants to Assist the Farming Community

Mr Doherty asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (i) for an inventory of grants which are available from the Department to assist the farming community; and (ii) the purposes, objectives and eligibility criteria for these grants. (AQW 8802/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: A table listing the grants available to assist the farming community has been placed in the Assembly Library (subsidy schemes have been excluded from this information).

Safety on Farms

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what discussions she has had with Farmers' Unions to improve safety on farms. (AQW 8827/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: I have not had specific discussions with the Farmers' Unions regarding the improvement of safety on farms, because responsibility for farm safety lies with the Health and Safety Executive for NI within the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment.

I am however, very conscious of the risks and dangers faced by farmers as they carry out their work. Improving safety and preventing accidents on farm is included as an integral component of the further and higher education programmes delivered by my Department through the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise, (CAFRE).

Students enrolled on these programmes receive training in the safe use and operation of farm machinery, safe movement and handling of livestock, safe use of pesticides, emergency first aid procedures and safe lifting techniques.

CAFRE also offers a similar range of health and safety related training courses for farmers and family farm members. These courses are delivered at the CAFRE Campuses and at local outreach centres throughout the North.

Development Service of the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what strategies she is considering to encourage young people to stay at work on the farm. (AQW 8890/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: My Department, primarily through the

Development Service of the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE), provides support and assistance to those farmers of all age groups who wish to develop their farm business and secure their future in the industry.

CAFRE's team of Development Advisers, who are located throughout the North, work with farmers through delivery of tailored Development Plans for their businesses. Through this process, business objectives and development needs are identified and the appropriate support agreed. Development Advisers provide support to these farmers through delivery of:

- Benchmarking which enables farmers to compare their business / farm enterprise performance with other similar businesses.
- Knowledge and Technology Transfer – through a diverse range of projects, CAFRE encourages farmers to adopt world-class, leading edge technology.
- Training – CAFRE has developed a wide portfolio of short courses and *Challenge* programmes to meet the competence development needs of those within the industry.

For those young people wishing to pursue a career in farming, CAFRE also provides Further and Higher Education programmes in agriculture. Courses ranging from NVQ level 2 to Honours Degree level, (which is delivered in partnership with The Queen's University of Belfast), are available at CAFRE's Greenmount Campus in Antrim. The NVQ part-time programmes are also available at CAFRE's Enniskillen Campus.

As well as its considerable education programme, my Department offers financial assistance to new entrants to the farming industry. The New Entrants Scheme is open to young farmers under 40 who possess adequate competence and are setting up as head of holding for the first time. The scheme provides an interest rate subsidy on loans for eligible projects that add value and make a positive impact on the farming industry and the NI rural economy.

There are also a number of measures within the NIRDP which are designed to support farmers who wish to stay at work on the farm. For example, benchmarking, focus farms, and supply chain measures, as well as the reskilling/upskilling measure which has been aligned with the NIRDP.

Damage to Wind Turbines

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many wind turbines have broken and caused damage; and what steps she is taking to prevent further damage and possible injury. (AQW 8901/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: My Department provided financial assistance to 26 applicants to the Wind Energy for Rural Business scheme under the E.U. Programme for Building Sustainable Prosperity. I am very concerned that serious problems have occurred, primarily with regards to the make of turbine supplied to 11 of these applicants. It is my understanding that when damage to property was reported, the manufacturers of the machines in question immediately requested that all 11 applicants with these turbines cease to operate them until the problems were rectified.

I further understand that the manufacturer has committed to resolving the problems under warranty and that a test turbine has been installed with the aim of identifying and rolling out modifications, to all problem turbines. This has, regrettably become a protracted process.

While my Department has no legal standing in the contractual relationship between the supplier/manufacturer and the rural businesses, it is nevertheless keen to assist further, if possible, in helping to bring about a satisfactory resolution to this situation. To that end, a review has been commissioned, by the Department, to investigate the roles and responsibilities of all parties involved in the scheme, with the intention of identifying potential options for resolution.

As part of the review a professional engineer will be employed to assess technical aspects of the project, the compliance of parties to their contract obligations, and to provide advice on whether these turbines can be made operational.

It is intended that the review will report in September.

Sale of Crossnacreevy Site

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if she intends to proceed with the sale of the Crossnacreevy site, in light of its much reduced value. (AQW 8929/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: No final decision has yet been taken regarding the possible sale of the Crossnacreevy site. That decision will be guided by an overall assessment of the costs and benefits of re-locating the AFBI functions currently undertaken at Crossnacreevy, AFBI's future estate needs across its entire business and the possible proceeds from the disposal of the Crossnacreevy site. AFBI is currently developing a business case that will inform this assessment.

Crossnacreevy Site Devaluation

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what effect the reduced value of

the Crossnacreevy site will have on her budgetary plans. (AQW 8930/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: DFP has been advised that the sale of the Crossnacreevy site would be unlikely to generate a receipt of £200m in 2010/11 but there has been no amendment to the Department's budgetary plans to date. An assessment of the position of Departments in relation to Capital requirements and receipt targets is to be carried out in the context of a Strategic Stocktake in the autumn. This will consider the position at NI Block level and take into account the ten year ISNI programme of some £1,900m.

Crossnacreevy Site Valuation and Farmers' Grants

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development will there be any affect on the delivery of promised grants to farmers as a result of the devaluation of the Crossnacreevy site. (AQW 8932/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: There are no indications at this stage that there will be any effect on the delivery of grants to farmers. DFP has been advised that the sale of the Crossnacreevy site would be unlikely to generate a receipt of £200m in 2010/11 but there has been no amendment to the Department's budgetary plans. An assessment of the position of Departments in relation to Capital requirements and receipt targets is to be carried out in the context of a Strategic Stocktake in the autumn. This will consider the position at NI Block level and take into account the ten year ISNI programme of some £1,900m.

Pig Producers

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many pig producers were operating in each of the last 3 years. (AQW 8954/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Number of Pig Farms operating in the last 3 years

Year	Number of Pig Farms
2005	438
2006	452
2007	490

As most pig farmers only have one pig holding, the number of farms is a good approximation to the number of pig producers.

Pig Meat Imports

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how much pig meat was imported in each of the last three years. (AQW 8955/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development does not maintain this information centrally. Pig meat of EU origin can move freely between Member States. Information does exist in relation to imports from a Third Country direct to here. However, information does not exist in relation to indirect importations. This is due to the fact that once imports from countries outside the European Union enter through the Border Inspection Post (BIP) in any Member State, they are issued with a Common Veterinary Entry Document which permits them to move freely within the EU. Under EU Trade rules, these products are permitted to move freely within the EU.

Table A below details the imports of pig meat directly from Third Countries to here.

The Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board maintain figures for pig meat imports into the UK as a whole. These figures are detailed in Table B below.

TABLE A- PIG MEAT IMPORTED DIRECT FROM THIRD COUNTRIES.

('000 Tonnes)	2005	2006	2007	Jan-June 2008
	23.9	0.0	0.0	0.0

TABLE B- UK PIG MEAT IMPORTS

('000 tonnes)	2005	2006	2007	Jan-April 2008
	432.0	458.8	465.1	147.3

Source: Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board

Red Meat Imports

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how much red meat was imported in each of the last three years. (AQW 8956/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development does not maintain this information centrally. Red meat of EU origin can move freely between Member States. Information does exist in relation to imports from a Third Country direct to here. However, information does not exist in relation to indirect importations. This is due to the fact that once imports from countries outside the European Union enter through the Border Inspection Post (BIP)

in any Member State; they are issued with a Common Veterinary Entry Document which permits them to move freely within the EU. Under EU Trade rules, these products are permitted to move freely within the EU.

Table A details the imports of red meat directly from Third Countries to here.

The Livestock and Meat Commission monitor and maintain figures of beef imports to the UK. Similarly the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board maintain figures for lamb imports into the UK as a whole. The composite figures are detailed in Table B and C below respectively.

TABLE A –RED MEAT IMPORTED DIRECTLY FROM THIRD COUNTRIES

('000 Tonnes)	2005	2006	2007	Jan-June 2008
Lamb	2391.2	550.1	1,450.4	543.4
Beef	0.0	49.6	124.5	73.1
Venison	0.0	28.6	0.0	16.7

TABLE B- UK BEEF IMPORTS

('000 tonnes)	2005	2006	2007	Jan-April 2008
Total imports	239.9	235.7	238.3	79.2
from EU-27	176.4	180.1	184.8	62.9
from non EU-27	63.5	55.5	53.5	16.3
Main Sources				
ROI	136.5	145.0	145.9	48.7
Brazil	32.2	28.6	25.9	5.5
Other Sources				
Germany	9.2	11.0	12.9	3.9
The Netherlands	12.7	12.8	15.3	5.1
Uruguay	7.0	7.6	9.3	6.6
Australia	4.7	6.2	4.0	0.9
Namibia	5.9	3.5	4.8	**
Botswana	3.5	2.4	3.9	**
Argentina	9.1	5.0	3.5	1.7

Source: Meat and Livestock Commission

** No figures available

TABLE C-UK LAMB IMPORTS

('000 tonnes)	2005	2006	2007	Jan-April 2008
Lamb	110.1	113.8	114.1	44.7

Source: Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board

Sale of Red Meat

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what percentage of total meat sales has red meat sales represented in each of the last three years, and what steps are being taken to increase the sale of red meat. (AQW 8957/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: The most up to date information which DARD has available on meat sales relates to 2005. I can therefore provide the figures for 2005 and the two previous years. The value of red meat sold in the North as a percentage of the total value of all meat sold here in 2003, 2004 and 2005 was 58.5%, 57.3% and 58.7% respectively.

With regard to your point about increasing red meat sales, you should note that EU State Aid Rules place severe constraints on the use of Government funds for promotional activities, therefore DARD cannot provide direct funding for marketing or advertising of red meat in the North of Ireland.

The Livestock and Meat Commission (LMC) is responsible for the promotion of red meat in the domestic and export markets. Promotional activities aimed at the domestic market include; a press and television campaign highlighting the importance of red meat as part of a balanced diet; provision of advertising posters for butchers' shops and promoting Farm Quality Assured beef.

For the export market, the LMC is heavily involved in major international red meat trade shows, such as ANUGA in Germany and SIAL in France.

I understand also that Invest NI has developed a focused export trade model to target specific export markets and facilitate trade visits by red meat processing companies. Invest NI work closely with the LMC in delivering this initiative and have arranged trade missions to Italy, Sweden, Norway and Spain.

Loughs Agency (Employees)

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what action her Department is taking to bring about a resolution to the current industrial action which has been undertaken by Loughs Agency field staff. (AQW 8984/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: The Loughs Agency has advised that it has provided two proposals to Field Staff to address issues related to the current industrial action and met union officials on Tuesday 8th July 2008 to discuss these.

At that meeting it was agreed that the Agency would write to each of the field staff detailing these

proposals and their impact on each individual to enable full consideration to be given to them.

The Agency and the representatives of the field staff have agreed to meet again when the Trade Unions have consulted further with their members.

Loughs Agency (Employees)

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if Loughs Agency field staff are entitled to pay and conditions similar to those of the Northern Ireland Civil Service. (AQW 8987/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: The staff of the Agency are not NI Civil Servants and the Conditions of employment are different from those of the NI Civil Service.

At a meeting of the North South Ministerial Council, Foyle Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission Sector Meeting on 5th July 2000 it was confirmed that the pay of the staff of the Loughs Agency would continue to be linked to the appropriate pay scales in the NI Civil Service.

The July 2000 decision also confirmed the maintenance of the then conditions of employment, but agreed that these could be reviewed on completion of a staff review. The review of staffing was undertaken and implementation was completed in early 2007. At this point a review of the conditions of service of the Loughs Agency was implemented.

Loughs Agency (Employees)

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if she will include fisheries officers in the Loughs Agency on the list of employees who are entitled to an all hours worked allowance. (AQW 8988/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: The proposals which the Loughs Agency has made to recognise the unsocial hours worked by staff will apply to all of their field staff.

CULTURE, ARTS AND LEISURE

Paramilitary Murals

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what finance the Arts Council has made available to assist in the removal of paramilitary murals in estates in 2008. (AQW 8437/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr Campbell): On 10 July 2006 the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure launched the Re-imaging Communities Programme. The objective of the initiative was to help people feel part of and pride in the communities in which they live by enhancing the physical and natural environment and removing displays of sectarian aggression and intimidation from the public realm.

The Arts Council has allocated £750k from its Lottery budget to the Re-imaging Communities programme in the 2008/09 financial year. The funds are not simply for the removal of paramilitary murals, but include the replacement of these with artworks which express community pride and aspirations.

Paramilitary Murals

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much money the Arts Council set aside for the removal of paramilitary murals in the last 3 years. (AQW 8438/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The value of the Re-Imaging Communities programme is £3.3m over 3 years, 2006 to 2009. It includes a Lottery allocation of £750k from the Arts Council of Northern Ireland.

The Arts Council allocation will be awarded in full in July 2008.

The funds are not simply for the removal of paramilitary murals, but include the replacement of these with artworks which express community pride and aspirations.

Promoting Interest in Genealogy

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what action he is taking to promote interest in genealogy, especially for people from the USA, Canada, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand. (AQW 8439/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: A major project the Electronic Catalogue for Northern Ireland [eCATNI], to make the detailed catalogues of the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI) available and searchable on-line will be available by the end of this year; this will open up PRONI's archives to a world-wide audience and particularly for genealogical research.

In addition, PRONI has re-designed its website which now includes specific pages on genealogy to guide the overseas visitor to the archives available in PRONI for genealogical research as well as lots of

helpful advice to potential customers wanting to use the archives in PRONI.

In addition, PRONI has re-designed its website (launched in January 2008) which now includes specific pages on genealogy to guide the overseas visitor to the archives available in PRONI for genealogical research. It also has lots of helpful advice to potential customers wanting to use the archives in PRONI as well as details of our enquiry service which makes PRONI more accessible to overseas enquirers.

PRONI's Public Service Agreement targets include the production of databases to a wide range of archives that will assist overseas customers to access the wealth of archival resources held in PRONI.

A number of overseas engagements in recent times have provided unique opportunities to promote interest in genealogy including the Smithsonian Folklife Festival in Washington DC last year.

Bookstart Scheme

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure the percentage uptake of the Bookstart Scheme to date; what plans his Department has to improve the uptake of the scheme; and how the scheme can play a role in raising literacy standards. (AQW 8557/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: My Department provided additional funding of £312k in March 2008 for the marketing, support and distribution of Bookstart packs. The Education and Library Boards purchased enough Baby packs and Bookstart Treasure Chests to enable 100% coverage across Northern Ireland in 2008/09 for both schemes. I understand that Bookstart Plus is delivered in partnership with Surestart, in selected areas, with Surestart funding.

I understand that DE is currently reviewing its literacy and numeracy strategies which will include the promotion of reading materials for pre-school children. DCAL can make a positive contribution to improving pre-school children's literacy through its network of public libraries and will continue to support the Department of Education, as lead Department, in progressing this aim.

Research evidence shows children who have been introduced to books from an early age attain higher literacy standards by the time they reach school age. The Bookstart scheme promotes early language development and a love of books by encouraging parents to share books with their children.

Northern Ireland Events Company

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to the answer to AQW 2449/08, when his department was made aware of discrepancies in PAYE, National Insurance, and VAT payments at the Northern Ireland Events Company; and to outline what action officials took as a result. (AQW 8619/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The draft independent review report of the circumstances involved in the deficit at the Northern Ireland Events Company contains a number of matters of some public concern. Although, there is no specific reference to discrepancies in PAYE, National Insurance and VAT payments within the Company, reference is made to a then ongoing VAT inspection and the requirement by Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs to clarify certain information. The Department has only subsequently been made aware of possible VAT issues within the Company.

Northern Ireland Events Company

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to the answer to AQW 2452/08, what the extent of the Northern Ireland Events Company overspend was at the end of the 2005-06 financial year; and to outline what action was taken by departmental officials as a result of that overspend. (AQW 8620/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: In November 2006, the Department received Northern Ireland Events Company accounts for 2005-2006 showing net current liabilities at 30 March 2006 of £88,763. This figure was arrived at by deducting the amount owed to creditors (£631,302) from current assets (stated as £542,211). Departmental officials examined the accounts and no action was deemed to be necessary.

KPMG were commissioned by the Department to carry out a comprehensive review of all the circumstances surrounding the deficit accumulated by the Company. This review has identified a different deficit figure for that period. As these are matters of a sensitive legal and financial nature, I am unable to comment further in order to avoid prejudicing further investigations.

Northern Ireland Events Company

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to the answer to AQW 2410/08, to provide full details of the work undertaken by accountants Finnegan and Gibson during their visit to the offices of the Northern Ireland Events Company

for a period of three days, and then for a further period of five days, during the 2006-07 financial year. (AQW 8621/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I have been informed by the Northern Ireland Events Company that its accountants, Finegan Gibson, visited its premises during 2006-2007 to carry out fieldwork on the audit of the Company's accounts for year ending 31 March 2007.

KPMG were commissioned by the Department to carry out a comprehensive review of all the circumstances surrounding the deficit accumulated by the Company. This report contains matters of a sensitive legal and financial nature. I am unable to comment further on this matter in order to avoid prejudicing further investigations.

Appointment of the Chairman for Sport NI

Lord Browne asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure when he intends to announce the appointment of the Chairman for Sport NI. (AQW 8684/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The appointment process for the position of Chair of Sport Northern Ireland is ongoing and I would hope to make an announcement in the near future.

Windsor Park

Lord Browne asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure if future Northern Ireland soccer matches are to be played at a venue other than Windsor Park; what are the consequences for the agreement between the Irish Football Association and Linfield Football Club; and who would be responsible for any financial compensation to Linfield Football Club. (AQW 8685/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The Irish Football Association (IFA) is responsible for determining the venue at which Northern Ireland home international soccer matches are to be played. The consequences for the agreement between the IFA and Linfield FC over the staging of such matches at a venue other than Windsor Park are for the IFA and Linfield to decide in the first instance. The question of financial compensation to Linfield FC, if due, would be a matter for the IFA in the first instance.

2012 Olympics

Lord Browne asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure if any of the existing Irish League soccer

grounds meet the criteria to host the 2012 Olympics soccer games. (AQW 8686/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: No existing Irish League soccer grounds meet the criteria set by the International Olympic Committee to host soccer games at the 2012 Olympics.

2012 Olympics

Lord Browne asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what assessment he has made of the financial viability of bringing an Irish League Club ground up to the standard to meet the criteria for hosting soccer games in the 2012 Olympics. (AQW 8687/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The only stadium which is presently under consideration for hosting soccer games in the 2012 Olympics is the proposed multi-sports stadium. No assessment has therefore been made of the financial viability of bringing other grounds up to the standard required for the 2012 Olympics.

Local Postal Services

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what consideration has been given and what progress has been made by his Department to utilise the Post Office as a source, agency or outlet for the delivery of its services as outlined in the May 2008 report of the Assembly's Ad Hoc Committee, 'Report of the Committee's Consideration of, and Proposals for, Partnership that could Enhance the Economic Case for Viable Local Postal Services'. (AQW 8691/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The Ad Hoc Committee on Local Postal Services' Report made a number of recommendations to the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (DBERR) concerning the future of Postal Services and the Post Office network. Junior Minister Donaldson and Junior Minister Kelly wrote to Executive Ministers on 21 April asking them to consider whether any further public services could be delivered through post offices.

DCAL indicated that it currently sells angling permits through a distribution network including fishing tackle shops, hotels and tourist information outlets. While there are no obstacles to Post Offices selling DCAL permits or FCB and Loughs Agency angling licences, to replace the current distribution network would require careful consideration and planning. It may be more appropriate to strategically identify where there are geographical gaps in the current distribution network and consider distributing permits and licenses through Post Offices in those areas. The planned transfer of

the FCB functions to the Department (early 2009) will provide an opportunity to review the distribution systems with regards to both licenses and permits.

Ulster-Scots Academy

Mr Bresland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what financial assistance has been provided to the Ulster Scots Academy in each of the last three financial years. (AQW 8734/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Funding granted to the Ulster Scots Academy is as listed below:

2005/06	£134,413
2006/07	£392,412
2007/08	£405,189

Departmental Funding to Sports Clubs

Mr Bresland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what financial assistance has been provided to Cricket, the Gaelic Athletic Association, Hockey and Football in each of the last three financial years, broken down by (i) district council area; and (ii) club. (AQW 8735/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Sport Northern Ireland (SNI) is responsible for the development of sport in Northern Ireland including the distribution of funding. The tables below detail the amount of exchequer and lottery funding awarded to Cricket, the Gaelic Athletic Association, Hockey and Football in each of the last three financial years broken down by district council area and club.

2005/2006

Club	Award Amount (£)	District / Council	Sport	Funding Programmes
St John's GAC	108,183	Down	Gaelic Sports	Lottery\ Capital\ Club Sport
Steelstown GAC	225,000	Derry	Gaelic Sports	Lottery\ Capital\ Building Sport
Cliftonville FC	800,000	Belfast	Association Football	Facilities\ Stadia Safety Programme

2006 / 2007

Club	Award Amount (£)	District / Council	Sport	Funding Programmes
Ballymena United FC	168,326	Ballymena	Association Football	Facilities/Stadia Safety Programme
Ards FC	458	Ards	Association Football	Facilities/Safety Management Programme
Cliftonville FC	4,023	Belfast	Association Football	Facilities/Safety Management Programme
Armagh City FC	3,365	Armagh	Association Football	Facilities/Safety Management Programme
Glentoran FC	11,706	Belfast	Association Football	Facilities/Safety Management Programme
Newry City FC	2,179	Newry & Mourne	Association Football	Facilities/Safety Management Programme
Dungannon Swifts FC	2,402	Dungannon	Association Football	Facilities/Safety Management Programme
Portadown FC	4,995	Armagh	Association Football	Facilities/Safety Management Programme
Linfield FC	11,628	Belfast	Association Football	Facilities/Safety Management Programme
Enniskillen Gaels GAA	407,572	Fermanagh	Gaelic Sports	Facilities/Safety Management Programme
Donegal Celtic FC	3,150	Belfast	Association Football	Facilities/Safety Management Programme
Crusaders FC	2,134	Belfast	Association Football	Facilities/Safety Management Programme

2007 / 2008

Club	Award Amount (£)	District / Council	Sport	Funding Programmes
Kickhams Creggan GAC	240,000	Antrim	Gaelic Sports	Lottery/Capital/Building Sport
Lisnaskea Emmetts GAC	220,000	Fermanagh	Gaelic Sports	Lottery/Capital/Building Sport
Bready Cricket Club	1,817,451	Strabane	Cricket	Lottery/Capital/Building Sport
St Mary's GAC	235,000	Derry	Gaelic Sports	Lottery/Capital/Building Sport

Club	Award Amount (£)	District / Council	Sport	Funding Programmes
Portadown FC	800,900	Craigavon	Association Football	Facilities/Stadia Safety Programme
Linfield FC	4,425	Belfast	Association Football	Facilities/Safety Management Programme
Cliftonville FC	900	Belfast	Association Football	Facilities/Safety Management Programme
Donegal Celtic FC	938	Belfast	Association Football	Facilities/Safety Management Programme
Na Magha Hurling Club	238,274	Derry	Gaelic Sports	Lottery/Capital/Building Sport
Newry Olympic Hockey Club	200,000	Newry & Mourne	Hockey	Exchequer/Capital/Building Sport
St Colmcille's GAC	245,000	Armagh	Gaelic Sports	Exchequer/Capital/Building Sport
Waringstown Cricket Club	40,000	Craigavon	Cricket	Exchequer/Capital/Building Sport
St Colm's GAC	100,000	Derry	Gaelic Sports	Exchequer/Capital/Building Sport
O'Brien's GAC	245,000	Derry	Gaelic Sports	Exchequer/Capital/Building Sport

Northern Ireland Athletes

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what discussions he has held, or intends to hold, with the Great Britain Olympics Organisation to ensure that athletes from Northern Ireland can compete with the British team at the Olympic Games. (AQW 8750/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Responsibility for ensuring Northern Ireland athletes can compete for the Great Britain team rests, in the first instance, with the relevant sports governing bodies and the British Olympic Association (BOA). I would support any opportunities provided by the relevant sports governing bodies and the BOA to assist Northern Ireland athletes in qualifying and competing for the Great Britain Team at the Olympic Games.

Sports Events in Northern Ireland

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what action his Department has taken to attract sporting events to Northern Ireland, given the impact that this would have on tourism.

(AQW 8776/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

The promotion of sporting events is primarily the responsibility of the governing bodies of sport. However, it is consistent with the commitment of Government, through the draft Northern Ireland Strategy for Sport and Physical Recreation 2008-2018 produced by the Department and Sport Northern Ireland, to establish Northern Ireland as a world class venue for sporting events. The contribution to tourism of sport, including sporting events, emerged as an important issue in the development of the draft Strategy.

The Department's Events Unit operates two grant funding programmes for events which: impact positively on the image of Northern Ireland, in particular its external image, create opportunity for social cohesion and bring direct and indirect benefits to Northern Ireland.

2008 Belfast Gay Pride Parade

Mr Kennedy asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much funding his Department is allocating to the 2008 Belfast Gay Pride Parade.

(AQW 8861/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: My Department has not allocated any funding to the 2008 Belfast Pride Parade.

From 1 April 2008 the delivery of the Community Festivals Fund was devolved to Local Authorities and festival organisers may apply to their local council for support.

The Northern Ireland Strategy for Sport and Physical Recreation 2007-2017

Dr Farry asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for his assessment of the desire for mixed leisure and sporting activities, based upon the Northern Ireland Life and Times Surveys and other reports.

(AQW 8866/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The findings of the Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey in respect of the desire for mixed leisure and sporting activities is consistent with the proposals for the future development of sport and physical recreation in Northern Ireland set out within the recently published

draft of "The Northern Ireland Strategy for Sport and Physical Recreation, 2007-2017". This draft Strategy was developed by the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure in partnership with Sport Northern Ireland. It contains a number of proposals that are designed to promote and encourage community cohesion and community integration in sport and physical recreation in Northern Ireland.

Halloween Bonfires

Mr Moutray asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how many complaints his Department has received in relation to the negative contribution to cultural expression of Halloween bonfires, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 8906/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The Department has received no complaints in relation to the negative contribution to cultural expression of Halloween bonfires in each of the last five years.

Ulster Grand Prix

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for his assessment of the success of the Ulster Grand Prix and the value of the funding provided from his Department.

(AQW 8945/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I recognise that the Ulster Grand Prix annual road race is one of the most important road races in the Northern Ireland motor sports' road race calendar. Sport Northern Ireland (SNI) is responsible for the development of sport in Northern Ireland including the distribution of funding. SNI has provided the Ulster Grand Prix, via the 2 & 4 Wheel Motor Sport Steering Group Ltd, with an Exchequer award of £10,186. This will assist the organisers of the race implement essential safety improvements for the 2008 event.

The Ulster Grand Prix submitted an application to the Major Events Fund requesting £70,000. The application was assessed by DCAL Events Unit. The event scored 43.7% exceeding the required 40% threshold to permit funding. The Ulster Grand Prix submitted a detailed development plan prepared in partnership with Lisburn City Council. The internal assessment of the potential economic benefit of the event was estimated at £5.13 to every £1 of public sector investment.

The Grant Approval Panel, comprising two senior Departmental officials and an independent member from the NI Tourist Board met on the 18th June and agreed that an offer of £40,000 on a revenue basis to support specific costs related to the preparation of the venue and the marketing of the event.

Architecture and the Built Environment Ministerial Advisory Group

Mr Newton asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the remit of the Architecture and the Built Environment Ministerial Advisory Group in terms of planning applications; and if it is within the remit of the advisory group to offer advice to Planning Service on planning applications. (AQW 8989/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The policy on 'Architecture and the Built Environment for Northern Ireland' (A+BE policy) published in June 2006 made provision for the establishment of a Ministerial Advisory Group (MAG) to advise the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure on the implementation and development of the A+BE policy. In August 2007 the Minister announced the appointment of the chair and eight members of MAG. The A+BE policy provides MAG with the remit to offer advice to Planning Service on planning applications. It is also written into the Terms of Appointment that MAG shall review design aspects of significant projects including projects referred by Planning Service for comment.

Architecture and the Built Environment Ministerial Advisory Group

Mr Newton asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how many members of the Architecture and the Built Environment Ministerial Advisory Group were invited to the meeting of the group on 18 April 2008; how members were notified of the meeting; and why less than half of the members of the group were present at the meeting. (AQW 8990/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The purpose of the meeting on 18 April 2008 was to carry out design reviews of two separate applications for planning approval. The first, a tall building proposal was reported to MAG members in December 2007. In February 2008 MAG members agreed to set up a subgroup to consider that scheme and to make a request to view the plans for a second scheme involving another tall building and to consider it alongside the first. The intention was that the subgroup should form the panel that would review the design of both schemes. Initially the proposed panel consisted of five, the chair and four members of MAG. The date was agreed and an open invitation issued to the three remaining MAG members but none accepted (At that time there was one vacancy in the MAG membership). Subsequently, one member of the proposed panel declared a conflict of interest in relation to one scheme which resulted in that member not attending either of the two reviews. As a result the

chair and three members of MAG attended the meeting on 18 April 2008.

Architecture and the Built Environment Ministerial Advisory Group

Mr Newton asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure under what guidelines or constitution the Architecture and the Built Environment Ministerial Advisory Group operates. (AQW 8991/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The MAG operates within a mandate which is detailed in the Terms of Appointment (TOA). The TOA specifies the terms of appointment for the chair and members of MAG. The TOA incorporates procedures and operational guidelines as well as advice on public service standards of conduct and behaviour. A copy of the TOA is attached for the Member's convenience.

Appendix A

Architecture and the Built Environment for Northern Ireland Ministerial Advisory Group

Terms of Appointment

Mandate The Architecture and the Built Environment - Ministerial Advisory Group for (A+BE MAG) shall:

- 1.01 Advise the Ministerial Design Champion and the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) on the implementation and development of the policy on Architecture and the Built Environment for Northern Ireland (A+BENI) published in June 2006. DCAL is the sponsor Department;
- 1.02 Champion good design in all sectors of the built environment and challenge accepted guidance, policy and standards relevant to design, which are considered to fall short of expectations;
- 1.03 Collaborate with key stakeholders in the development of knowledge and skills concerning design of the built environment. Facilitate good design by disseminating research evidence, information and advice to those in the public and private sectors who have a role in the procurement and delivery of construction projects;
- 1.04 Help give effect to A+BENI policy objectives in the public interest whilst working within the policy and statutory framework and acting with professional integrity;
- 1.05 Review design aspects of significant projects including projects referred by the Planning Service for comment; and

- 1.06 Review the implementation of A+ BENI policy objectives. Through consultation with stakeholders assess its impact on design quality. Produce an annual report which incorporates evidence of progress and other relevant findings.
- 2.0 Aspirations** The A+BE MAG shall seek to:
- 2.01 Establish a reputation as a respected source of advice on architecture and built environment issues pertinent to Northern Ireland;
- 2.02 Win recognition as a champion for good design whilst encouraging developers and policy makers to raise design standards in an ongoing way;
- 3.0 Membership and Appointments**
- 3.01 The A+BE MAG shall consist of a Chair and up to 8 members appointed by the Minister for DCAL in accordance with the guidelines set out in the Commissioner for Public Appointments for Northern Ireland Code of Practice.
- 3.02 Appointments shall be for a term of 3 years with an option - dependent on satisfactory performance - for a further term of no greater than 3 years which shall be specified at the time of reappointment.
- 3.03 The post requires an average input of up to 2 days per month depending on business needs.
- 3.04 Appointments to fill interim vacancies shall be for the unexpired portion of the vacant post.
- 3.05 The Chair shall receive an annual fee of £6,000 from the Department.
- 3.06 The posts of member of the A+BE MAG are unremunerated.
- 3.07 Departmental procedures for appraising the performance of appointees apply.
- 3.08 Reasonable travelling and subsistence expenses incurred through carrying out official duties and certain dependant carer expenses determined in accordance with the Northern Ireland Civil Service Handbook shall be reimbursed by the Department.
- 4.0 Procedures and Operational Guidelines**
- 4.01 The A+BE MAG shall meet quarterly. In the absence of the Chair the members of the Group shall agree for one of the members to deputise as Chair as a temporary measure. If the Chair or a member does not attend 2 consecutive meetings, his/her appointment shall be reviewed by the Department.
- 4.02 Design Review panels shall be chaired by either Chair or member of the A+BE MAG. The proceedings and recommendations shall be recorded.
- 4.03 Procedures are built into the appointments process to identify, discuss and record any real or perceived conflict of interest. Thereafter each member must declare any personal or business interests including any private, voluntary, charitable or political interest which might be material and relevant to the work of the A+BE MAG and which may, or may be perceived to, influence their judgement in performing their functions. Any conflict of interest whether real or perceived must be dealt with appropriately. These interests shall be recorded in a register of interests maintained and kept up-to-date by the A&BE MAG. Such procedures apply routinely to Design Review sessions and likewise any conflict of interest real or perceived shall be dealt with appropriately and documented.
- 4.04 Task groups chaired by members of the A+BE MAG shall provide advice in specific areas for example public housing, sustainable development or urban regeneration. Individuals with specialist expertise and experience drawn from a Call-off List shall support and contribute to the work of the A+BE MAG.
- 4.05 All formal meetings including sub-committee meetings are required to have an agenda and shall be recorded to include where appropriate review of action items, those responsible and the date action is completed. Design Review sessions shall be recorded to include all relevant issues, opinion and recommendations.
- 4.06 The Chair shall report regularly or on request to the Department.
- 4.07 The Department's Press office will be available to assist the A+BE MAG in all requests for press statements and media interviews.
- 4.08 Where authorised by the Department, costs associated with the activities of A+BE MAG will be paid by the Department.
- 5.0 Public Service Standards of Conduct and Behaviour**
- 5.01 The Chair and members must be seen to act in the public interest at all times. Their conduct and behaviour must be beyond reproach. The Chair and members must be committed to the principles defined in the

first report of the Committee on Standards in Public Life published in 1995.

- 5.02 Compliance with these principles requires holders of public office to:
1. **Selflessness** Take decisions solely in terms of the public interest. They should not do so in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family or their friends;
 2. **Integrity** Not place themselves under any financial or other obligation to outside individuals or organisations that might influence them in the performance of their official duties;
 3. **Objectivity** In carrying out public business, including making public appointments, awarding contracts, or recommending individuals for rewards and benefits, make choices on merit;
 4. **Accountability** Submit themselves to whatever scrutiny is appropriate to their post because they are accountable to the public for their decisions and actions;
 5. **Openness** Be as open as possible in the decisions they make and actions they take. They should give reasons for their decisions and restrict information only when the wider public interest clearly demands;
 6. **Honesty** Because they have a duty to declare any private interests relating to their public duties, take steps to resolve any conflicts arising in a way that protects the public interest; and
 7. **Leadership** Promote and support these principles by leadership and example.
- 5.03 The requirement for probity applies equally to the Chair and Members of the A+BE MAG as well as those who are drawn from the Call-off List when participating in Design Review panels or contributing to the work of task groups.

EDUCATION

Ballywalter Primary School

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Education to give a timescale within which the replacement of Ballywalter Primary School will commence.

(AQW 6065/08)

The Minister of Education (Ms Ruane): Following a request from the South Eastern Education and Library Board, a site visit was undertaken by the Department's technical advisors in 2007 and Ballywalter Primary was identified as having significant accommodation deficiencies. Earlier this month, the Department agreed the appraisal submitted by the South Eastern Education and Library Board for a new school on an alternative site.

De bharr nach bhfuil aon dáta leagtha síos don chéad fhógra eile i dtaobh cistiú caipitil, níl aon amscála ann ag an phointe seo maidir le leanúint ar aghaidh leis an scéim seo.

As there is currently no date set for the next capital funding announcement, there is no timescale at this stage for proceeding with this scheme.

Use of School Facilities by the Local Community

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail, for each parliamentary constituency, (i) the number of schools that make their facilities available for (a) sporting clubs; and (b) community organisations, out of school hours; and (ii) the proportion of the total number of schools that this represents. (AQW 6591/08)

The Minister of Education: The Department does not collect information on the use of school premises outside of school hours.

Under Article 140 of the 1989 Education Order schools are encouraged to make premises available (when not required by or in connection with the school) for use by members of the community.

Through the Department's Extended School programme almost 400 of our most socially disadvantaged schools have been identified for funding.

Our policy seeks to establish each extended school as the hub of its local community engaging positively and actively with neighbouring schools, statutory, voluntary and community sector organisations in an effort to meet the needs of the pupils in the school. As part of the process of preparing their Action Plans schools were asked to consult with local community and statutory organisations to establish if there are particular community needs which could be met by the school.

Ar ndóigh, ní féidir linn bheith ag súil le scoileanna bheith ábalta freagra dearfach a thabhairt ar gach iarratas ach tá naisc níos deise idir an scoil agus a pobal mar phríomheilimint den pholasaí, eilimint a bhfuilimid ag iarraidh forbairt a dhéanamh uirthi.

Of course we cannot expect schools to be able to respond positively to all requests but closer links

between the school and its community is a key element of the policy and one which we are seeking to develop.

Funding for Irish Language

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Education to detail the funding available to promote Irish language schools and Irish language education, broken down by parliamentary constituency. (AQW 6800/08)

The Minister of Education: The information is not readily available by Parliamentary constituency and an exercise to obtain it would result in disproportionate costs.

Under Article 89 of the Education Order 1998 the Department of Education funds the Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta to encourage the development of Irish medium education in the north of Ireland. The Comhairle's budget for 2008/09 is £581,000.

Sa bhliain airgeadais 2007-2008, ba é £7.9m an maoiniú a leithdháileadh ar Ghaelscoileanna neamhspleácha faoin Fhoirmle Chomh-mhaoinithe. Leithdháileadh Caipiteal £487,000 chomh maith.

In the 2007- 2008 financial year, funding allocated to free standing Irish medium schools under the Common Funding Formula was £7.9m. Capital amounting to £487,000 was also allocated.

Criterion Changes to Extended Schools Budget Allocations

Mr S Wilson asked the Minister of Education what consultation was carried out on changes to the criterion for the extended schools budget allocations. (AQW 7113/08)

The Minister of Education: The main difference to the criteria has been the move to more accurate, post-code based data for special and primary schools which draw over half their pupils from Neighbourhood Renewal Areas (NRA). It was always our intention to use that more accurate data once it became available. We have, additionally and necessarily, targeted the available resources directly at schools serving the most socially disadvantaged communities. This is in line with the aim of the Extended Schools programme.

B'ábhar pléite le Painéal Idirbhoird na Scoileanna Forleathnaithe agus le CSCC na critéir cháilitheachta agus na leithdháiltí buiséid faoi seach.

The eligibility criteria and respective budget allocations were the subject of discussions with the Inter-Board Extended Schools Panel and CCMS.

Extended Schools Programme

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Education when the Extended Schools Programme began; and how long it was envisaged to last. (AQW 7187/08)

The Minister of Education: Seoladh na Scoileanna Sínte i Meitheamh 2006 mar pháirt den Phacáiste Maoinithe i gcomhair Páistí agus Daoine Óga; cuireadh £10m ar fáil i ngach ceann de na blianta airgeadais, 2006/07 agus 2007/08.

The Extended Schools was launched in June 2006 as part of the Children and Young People Funding Package with £10m made available in each of the 2006/07 and 2007/08 financial years.

It was envisaged that the programme would be a key vehicle for contributing to the strands across the Ten Year Strategy for Children and Young People and accordingly our understanding was that when funding was allocated to DE during direct rule that it was to be mainstreamed i.e. a baseline allocation and not a short term programme. However contrary to that understanding the funding for the programme was removed from the DE baseline from 2008-09 onwards and as a consequence I have only been able to continue funding at 60% of the level available to schools over the last two years meaning a substantial reduction from £10m to £5.8m.

I have raised the difficulties and registered most strongly my concerns, as far back as 20 September 2007 in a meeting with the Finance Minister and through correspondence on 8 separate occasions since, that the shortfall in funding presents. I will continue to press at every available opportunity during the year for additional resources, given the endorsement by the Assembly during the motion on 20 May, to restore this important programme.

Use of School Premises for the Local Community

Dr Farry asked the Minister of Education what steps are being taken to make school premises available for use as community facilities outside of school hours. (AQW 7225/08)

The Minister of Education: Under Article 140 of the 1989 Education Order schools are encouraged to make premises available (when not required by or in connection with the school) for use by members of the community.

Through the Department's Extended School programme almost 400 of our most socially disadvantaged schools have been identified for funding.

Our policy seeks to establish each extended school as the hub of its local community engaging positively

and actively with neighbouring schools, statutory, voluntary and community sector organisations in an effort to meet the needs of the pupils in the school. As part of the process of preparing their Action Plans schools were asked to consult with local community and statutory organisations to establish if there are particular community needs which could be met by the school.

Ar ndóigh ní thig linn a bheith ag súil go mbeidh scoileanna in ann freagairt go dearfach do gach iarratas ach is príomhghné den bheartas naisc níos dlúithe idir an scoil agus a pobal agus is gné í atáimid ag iarraidh a fhorbairt.

Of course we cannot expect schools to be able to respond positively to all requests but closer links between the school and its community is a key element of the policy and one which we are seeking to develop.

Playboard

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Education to detail the outcome of discussions with Playboard for frontline children's services. (AQW 7304/08)

The Minister of Education: Playboard were advised by my officials that the Department of Education had no responsibility for these projects which are currently funded by DHSSPS. OFMDFM has organised further meetings with DE and DHSSPS to discuss the future funding of these services. DE officials are due to meet with OFMDFM on 5 August 2008.

Integrated Development Funding

Mr Butler asked the Minister of Education what Integrated Development Funding was received by each primary school in (i) North Belfast; and (ii) West Belfast, in each of the last 3 years. (AQW 7331/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá an t-eolas a iarradh mionsonraithe sa tábla faoi iamh.

The information requested is detailed in the attached table.

Details are also provided for the West Belfast Greater Shankill Taskforce Initiative which was also funded from IDF resources.

School Name	Renewing Communities Funding 2006/07 (£)	Renewing Communities Funding 2007/08 (£)
Ballygolan PS	6,445	9,137
Ballysillan PS	24,740	29,306

School Name	Renewing Communities Funding 2006/07 (£)	Renewing Communities Funding 2007/08 (£)
Carr's Glen PS	27,600	29,125
Cavehill PS	5,000	5,000
Cliftonville PS	25,855	21,948
Currie PS	27,392	39,053
Edenbrooke PS	48,590	52,869
Glenwood PS	59,870	68,080
Grove PS	17,780	17,953
Ligoniel PS	16,885	22,235
Lowwood PS	22,235	26,234
Seaview PS	25,060	31,900
Wheatfield PS	29,235	45,323
Hazelwood Integrated PS	1,200	0
Blackmountain PS	20,480	22,347
Forth River PS	21,125	25,528
Harmony PS	29,235	37,285
Malvern PS	29,030	32,107
Springfield PS	15,500	17,500
Springhill PS	25,755	29,670
Suffolk PS	800	2,400
Totals	479,812	565,001

COLIN IDF PROJECT

School Name	2007/08 (£)
St Kieran's PS	8,620
Good Shepherd PS	8,620
St Luke's PS	8,620
Scoil na Fuiseoige	8,620
St Mark's PS	8,620
Our Lady Queen of Peace PS	8,620
Christ the Redeemer PS	8,620
Totals	60,340

Departmental Grants

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education for the details of all grants available through her Department. (AQW 7360/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá roinnt cineálacha éagsúla deontais a leithdháiltear trí mo Roinn agus tá siad seo liostaithe thíos.

There are a number of different types of grants allocated through my Department and these are listed below.

GRANT-IN-AID TO PROVIDE GENERAL SUPPORT TO EACH OF THE DEPARTMENT'S ARMS LENGTH BODIES

The Belfast Education and Library Board
The North-Eastern Education and Library Board
The South-Eastern Education and Library Board
The Southern Education and Library Board
The Western Education and Library Board
The Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment
The Council for Catholic Maintained Schools
The Staff Commission
Middletown Centre for Autism Limited
Middletown Centre for Autism (Holdings) Limited
Boards of Governors of Grant Maintained Integrated Schools
Boards of Governors of Voluntary Grammar Schools

CURRENT GRANT PROVIDED FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES

Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta
NI Council for Integrated Education
Prince's Trust XL Programme
KidsStop after Schools Club
Millennium Volunteers
Bytes Project
Barnardo's
Save The Children
Include Youth
NSPCC/Childline
The Gaelic Athletic Association
The Irish Football Association
Music for Youth
The Queen's University, Belfast
Amnesty International
The University of Ulster
Early Years, The Organisation for Children
NI Child Minding Association
Northern Health and Social Services Board
Southern Health and Social Services Board

Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta
Eastern Health and Social Services Board
Western Health and Social Services Board
Charter Work Experience
Foyle Schools and Employer Connections
Business Education Partnerships
Sentinus
Young Enterprise Northern Ireland

CAPITAL GRANTS FOR APPROVED CAPITAL WORKS

Trustees of Voluntary Grammar Schools
Trustees of Grant Maintained Integrated Schools

COMMUNITY RELATIONS CORE FUNDING SCHEME

Belfast YMCA
Bytes Project - Community Relations
Childrens Project
Community Relations in Schools
Co-operation Ireland
Corrymeela
Creggan Education & Research Services
Forthspring Inter-Community Group
Harmony Community Trust
Kilcranny House
National Trust
Nerve Centre (The)
Childrens Enterprise
Childrens Holidays Scheme
NUS/USI (National Union of Students)
Panarts
Public Achievement
REACT
St Patrick's Centre
Spirit of Enniskillen Trust
Ulster Folk & Transport Museum
Verbal Arts Centre (NI) Ltd.
Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust
Youth Link

VOLUNTARY YOUTH PROJECTS – CAPITAL GRANTS

St Columbanus College, Bangor
St Peter's Immaculata Youth Club, Belfast
St Bronagh's Youth Club, Rostrevor
Clonard Monastery Youth Centre
Patrician Youth Centre
St Joseph's Youth Club
Ogras Club
St Mary's Youth Centre
Corpus Christi Youth Centre
Boys' Brigade Belfast Battalion
Corrymeela Community
Belfast & Lisburn Women's Aid
Share Discovery '80' Ltd
Downpatrick Group Scouting Ireland
Scout Council
WAVE Trauma Centre
Ederney Youth Club
Trillick & District YFC
Goalline Youth Centre
Belfast Circus School
Long Tower Youth & Community Centre
Pennyburn Youth Club
Scouting Ireland/Down & Connor Scouts
St Macartan's Guide Unit
All Saints Youth Club
St John Bosco Youth Club
Seagoe Youth Group
Rosario Youth Club
St Mary's Youth Club
YMCA -Lurgan
Challenge for Youth
Greenhill YMCA
St Oliver Plunkett Youth Club
Ist Warrenpoint Scouts Group
Lisburn YMCA
The Scout Association
Darkley Clubhouse/Crossfire Trust
St John's Scouts
Ebrington Church Youth Council

St Columbanus College, Bangor
St John Vianney Youth Centre
RNIB Northern Ireland
The 6th Belfast Scout Group
Girlguiding Ulster
Belfast Activity Centre
Artibility (NI) Ltd
Youthcom
Langley Youth Club
Portstewart Guides

Donaghadee High School

Mr Cree asked the Minister of Education if she still intends to close Donaghadee High School, given the current provision for secondary school places in the North Down constituency. (AQW 7634/08)

The Minister of Education: Cuireadh deireadh leis an tréimhse chomhairliúcháin ar 30 Meitheamh; tréimhse comhairliúcháin a bhain leis an Togra Fhorbartha le dúnadh na scoile a cheadú. Agus an cinneadh á dhéanamh agam, cuirfidh mé na fachtóirí cuí uile san áireamh, lena n-áirítear leibhéal na bunscolaíochta a sholáthraítear sa cheantar.

The consultation period for the Development Proposal to allow for the closure of the school ended on 30 June. In making my decision I will take all relevant factors into account, including the level of post-primary provision in the area.

Siting of Schools Near Overhead Power Lines

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Education what steps she is taking to ensure that during the proposed future school building programme new schools will not be sited close to overhead power lines. (AQW 7664/08)

The Minister of Education: The department has not had any consultations with the British Government or other devolved administrations in relation to the siting of schools near overhead power lines.

Tá roinnt rudaí le meas a dhéanamh orthu nuair a bhítear ag cuartú suímh do scoil nua, ceann acu seo is ea a chónarai is atá línte cumhachta don suíomh. Má bhíonn aon líne cumhachta ann cóngarach do shuíomh atá molta fá choinne scoile úir lorgáinn an fhoireann deartha atá freagrach as pleanáil na scoile comhairle ó

Leictreachas Thuaisceart Éireann agus más gá déantar na línte cumhachta a chlaonadh nó a chur faoi thalamh.

There are a number of factors to be considered when identifying a site for a new school of which the proximity of power lines to the site is one. If there are any power lines near the site of a proposed new school, the design team responsible for the planning of the school seek advice from NIE and if required the power lines are either diverted or buried underground.

Employment of Retired Teachers

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Education how many retired teachers have been employed in (i) primary; and (ii) post-primary schools, in the last 12 months. (AQW 7695/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá an t-eolas a iarradh mionsonraithe sa tábla faoi iamh.

The information requested is detailed in the attached table.

Primary		Post-Primary		Both	
Primary	Nursery	Grammar	Secondary	Peripatetic*	Special*
975	90	157	738	18	186
1065		895		204	

* Peripatetic and Special Schools can be either primary or post-primary schools

Siting of Schools Near Overhead Power Lines

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Education what consultations her Department has had with the UK Government and other devolved administrations in relation to the siting of new schools near overhead power lines. (AQW 7701/08)

The Minister of Education: The department has not had any consultations with the British Government or other devolved administrations in relation to the siting of schools near overhead power lines.

Tá roinnt rudaí le meas a dhéanamh orthu nuair a bhítear ag cuartú suímh do scoil nua, ceann acu seo is ea a chónagaráí is atá línte cumhachta don suíomh. Má bhíonn aon líne cumhachta ann cóngarach do shuíomh atá molta fá choinne scoile úir lorgaíonn an fhoireann deartha atá freagrach as pleanáil na scoile comhairle ó Leictreachas Thuaisceart Éireann agus más gá déantar na línte cumhachta a chlaonadh nó a chur faoi thalamh.

There are a number of factors to be considered when identifying a site for a new school of which the proximity of power lines to the site is one. If there are any power lines near the site of a proposed new school, the design team responsible for the planning of the school seek advice from NIE and if required the power lines are either diverted or buried underground.

Reading Recovery Programme

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of Education (i) for her assessment of the effectiveness of the Reading Recovery programme and its ability to take children, particularly boys, out of underachievement; and what plans she has to reinstate funding for this programme. (AQW 7734/08)

The Minister of Education: Dearbhaíonn measúnuithe a rinneadh ar Bhreith ar an Léitheoireacht anseo agus in áiteanna eile araon gur idirghabháil éifeachtach í Breith ar an Léitheoireacht ag páistí óga a bhfuil deacrachtaí léitheoireachta acu.

Evaluations of Reading Recovery both here and elsewhere confirm that Reading Recovery is an effective intervention for young children with reading difficulties.

The arrangements for the future funding and delivery of Reading Recovery are tied into the literacy and numeracy strategy which issued for consultation in June 2008. The strategy recognises the importance of identifying problems in literacy and numeracy at an early stage and taking steps to resolve these. We envisage Reading Recovery as one of a number of approaches which will be supported once the strategy is finalised. In the meantime, the Literacy Steering Group has been asked to consider the arrangements for Reading Recovery as part of the process of drawing up the Regional Action Plan for Literacy from September 2008 and which is expected to be submitted shortly.

Car Park at Derryboye Primary School

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Education when the building work will start on the car park at Derryboye Primary School; and what date will the car park be completed. (AQW 7736/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá sé beartaithe ag Bord Oideachais agus Leabharlann an Oirdheiscirt tús a chur leis an obair ar charrechlós Bhunscoil Dhoire Bhuí san fhómhar agus táthar ag súil go gcríochnófar an obair faoi mhí an Mhárta 2009.

The South Eastern Education and Library Board is planning to start work on the Derryboye Primary School car park in the autumn and it is anticipated that work will be completed by March 2009.

Review of Community Relations Policy

Miss McIlveen asked the Minister of Education what are the terms of reference of the working group set up to review the community relations policy.
(AQW 7808/08)

The Minister of Education: Shocraigh mé go gcuirfí cóip de na Tármaí Tagartha i Leabharlann an Tionóil.

I have arranged to have a copy of the Terms of Reference placed in the Assembly Library.

Extended Schools Programme

Mr Butler asked the Minister of Education to detail the reduction in the amount of Extended Schools funding for primary schools in the Colin area; which schools will have a reduction in their Extended Schools funding; and whether the ‘carry forward’ funding for these schools will be withdrawn from their budgets.
(AQW 7810/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá an t-eolas a iarradh mionsonraithe sa tábla faoi iamh.

The information requested is detailed in the attached table.

DENI Ref	School name	Ward name	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
4036134	St Mark's Ps	Twinbrook	£35,972	£35,294	£21,070
4036285	The Good Shepherd Ps	Poleglass	£32,028	£31,223	£18,508
4046600	Scoil Na Fuiseoige	Twinbrook	£18,314	£17,883	£11,186
Totals			£86,314	£84,400	£50,764

In respect of Extended School ‘carry forward’ funding, all schools with underspends from 2007/08 will have full access to this funding in 2008/09.

In light of the very positive indications given by the Finance Minister to the Assembly on June Monitoring about the importance of the Extended Schools programme to the Executive I am very hopeful that additional in year resources will be allocated for the programme which will allow the Department to widen the eligibility criteria and restore previous funding levels.

Permanent Teaching Posts

Mr Savage asked the Minister of Education how many teachers, qualified within the last 5 years, are

still without a full-time permanent teaching post.
(AQW 7841/08)

The Minister of Education: The Department does not employ teachers nor does it hold this information. However, the General Teaching Council has been registering initial teacher education graduates on an annual basis since April 2004. The Council also seeks information, annually, from all grant-aided schools on teachers employed on a permanent or significant temporary nature (i.e. excluding supply/substitute teachers). The Council has provided the following information:

	2003/04 ⁽¹⁾	2004/05 ⁽¹⁾	2005/06 ⁽¹⁾	2006/07 ⁽¹⁾	2007/08 ⁽¹⁾
NI Graduate Records	705	792	816	807	801
Currently Registered	635	672	671	708	683
Currently Employed (see note 2)	535	490	413	337	187

Notes:

- The years stated refer to the GTC Registration Year, i.e. 1 April to 31 March.
- “Currently Employed” includes teachers who are employed on a permanent or significant temporary basis (i.e. excludes substitute/supply teachers).

Tá iarrtha agam ar mo Roinn tuilleadh oibre a dhéanamh ar phatrúin fostaíochta mhac léinn ag baint céime amach as oideachas tosaigh múinteoireachta.

I have asked my Department to undertake further work on the employment patterns of students graduating from initial teacher education.

New Senior High School in Lurgan

Mr Moutray asked the Minister of Education what plans she has to build a new senior high school in Lurgan.
(AQW 7905/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá scéim chaipitil fhaofa ann do Choláiste an Lorgain. Bhí gá le Breithmheas Eacnamaíochta de bharr gur moladh athruithe ar na bunphleananna; chuir Bord Oideachais agus Leabharlann an Deiscirt an cháipéis sin faoi bhráid na Roinne ní ba luaithe i mbliana agus tá comhairleoirí gairmiúla na Roinne á bhreithniú faoi láthair.

There is an approved capital scheme for Lurgan College. A revised Economic Appraisal was necessary due to proposed changes to the original plans, and this was submitted by the Southern Education and Library Board earlier this year and is currently with the Department’s professional advisers for consideration.

Special Educational Needs

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Education what level of funding is provided to pupils of primary schools where the pupil has (i) no statement of educational need; and (ii) a statement of special educational need. (AQW 8040/08)

The Minister of Education: The information requested is not available.

Average funding in primary schools under the delegated formula funding arrangements in 2008/09 was £2,646 per pupil. Primary schools budgets may include funding for nursery class pupils as well as funding for pupils with statements of educational need within mainstream class and special unit settings.

Eisíonn Bord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne ráiteas de Riachtanais Speisialta Oideachais chun soláthar speisialta oideachais a chur ar fáil bhunaithe ar mheastachán riachtanais. Déantar an soláthar seo a chomhoiriúnú le riachtanais aonarachá an dalta, ar féidir leo a bheith an-éagsúil maidir leis an chineál soláthair atá de dhíth agus costas an tsoláthair sin, agus níl aon mheánchostas nó costas tipiciúil ann. Níl costais iomlána daltaí ar ráiteas, i suímh speisialta agus i bpríomhshuímh araon, ar fáil ar leithligh óna chéile don bhunoideachas agus don iarbhunoideachas.

A statement of Special Educational Needs is issued by an Education and Library Board to make special educational provision based on an assessment of need. This provision is matched to the individual needs of a pupil, which can vary widely in the nature of provision required and the cost of that provision, and there is no average or typical cost. The overall costs for stated pupils, both in special and mainstream settings, are not available separately for primary and post-primary.

Capital Development Proposals

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of (i) new build capital development proposals; and (ii) capital development proposals, currently with her Department, for which valid economic appraisals have been accepted; the length of time they have been with her Department; and how many site meetings were granted by her officials as part of the process towards the submission of valid economic appraisals, in relation to all capital development proposals in each of the last 5 years. (AQW 8045/08)

The Minister of Education: All capital schemes which have been announced for funding have agreed economic appraisals. In all cases they were preceded by a site visit to the school and in the case of a

potential amalgamation on a new site or relocation to a new site, a visit to the proposed new site.

Tá eolas faighte ag an Roinn ar 80 scéim chaipitil atá beartaithe faoi láthair; fuair an Roinn an t-eolas sin ón údarás oideachais chuí. Tá breithmheas eacnamaíochta ag ceithre scéim is fiche faoi láthair; tá 5 cinn acu ceadaithe ag an Roinn.

There are currently 80 proposed capital schemes which have been identified to the department by the relevant education authority. Twenty-four of these currently have economic appraisals, 5 of which have been approved by the Department. Of the 5 one was approved in October 2006, one June 2007, one January 2008 and two in June 2008. All of these schemes were the subject of site visits which are requested by the relevant authority in advance of the appraisal work.

The number of site visits in each of the past 5 years was as follows:

Year	Number of Visits
2003/04	15
2004/05	44
2005/06	29
2006/07	2
2007/08	2

Ballywalter Primary School

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Education how long Ballywalter Primary School has been listed as a priority scheme by her Department; when her Department accepted the findings of the economic appraisal submitted by the South Eastern Education and Library Board; and the timescale for completion of this scheme. (AQW 8050/08)

The Minister of Education: Following a request from the South Eastern Education and Library Board, a site visit was undertaken by the Department's technical advisors in 2007 and Ballywalter Primary was identified as having significant accommodation deficiencies. Earlier this month, the Department agreed the appraisal submitted by the South Eastern Education and Library Board for a new school on an alternative site.

De bharr nach bhfuil aon dáta leagtha síos don chéad fhógra eile i dtaobh cistiú caipitil, níl aon amscála ann ag an phointe seo maidir le leanúint ar aghaidh leis an scéim seo.

As there is currently no date set for the next capital funding announcement, there is no timescale at this stage for proceeding with this scheme.

Ballywalter Primary School

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of Education when she expects to bring forward a capital build programme that includes a replacement school building for Ballywalter Primary school. (AQW 8055/08)

The Minister of Education: Following a request from the South Eastern Education and Library Board, a site visit to Ballywalter Primary School was undertaken by the Department's technical advisors in 2007.

An mhí seo caite, thug an Roinn breithmheas eacnamaíochta chun réitigh; ba é Bord Oideachais agus Leabharlann an Oirdheiscirt a chuir isteach é. Ní dhearnadh aon chinneadh go fóill ar thráthúlacht an chéad fhógra eile i dtaobh cistiú caipitil.

Last month, the Department agreed an economic appraisal submitted by the South Eastern Education and Library Board. No decision has been made on the timing of the next capital funding announcement.

Newbuild Project at Academy Primary, Saintfield

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of Education what plans there are for a new build project at Academy Primary in Saintfield and what is the timescale for any proposal. (AQW 8056/08)

The Minister of Education: Following a request from the South Eastern Education and Library Board for a site visit to this school in May 2008, the Department has requested further information on the accommodation at the school to help inform the consideration of the necessity for a capital scheme. This information will be assessed by the Department on receipt and, if necessary, a site visit will be arranged.

Go dtí go gcomhaontaítear riachtanas le scéim chaipitil leis an Bhord ní féidir cur in iúl cá huair a rachadh tionscadal do Bhunscoil an Acadaimh ar aghaidh.

Until a need for a capital scheme has been agreed with the Board, it is not possible to give any indication as to when a project for Academy Primary School would proceed.

Entry to Controlled Nursery Schools

Mr O'Loan asked the Minister of Education whether a controlled nursery school can give entry preference to children who have an older brother or sister currently attending, or has previously attended, the school; and what is her assessment of the discriminatory impact of this criterion on (i) a child

who is the eldest in a family; and (ii) the parents in terms of age. (AQW 8078/08)

The Minister of Education: The Pre-School Education in Schools (Admissions Criteria) Regulations 1999 apply to the admissions criteria used by nursery schools and nursery classes in primary schools. These Regulations state that priority must be given, in the following order, to:

- i. children from socially disadvantaged circumstances who will be aged 4 before September in their final pre-school year
- ii. children from socially disadvantaged circumstances who will be aged 3 before September in their final pre-school year
- iii. children not falling within i. or ii. who will be aged 4 before 1 September in their final pre-school year
- iv. children not falling within i. or ii. who will be aged 3 before 1 September in their final pre-school year.

These Regulations also require that further criteria be set to reflect the Board of Governors' priorities for admission to each school. Responsibility for drawing up these criteria rests entirely with the Board of Governors of each school. If the Governors' wish to give entry preference to children who have an older brother or sister currently attending, or has previously attended, that is entirely a matter for the Board of Governors.

Nuair a chuirtear critéir iontrála i bhfeidhm mar is ceart, bíonn rogha le déanamh idir iarratasóirí áirithe thar iarratasóirí eile. Dá thairbhe sin, b'fhéidir go mbraithfeadh na daoine úd nár éirigh leo gur caitheadh go leatromach leo ar dhóigh éigin

The application of admissions criteria by definition involves the prioritisation of some applicants above others, and as such this may be perceived by those who are unsuccessful as being in some way discriminatory. However, provided the criteria employed are not in breach of either education or other relevant law, this should not be the case.

Capital Works Schemes

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education to outline the capital schemes that have been approved by her Department and the start date for each, broken down by parliamentary constituency. (AQW 8099/08)

The Minister of Education: Léiríonn Tábla A thíos na mórscéimeanna oibreacha caipitiúla a ceadaíodh agus na háiteanna ina bhfuil obair thógála á déanamh faoi láthair.

Table A below identifies major capital works schemes which have been approved and where construction is currently underway.

TABLE A

Parliamentary Constituency	School	Details of Project	Estimated Completion Date
Belfast West	La Salle Boys' S.S. Belfast	New replacement school on existing site	Apr-09
Belfast West	St Dominic's H.S. Belfast	Extension & Refurbishment	Jan-10
East Derry	Burnfoot/Dungiven/Largy P.S.	New replacement school on existing site	Aug-08
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	Mount Lourdes G.S. Enniskillen	Extension & Refurbishment	Jun-08
Lagan Valley	Ballymacrickett P.S.	New replacement school on extended site	Nov-08
Lagan Valley	Brookefield Special School, Moira	New replacement school on existing site	Feb-09
Lagan Valley	Ballinderry P.S.	New replacement school on existing site	Feb-09
Lagan Valley	Pond Park P.S. Lisburn	New replacement school on extended site	Apr-09
Newry & Armagh	St Colman's College, Newry	Extension & Refurbishment	Feb-09
Newry & Armagh	St Peter's P.S. Cloughreagh	New replacement school on existing site	Sep-09
Newry & Armagh	Abbey G.S. Newry	New replacement school on new site	Nov-09
North Antrim	Moorfields P.S. Ballymena	New replacement school on existing site	Aug-08
North Down	Bangor Academy	New replacement school on existing site	Jun-08

Parliamentary Constituency	School	Details of Project	Estimated Completion Date
North Down	Towerview P.S. Bangor	New replacement school on existing site	Jul-09
South Down	St Patrick's P.S. Saul	New replacement school on new site	Jul-08
South Down	Assumption G.S. Ballynahinch	Extension & Refurbishment	Dec-09
Strangford	Victoria P.S. Ballyhalbert	New replacement school on extended site	Sep-08
Upper Bann	Waringstown P.S.	Extension & Refurbishment	Sep-08
West Tyrone	Holy Cross College, Strabane	New replacement school on existing site	Jul-08
West Tyrone	Drumragh Integrated College. Omagh	New replacement school on new site	Apr-09

There are also major capital schemes that have been approved which are currently at various stages of the planning process prior to the construction stage. The details of these projects are listed in Table B. These projects are being progressed with the relevant education authorities and the estimated timescales for doing so will be subject to all statutory approvals being achieved, the necessary planning and building processes being completed satisfactorily, and the availability of resources in any particular year.

TABLE B

Parliamentary Constituency	School	Details of Project	Estimated Completion Date
Belfast East	Glendhu NS, Belfast	New replacement school on existing site	2008/09
Belfast East	Ravenscroft NS, Belfast	New replacement school on existing site	2008/09
Belfast East	Strathearn GS, Belfast	New replacement school on existing site	2011/12
Belfast East	Knockbreda HS, Belfast	New replacement school on existing site	2011/12

Parliamentary Constituency	School	Details of Project	Estimated Completion Date
Belfast East	Strand / Sydenham P.S.	New replacement school on existing site	2010/11
Belfast East	Strandtown PS, Belfast	New replacement school on existing site	2011/12
Belfast East	Mitchell House Special School	New replacement school on new site	2011/12
Belfast East	Greenwood Assessment Centre	New replacement school on new site	2011/12
Belfast East	Ashfield Girls H.S. Belfast	New replacement school on existing site	2009/10
Belfast East	Grosvenor G.S. Belfast	New replacement school on existing site	2010/11
Belfast East	Orangefield P.S. Belfast	New replacement school on existing site	2009/10
Belfast East	Lagan College, Belfast	Extension & refurbishment	2010/11
Belfast East	Our Lady & St Patrick's College, Belfast	New replacement school on existing site	2010/11
Belfast North	Whitehouse PS, N'Abbey	New replacement school on existing site	2009/10
Belfast North	Little Flower Girls S.S., Belfast	New replacement school on existing site	2011/12
Belfast North	Belfast Boys Model School	New replacement school on existing site	2010/11
Belfast North	Belfast Model School for Girls	New replacement school on existing site	2009/10
Belfast South	Victoria College, Belfast	Extension & refurbishment	2012/13
Belfast South	Methodist College, Belfast	Extension & refurbishment	2013/14

Parliamentary Constituency	School	Details of Project	Estimated Completion Date
Belfast South	Taughmonagh P.S. Belfast	New replacement school on existing site	2010/11
Belfast West	Scoil Na Fuiseoige P.S., Belfast	New replacement school on existing site	2009/10
Belfast West	Colaiste Feirste, Belfast	Extension & refurbishment	2010/11
Belfast West	Springhill P.S. Belfast	New replacement school on existing site	2010/11
Belfast West	Glenwood P.S./ Edenderry NS, Belfast	New replacement school on existing site	2010/11
East Derry	BallyKelly PS, Limavady	New replacement school on existing site	2010/11
East Derry	Limegrove / Glasvey Special School	New replacement school on existing site	2011/12
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	Lisbellaw P.S.	New replacement school on existing site	2010/11
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	Coranny & Cornagague P.S.	New replacement school on new site	2009/10
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	St Pat's Boys/ Girls Acad, Dgnon	New replacement school on existing site	2012/13
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	Enniskillen Model PS	New replacement school on existing site	2010/11
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	St Paul's P.S. Irvinestown	New replacement school on new site	2011/12
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	Devenish College	New replacement school on new site	2011/12
Foyle	Lisnagelvin P.S.	New replacement school on existing site	2010/11

Parliamentary Constituency	School	Details of Project	Estimated Completion Date
Foyle	New Buildings PS, Derry	New replacement school on existing site	2010/11
Foyle	Eglinton PS, Derry	New replacement school on existing site	2010/11
Foyle	Ebrington PS, L'Derry	New replacement school on new site	2010/11
Foyle	Foyle & Londonderry College	New replacement school on new site	2012/13
Foyle	Belmont Special School	New replacement school on existing site	2011/12
Foyle	St Cecilia's College, Derry (PPP)	New replacement school on existing site	2009/10
Foyle	St Mary's College, Derry (PPP)	New replacement school on new site	2009/10
Lagan Valley	St Colman's P.S. Lambeg	New replacement school on extended site	2009/10
Lagan Valley	Dromore Central P.S.	New replacement school on new site	2010/11
Mid Ulster	St Columba's P.S, Straw, Draperstown	New replacement school on new site	2009/10
Mid Ulster	Magherafelt HS	New replacement school on existing site	2010/11
Mid Ulster	Magherafelt P.S.	New replacement school on new site	2009/10
Mid Ulster	Edendork P.S	New replacement school on new site	2010/11

Parliamentary Constituency	School	Details of Project	Estimated Completion Date
Mid Ulster	Holy Family PS, Magherafelt	New replacement school on extended site	2011/12
Mid Ulster	Rainey Endowed School, Magherafelt	New replacement school on existing site	2010/11
Mid Ulster	Holy Trinity College, Cookstown	New replacement school on existing site	2011/12
Newry & Armagh	St Joseph's P.S Madden, Armagh	New replacement school on existing site	2009/10
Newry & Armagh	St Catherine's College, Armagh	Extension to Irish medium unit	2008/09
Newry & Armagh	St Clare's Abbey PS Newry	New replacement school on extended site	2010/11
Newry & Armagh	St Oliver Plunkett P.S. Forkhill	New replacement school on new site	2010/11
Newry & Armagh	Dromintee P.S.	New replacement school on extended site	2009/10
Newry & Armagh	St Joseph's Convent PS, Newry	New replacement school on existing site	2010/11
Newry & Armagh	St Patrick's G.S. Armagh	Extension & refurbishment	2012/13
North Antrim	St Patrick's & St Brigid's P.S. B'castle	New replacement school on existing site	2010/11
North Antrim	Ballymoney H.S.	New replacement school on existing site	2010/11
North Antrim	St Mary's P.S. Portglenone (PPP)	New replacement school on extended site	2009/10
North Down	Bangor Grammar	New replacement school on new site	2011/12

Parliamentary Constituency	School	Details of Project	Estimated Completion Date
North Down	St Columbanus College, Bangor	New replacement school on existing site	2010/11
North Down	Priory College, Holywood	New replacement school on new site	2011/12
North Down	Hollywood PS	New replacement school on new site	2012/13
South Antrim	Templepatrick PS	New replacement school on existing site	2009/10
South Antrim	Parkhall College, Antrim	New replacement school on existing site	2010/11
South Down	Carrick P.S. Warrenpoint	New replacement school on extended site	2009/10
South Down	St Mary's P.S, Newcastle	New replacement school on existing site	2009/10
South Down	St Louis Grammar, Kilkeel	New replacement school on existing site	2011/12
South Down	Knockevin Spec School, Downpatrick	New replacement school on existing site	2010/11
South Down	St Bronagh's P.S (Conv of Mercy/ St Mary's Boys P.S) Rostrevor	New replacement school on extended site	2010/11
South Down	The High School, Ballynahinch	New replacement school on existing site	2011/12
South Down	St Patrick's G.S. Downpatrick (PPP)	New replacement school on existing site	2009/10
Strangford	Glastry College, Ballyhalbert	New replacement school on extended site	2011/12

Parliamentary Constituency	School	Details of Project	Estimated Completion Date
Strangford	S Joseph's P.S. Carryduff (PPP)	New replacement school on extended site	2009/10
Strangford	Tor Bank Special School, Dundonald (PPP)	New replacement school on new site	2010/11
Upper Bann	Banbridge Academy	Extension & refurbishment	2011/12
Upper Bann	St Teresa's PS, Lurgan	New replacement school on extended site	2009/10
Upper Bann	Tannaghmore P.S, Lurgan	New replacement school on existing site	2010/11
Upper Bann	St Patrick's College, Banbridge	New replacement school on existing site	2010/11
Upper Bann	St Mary's P.S, Banbridge	New replacement school on existing site	2010/11
Upper Bann	Lurgan College	New replacement school on existing site	2012/13
Upper Bann	Portadown College	New replacement school on existing site	2012/13
West Tyrone	St Columbkille's P.S. Carrickmore	New replacement school on extended site	2010/11
West Tyrone	Artigarvan PS, Strabane	New replacement school on new site	2010/11
West Tyrone	St Conor's P.S, Omagh	New replacement school on extended site	2010/11
West Tyrone	Omagh IPS	New replacement school on new site	2010/11
West Tyrone	Dean Maguire College, Carrickmore	New replacement school on new site	2011/12

Parliamentary Constituency	School	Details of Project	Estimated Completion Date
West Tyrone	Cranny Special School, Omagh	New replacement school on existing site	2011/12
West Tyrone	Arvalee Spec School, Omagh	New replacement school on existing site	2011/12
West Tyrone	Loreto College, Omagh	New replacement school on existing site	2011/12

Funding Initiatives

Mr Attwood asked the Minister of Education what level of funding has been earmarked for major initiatives such as (i) children and young people's funding; (ii) Extended Schools; and (iii) Renewing Communities, in 2008-09; and how this compares with the level of funding in 2007-08. (AQW 8155/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá an t-eolas a iarradh mionsonraithe sa tábla faoi iamh.

The information requested is detailed in the attached table.

Projects	2007/08 Allocation £k	2008/09 Allocation £k
Projects / activities formerly funded under the Children and Young People Funding Package	24,252	18,824
Renewing Communities	1,840	310

In addition to the above, for 2008-09, mainstream funding of £16.1 million has been provided within schools delegated budgets in line with the funding which was allocated direct to schools from the Children and Young People Funding Package in 2007/08.

In relation to the extended schools programme funded under the Children and Young People Funding Package, I wanted to continue funding at previous levels but with the resources available was unable to do so. I have only been able to continue funding at 60% of the level available to schools over the last two years meaning a massive cut from £10m to £5.8m.

I have raised the difficulties and registered most strongly my concerns, as far back as 20 September 2007 in a meeting with the Finance Minister and through correspondence on 8 separate occasions since, that the shortfall in funding presents.

Leanfaidh mé, gach deis atá ar fáil le linn na bliana, de bheith ag iarraidh tuilleadh acmhainní, ó thacaigh an Tionól le linn rún 20 Bealtaine, le hathbhunú an chláir thábhachtaigh seo.

I will continue to press at every available opportunity during the year for additional resources, given the endorsement by the Assembly during the motion on 20 May, to restore funding levels for this important programme.

You may have seen Nigel Dodds' statement to the Assembly on 24 June regarding June Monitoring and it looks hopeful that additional resources will be made available for the programme.

Educational Psychologists

Mr Attwood asked the Minister of Education how many children were waiting to see an educational psychologist on 1 December 2007, in each of the Education and Library Board areas. (AQW 8156/08)

The Minister of Education: Chuir Príomh-Fheidhmeannaigh na mBord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne in iúl dom go raibh an líon seo páistí a leanas ag feitheamh le síceolaí oideachasúil a fheiceáil ar 1 Nollaig 2007.

I have been advised by the Chief Executives of the Education and Library Boards that the following numbers of children were waiting to see an educational psychologist on 1 December 2007.

BELB	564
NEELB	499
SEELB	600
SELB	218
WELB	88

These figures are in regard to children with a variety of need, including Stage 3 (non-statutory assessments) and Stage 4 (statutory assessments) of the Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs, reviews at Stage 3 and Stage 5 of the Code of Practice, special testing at transfer stage between primary and post-primary, pre-school and examination arrangements.

Class Sizes

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Education the current maximum permissible class sizes for (i) P1 - P3 classes; (ii) P4 - P7 classes; and (iii) composite classes; and what plans her Department has to reduce pupil-teacher ratios. (AQW 8184/08)

The Minister of Education: The current maximum permissible class size for P1 – P4 classes (including composite classes) is 30. The Department has not set a maximum permissible class size in relation to P5 – P7 classes (including composite classes).

Creidim go bhfuil sé thar a bheith tábhachtach líon na ndaltaí a bhíonn i ranganna a laghdú; bheadh infheistíocht shubstantiúil ón Choiste Fheidhmiúcháin de dhíth leis an sprioc sin a bhaint amach. Ar an ábhar go bhfuil ardchostas i gceist, breithneoidh an Coiste Feidhmiúcháin an plean taobh lena chuid tosaíochtaí eile.

I believe it is very important to reduce class sizes and this would require substantial investment by the Executive. It will therefore have to be considered alongside its other priorities.

St. Colman's Primary School, Shinn

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister of Education if she is aware of the Health and Safety risk associated with the overcrowding at St. Colman's Primary School, Shinn. (AQW 8210/08)

The Minister of Education: I am very aware of the accommodation issues at St Colman's, having visited the school on 2 May 2008. I was very impressed by the commitment and dedication of the teachers and pupils.

Bhí measúnú á dhéanamh ag Roinn s'agamsa ar an chóiríocht ag an scoil agus rachaimid i dteagmháil leis an scoil arís roimh i bhfad maidir leis an dóigh a bhfuil cúrsaí.

My Department has been assessing the accommodation at the school and will be in contact with the school again shortly on the position.

Primary School Pupils Receiving School Transport

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Education how many pupils attending (i) State Controlled primary schools; (ii) Catholic Maintained primary schools; (iii) Integrated primary schools; and (iv) Irish Medium primary schools, used school transport during the 2007-08 academic year, broken down by (a) Education and Library Board; and (ii) school. (AQW 8220/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá dearbhaithe ag na Boird Oideachais agus Leabharlainne go raibh an líon daltaí a leanas ag freastal ar na h-earnálacha bunscoile liostaithe agus ag fáil iompar scoile in 2007/08:

The Education and Library Boards have confirmed that the following number of pupils were attending the primary school sectors listed and receiving school transport in 2007/08:

	Controlled	Catholic Maintained	Integrated*	Irish Medium	Total
BELB	79	0	157	3	239
NEELB	1,540	1,471	253	5	3,269
SEELB	1,178	491	127	5	1,801
SELB	1,985	2,780	159	16	4,940
WELB	2,408	3,215	352	125	6,100

* This category includes both Grant Maintained and Controlled Integrated schools.

Broken down by individual school as follows:

(I) CONTROLLED PRIMARY SCHOOLS:

Belfast Board:	Ballygolan Primary School	29
	Botanic Primary School	2
	Cregagh Primary School	2
	Down High School (Prep)	2
	Elmgrove Primary School	1
	Euston Street Primary School	1
	Glenwood Primary School	2
	Knockbreda Primary School	3
	Orangefield Primary School	1
	Taughmonagh Primary School	35
Vere Foster Primary School	1	
North-Eastern Board:	Antrim Primary School	2
	Armoy Primary School	3
	Ballyclare Primary School	5
	Ballykeel Primary School	1
	Ballymena Primary School	6
	Ballymoney Model Primary School	3
	Ballynure Primary School	22
	Ballysally Primary School	6
	Ballytober Primary School	6
	Balnamore Primary School	7
Broughshane Primary School	44	

North-Eastern Board:	Buick Memorial Primary School	74
	Bushmills Primary School	4
	Bushvalley Primary School	68
	Cairncastle Primary School	15
	Carnaghts Primary School	28
	Carnalbanagh Primary School	27
	Carrickfergus Central Primary School	1
	Carrowreagh Primary School	22
	Castleroe Primary School	1
	Clough Primary School	83
	Cloughmills Primary School	5
	Creavery Primary School	5
	Cregagh Primary School	1
	Crumlin Primary School	111
	Cullycapple Primary School	2
	D H Christie Memorial Primary School	2
	D H Christie Memorial Primary School, Special Unit	62
	Dromara Primary School	1
	Drumachose Primary School	1
	Drumard Primary School	19
	Duneane Primary School	4
	Dunseverick Primary School	93
	Earlview Primary School	1
	Eden Primary School, Ballymoney	14
	Fairview Primary School	1
	Garvagh Primary School	37
	Gorran Primary School	51
	Gracehill Primary School	13
	Greenisland Primary School	1
	Groggan Primary School	61
	Harpur's Hill Primary School	2
	Hazelbank Primary School	29
	Hezlett Primary School	32
	Kells & Connor Primary School	17
	Kilbride Central Primary School	1
	Kilrea Primary School	38
	Kilross Primary School	6
	Knockahollet Primary School	34
	Knockloughrim Primary School	24
	Larne & Inver Primary School	6

North-Eastern Board:	Leaney Primary School	4
	Limavady Central Primary School	1
	Longstone Primary School	31
	Macosquin Primary School	20
	Maghera Primary School	8
	Magherafelt Primary School	16
	Millburn Primary School	1
	Moneymore Primary School	8
	Moorfields Primary School	104
	Mossley Primary School	3
	Moyle Primary School	1
	Mullaghdubh Primary School	1
	Oakfield Primary School	1
	Pond Park Primary School	1
	Portglenone Primary School	24
	Portstewart Primary School	3
	Randalstown Central Primary School	19
	Rasharkin Primary School	37
	Straid Primary School	26
	Straidbilly Primary School	7
	Straidhavern Primary School	41
	Templepatrick Primary School	7
	The Diamond Primary School	9
The Irish Society's Primary School	2	
The Thompson Primary School	2	
Tildarg Primary School	16	
Toreagh Primary School	4	
Upper Ballyboley Primary School	22	
Victoria Primary School	1	
Whitehouse Primary School	2	
Woodburn Primary School	2	
Woods Primary School	14	
South-Eastern Board:	Abbey Primary School	2
	Academy Primary School	41
	Alexander Dickson Primary School	1
	Anahilt Primary School	34
	Andrews Memorial Primary School	6
	Ballinderry Primary School	53
	Ballycarrickmaddy Primary School	74
Ballycloughan Primary School	1	

South-Eastern Board:	Ballygolan Primary School	1
	Ballyholme Primary School	3
	Ballykeigle Primary School	10
	Ballymacash Primary School	2
	Ballymagee Primary School	5
	Ballynahinch Primary School	1
	Ballywalter Primary School	3
	Belvoir Park Primary School	36
	Bloomfield Road Primary School	13
	Braniel Primary School	2
	Brooklands Primary School	6
	Brownlee Primary School	1
	Cairnshill Primary School	3
	Carrowdore Primary School	1
	Castle Gardens Primary School	2
	Castlewellan Primary School	28
	Clandeboye Primary School	9
	Comber Primary School	1
	Crawfordsburn Primary School	3
	Cregagh Primary School	5
	Crumlin Primary School	13
	Cumran Primary School	101
	Donaghadee Primary School	5
	Down High Preparatory	3
	Downpatrick Primary School	60
	Downshire Primary School	18
	Dromara Primary School	28
	Dromore Central Primary School	1
	Dundonald Primary School	4
	Dunmurry Primary School	1
	Gilnahirk Primary School	2
	Grange Park Primary School	1
	Harmony Hill Primary School	1
Hollywood Primary School	7	
Kilcooley Primary School	1	
Killinchy Primary School	114	
Killowen Primary School	4	
Kilmaine Primary School	2	
Kirkistown Primary School	26	
Knockbreda Primary School	17	

South-Eastern Board:	Knockmore Primary School	56
	Largymore Primary School	4
	Leadhill Primary School	2
	Lisburn Central Primary School	1
	Lisnasharragh Primary School	4
	Loughries Primary School	1
	Maghaberry Primary School	16
	McKinney Primary School	39
	Meadow Bridge Primary School	140
	Millisle Primary School	1
	Moira Primary School	5
	Moneyrea Primary School	2
	Newcastle Primary School	6
	Newtownards Model Primary School	5
	Newtownbreda Primary School	1
	Old Warren Primary School	2
	Pond Park Primary School	5
	Portavogie Primary School	1
	Rathmore Primary School	3
	Redburn Primary School	1
	Riverdale Primary School	26
	Seymour Hill Primary School	18
	Spa Primary School	33
	Strandtown Primary School	1
	Taughmonagh Primary School	2
	Towerview Primary School	14
Victoria Primary School (Ballyhalbert)	18	
Victoria Primary School (Newtownards)	4	
West Winds Primary School	11	
Southern Board:	Abercorn Primary School	1
	Augher Central Primary School	18
	Aughnacloy Primary School	58
	Ballinderry Primary School	2
	Ballydown Primary School	46
	Ballytrea Primary School	61
	Benburb Primary School	14
	Birches Primary School	54
	Brackenagh West Primary School	162
	Bronte Primary School	9
Bush Primary School	35	

Southern Board:	Carntall Primary School	79
	Carrick Primary School, Lurgan	36
	Churchill Primary School	37
	Clare Primary School	38
	Clogher Regional Primary School	1
	Cookstown Primary School	6
	Cortamlet Primary School	55
	Donaghey Primary School	28
	Donaghmore Primary School	23
	Dromore Central Primary School	37
	Drumadonnell Primary School	35
	Drumhillery Primary School	47
	Dungannon Primary School	2
	Edenderry Primary School, Banbridge	2
	Fair Hill Primary School	28
	Fivemiletown Primary School	9
	Hamiltonsbawn Primary School	20
	Hardy Memorial Primary School	52
	Howard Primary School	1
	Iveagh Primary School	37
	Kilkeel Primary School	37
	Killylea Primary School	6
	Killyman Primary School	1
	Kingsmills Primary School	17
	Lisfarty Primary School	25
	Lisnadill Primary School	1
	Markethill Primary School	112
	Minterburn Primary School	6
	Mountnorris Primary School	48
	Moy Regional Primary School	4
	Newmills Primary School	15
	Newtownhamilton Primary School	36
	Omagh County Primary School	1
	Orchard County Primary School	60
	Orritor Primary School	90
	Poyntzpass Primary School	36
	Queen Elizabeth II Primary School	22
	Richmond Primary School	70
Richmount Primary School	184	
Scarva Primary School	18	

Southern Board:	Stewartstown Primary School	6
	Tamnamore Primary School	6
	Tandragee Primary School	2
	The Armstrong Primary School	1
	The Cope Primary School	112
	Walker Memorial Primary School	36
	Western Board:	Aghadrumsee Primary School
Ardstraw Primary School		22
Artigarvan Primary School		71
Ashlea Primary School		3
Ballinamallard Primary School		5
Ballykelly Primary School		65
Bellarena Primary School		28
Belleek No 2 Primary School		33
Bready Jubilee Primary School		70
Bridgehill Primary School		36
Brookeborough Primary School		24
Burnfoot Primary School		19
Cooley Primary School		98
Cumber Claudy Primary School		82
Denamona Primary School		51
Derrygonnelly Primary School		34
Donemana Primary School		75
Dromore Primary School		34
Drumachose Primary School		27
Drumahoe Primary School		20
Drumlegagh Primary School		25
Dunmullan Primary School		33
Ebrington Primary School		1
Edwards Primary School		57
Eglinton Primary School		24
Enniskillen Model Primary School		106
Erganagh Primary School		21
Fivemiletown Primary School	45	
Florencecourt Primary School	82	
Gibson Primary School	93	
Gillygooley Primary School	38	
Gortin Primary School	35	
Hezlett Primary School	2	

Western Board:	Irvinestown Primary School	70
	Jones Memorial Primary School	88
	Kesh Primary School	96
	Killen Primary School	11
	Lack Primary School	37
	Langfield Primary School	22
	Largy Primary School	12
	Limavady Central Primary School	48
	Lisbellaw Primary School	125
	Lisnagelvin Primary School	2
	Londonderry Model Primary School	2
	Maguiresbridge Primary School	33
	McClintock Primary School	55
	Moat Primary School	50
	Newbuildings Primary School	2
	Newtownbutler Primary School	29
	Newtownstewart Model Primary School	19
	Omagh County Primary School	60
	Queen Elizabeth II Primary School, Kilskeery	23
	Shanmullagh Primary School	7
	Sion Mills Primary School	26
	Strabane Primary School	99
	Tempo No 1 Primary School	76
Trillick Primary School	12	

(II) MAINTAINED PRIMARY SCHOOLS:

North-Eastern Board:	Altayeskey Primary School	6
	Anahorish Primary School	4
	Ballyhackett Primary School	27
	Barnish Primary School	27
	Braid Primary School	10
	Creggan Primary School	3
	Crossroads Primary School	68
	Glenravel Primary School	43
	Holy Family Primary School	1
	Holy Trinity Primary School	1
	Knocknagin Primary School	1
	Millquarter Primary School	26
	Moneynick Primary School	7
	Mount St Michael's Primary School	29

North-Eastern Board:	New Row Primary School	1
	Sacred Heart Boys Primary School	1
	Seaview Primary School	52
	St Anne's Primary School	36
	St Anthony's Primary School	3
	St Bernard's Primary School	6
	St Brigid's Primary School, Ballymoney	12
	St Brigid's Primary School, Cloughmills	24
	St Brigid's Primary School, Magherafelt	53
	St Brigid's Primary School, Mountjoy	1
	St Brigid's Primary School, Tirkane	69
	St Ciaran's Primary School	1
	St Colmcille's Primary School	6
	St Colmcille's Primary School, Ballymena	12
	St Columba's Primary School, Draperstown	14
	St Columba's Primary School, Garvagh	68
	St Columba's Primary School, Kilrea	9
	St Columb's Primary School, Desertmartin	17
	St Eoghan's Primary School	8
	St Francis' Primary School, Lurgan	1
	St James' Primary School, Newtownabbey	1
	St John Bosco Primary School, Ballynease	2
	St John's Primary School, Carnlough	4
	St John's Primary School, Coleraine	2
	St John's Primary School, Swatragh	29
	St Joseph's Primary School, Ahoghill	2
	St Joseph's Primary School, Crumlin	63
	St Joseph's Primary School, Dunloy	64
	St MacNissi's Primary School, Newtownabbey	3
	St MacNissius' Primary School	4
	St Malachy's Primary School	1
	St Mary's Primary School, Ballymena	13
	St Mary's Primary School, Belfast	16
St Mary's Primary School, Cushendall	4	
St Mary's Primary School, Draperstown	16	
St Mary's Primary School, Glenview	4	
St Mary's Primary School, Greenlough	18	
St Mary's Primary School, Portglenone	69	
St Mary's PS Special Unit, Glenview	25	

North-Eastern Board:	St Mary's Star of the Sea Primary School	1
	St Nicholas' Primary School	20
	St Olcan's Primary School	8
	St Oliver Plunkett's Primary School	6
	St Patrick's & St Brigid's Primary School	21
	St Patrick's & St Joseph's Primary School	104
	St Patrick's Primary School, Ahoghill	2
	St Patrick's Primary School, Glenariff	12
	St Patrick's Primary School, Loughgiel	96
	St Patrick's Primary School, Loup	3
	St Patrick's Primary School, Maghera	99
	St Patrick's Primary School, Portrush	2
	St Patrick's Primary School, Rasharkin	109
	St Trea's Primary School	1
	South-Eastern Board:	Ballymacrickett Primary School
Ballymacward Primary School		32
Christ the King Primary School, Drumaness		2
Convent of Mercy Primary School		1
Holy Family Primary School		18
Holy Trinity Primary School		9
Our Lady Queen of Peace Primary School		1
St Aloysius Primary School		8
St Anne's Primary School		1
St Bernard's Primary School		3
St Colman's Primary School, Lambeg		24
St Colman's Primary School, Moira		12
St Colmcille's Primary School		11
St Comgall's Primary School		5
St Finian's Primary School		2
St Francis' Primary School, Drumaroad		5
St Ita's Primary School		1
St Joseph's Primary School, Carryduff		2
St Joseph's Primary School, Crumlin		1
St Joseph's Primary School, Holland Dr		2
St Joseph's Primary School, Lisburn		2
St Joseph's Primary School, Strangford		14
St Joseph's Primary School, Tyrella		5
St Kieran's Primary School		6
St Luke's Primary School		1
St Macartan's Primary School	39	

South-Eastern Board:	St Malachy's Primary School, Bangor	23
	St Malachy's Primary School, Castlewellan	20
	St Malachy's Primary School, Kilclief	2
	St Malachy's Primary School, Kilcoo	22
	St Mark's Primary School	2
	St Mary's Primary School, Derrymore	1
	St Mary's Primary School, Killyleagh	1
	St Mary's Primary School, Kircubbin	63
	St Mary's Primary School, Newcastle	2
	St Mary's Primary School, Portaferry	8
	St Michael's Primary School, Finnis	22
	St Nicholas' Primary School	4
	St Patrick's Primary School, Ballygalget	20
	St Patrick's Primary School, Ballynahinch	1
	St Patrick's Primary School, Derrynaseer	4
	St Patrick's Primary School, Downpatrick	5
	St Patrick's Primary School, Holywood	1
St Patrick's Primary School, Legamaddy	20	
St Patrick's Primary School, Saul	2	
Southern Board:	Aughamullan Primary School	50
	Ballyholland Primary School	123
	Ballymacrickett Primary School	1
	Blessed Patrick O'Loughran Primary School	34
	Clintyclay Primary School	5
	Clonalig Primary School	73
	Crievagh Primary School	18
	Derrylatinee St Francis Primary School	75
	Edendork Primary School	48
	Holy Trinity Primary School	5
	Laghey Primary School	15
	Moneydarragh Primary School	12
	Our Lady's & St Mochua's Primary School	61
	Primate Dixon Primary School	17
	Roan St Patrick's Primary School	30
	Sacred Heart Primary School	113
	St Brendan's Primary School	1
	St Brigid's Primary School, Augher	1
	St Brigid's Primary School, Drumilly	39
	St Brigid's Primary School, Glassdrummond	123

Southern Board:	St Brigid's Primary School, Mountjoy	64
	St Clare's Convent Primary School	5
	St Colman's Abbey Primary School	1
	St Colman's Primary School, Annaclone	59
	St Colman's Primary School, Bann	2
	St Colman's Primary School, Dromore	17
	St Colman's Primary School, Saval	96
	St Francis' Primary School, Aghaderg	22
	St James' Primary School, Drumatee	16
	St Jarlath's Primary School, Blackwatertown	33
	St John's Primary School, Eglisli	45
	St John's Primary School, Kingsisland	13
	St John's Primary School, Middletown	53
	St John's Primary School, Moy	25
	St Joseph's and St James's Primary School	73
	St Joseph's Convent Primary School	40
	St Joseph's Primary School, Caledon	14
	St Joseph's Primary School, Crumlin	1
	St Joseph's Primary School, Galbally	93
	St Joseph's Primary School, Killeenan	58
	St Laurence O'Toole Primary School	15
	St MacCartan's Convent Primary School	28
	St Malachy's Primary School, Ballymoyer	72
	St Malachy's Primary School, Drummullan	8
	St Malachy's Primary School, Glencull	13
	St Mary's Primary School, Aughnacloy	22
	St Mary's Primary School, Ballygawley	25
	St Mary's Primary School, Cabra	120
	St Mary's Primary School, Derrymore	17
	St Mary's Primary School, Dunamore	114
	St Mary's Primary School, Glassdrumman	34
	St Mary's Primary School, Maghery	74
	St Mary's Primary School, Mullaghbawn	135
	St Mary's Primary School, Pomeroy	80
	St Mary's Primary School, Stewartstown	20
St Michael's Primary School, Finnis	22	
St Oliver Plunkett Primary School, Ballyhegan	32	
St Patrick's Primary School, Aghacommon	30	
St Patrick's Primary School, Annaghmore	49	

Southern Board:	St Patrick's Primary School, Crossmaglen	55
	St Patrick's Primary School, Donaghmore	28
	St Patrick's Primary School, Dungannon	6
	St Patrick's Primary School, Loup	33
	St Patrick's Primary School, Mayobridge	43
	St Patrick's Primary School, Mullinahoe	92
	St Ronan's Primary School, Newry	1
	St Teresa's Primary School Tullyherron	38
	Western Board:	All Saint's Primary School, Tattysallagh
Altishane Primary School		12
Barrack Street Boys' Primary School		8
Broadbridge Primary School		33
Chapel Road Primary School		1
Christ the King Primary School		2
Cornagogue Primary School		45
Corranny Primary School		58
Craigbrack Primary School		6
Drumduff Primary School		31
Drumnabey Primary School		5
Envagh Primary School		22
Evish Primary School		21
Faughanvale Primary School		22
Glendermott Primary School		7
Good Shepherd Primary School		2
Gortnagarn Primary School		13
Hollybush Primary School		1
Holy Child Primary School		1
Holy Family Primary School		3
Holy Trinity Primary School		94
Killyhommon Primary School		44
Knocknagor Primary School		25
Listress Primary School		15
Longtower Primary School		1
Loughash Primary School		29
Magheralough Primary School		23
Mullabuoy Primary School		8
Our Lady of Lourdes Primary School, Greencastle		92
Recarson Primary School		1
Roscavey Primary School	12	
St Aidan's Primary School, Magilligan	10	

Western Board:	St Anne's Primary School, Derry	11
	St Anne's Primary School, Strabane	12
	St Anthony's Primary School, Limavady	20
	St Brigid's Primary School, Altamuskin	52
	St Brigid's Primary School, Carnhill	1
	St Brigid's Primary School, Cranagh	23
	St Brigid's Primary School, Mountfield	5
	St Caireall's Primary School	82
	St Canice Primary School, Dungiven	45
	St Canice's Primary School, Feeny	10
	St Colmcille's Primary School, Claudy	88
	St Colmcille's Primary School, Omagh	3
	St Columban's Primary School, Belcoo	75
	St Columba's Primary School, Clady	16
	St Columba's Primary School, Dromore	3
	St Columba's Primary School, Newbuildings	1
	St Columbkille's Primary School, Carrickmore	130
	St Conor's Primary School, Omagh	13
	St Davog's Primary School, Belleek	30
	St Davog's Primary School, Scraghey	11
	St Dympna's Primary School, Dromore	12
	St Eithne's Primary School, Derry	1
	St Eugene's Primary School, Knocks	9
	St Eugene's Primary School, Tircur	23
	St Eugene's Primary School, Victoria Bridge	20
	St John the Baptist Primary School, Roscor	59
	St John's Primary School, Bligh's Lane	1
	St Joseph's Primary School, Donagh	36
	St Joseph's Primary School, Drumquin	63
	St Joseph's Primary School, Ederney	61
	St Joseph's Primary School, Glenmornan	8
	St Lawrence's Primary School, Fintona	92
	St Macartan's Primary School	6
	St Martin's Primary School, Garrison	62
	St Mary's Boys' Primary School, Strabane	3
	St Mary's Primary School, Fivemiletown	10
	St Mary's Primary School, Altinure	96
	St Mary's Primary School, Brookeborough	49
	St Mary's Primary School, Cloughcor	60

Western Board:	St Mary's Primary School, Killesher	39
	St Mary's Primary School, Killyclogher	6
	St Mary's Primary School, Maguiresbridge	41
	St Mary's Primary School, Mullymesker	61
	St Mary's Primary School, Newtownbutler	63
	St Mary's Primary School, Teemore	33
	St Mary's Primary School, Tempo No 2	56
	St Matthew's Primary School, Drumsurn	18
	St Matthew's Primary School, Garvaghey	21
	St Naile's Primary School	72
	St Ninnidh's Primary School	48
	St Oliver Plunkett Primary School, Beragh	32
	St Oliver Plunkett Primary School, Strathfoyle	1
	St Patrick's Primary School, Castlederg	42
	St Patrick's Primary School, Creggan	25
	St Patrick's Primary School, Derrygonnelly	58
	St Patrick's Primary School, Dunamanagh	19
	St Patrick's Primary School, Eskra	23
	St Patrick's Primary School, Gortin	41
	St Patrick's Primary School, Mullanaska	65
	St Patrick's Primary School, Newtownstewart	31
	St Patrick's Primary School, Pennyburn	6
	St Patrick's Primary School, Seskinore	7
	St Paul's Primary School, Irvinestown	42
	St Peter's & St Paul's Primary School	14
	St Peter's Primary School, Plumbridge	61
	St Ronan's Primary School, Lisnaska	60
	St Scire's Primary School	45
	St Teresa's Primary School, Loughmacrory	76
	St Theresa's Primary School, Glebe	5
	St Therese Primary School, Lenamore	1
	St Tierney's Primary School, Roslea	38
	Tattygar Primary School	25
	Termoncanice Primary School	53
	Trench Road Primary School	3
	Tummery Primary School	24

(III) INTEGRATED PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Belfast Board:	Cranmore Integrated Primary School	47
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Belfast Board:	Forge Integrated Primary School	9
	Hazelwood Primary School	94
	Loughview Integrated Primary School	7
North-Eastern Board:	Acorn Integrated Primary School	23
	Ballycastle Controlled Integrated Primary School	8
	Braidside Integrated Primary School	89
	Carhill Integrated Primary School	34
	Carnlough Integrated Primary School	2
	Corran Integrated Primary School	12
	Glengormley Integrated Primary School	5
	Hazelwood Primary School	40
	Mill Strand Integrated Primary School	22
	Rathenraw Integrated Primary School, Special Unit	9
	Roundtower Integrated Primary School	8
	Spires Integrated Primary School	1
South-Eastern Board:	All Children's Integrated Primary School	31
	Annsborough Integrated Primary School	15
	Bangor Central Integrated Primary School	4
	Cranmore Integrated Primary School	2
	Kircubbin Integrated Primary School	37
	Lough View Integrated Primary School	29
	Millennium Integrated Primary School	2
	Oakwood Integrated Primary School	4
	Portadown Integrated Primary School	1
Portaferry Integrated Primary School	2	
Southern Board:	All Children's Integrated Primary School	2
	Bridge Primary School	36
	Portadown Integrated Primary School	59
	Saints and Scholars Primary School	62
Western Board:	Enniskillen Integrated Primary School	78
	Groarty Integrated Primary School	2
	Oakgrove Integrated Primary School	156
	Omagh Integrated Primary School	114
	Roe Valley Integrated Primary School	2

(IV) IRISH-MEDIUM PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Belfast Board:	Bunscoil Phobal Feirste	3
North-Eastern Board:	Bunscoil Mhic Reachtain	2
	Bunscoil Phobal Feirste	2

North-Eastern Board:	Gaelscoil Na Speirintí	1
South-Eastern Board:	Bunscoil Phobal Feirste	5
Southern Board:	Gaelscoil Uí Neill	16
Western Board:	Bunscoil Cholmille, Carrickmore	53
	Bunscoil Cholmille, Derry	37
	Gaelscoil Eadain Mhoir, Derry	33
	Gaelscoil Uí Dhochartaigh, Strabane	2

Post-Primary Pupils Receiving School Transport

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Education how many pupils attending (i) State Controlled post-primary schools; (ii) Catholic Maintained post-primary schools; (iii) Integrated post-primary schools; and (iv) Irish Medium post-primary schools, used school transport during the 2007-08 academic year, broken down by (a) Education and Library Board; and (ii) school. (AQW 8221/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá dearbhairte ag na Boird Oideachais agus Leabharlainne go raibh an líon daltaí a leanas ag freastal ar na h-earnálacha iar-bhunscoile liostaithe agus ag fáil iompar scoile in 2007/08:

The Education and Library Boards have confirmed that the following number of pupils were attending the post-primary school sectors listed and receiving school transport in 2007/08:

	Controlled	Catholic Maintained	Integrated*	Irish Medium	Total
BELB	124	24	942	69	1,159
NEELB	5,025	2,937	1,301	12	9,275
SEELB	4,195	1,872	1,658	102	7,827
SELB	5,159	5,697	962	27	11,845
WELB	3,977	4,179	1,472	18	9,646

* This category includes both Grant Maintained and Controlled Integrated schools.

Broken down by individual school as follows:

(I) CONTROLLED POST-PRIMARY SCHOOLS:

Belfast Board:	Antrim Grammar School	2
	Ashfield Boys' High School	3
	Ashfield Girls' High School	2
	Ballyclare High School	2
	Ballynahinch High School	1
	Balmoral High School	4
	Bangor Academy	3
	Belfast Boys' Model School	11
	Belfast Model School for Girls	3
	Castle High School	2
	Downshire School	1
	Dundonald High School	3
	Dunmurry High School	34
	Glengormley High School	3
	Grosvenor Grammar School	9
	Knockbreda High School	4
	Lisnagarvey High School	1
	Lisnasharragh High School	1
	Monkstown Community School	3
	Nendrum College	2
Newtownbreda High School	9	
Orangefield High School	7	
Wellington College	14	
North-Eastern Board:	Antrim Grammar School	305
	Ashfield Girls' High School	1
	Ballee Community High School	97
	Ballycastle High School	254
	Ballyclare High School	632
	Ballyclare Secondary School	320
	Ballymoney High School	274
	Ballymoney HS Special Unit	12
	Balmoral High School	1
	Bangor Academy & Sixth Form College	1
	Belfast Model School for Girls	2
	Cambridge House Grammar School	672
	Carrickfergus College	109
	Carrickfergus Grammar School	80
	Coleraine College	89

North-Eastern Board:	Coleraine College Special Unit	13
	Coleraine High School	389
	Cullybackey High School	394
	Downshire School	193
	Dunclug College	277
	Dunluce School	247
	Garvagh High School	90
	Glengormley High School	41
	Knockbreda High School	1
	Larne High School	56
	Larne High School Special Unit	7
	Limavady Grammar School	15
	Limavady High School	23
	Maghera High School	78
	Maghera High School Special Unit	20
	Magherafelt High School	203
	Monkstown Community High School	11
	Monkstown Community HS Special Unit	5
	Newtownabbey Community High School	10
	Parkhall College	101
Wellington College	2	
South-Eastern Board:	Antrim Grammar School	12
	Ashfield Boys' High School	3
	Ashfield Girls' High School	20
	Ballynahinch High School	198
	Banbridge Academy	26
	Banbridge High School	3
	Bangor Academy & Sixth Form College	95
	Belfast Boys' Model School	1
	Carrickfergus College	1
	Carrickfergus Grammar School	1
	Castle High School	1
	Craigavon Senior High School, Lurgan	24
	Donaghadee High School	81
	Down High School	851
	Dromore High School	249
	Dundonald High School	28
Dunmurry High School	6	
Glastry College	418	
Glenlola Collegiate	148	

South-Eastern Board:	Grosvenor Grammar School	393
	Kilkeel High School	44
	Knockbreda High School	13
	Laurelhill Community College	172
	Lisnagarvey High School	24
	Lisnasharragh High School	5
	Lurgan College	65
	Lurgan Junior High School	123
	Movilla High School	12
	Nendrum College	47
	Newtownbreda High School	42
	Orangefield High School	10
	Parkhall College	4
	Rathfriland High School	12
	Regent House	588
	Saintfield High School	191
	Wellington College	284
	Southern Board:	Aughnacloy College
Ballynahinch High School		12
Banbridge Academy		740
Banbridge High School		197
City of Armagh High School		188
Clounagh Junior High School		179
Collegiate Grammar School		14
Cookstown High School		505
Craigavon Senior High School, Lurgan		54
Craigavon Senior High School, Portadown		195
Devenish College, Enniskillen		1
Down High School		5
Dromore High School		217
Drumglass High School		290
Fivemiletown College		190
Kilkeel High School		308
Killicomaine Junior High School		42
Laurelhill Community College		3
Lisnagarvey High School		3
Lurgan College		188
Lurgan Junior High School	108	
Magherafelt High School	25	
Markethill High School	514	

Southern Board:	Newry High School	227
	Newtownhamilton High School	252
	Omagh Academy Grammar School	28
	Omagh High School	2
	Portadown College	341
	Rathfriland High School	122
	Tandragee Junior High	86
	Wellington College	3
	Western Board:	Castledearg High School
Coleraine College		4
Coleraine High School		9
Collegiate Grammar School		399
Devenish College, Enniskillen		545
Fivemiletown HS & Community College		180
Limavady Grammar School		469
Limavady High School		314
Lisnaskea High School		146
Lisneal College		331
Omagh Academy Grammar School		429
Omagh High School		256
Strabane Grammar School		337
Strabane High School	228	

(II) MAINTAINED POST-PRIMARY SCHOOLS:

Belfast Board:	Christian Brothers' School	1
	Edmund Rice College	3
	Little Flower Girls' School	1
	Our Lady of Mercy Girls' School	1
	St Colman's High School, Ballynahinch	4
	St Columbanus' College, Bangor	2
	St Gabriel's College, Belfast	1
	St Joseph's College, Belfast	6
	St Louise's Comprehensive College, Belfast	2
	St Patrick's College	3
North-Eastern Board:	Christian Brothers Secondary School	2
	Cross & Passion College	289
	De La Salle Boys' School	18
	Edmund Rice College	22
	Holy Trinity College	4
	La Salle Boys' Junior School	1

North-Eastern Board:	Little Flower Girls' School	209
	Our Lady of Lourdes High School	139
	Our Lady of Lourdes HS Special Unit	18
	Our Lady of Mercy Girls' School	36
	St Aloysius' High School	46
	St Benedict's College	334
	St Brigid's College	1
	St Colm's High School, Draperstown	135
	St Colm's High School, Twinbrook	1
	St Comgall's College	38
	St Gemma's High School	2
	St Genevieve's High School	16
	St Joseph's College, Belfast	1
	St Joseph's College, Coleraine	135
	St Louise's Comprehensive College	69
	St Mary's College	154
	St Mary's High School, Limavady	2
	St Mary's High School, Lurgan	1
	St Patrick's College, Ballymena	165
	St Patrick's College, Bearnageeha	15
	St Patrick's College, Maghera	592
	St Patrick's College Special Unit, Maghera	15
	St Patrick's High School, Lisburn	28
	St Paul's College	197
St Paul's High School, Lurgan	2	
St Pius X College	244	
St Rose's High School	6	
South-Eastern Board:	Christian Brothers' Secondary School	10
	Corpus Christi College	2
	De La Salle High School	143
	La Salle Boys' School	28
	Lismore Comprehensive School	8
	St Colman's High School	127
	St Colmcille's High School	295
	St Colm's High School	1
	St Columban's College	1
	St Columbanus' College	194
	St Columba's College	114
	St Genevieve's High School	11
	St Joseph's College	38

South-Eastern Board:	St Louise's Comprehensive College	46
	St Malachy's High School	486
	St Mary's High School, Downpatrick	237
	St Mary's High School, Lurgan	21
	St Patrick's College, Banbridge	2
	St Patrick's High School, Lisburn	94
	St Paul's Junior High School	9
	St Rose's High School	5
	Southern Board:	Dean Maguire College
Drumcree College		41
Holy Trinity College		475
Lismore Comprehensive School		227
Sacred Heart College		1
St Brigid's High School, Armagh		83
St Catherine's College		448
St Ciaran's High School		550
St Colman's High School		7
St Colm's High School, Draperstown		4
St Columban's College		108
St Genevieve's High School		1
St Joseph's Boys' High School, Newry		106
St Joseph's College, Coalisland		149
St Joseph's High School, Crossmaglen		473
St Louise's Comprehensive College		1
St Malachy's High School, Castlewellan		344
St Mark's High School, Warrenpoint		470
St Mary's High School, Downpatrick		1
St Mary's High School, Lurgan		137
St Mary's High School, Newry		152
St Patrick's College, Maghera	4	
St Patrick's College, Banbridge	192	
St Patrick's College, Dungannon	310	
St Patrick's High School, Keady	482	
St Patrick's High School, Lisburn	1	
St Paul's High School, Bessbrook	559	
St Paul's High School, Lurgan	95	
St Pius X College	273	
Western Board:	Dean Maguire College	387
	Holy Cross College	393
	Immaculate Conception College	36

Western Board:	Sacred Heart College	428
	St Aidan's High School, Derrylin	146
	St Brigid's College	30
	St Cecilia's College	370
	St Ciaran's High School	184
	St Colms HS, Draperstown	16
	St Comhghall's College	159
	St Eugene's College, Roslea	177
	St Eugene's High School, Castlederg	87
	St Fanchea's College	190
	St John's Business and Enterprise College	116
	St Joseph's Boys' High School, Creggan	26
	St Joseph's College, Enniskillen	160
	St Mary's College, Irvinestown	101
	St Mary's College, Londonderry	35
	St Mary's High School, Brollagh	137
	St Mary's Secondary School, Limavady	441
	St Patrick's & St Brigid's College	219
	St Patrick's College, Dungiven	120
	St Patrick's College, Maghera	208
St Peter's High School	13	

(III) INTEGRATED POST-PRIMARY SCHOOLS:

Belfast Board:	Fort Hill Integrated College	39
	Hazelwood Integrated College	299
	Lagan College	291
	Malone College	257
	Priory College	55
	Ulidia Integrated College	1
North-Eastern Board:	Crumlin Integrated College	111
	Fort Hill Integrated College	2
	Hazelwood Integrated College	115
	Lagan College	6
	Malone College	17
	North Coast Integrated College	169
	Priory College	1
	Slemish Integrated College	476
	Sperrin Integrated College	171
	Ulidia Integrated College	223

South-Eastern Board:	Crumlin Integrated College	68
	Down Academy	191
	Fort Hill Integrated College	136
	Hazelwood Integrated College	5
	Lagan College	369
	Malone College	45
	New-Bridge Integrated College	2
	Priory College	191
	Shimna College	192
	Strangford College	459
Southern Board:	Armagh Integrated College	52
	Brownlow College	97
	Crumlin Integrated College	2
	Drumragh Integrated College	6
	Fort Hill Integrated College	11
	Integrated College, Dungannon	246
	Lagan College	2
	Malone College	4
	New-Bridge Integrated College	367
	Shimna Integrated College	100
Sperrin Integrated College	75	
Western Board:	Drumragh Integrated College	355
	Erne Integrated College	241
	North Coast Integrated College	2
	Oakgrove Integrated College	874

(IV) IRISH-MEDIUM POST-PRIMARY SCHOOLS:

Belfast Board:	Coláiste Feirste	69
North-Eastern Board:	Coláiste Feirste	12
South-Eastern Board:	Coláiste Feirste	102
Southern Board:	Coláiste Feirste	1
	St Catherine's College, Irish Medium Unit	26
Western Board:	Coláiste Bhríde (St Brigid's College)	18

Premature Retirement Compensation Scheme

Mr Attwood asked the Minister of Education for an update on the working group on Premature Retirement

Compensation Scheme, particularly in relation to the issue of 'hard charging' schools for teachers' added years; and what plans she has to respond to the issue.
(AQW 8249/08)

The Minister of Education: The Premature Retirement Compensation Scheme (PRCS) Review Group was established for consultation with key stakeholders on the arrangements for compensating teachers retiring prematurely from April 2009 onwards. The Review Group comprises representatives of the Department, employers and teacher unions in both the schools and FE sectors. Its remit is to bring forward options for managing the costs of the PRCS in future.

The group met on 26 February 2008, 7 April 2008 and 25 June 2008. At the meeting on 25 June it was agreed that my Department would amend existing legislation to bring provisions for compensating teachers for premature retirement broadly into line with arrangements under the corresponding schemes in Scotland and in England and Wales. The Review Group will in the meantime continue to consider how such provisions may be applied consistently for the benefit of teachers and employers, and in the interests of economy and efficiency.

Tá beart déanta cheana lena chinntiú, ón bhliain airgeadais seo amach, go mbeidh na daoine sin atá freagrach as a shocrú go mbronnfar cúiteamh méadaithe as scor roimh am ("blianta breise"), freagrach fosta as na costais.

Action has already been taken to ensure that, from the current financial year, those who are responsible for decisions to award enhanced compensation for premature retirement ("added years") are also accountable for the costs. In the corresponding scheme in England and Wales, responsibility for the cost of added years was transferred to teachers' employers in 1991. In 1997 employers became liable for all the costs associated with the scheme, including the additional cost of early payment of unreduced pension benefits.

Sports Facilities at Schools

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education to give her assessment of sports facilities in (i) Primary Schools; and (ii) Post Primary Schools. (AQW 8250/08)

The Minister of Education: There are no plans to carry out an audit of sports facilities in all schools.

Cuirtear áiseanna spóirt ar fáil ag scoileanna chun tacú le soláthar an churaclaim agus ar chomhairle na Cigireachta Oideachais agus Oiliúna.

Sports facilities are provided at schools to support the delivery of the curriculum and on the advice of the Education and Training Inspectorate.

Sports Facilities at Schools

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education if she will carry out an audit of sports facilities in all schools.
(AQW 8251/08)

The Minister of Education: There are no plans to carry out an audit of sports facilities in all schools.

Cuirtear áiseanna spóirt ar fáil ag scoileanna chun tacú le soláthar an churaclaim agus ar chomhairle na Cigireachta Oideachais agus Oiliúna.

Sports facilities are provided at schools to support the delivery of the curriculum and on the advice of the Education and Training Inspectorate.

School Buses Provided by Translink

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Education how many buses are provided by Translink on a daily basis for the purpose of transporting pupils attending (i) State Controlled primary schools; (ii) Catholic Maintained primary schools; (iii) Integrated primary schools; and (iv) Irish Medium primary schools, broken down by (a) Education and Library Board; and (b) school.
(AQW 8268/08)

The Minister of Education: I have been informed by Translink that it does not hold the information in the format requested. Translink does not have a dedicated schools fleet but rather incorporates school transport provision into its stage carriage network.

Iompraíonn Translink tuairim is ar 65,000 dalta go dtí an scoil agus ar ais ar bhonn laethúil, agus cuirtear ar fáil 2,600 turas breise ar bharr ghnáthsheirbhísi amhláir le seo a chomhlíonadh.

Translink carries some 65,000 pupils to and from school on a daily basis, and 2,600 extra journeys are provided in addition to normal timetabled services to fulfil this.

School Buses Provided by Translink

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Education how many buses are provided by Translink on a daily basis for the purpose of transporting pupils attending (i) State Controlled post-primary schools; (ii) Catholic Maintained post-primary schools; (iii) Integrated post-primary schools; and (iv) Irish Medium post-primary schools, broken down by (a) Education and Library Board; and (b) school.
(AQW 8269/08)

The Minister of Education: I have been informed by Translink that it does not hold the information in the format requested. Translink does not have a dedicated schools fleet but rather incorporates school transport provision into its stage carriage network.

Iompraíonn Translink tuairim is ar 65,000 dalta go dtí an scoil agus ar ais ar bhonn laethúil, agus cuirtear ar fáil 2,600 turas breise ar bharr ghnáthsheirbhísí amchláir le seo a chomhlíonadh.

Translink carries some 65,000 pupils to and from school on a daily basis, and 2,600 extra journeys are provided in addition to normal timetabled services to fulfil this.

School Closures

Mr Gallagher asked the Minister of Education how many school closures have been announced since devolution; and in how many cases at primary and post-primary level, has the school cited difficulties in delivering the revised curriculum among the reasons for closure. (AQW 8286/08)

The Minister of Education: Ón chineachadh, fógraíodh druidim ocht scoil agus aon aonad bunscoile. Níor luaigh ceann ar bit de na scoileanna deacrachtaí i soláthar an churaclaim athbhreithnithe ar an cúiseanna le druidim.

Closures of eight schools and one unit of a primary school have been announced since devolution. None of the schools cited difficulties in delivering the revised curriculum among the reasons for closure.

Movilla High School

Miss McIlveen asked the Minister of Education what plans she has for maintaining and improving facilities at Movilla High School. (AQW 8294/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá Bord Oideachais agus Leabharlann an Oirdheiscirt freagrach as cothabháil agus soláthar na n-oibreacha caipitiúla ag Ardscoil Mhaigh Bhile. Thug an Bord le fios dom gur cuireadh coire úr isteach le gairid; chosain an coire tuairim is £29,000 agus soláthróidh sé teas don halla spóirt. Tá sé de rún ag an Bhord na háiseanna a fheabhsú trí uasghrádú a dhéanamh ar na seomraí a úsáidtear le haghaidh eacnamaíocht bhaile; samhradh 2009 an sprioc-am atá i gceist.

The South Eastern Education and Library Board has responsibility for maintenance and the provision of capital works at Movilla High School. The Board has advised that a new boiler to serve the sports hall has just been installed at a cost of approximately £29,000. The Board plans to improve the facilities with an upgrade of the home economics accommodation, with a target date of summer 2009.

Statements of Special Educational Needs

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Education how many pupils are currently awaiting a statement of special educational need. (AQO 4020/08)

The Minister of Education: Thug Príomhfheidhmeannaigh na mbord oideachais agus leabharlaine eolas dom faoin líon daltaí a ndearnadh measúnú reachtúil ar a riachtanais speisialta oideachais, faoin líon a measann na Boird ráiteas riachtanas speisialta oideachais a bheith de dhíth orthu, agus faoin líon atá ag fanacht lena ráiteas a bheith réidh. Seo leanas an líon:

I have been advised by the Chief Executives of the education and library boards that the number of pupils who have undergone a statutory assessment of their special educational needs, are considered by the Boards to require a statement of special educational needs, and who are currently awaiting completion of their statement is as follows:-

1. Belfast Education and Library Board - 21
2. North-Eastern Education and Library Board - 45
3. South-Eastern Education and Library Board - 42
4. Southern Education and Library Board - 124
5. Western Education and Library Board - 34

These figures represent those pupils on whom a statutory assessment of their special educational needs has been completed and who are currently awaiting either a proposed or final statement of special education needs.

Education and Library Board Underspend

Mr O'Dowd asked the Minister of Education to detail the underspend of each of the Education and Library Boards in the last three financial years. (AQW 8312/08)

The Minister of Education: The amount of resources which remained unspent for each of the Education and Library Boards in the last three financial years, are detailed in the table below. These include unspent resources in the Education & Library Boards themselves, schools and youth services.

£000S

	2005-06		2006-07		2007-08	
	Resource	Capital	Resource	Capital	Resource	Capital
BELB	2,251	757	7,858	2,245	6,785	1,902

Education & Library Board	2005-06		2006-07		2007-08	
	Resource	Capital	Resource	Capital	Resource	Capital
NEELB	5,725	3	14,900	61	5,887	209
SEELB	2,071	21	6,963	95	7,349	97
SELB	7,878	1,191	17,852	2,425	7,572	1,030
WELB	9,432	378	20,680	870	6,857	479
Total	27,357	2,350	68,253	5,696	34,450	3,717

D'aontaigh an Coiste Feidhmiúcháin socrúithe Solúbthachta Dheireadh na Bliana in Aibreán 2008; cinntíonn na socrúithe sin nach n-úsáidfear na hacmhainní seo ach i gcomhair oideachais sna blianta amach romhainn.

It should be noted that under the End Year Flexibility arrangements, agreed by the Executive in April 2008, these resources remain committed to education for use in subsequent years.

Teachers' Added Years Scheme

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education what are the effects of the changes in resourcing of the teachers' added years scheme on the implementation of Sustainable Schools' Policy. (AQW 8338/08)

The Minister of Education: Ní bhaineann na hathruithe a rinneadh le gairid ar an Scéim Chúitimh le haghaidh Múinteoirí a Scoireann Roimh Am (PRCS) leis an Pholasáí um Scoileanna Inmharthana

Recent changes to the administration of the Teachers' Premature Retirement Compensation Scheme (PRCS) are unconnected to Sustainable Schools Policy. Action has been taken to ensure that, from the current financial year, those who are responsible for decisions to award teachers enhanced compensation for premature retirement ("added years") are also accountable for the costs. In taking this action my Department is seeking to ensure that in future the level of discretionary compensation awarded to teachers is both affordable and appropriate in light of criticism by the House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts of the generous nature of the PRCS. While it is a matter for employing authorities to determine what compensation they are prepared to offer, the guiding principle should be the maximum economy consistent with effectiveness.

Permanent Teaching Posts

Mr Simpson asked the Minister of Education how many qualified teachers who completed their training

last year have yet to obtain a permanent teaching post in Northern Ireland. (AQW 8339/08)

The Minister of Education: The Department does not employ teachers nor does it hold this information. However, the General Teaching Council has been registering initial teacher education graduates on an annual basis since April 2004. The Council also seeks information, annually, from all grant-aided schools on teachers employed on a permanent or significant temporary nature (i.e. excluding supply/substitute teachers). The Council has provided the following information:

	2007/08 ⁽¹⁾
Graduate Records	801
Currently Registered	683
Currently Employed (see note 2)	187

Notes:

1. The year stated refers to the GTC Registration Year, i.e. 1 April 2007 to 31 March 2008.
2. "Currently Employed" includes teachers who are employed on a permanent or significant temporary basis (i.e. excludes substitute/supply teachers).

Tá iarrtha agam ar mo Roinn tuilleadh oibre a dhéanamh ar phatrúin fostaíochta mhac léinn ag baint céime amach as oideachas tosaigh múinteoireachta.

I have asked my Department to undertake further work on the employment patterns of students graduating from initial teacher education.

Permanent Teaching Posts

Mr Simpson asked the Minister of Education how many qualified teachers who completed their training in each of the last five years have yet to obtain a permanent teaching post in Northern Ireland six months after qualification. (AQW 8340/08)

The Minister of Education: The Department does not employ teachers nor does it hold this information. However, the General Teaching Council has been registering initial teacher education graduates on an annual basis since April 2004. The Council also seeks information, annually, from all grant-aided schools on teachers employed on a permanent or significant temporary nature (i.e. excluding supply/substitute teachers). The Council has provided the following information:

	2003/04 ⁽¹⁾	2004/05 ⁽¹⁾	2005/06 ⁽¹⁾	2006/07 ⁽¹⁾	2007/08 ⁽¹⁾
Graduate Records	705	792	816	807	801

	2003/ 04 ⁽¹⁾	2004/ 05 ⁽¹⁾	2005/ 06 ⁽¹⁾	2006/ 07 ⁽¹⁾	2007/ 08 ⁽¹⁾
Currently Registered	635	672	671	708	683
Currently Employed (see note 2)	535	490	413	337	187

Notes:

1. The years stated refer to the GTC Registration Year, i.e. 1 April to 31 March.
2. "Currently Employed" includes teachers who are employed on a permanent or significant temporary basis (i.e. excludes substitute/supply teachers).

Tá iarrtha agam ar mo Roinn tuilleadh oibre a dhéanamh ar phatrúin fostaíochta mhac léinn ag baint céime amach as oideachas tosaigh múinteoireachta.

I have asked my Department to undertake further work on the employment patterns of students graduating from initial teacher education.

Capital Scheme for Ballymacash Primary School

Mr Poots asked the Minister of Education what plans her Department has to provide a new teaching block at Ballymacash Primary School, Lisburn, and to remove the mobiles currently on site. (AQW 8355/08)

The Minister of Education: Baineann pleanáil eastát rialaithe na scoileanna le Bord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an Oirdheiscirt ar an chéad dul síos. Níl aon phlean ann faoi láthair chun scéim chaipitil a bheith ann do Bhunscoil Ballymacash.

The planning of the controlled schools' estate is a matter for the South Eastern Education and Library Board in the first instance. There are currently no plans for a capital scheme for Ballymacash Primary School.

Educational Provision and Facilities in Dromore, Co Down

Mr Poots asked the Minister of Education what plans her Department has to enhance the educational provision and facilities in Dromore, Co Down, to meet the needs of (i) pre-school; (ii) primary school; and (iii) post-primary school, education for children and young people aged between 3 and 18. (AQW 8357/08)

The Minister of Education:

- (i) Pre-School

The Southern Education and Library Board are currently reviewing pre-school provision across the

Board area, but has no specific plans relating to the Dromore area at this time.

- (ii) Primary and (iii) Post Primary

There are no current major works proposals from the maintained or voluntary grammar sectors for the Dromore area.

Maidir leis an earnáil rialaithe, tá dhá scéim chaipitil á bpleanáil faoi láthair i gcomhair áitribh úra a thógáil do Lár-Bhunscoil an Droma Mhóir agus Ardscóil an Droma Mhóir.

In regard to the controlled sector, there are two capital schemes currently in planning for new school builds for Dromore Central Primary School and Dromore High School. A new school on a new site was approved for Dromore Central Primary School. The SELB has advised that the scheme is now progressing in planning, after some delay in acquiring the site. A capital scheme for Dromore High School is at Economic Appraisal stage. An appraisal was submitted to the Department in January 2008 and comments on the appraisal were provided to the SELB at the end of June.

Primary School Pupil Funding

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Education the average amount spent per primary school pupil in each year since 2001-02. (AQW 8375/08)

The Minister of Education: The table below sets out the average funding per pupil delegated to schools under Local Management of Schools arrangements in each of the last seven years. Further funding is allocated directly to Funding Authorities for a wide range of services, some which benefit all pupils while others are more specifically targeted.

Dá réir sin ní thig an maoiniú sin a chur i láthair ar bhonn dalta aonair.

Accordingly it is not possible to present that funding accurately on a per-pupil basis.

Primary School Sector	Average amount Per Capita £
2001/02	£1,890
2002/03	£1,964
2003/04	£2,126
2004/05	£2,228
2005/06	£2,442
2006/07	£2,620
2007/08	£2,741

Complaints Against Teachers

Dr Farry asked the Minister of Education what mechanisms are in place to address complaints against teachers making inappropriate remarks related to prejudice. (AQW 8428/08)

The Minister of Education: Príomhoide agus Bord Gobharnóirí na scoile atá i gceist a bíos freagrach as fiosrú gearán in éadan múinteoirí.

Complaints against teachers are a matter for investigation by the Principal and Board of Governors of the school concerned. Following a preliminary investigation, if the complaint cannot be resolved informally, the Disciplinary Procedure for Teachers may be invoked. The Procedure was agreed by the employing authorities and the teacher unions through the Teacher Negotiating Committee to provide a fair, consistent process for dealing with alleged misconduct.

Post-Primary School Places

Dr Farry asked the Minister of Education further to her answers to AQO 3975/08 and AQW 7582/08, to clarify and reconcile the differing figures in relation to the number of children from the North Down constituency who are without a suitable place in a post-primary school for the forthcoming academic year. (AQW 8429/08)

The Minister of Education: The reason for the difference between the figures given in response to these two questions is essentially because the questions have been understood as asking about two different definitions of the area concerned: the “North Down” and the smaller “North Down Constituency”. In AQO 3975/08 Peter Weir MLA asked me what action my Department was taking to ensure adequate provision for the intake of new pupils at secondary level “in North Down” in September 2008. In my answer I stated that there were, at that time, 45 unplaced children resident “in the area”. These 45 unplaced children did not all reside in the North Down constituency: for example, included in their number were unplaced children residing in Newtownards and Dundonald (Strangford constituency) who were seeking admission to schools in North Down. This reflects a long tradition of children from the Strangford constituency attending schools in North Down and vice versa.

In Question AQW 7582/08 you asked me (i) how many; and (ii) what percentage of, P7 children attending schools specifically in the North Down constituency have not been allocated a place at a post-primary school for the 2008-09 academic year. In my answer I quoted a figure of 30 children (which equates to 3%). This figure is lower than the 45 figure

previously given because it excludes those children resident outside the North Down constituency but who were included in the figure of 45 given for the number of unplaced children resident “in North Down”.

Tá áit glactha ag cuid de na 45 pháiste i scoileanna malartacha anois; seo na páistí a bhfuil cónaí orthu i limistéar Thuaisceart an Dúin agus a liostáladh ar 10 Meitheamh 2008 mar dhaoine gan áit scoile.

Some of the 45 children resident in the North Down area who, on 10 June, 2008, were counted as unplaced have now accepted places at alternative schools. The South Eastern Education and Library Board have advised the Department that the number of children resident in North Down who, on 3 July, 2008, were unplaced was 11 with a further eight unplaced children resident outside the North Down constituency.

Preschool Places in East Antrim

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Education how many pre-school places are available in nursery schools in the East Antrim constituency. (AQW 8446/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá 390 áiteanna páirtaimseartha agus 234 áiteanna lánaimseartha ar fáil i naiscoileanna agus i mbunscoileanna a bhfuil aonaid náiolainne acu i dtoghcheantar Aontroma Thoir.

There are 390 part-time places and 234 full-time places available in nursery schools and primary schools with nursery units in the East Antrim constituency.

Increasing Fuel Costs

Mrs Long asked the Minister of Education what assessment she has made of the impact of the increase in (i) fuel costs; and (ii) fuel duty, on the departmental budget and the realisation of efficiency targets; and what action she has taken to mitigate against these increased costs. (AQW 8451/08)

The Minister of Education: In recognition of the impact of increasing fuel costs and fuel duty on the budget for education, a bid was submitted in the June Monitoring round for £7.5 million to cover the increased energy costs in schools. This bid was unsuccessful but the pressure on school budgets will be kept under review and a further bid will be made in subsequent Monitoring rounds, if necessary. In relation to the fuel costs for the running of the Department of Education, these are paid for by the Department of Finance and Personnel and therefore any increase in costs is a matter for them to address.

Níltear ag dúil go n-oibreoidh an méadú ar chostas agus ar dhleacht breosla tionchar ar chumas na Roinne na spriocanna éifeachtúlachta a leagadh amach i bpróiseas buiséid 2007 a shroicheadh.

It is not anticipated that the increase in fuel costs and fuel duty will have an impact on the Department's ability to achieve the efficiency targets set in the 2007 Budget process.

Primary Languages Group

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to her answer to AQW 7500/08, if she will give details of the Primary Languages Group set up to manage and monitor the Primary Languages Programme, including the members' names and the education partners they represent, as well as their background in the two primary languages.

(AQW 8456/08)

The Minister of Education: The regional Primary Modern Languages group consists of curricular advisors from the North-Eastern, South-Eastern, Southern and Belfast Education and Library Boards, a Field Officer from the Western Education and Library Board, an Assistant Advisor from the South-Eastern Education and Library Board and an Assistant Principal Officer from the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment. The group is chaired by an Assistant Senior Education Officer from the South Eastern Education and Library Board, and representation has been sought from the Higher Education Institutions.

In terms of background, group members bring educational expertise as well as a range of linguistic experience, including in Spanish and Irish. Specific language expertise in Spanish and Irish is drawn by the group from organisations such as the Spanish Embassy, Foras na Gaelige, the Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research and Gael Linn.

Tuairiscíonn an grúpa ar bhonn rialta don Bhord Bainistíochta Páirtíochta (BBP) agus do mo Roinn. Tá an Chigireacht Oideachais agus Oiliúna fosta ag déanamh meastóireachta neamhspleáiche ar an chlár le linn na scoilbhliana 2008-09.

The group reports regularly to the Partnership Management Board (PMB) and my Department. The Education and Training Inspectorate is also carrying out an independent evaluation of the programme during the 2008-09 school year.

Pattern of Attendance

Mr Newton asked the Minister of Education how many nursery schools in the East Belfast constituency

applied for additional places for the (i) 2008-09; and (ii) 2009-10, academic years; and to detail (a) the nursery schools that were refused additional places, and (b) the reasons for refusal. (AQW 8463/08)

The Minister of Education: Níor iarr aon naiscoil athrú sa phatrún freastail don bhliain acadúil 2008/09.

No nursery schools have requested a change in the pattern of attendance for the 2008/09 academic year.

One school, Braniel Primary School, has requested a change in pattern of attendance in their nursery unit from 1 full-time and 2 part-time classes to 2 full-time classes from 1 September 2009. This request is currently under consideration.

Independent Admissions Criteria

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education when she became aware that it is legally permissible for schools to set their own independent admissions criteria in the absence of an agreed alternative. (AQW 8487/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá faisnéis tugtha ag oifigigh domh ar impleachtaí gach gné den reachtaíocht a bhaineann le hiontráil go scoileanna ó thús mo thréimhse oifige.

I have been briefed by officials on the implications of all aspects of legislation governing school admissions from the beginning of my term of office.

Lisnadill Primary School

Mr Kennedy asked the Minister of Education for an update on the proposed extension works to Lisnadill Primary School for the provision of a new assembly hall and enhanced sports facilities and the timescale for this project. (AQW 8505/08)

The Minister of Education: Is mionscéim oibreacha atá ann agus dá bharr sin titeann sí faoi fhreagracht tharmligthe Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlann an Deiscirt (BOLOD).

This is a minor works scheme and as such falls within the delegated responsibility of the Southern Education and Library Board (SELB).

I understand from the Chief Executive of the SELB that preliminary design drawings for the extension, comprising a multi-purpose hall and other ancillary accommodation, have been agreed with the school principal and that an outline planning application has been made.

Biometric Systems

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education how many schools in each Education and Library Board area use biometric systems in the administration of (a) school meals (b) school libraries. (AQW 8515/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá an t-eolas a iarradh mionsonraithe sa tábla faoi iamh.

The information requested is detailed in the attached table.

	School Meals	School Libraries
BELB	0	1
NEELB	0	0
SEELB	0	4
SELB	2	Not Available ¹
WELB	3	Not Available ¹

1. Not all Boards hold details on the number of schools who have biometric systems in their school libraries as this is a matter for individual schools.

Schools must comply with the Data Protection Act 1998 in using biometric systems. Biometric data must be treated just like any other personal data under the terms of the Act. Guidance for schools on the introduction of biometric systems is available on the Department's website www.deni.gov.uk.

All systems are password protected and only permitted staff will have access. The majority of schools use fingerprint data, where a user has their fingerprint scanned, converted into digital data and recorded. The image of the fingerprint is not held on the system and cannot be regenerated from the digital data.

At the end of each school year, a complete upgrade is carried out when all school leavers will have all their biometric details deleted from the system and new inta

Administration of School Meals

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education how many schools in each Education and Library Board area still use paper lunch tickets/passes in the administration of school meals. (AQW 8516/08)

The Minister of Education: Ní choinníonn an Roinn eolas ar líon na scoileanna i ngach Bord Oideachais agus Leabharlann atá ag úsáid ticéid/pasanna lóin go fóill de bharr nach mbaineann an t-ábhar sin ach leis na scoileanna iad féin.

The Department does not hold information on the number of schools in each Education and Library

Board who are still operating lunch tickets/passes as this is a matter for individual schools.

The Belfast Board has confirmed that paper tickets have been withdrawn from their primary schools. The North-Eastern Board no longer issue paper tickets to schools as they operate a register system, but some of their schools may be operating a pass system. The Southern Board has confirmed that there are 9 primary schools and 25 post-primary schools who still use paper lunch tickets/passes. The South-Eastern and Western Boards do not hold figures on the number of schools who are still operating paper ticketing systems.

Biometric Systems

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education how the Department ensures the security of biometric information on pupils stored in schools.(AQW 8517/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá an t-eolas a iarradh mionsonraithe sa tábla faoi iamh.

The information requested is detailed in the attached table.

	School Meals	School Libraries
BELB	0	1
NEELB	0	0
SEELB	0	4
SELB	2	Not Available ¹
WELB	3	Not Available ¹

1. Not all Boards hold details on the number of schools who have biometric systems in their school libraries as this is a matter for individual schools.

Schools must comply with the Data Protection Act 1998 in using biometric systems. Biometric data must be treated just like any other personal data under the terms of the Act. Guidance for schools on the introduction of biometric systems is available on the Department's website www.deni.gov.uk.

All systems are password protected and only permitted staff will have access. The majority of schools use fingerprint data, where a user has their fingerprint scanned, converted into digital data and recorded. The image of the fingerprint is not held on the system and cannot be regenerated from the digital data.

At the end of each school year, a complete upgrade is carried out when all school leavers will have all their biometric details deleted from the system and new intakes added.

Biometric Systems

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education how and when schools dispose of biometric information on pupils. (AQW 8518/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá an t-eolas a iarradh mionsonraithe sa tábla faoi iamh.

The information requested is detailed in the attached table.

	School Meals	School Libraries
BELB	0	1
NEELB	0	0
SEELB	0	4
SELB	2	Not Available ¹
WELB	3	Not Available ¹

1. Not all Boards hold details on the number of schools who have biometric systems in their school libraries as this is a matter for individual schools.

Schools must comply with the Data Protection Act 1998 in using biometric systems. Biometric data must be treated just like any other personal data under the terms of the Act. Guidance for schools on the introduction of biometric systems is available on the Department's website www.deni.gov.uk.

All systems are password protected and only permitted staff will have access. The majority of schools use fingerprint data, where a user has their fingerprint scanned, converted into digital data and recorded. The image of the fingerprint is not held on the system and cannot be regenerated from the digital data.

At the end of each school year, a complete upgrade is carried out when all school leavers will have all their biometric details deleted from the system and new intakes added.

Free School Meals

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education for her assessment of whether the cafeteria system in schools leads pupils on free school meals to overspend on the daily allowance. (AQW 8519/08)

The Minister of Education: Níl aon fhianaise ag an Roinn go dtugann córas caifé ar bhonn airgead tirim ar dhaltáí atá i dteideal béilte scoile saor in aisce chun róchaithimh.

The Department has no evidence that a cash cafeteria system leads pupils entitled to free school meals to overspend. All free school meals pupils can obtain a nutritionally balanced two course meal in a cash cafeteria for the current free school meal

allowance. It is only when they choose additional items that a charge is made.

Extended Schools Programme

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Education how much money has been offered to each school under Extended Schools Funding for 2008-09, broken down by parliamentary constituency; and how this compares to funding allocated to each school for 2007-08. (AQW 8559/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá an t-eolas a iarradh mionsonraithe sa tábla faoi iamh.

The information requested is detailed in the attached table.

In light of the very positive indications given by the Finance Minister to the Assembly on June Monitoring about the importance of the Extended Schools programme to the Executive I am very hopeful that additional in year resources will be allocated for the programme which will allow the Department to widen the eligibility criteria and restore previous funding levels.

DENI REF	School Name	Parliamentary Constituency	2007/08	2008/09
Nursery Schools				
1110002	Mcarthur Nursery School	Belfast East	8,200	1,270
1116074	Glendhu Nursery School	Belfast East	5,600	1,010
1116158	Ravenscroft Nursery School	Belfast East	8,200	1,270
1116160	Sandbrook Nursery School	Belfast East	9,545	1,461
4116216	King's Road Nursery School	Belfast East	9,430	1,461
4116240	Castlereagh Nursery School	Belfast East	8,200	1,270
1110003	Edenderry Nursery School	Belfast North	9,430	7,112
1110007	Glenbank Nursery School	Belfast North	6,440	1,162
1110025	Tudor Lodge Nursery School	Belfast North	9,430	7,112
1110028	Brefne Nursery School	Belfast North	0	5,656
1110036	New Lodge Nursery School	Belfast North	9,430	7,112
1116011	Victoria Nursery School	Belfast North	6,440	5,656

DENI REF	School Name	Parliamentary Constituency	2007/08	2008/09
1116157	Stanhope Street Nursery School	Belfast North	8,200	1,270
1116159	Oldpark Nursery School	Belfast North	8,200	7,112
1136229	St Mary's Nursery School	Belfast North	8,300	1,280
1136230	Holy Family Nursery School	Belfast North	8,200	1,270
1136251	Our Lady's Nursery School	Belfast North	9,430	1,461
1136360	Holy Cross Nursery School	Belfast North	9,430	7,112
1110001	Arellian Nursery School	Belfast South	8,200	7,112
1130027	Bethlehem Nursery School	Belfast South	4,100	0
1110038	Shaftesbury Nursery School	Belfast West	9,430	1,461
1116155	Hope Nursery School	Belfast West	9,430	7,112
1136106	St Martin's Nursery School	Belfast West	9,545	7,112
1136228	St Bernadette's Nursery School	Belfast West	9,430	7,112
1136302	St Paul's Nursery School	Belfast West	9,430	7,056
1136314	St Teresa's Nursery School	Belfast West	9,430	1,472
1136315	St Michael's Nursery School	Belfast West	9,430	1,461
1136316	Holy Child Nursery School	Belfast West	9,430	1,461
1136340	St Peter's Nursery School	Belfast West	9,430	7,112
1136349	Matt Talbot Nursery School	Belfast West	9,545	7,112
1136353	St Maria Goretti Nursery School	Belfast West	9,430	7,112
1136383	St Oliver Plunkett Nursery Sch	Belfast West	8,100	7,112
1136603	The Cathedral Nursery School	Belfast West	9,430	7,112
4136368	St Luke's Nursery School	Belfast West	9,430	7,168
4136481	St Kieran's Nursery School	Belfast West	9,430	7,112

DENI REF	School Name	Parliamentary Constituency	2007/08	2008/09
4136606	St Therese Nursery School	Belfast West	9,430	7,112
3136332	St Anthony's Nursery School	East Antrim	9,430	1,461
2116628	Limavady Nursery School	East Derry	9,430	1,449
3116215	Kylemore Nursery School	East Derry	9,373	1,438
3116263	Ballysally Nursery School	East Derry	8,510	7,112
5116198	Fivemiletown Nursery School	Fermanagh & South Tyrone	6,670	1,173
2116023	The Academy Nursery School	Foyle	9,603	1,484
2116232	Strathfoyle Nursery School	Foyle	9,545	1,461
2116266	Bligh's Lane Nursery School	Foyle	9,660	7,280
2116267	Carnhill Nursery School	Foyle	9,430	1,461
2116336	Galliagh Nursery School	Foyle	9,430	7,224
2116345	Belmont Nursery School	Foyle	9,545	1,484
2116348	Trench Road Nursery School	Foyle	9,430	1,461
4116018	Barbour Nursery School	Lagan Valley	8,200	1,270
4136286	Good Shepherd Nursery School	Lagan Valley	9,545	7,168
4136317	Holy Trinity Nursery School	Lagan Valley	9,660	1,461
3116177	Magherafelt Nursery School	Mid Ulster	12,420	1,760
5110017	Railway Street Nursery School	Newry And Armagh	6,555	2,828
5136342	St Malachy's Nursery School	Newry And Armagh	8,200	7,112
3110037	Ballymena Nursery School	North Antrim	7,400	1,205
3116165	Dunlug Nursery School	North Antrim	8,400	1,275
3116162	Mossley Nursery School	South Antrim	8,200	1,270
3116220	Ballyclare Nursery School	South Antrim	12,363	1,765
3136183	St Joseph's Nursery School	South Antrim	9,430	1,461

DENI REF	School Name	Parliamentary Constituency	2007/08	2008/09
4116176	Downpatrick Nursery School	South Down	6,440	1,162
4136211	St Colmcille's Nursery School	South Down	9,430	1,461
4136212	St Patrick's Convent Nursery	South Down	9,430	1,461
5116197	Kilkeel Nursery School	South Down	9,430	1,461
4110035	Newtownards Nursery School	Strangford	8,200	1,270
4116307	Glenbrook Nursery School	Strangford	9,430	1,461
5116189	Millington Nursery School	Upper Bann	9,545	1,472
5136217	St John The Baptist Nursery	Upper Bann	9,430	1,461
5136631	Drumnamee Nursery School	Upper Bann	8,300	1,270
2116333	Ballycolman Nursery School	West Tyrone	9,430	1,438
Primary Schools				
1010146	Euston Street PS	Belfast East	26,680	16,030
1010231	Strand Primary School	Belfast East	24,150	13,160
1010255	Elmgrove PS	Belfast East	33,891	20,888
1010269	Avoniel PS	Belfast East	22,540	13,706
1010271	Beechfield PS	Belfast East	15,813	9,800
1010289	Sydenham Infants PS	Belfast East	16,503	10,892
1013018	Knocknagoney PS	Belfast East	15,100	11,102
1016242	Dundela Infants School	Belfast East	0	16,205
1036505	St Matthew's PS	Belfast East	29,411	17,395
4011632	Cregagh PS	Belfast East	21,419	13,034
4011657	Lisnasharragh PS	Belfast East	21,850	2,513
4013038	Tullycarnet PS	Belfast East	15,554	9,128
1010063	Currie PS	Belfast North	16,589	10,766
1010266	Seaview PS	Belfast North	29,153	8,418
1010282	Carr's Glen PS	Belfast North	29,871	17,794
1010283	Grove PS	Belfast North	15,295	9,464
1010296	Ballygolan PS	Belfast North	14,800	10,850

DENI REF	School Name	Parliamentary Constituency	2007/08	2008/09
1010323	Edenbrooke PS	Belfast North	22,195	13,160
1010325	Ligoniel PS	Belfast North	15,295	10,304
1010831	Cavehill PS	Belfast North	0	18,529
1016076	Ballysillan PS	Belfast North	17,796	11,270
1016483	Cliftonville PS	Belfast North	21,074	12,782
1016485	Glenwood PS	Belfast North	33,753	20,587
1016532	Wheatfield PS	Belfast North	20,729	13,118
1016537	Lowwood PS	Belfast North	24,840	14,945
1016647	Bunsoil Mhic Reachtain	Belfast North	9,500	8,176
1030194	Holy Cross Boys' PS	Belfast North	30,705	18,424
1030326	Our Lady's Girls' PS	Belfast North	30,360	17,731
1030329	Edmund Rice (Cb) PS	Belfast North	30,274	17,857
1030331	Holy Cross Girls' PS	Belfast North	19,435	11,858
1036041	Mercy PS	Belfast North	25,588	14,875
1036042	St Vincent De Paul PS	Belfast North	23,690	14,420
1036048	St Mary's Star Of The Sea PS	Belfast North	18,100	12,446
1036464	Star Of The Sea Girls' PS	Belfast North	29,814	17,430
1036471	Sacred Heart PS	Belfast North	26,645	14,840
1036566	Holy Family PS	Belfast North	27,375	19,264
1046596	Bunsoil Bheann Mhadagain	Belfast North	15,550	10,598
1066531	Hazelwood PS	Belfast North	14,685	20,720
3010827	Whitehouse PS	Belfast North	30,964	19,075
3010862	Abbots Cross PS	Belfast North	28,290	17,045
3010895	Rathcoole PS	Belfast North	22,799	13,286
1010267	Nettlefield PS	Belfast South	27,715	16,485
1010301	Taughmonagh PS	Belfast South	19,450	13,622
1010806	Finaghy PS	Belfast South	13,838	0
1016060	Donegall Road PS	Belfast South	17,800	12,362
1016205	Fane Street PS	Belfast South	17,425	12,866
1016207	Blythefield PS	Belfast South	15,400	10,724

DENI REF	School Name	Parliamentary Constituency	2007/08	2008/09
1016499	Botanic PS	Belfast South	19,375	13,622
1036466	St Malachy's PS	Belfast South	23,550	16,205
1046641	Scoil An Droichid	Belfast South	11,900	9,926
4013013	Belvoir Park PS	Belfast South	24,950	17,150
1010205	Forth River PS	Belfast West	23,403	14,000
1010221	Springfield PS	Belfast West	11,845	7,952
1010307	Springhill PS	Belfast West	28,348	16,380
1010321	Vere Foster PS	Belfast West	15,123	8,736
1010863	Suffolk PS	Belfast West	0	9,352
1016059	Blackmountain PS	Belfast West	16,158	10,262
1016498	Malvern PS	Belfast West	16,158	10,472
1016604	Harmony PS	Belfast West	23,863	14,245
1030316	St Aidan's Christian Brothers PS	Belfast West	23,805	12,992
1030317	St Bernadette's PS	Belfast West	24,265	13,412
1036091	St John The Baptist Girls' PS	Belfast West	25,725	17,045
1036092	St John The Baptist Boys' PS	Belfast West	26,525	17,941
1036388	St Mary's PS	Belfast West	17,365	10,472
1036565	St Kevin's PS	Belfast West	33,321	20,664
1036576	Holy Child PS	Belfast West	31,260	21,672
1036589	St Teresa's PS	Belfast West	28,750	19,432
1036602	St Oliver Plunkett PS	Belfast West	31,720	22,652
1036620	St Peter's PS	Belfast West	30,073	17,465
1036621	St Joseph's PS	Belfast West	26,450	15,365
1036623	Holy Trinity PS	Belfast West	36,754	23,030
1036624	St Paul's PS	Belfast West	27,140	15,820
1036630	St Clare's Primary School	Belfast West	34,144	20,734
1046501	Bunscoil Phobal Feirste	Belfast West	24,775	16,573
1046571	Gaelscoil Na Bhfal	Belfast West	24,323	7,193
1046593	Bunscoil An Tsleibhe Dhuibh	Belfast West	21,505	12,656

DENI REF	School Name	Parliamentary Constituency	2007/08	2008/09
1046654	Gaelscoil An Damba	Belfast West	6,555	5,824
1046671	Gaelscoil Na Mona	Belfast West	11,040	8,232
1046672	Gaelscoil An Lonnain	Belfast West	8,510	6,664
4036081	St Luke's PS	Belfast West	25,070	14,770
4036134	St Mark's PS	Belfast West	35,294	21,070
4036285	The Good Shepherd PS	Belfast West	31,223	18,508
4036480	St Kieran's PS	Belfast West	33,264	19,327
4036591	Our Lady Queen Of Peace PS	Belfast West	30,159	18,697
4046600	Scoil Na Fuiseoige	Belfast West	17,883	11,186
3010553	Carrickfergus Model PS	East Antrim	28,175	3,553
3010841	Carrickfergus Central PS	East Antrim	19,750	2,200
3010860	Sunnylands PS	East Antrim	17,950	11,984
3010870	Moyle PS	East Antrim	27,658	3,464
3010880	King's Park PS	East Antrim	30,590	3,835
3016005	Silverstream PS	East Antrim	16,300	10,976
3016038	Hollybank PS	East Antrim	22,109	12,908
3016225	Woodlawn PS	East Antrim	0	0
3030900	St Anthony's PS	East Antrim	15,726	2,056
3033317	St John's PS	East Antrim	18,813	2,737
3036100	St James' PS	East Antrim	25,760	3,242
3036563	St Nicholas' PS	East Antrim	13,450	1,803
3050519	Carnlough Controlled Ips	East Antrim	7,100	6,832
3066561	Corran Integrated PS	East Antrim	22,540	2,875
2012058	Largy PS	East Derry	7,130	6,048
2012276	Burnfoot PS	East Derry	8,855	7,448
2012298	Ballykelly PS	East Derry	0	0
2016426	Limavady Central PS	East Derry	35,800	4,491
2032263	St Canice's PS	East Derry	16,244	10,430
2032287	Termoncanice PS	East Derry	36,214	4,584
2033706	Faughanvale PS	East Derry	17,193	10,934

DENI REF	School Name	Parliamentary Constituency	2007/08	2008/09
2036085	St Peter's & St Paul's PS	East Derry	9,200	6,888
2036149	St Finlough's PS	East Derry	9,085	1,403
2036187	St John's PS, Dernaflaw	East Derry	19,090	11,648
2036458	Gortnaghey PS	East Derry	7,475	5,992
2066665	Roevalley Integrated PS	East Derry	11,845	4,942
3012237	Killowen PS	East Derry	20,901	13,202
3012264	Millburn PS	East Derry	32,804	19,936
3016052	Harpurs Hill PS	East Derry	22,626	13,538
3016252	Ballysally PS	East Derry	23,403	14,175
3033709	St John's PS	East Derry	22,281	2,737
2011789	Moat PS	Fermanagh & South Tyrone	16,158	2,142
2011873	Aghadrumsee PS	Fermanagh & South Tyrone	0	6,776
2011879	Newtown butler(2) PS	Fermanagh & South Tyrone	0	6,776
2016151	Irvinestown PS	Fermanagh & South Tyrone	17,193	2,211
2031868	St Tierney's PS	Fermanagh & South Tyrone	0	9,016
2031869	St Mary's PS	Fermanagh & South Tyrone	19,004	11,774
2031886	Corranny PS	Fermanagh & South Tyrone	0	8,512
2031887	St John The Baptist PS	Fermanagh & South Tyrone	0	8,512
2031892	Cornagogue PS	Fermanagh & South Tyrone	0	7,280
2031898	St Paul's PS	Fermanagh & South Tyrone	24,783	14,700
2031901	St Ronan's PS	Fermanagh & South Tyrone	26,680	16,240
2036258	St Davog's PS	Fermanagh & South Tyrone	0	7,784
2036632	Holy Trinity PS	Fermanagh & South Tyrone	37,053	4,824
2046669	Bunscoil An Traonaigh	Fermanagh & South Tyrone	5,890	2,856
5012720	Dungannon PS	Fermanagh & South Tyrone	11,675	0
5016088	Fivemiletown PS	Fermanagh & South Tyrone	20,729	2,530

DENI REF	School Name	Parliamentary Constituency	2007/08	2008/09
5032736	St Mary's PS	Fermanagh & South Tyrone	7,590	1,277
5036363	St Mary's PS, Aughnacloy	Fermanagh & South Tyrone	11,200	1,630
5036504	St Patrick's PS Dungannon	Fermanagh & South Tyrone	0	23,786
5066554	Windmill Integrated PS	Fermanagh & South Tyrone	24,581	3,030
2010380	Londonderry Model PS	Foyle	30,274	18,403
2010382	Ebrington Controlled PS	Foyle	32,833	20,041
2012095	Ballougry PS	Foyle	11,385	8,176
2012227	Drumahoe PS	Foyle	27,255	3,198
2012261	Newbuildings PS	Foyle	25,099	14,350
2016071	Greenhaw PS	Foyle	27,888	17,080
2016124	Ashlea PS	Foyle	13,915	9,240
2016203	Lisnagelvin PS	Foyle	35,972	4,476
2016564	Fountain PS	Foyle	15,985	9,352
2030364	Rosemount PS	Foyle	28,405	16,485
2030373	Nazareth House PS	Foyle	30,216	17,689
2030381	Holy Child PS	Foyle	28,578	16,975
2032212	Glendermott PS	Foyle	0	12,698
2032277	Craigbrack PS	Foyle	0	0
2033707	Mullabuoy PS	Foyle	12,200	9,352
2036032	St John's PS	Foyle	36,375	22,638
2036069	St Anne's PS	Foyle	35,547	21,560
2036084	Steelstown Vol Maintained PS	Foyle	35,041	21,028
2036142	St Brigid's PS	Foyle	30,561	18,319
2036143	St Oliver Plunkett PS	Foyle	20,729	12,446
2036227	St Pauls PS, Slievemore	Foyle	22,109	13,076
2036247	St Columba's PS	Foyle	11,155	1,530
2036259	Trench Road PS	Foyle	30,504	17,962
2036288	Good Shepherd PS And Nursery School	Foyle	33,661	20,545
2036461	St Theresa's PS, Lenamore	Foyle	32,948	19,726

DENI REF	School Name	Parliamentary Constituency	2007/08	2008/09
2036465	Chapel Road PS	Foyle	19,349	12,572
2036472	Holy Family PS	Foyle	33,580	20,293
2036473	St Eithne's PS	Foyle	35,156	21,364
2036475	Longtower PS	Foyle	29,641	17,360
2036555	St Eugene's PS	Foyle	24,380	14,175
2036574	Bunscoil Cholmille	Foyle	20,384	12,278
2036581	St Patricks PS	Foyle	39,733	26,404
2046646	Gaelscoil Eadain Mhoir	Foyle	14,200	11,270
2052035	Groarty Integrated PS	Foyle	0	6,104
2066558	Oakgrove Integrated PS	Foyle	39,365	20,125
4010743	Largymore PS	Lagan Valley	16,450	5,719
4010762	Brownlee PS	Lagan Valley	17,050	2,200
4010807	Lisburn Central PS	Lagan Valley	20,900	2,525
4010882	Seymour Hill PS	Lagan Valley	10,025	0
4010885	Tonagh PS	Lagan Valley	17,125	11,984
4013308	Fort Hill PS	Lagan Valley	22,200	2,744
4013309	Derriaghy PS	Lagan Valley	8,300	6,608
4013334	Knockmore PS	Lagan Valley	17,725	6,223
4016144	Old Warren PS	Lagan Valley	15,025	10,514
4030897	St Joseph's PS	Lagan Valley	24,200	3,050
4033306	St Aloysius PS	Lagan Valley	23,700	8,243
4036618	Christ The Redeemer PS	Lagan Valley	35,972	22,386
4050618	Hilden Integrated PS	Lagan Valley	9,315	1,277
4066611	Oakwood Integrated PS	Lagan Valley	10,425	0
3012267	Magherafelt Controlled PS	Mid Ulster	30,245	3,702
3036039	St Mary's PS (Glenview)	Mid Ulster	0	17,584
3036562	Holy Family PS	Mid Ulster	35,018	4,451
5012615	Ballytrea PS	Mid Ulster	14,720	9,884
5012632	Donaghmore PS	Mid Ulster	0	7,112
5012643	Stewartstown PS	Mid Ulster	7,360	6,160
5012649	Coagh PS	Mid Ulster	10,695	1,449

DENI REF	School Name	Parliamentary Constituency	2007/08	2008/09
5016200	Queen Elizabeth Ii (Pomeroy) PS	Mid Ulster	5,900	5,936
5032692	St Mary's PS	Mid Ulster	16,158	10,304
5032699	St Mary's PS	Mid Ulster	20,384	12,614
5032703	St Peter's PS	Mid Ulster	22,195	13,328
5032713	Derrychrin PS	Mid Ulster	15,381	10,094
5032717	St Patrick's PS	Mid Ulster	0	12,824
5036033	St Joseph's PS	Mid Ulster	0	13,118
5036047	St Patrick's PS	Mid Ulster	24,610	2,990
5036057	St Malachy's PS	Mid Ulster	7,935	1,254
5036108	St Joseph's PS	Mid Ulster	11,730	8,736
5036118	St Mary's PS	Mid Ulster	21,505	12,824
5036590	Primate Dixon PS	Mid Ulster	34,397	20,944
5046637	Gaelscoil Ui Neill	Mid Ulster	13,300	5,173
5011137	Newtown hamilton PS	Newry And Armagh	11,040	7,840
5011175	Cortamlet PS	Newry And Armagh	9,800	7,896
5011179	Bessbrook PS	Newry And Armagh	15,295	9,842
5016028	Keady PS	Newry And Armagh	5,900	1,020
5030972	St Oliver Plunkett PS	Newry And Armagh	0	10,724
5030975	St Malachy's PS	Newry And Armagh	13,570	9,072
5031070	St Michael's PS	Newry And Armagh	10,580	7,056
5031086	Clonalig PS	Newry And Armagh	17,451	11,018
5031088	Dromintee PS	Newry And Armagh	0	12,614
5031110	Christian Brothers' PS	Newry And Armagh	25,050	17,710
5031126	Mount St Catherine's PS	Newry And Armagh	19,225	14,280
5031133	St Malachy's PS	Newry And Armagh	0	13,916
5031135	St Oliver's PS (Carrick rovaddy)	Newry And Armagh	9,085	1,380
5031146	Anamar PS	Newry And Armagh	7,935	6,104

DENI REF	School Name	Parliamentary Constituency	2007/08	2008/09
5031148	St Patrick's PS	Newry And Armagh	28,405	17,815
5031158	St Patrick's PS	Newry And Armagh	31,108	18,655
5031163	St Brigid's PS	Newry And Armagh	0	12,530
5031166	St Michael's PS	Newry And Armagh	9,660	1,461
5031169	St Brigid's (Drumilly) PS	Newry And Armagh	0	8,176
5031176	St Peter's PS	Newry And Armagh	25,775	17,731
5031183	St Patrick's PS	Newry And Armagh	33,707	10,199
5031188	St Joseph's PS	Newry And Armagh	0	13,244
5031213	St Clare's Convent PS	Newry And Armagh	24,668	14,805
5031340	St Joseph's Convent PS	Newry And Armagh	35,363	21,602
5031576	St Colman's Abbey PS	Newry And Armagh	0	15,855
5036064	St Malachy's PS	Newry And Armagh	0	16,625
5036087	St Mary's PS	Newry And Armagh	0	17,185
5036099	St Patrick's PS	Newry And Armagh	23,978	14,035
5036110	St Joseph's PS	Newry And Armagh	29,699	17,962
5036122	Jonesborough PS	Newry And Armagh	0	8,904
5036130	St Laurence O'Toole's PS	Newry And Armagh	0	7,392
5036433	St Malachy's PS	Newry And Armagh	30,015	17,689
5036610	St Francis Of Assisi Primary School	Newry And Armagh	25,990	3,091
5046241	The Drelincourt Infants School	Newry And Armagh	0	5,544
5046597	Bunscoil An Iuir	Newry And Armagh	0	9,884
3010726	Dunseverick PS	North Antrim	0	11,480
3010781	Harryville PS	North Antrim	17,969	10,472
3010835	Kells & Connor PS	North Antrim	0	0

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3010842	The Wm Pinkerton Memorial PS	North Antrim	10,300	8,288
3010873	Bushmills PS	North Antrim	16,675	10,094
3013315	Ballykeel PS	North Antrim	29,958	17,899
3013322	Camphill PS	North Antrim	29,958	3,818
3013325	Leaney PS	North Antrim	25,650	3,204
3016040	Armoy PS	North Antrim	10,005	7,000
3016063	Dunclug PS	North Antrim	16,244	10,640
3016171	Ballee PS	North Antrim	11,615	8,288
3016594	Bushvalley PS	North Antrim	19,004	2,496
3030719	St Olcan's PS	North Antrim	9,775	7,168
3030889	St Patrick's PS Aughercloney	North Antrim	0	0
3030898	St Anne's PS	North Antrim	11,845	1,725
3036154	St Patrick's PS	North Antrim	23,058	2,823
3036559	St Patrick's & St Brigid's PS	North Antrim	0	19,285
3053333	Ballycastle PS	North Antrim	14,950	10,850
4011681	Millisle PS	North Down	17,538	2,297
4013023	Bloomfield Road PS	North Down	0	16,870
4016002	Kilcooley PS	North Down	15,850	10,934
4033008	St Anne's PS	North Down	6,400	1,090
4036148	St Malachy's PS	North Down	26,400	3,094
3010558	Duneane PS	South Antrim	6,500	1,110
3010631	Ballyclare PS	South Antrim	34,811	4,338
3013301	Carnmoney PS	South Antrim	26,475	3,286
3013331	Ballycraig PS	South Antrim	16,244	9,688
3016015	Mossley PS	South Antrim	31,780	4,085
3016037	Greystone PS	South Antrim	0	0
3016058	Parkhall PS	South Antrim	26,105	7,928
3016249	Earlview PS	South Antrim	16,075	11,522
3030713	Carlane PS	South Antrim	7,475	1,219
3030815	Moneynick PS	South Antrim	0	0
3033303	St Oliver Plunkett's PS	South Antrim	19,866	2,461
3033304	Tir-Na-Nog PS	South Antrim	6,900	1,219
3036026	St Joseph's PS	South Antrim	16,770	0
3036046	St Mary's On The Hill PS	South Antrim	24,350	3,038

DENI REF	School Name	Parliamentary Constituency	2007/08	2008/09
3036050	St Joseph's PS	South Antrim	25,070	2,997
3056231	Rathenraw Integrated PS	South Antrim	14,490	8,960
3056248	Roundtower Integrated PS	South Antrim	20,556	13,790
4016235	Downpatrick PS	South Down	23,633	2,968
4031328	Christ The King PS	South Down	0	0
4031384	Convent Of Mercy PS	South Down	24,725	7,018
4031644	St Patrick's Boys' PS	South Down	29,469	17,626
4031671	St Patrick's PS	South Down	7,700	1,210
4036036	St Malachy's PS	South Down	14,350	1,915
4036182	St Colmcille's PS	South Down	24,208	14,560
5011649	Kilkeel PS	South Down	34,098	4,275
5011684	Annalong PS	South Down	17,200	12,614
5036545	St Colman's PS	South Down	19,300	12,740
4011345	Newtownards Model PS	Strangford	0	0
4011373	Kirkistown PS	Strangford	15,036	2,082
4011462	Castle Gardens PS	Strangford	26,600	3,223
4011488	Victoria PS (Ballyhalbert)	Strangford	18,055	2,340
4011507	Portavogie PS	Strangford	21,074	2,711
4011587	Dundonald PS	Strangford	36,053	4,591
4011588	Comber PS	Strangford	26,575	3,238
4011634	Killyleagh PS	Strangford	14,835	1,932
4011646	Victoria PS	Strangford	31,310	3,995
4016004	Londonderry PS	Strangford	29,699	3,658
4016083	West Winds PS	Strangford	17,200	11,606
4016503	Brooklands PS	Strangford	36,490	4,525
4033017	St Finian's PS	Strangford	17,193	2,211
4033036	St Mary's PS	Strangford	17,193	2,211
4036530	St Mary's PS	Strangford	24,898	2,983
4051601	Portaferry Integrated PS	Strangford	12,995	1,794
5010992	Lurgan Model PS	Upper Bann	22,971	13,664

DENI REF	School Name	Parliamentary Constituency	2007/08	2008/09
5011127	Carrick PS	Upper Bann	31,079	3,822
5011129	Hart Memorial PS	Upper Bann	28,520	16,853
5011190	Tullygally PS	Upper Bann	20,729	12,110
5011596	Craigavon PS	Upper Bann	16,503	2,099
5016007	Millington PS	Upper Bann	35,984	4,548
5016065	Dickson PS	Upper Bann	18,918	2,392
5016080	Drumgor PS	Upper Bann	26,450	15,575
5016117	Ballyoran PS	Upper Bann	27,313	16,415
5016543	Moyallon PS	Upper Bann	20,729	2,565
5031103	Tannaghmore PS	Upper Bann	37,812	4,934
5031184	St Anthony's PS	Upper Bann	35,317	21,826
5031669	St John's PS	Upper Bann	17,624	2,254
5036043	St Mary's PS	Upper Bann	31,798	3,991
5036101	St Brendan's PS	Upper Bann	31,510	19,411
5036173	St John The Baptist PS	Upper Bann	31,050	19,075
5036586	Presentation PS	Upper Bann	0	11,984
5036633	St Francis PS	Upper Bann	38,238	25,018
2012392	Drumlegagh PS	West Tyrone	8,740	6,664
2012617	Erganagh PS	West Tyrone	10,695	7,504
2012638	Edwards PS	West Tyrone	22,281	13,622
2012641	Killen PS	West Tyrone	14,720	9,884
2012660	Denamona PS	West Tyrone	12,420	4,564
2012671	Langfield PS	West Tyrone	8,050	6,608
2012674	Bridgehill PS	West Tyrone	9,660	6,944
2012691	Omagh County PS	West Tyrone	30,446	3,715
2012707	Dromore PS	West Tyrone	0	6,664
2012708	Strabane Controlled PS	West Tyrone	0	15,575
2012711	Donemana PS	West Tyrone	13,300	10,052
2016068	Artigarvan PS	West Tyrone	21,246	12,278
2016262	Newtown Stewart Model PS	West Tyrone	12,535	8,736
2016376	Ardstraw PS	West Tyrone	11,270	7,784
2016395	Gortin PS	West Tyrone	0	6,888
2016442	Sion Mills PS	West Tyrone	28,290	16,853

DENI REF	School Name	Parliamentary Constituency	2007/08	2008/09
2016645	Bready Jubilee Primary School	West Tyrone	14,030	9,016
2032510	Barrack Street Boys' PS	West Tyrone	22,195	13,538
2032573	St Brigid's PS	West Tyrone	0	8,008
2032600	Drumnabey PS	West Tyrone	10,120	6,888
2032603	Tummary PS	West Tyrone	0	8,232
2032612	St Matthew's PS	West Tyrone	0	5,992
2032628	Knocknagor PS	West Tyrone	0	7,448
2032631	Envagh PS	West Tyrone	5,980	1,139
2032639	Drumduff PS	West Tyrone	0	7,056
2032662	St Brigid's PS	West Tyrone	0	6,440
2032664	St Davog's Scraghey PS	West Tyrone	5,865	5,264
2032681	St Patrick's PS	West Tyrone	0	5,936
2032682	St Eugene's PS	West Tyrone	9,315	7,224
2032683	St Joseph's PS	West Tyrone	7,360	6,048
2032684	St Lawrence's PS	West Tyrone	26,623	15,190
2032685	St Brigid's PS	West Tyrone	7,130	5,936
2032687	St Macartan's PS	West Tyrone	7,590	5,936
2032689	St Mary's Boys' PS	West Tyrone	32,746	19,663
2032694	St Caireall's PS	West Tyrone	13,800	9,016
2032700	St Joseph's PS	West Tyrone	13,800	9,352
2032702	Evish PS	West Tyrone	10,580	7,728
2032716	St Patrick's PS	West Tyrone	0	5,152
2032722	Altishane PS	West Tyrone	8,050	6,496
2032724	Loughash PS	West Tyrone	7,130	6,216
2032730	St Columba's PS	West Tyrone	16,071	9,968
2032731	St Teresa's PS	West Tyrone	0	11,186
2032737	St Columbkille's PS	West Tyrone	0	16,905
2036008	St Patrick's PS	West Tyrone	18,573	12,320
2036094	St Patrick's PS	West Tyrone	25,128	14,998
2036095	St Mary's PS	West Tyrone	22,540	13,748
2036096	St Mary's Girls' PS	West Tyrone	30,878	18,508
2036097	St Peter's PS	West Tyrone	14,260	9,632

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2036186	St Dympna's PS	West Tyrone	0	9,128
2036387	St Patrick's PS	West Tyrone	9,775	7,000
2036389	St Anne's PS	West Tyrone	27,658	16,310
2036415	Our Lady Of Lourdes PS	West Tyrone	0	10,136
2036449	Christ The King PS	West Tyrone	18,831	11,900
2036459	St Theresa's PS	West Tyrone	18,573	11,606
2036557	All Saints PS	West Tyrone	7,475	1,231
2046638	Gaelscoil Ui Dhocartaigh	West Tyrone	16,416	11,060
Post Primary Schools				
1210014	Ashfield Girls' High School	Belfast East	32,120	23,576
1210015	Ashfield Boys' High School	Belfast East	36,754	23,240
1210266	Orangefield High School	Belfast East	25,550	17,465
4210030	Lisnasharragh High School	Belfast East	19,975	2,016
1210021	Belfast Model School For Girls	Belfast North	41,711	28,392
1210022	Belfast Boys' Model School	Belfast North	40,641	27,636
1210258	Castle High School	Belfast North	17,451	11,144
1230026	St Patrick's College	Belfast North	33,080	24,290
1230032	St Gabriel's Boys School	Belfast North	16,416	2,352
1230089	Little Flower Girls' School	Belfast North	32,340	23,828
1230104	Our Lady Of Mercy Girls' School	Belfast North	33,293	20,209
1230173	St Gemma's High School	Belfast North	27,140	15,435
1260269	Hazelwood College	Belfast North	38,790	25,578
3210279	Newtownabbey Community Hs	Belfast North	29,383	15,015
1230275	St Joseph's College	Belfast South	37,237	23,464
1260294	Malone Integrated College	Belfast South	33,630	25,508

DENI REF	School Name	Parliamentary Constituency	2007/08	2008/09
1230053	St Louise's College	Belfast West	49,082	36,442
1230130	St Rose's High School	Belfast West	35,915	21,770
1230146	Christian Brothers Sec School	Belfast West	31,530	21,896
1230155	St Genevieve's High School	Belfast West	35,870	28,686
1230182	La Salle Boys' School	Belfast West	37,360	30,366
1230262	Corpus Christi College	Belfast West	36,513	22,596
1240291	Colaiste Feirste	Belfast West	30,030	21,434
1420021	St Mary's Christian Brothers' Gs	Belfast West	36,970	29,750
1420029	St Dominic's High School	Belfast West	35,610	28,308
4230223	St Colm's High School	Belfast West	37,674	24,038
3210200	Monkstown Community School	East Antrim	37,881	24,038
3230066	St Comgall's High School	East Antrim	0	0
2210302	Limavady High School	East Derry	16,785	0
2230077	St Mary's Limavady	East Derry	38,985	5,161
2230109	St Mary's College	Fermanagh & South Tyrone	0	12,908
2230180	St Eugene's College	Fermanagh & South Tyrone	0	14,525
2230190	St Comhghall's High	Fermanagh & South Tyrone	0	17,115
5230293	St Patrick's College	Fermanagh & South Tyrone	35,409	4,520
2210306	Lisneal College	Foyle	0	0
2230081	St Mary's College	Foyle	39,940	26,446
2230131	St Joseph's Secondary	Foyle	39,986	26,726
2230181	St Peter's High School	Foyle	30,590	17,255
2230188	St Cecilia's College	Foyle	40,170	26,964

DENI REF	School Name	Parliamentary Constituency	2007/08	2008/09
2230225	St Brigid's College	Foyle	39,273	25,536
2230254	Immaculate Conception College	Foyle	25,818	15,505
2260276	Oakgrove Integrated College	Foyle	39,365	26,152
2420052	Thornhill College	Foyle	45,828	33,978
2420054	St Columb's College	Foyle	46,794	35,028
2420229	Foyle & Londonderry College	Foyle	0	0
2420287	Lumen Christi College	Foyle	0	26,250
1210288	Balmoral High School	Lagan Valley	17,050	0
4210051	Lisnagarvey High School	Lagan Valley	29,958	16,800
4210194	Dunmurry High School	Lagan Valley	30,073	17,710
4230165	St Patrick's High School	Lagan Valley	29,383	3,680
3210090	Maghera High School	Mid Ulster	17,950	12,068
5230192	St Joseph's High School	Mid Ulster	33,730	20,706
5230278	Holy Trinity College	Mid Ulster	38,215	12,383
5230056	St Joseph's Boys' High School	Newry And Armagh	33,408	20,587
5230108	St Mary's High School	Newry And Armagh	35,455	21,938
5230157	St Paul's High School	Newry And Armagh	0	33,978
5230160	St Brigid's High School	Newry And Armagh	0	15,155
5230167	St Joseph's High School	Newry And Armagh	35,869	22,008
5420062	St Colman's College	Newry And Armagh	17,185	0
3210124	Ballycastle High School	North Antrim	30,360	18,277
3210233	Ballee Community High School	North Antrim	30,331	18,109

DENI REF	School Name	Parliamentary Constituency	2007/08	2008/09
4210031	Donaghadee High School	North Down	0	0
3210207	Parkhall High School	South Antrim	0	0
3230203	Edmund Rice College	South Antrim	35,501	21,966
4230224	De La Salle Secondary School	South Down	31,510	3,771
5210016	Kilkeel High School	South Down	38,387	5,046
4210045	Comber High School	Strangford	0	0
4210262	Dundonald High School	Strangford	31,481	18,172
5230088	St Paul's Junior High School	Upper Bann	34,328	10,556
5230213	Lismore Comprehensive School	Upper Bann	41,860	29,372
5230256	Drumcree College	Upper Bann	30,648	16,660
5250216	Brownlow Int College	Upper Bann	33,293	20,377
2210065	Castledearg High School	West Tyrone	32,718	20,314
2210164	Strabane High School	West Tyrone	26,968	16,485
2230111	St Eugene's High School	West Tyrone	18,573	11,774
2230138	Dean Brian Maguire College	West Tyrone	0	20,762
2230148	St John's High School	West Tyrone	0	12,194
2230301	Holy Cross College	West Tyrone	45,713	33,516
2410096	Strabane Gs	West Tyrone	32,028	19,558
2420065	Loreto Gs	West Tyrone	0	27,188
	Special Schools			
1310017	Greenwood Hse Assessment Centre	Belfast East	0	7,336
1316584	Clarawood Special School	Belfast East	0	4,816
1310003	Cedar Lodge Special School	Belfast North	17,969	11,690

DENI REF	School Name	Parliamentary Constituency	2007/08	2008/09
1310014	Harberton Special School	Belfast South	0	14,490
1316500	Park Educ Resource Centre	Belfast South	0	9,884
1316569	Glenveagh Special	Belfast South	10,063	14,000
1316582	Oakwood Special School	Belfast South		9,352
1336012	St Francis De Sales	Belfast West	5,800	1,456
1336548	St Gerard's Resource Education Centre	Belfast West	20,750	14,385
3310018	Rosstulla Special School	East Antrim	0	12,404
3316514	Roddens Vale Special School	East Antrim	12,420	1,783
3340002	Jordanstown Special School	East Antrim	9,600	7,504
2310007	Limegrove School	East Derry	11,500	8,120
2316526	Glasvey Special School	East Derry	6,555	5,040
3316512	Sandelford Special School	East Derry	16,225	11,690
2316234	Erne Special School	Fermanagh & South Tyrone	15,381	9,968
2316601	Elmbrook Special School	Fermanagh & South Tyrone	10,005	7,392
5316523	Sperrinview Special School	Fermanagh & South Tyrone	0	8,848
2310015	Belmont House Special School	Foyle	22,109	12,992
2316525	Foyleview Special School	Foyle	16,071	10,850
4310008	Beechlawn Special School	Lagan Valley	25,530	15,190
4316022	Brookfield Special School	Lagan Valley	15,468	10,514
3316570	Kilronan Special School	Mid Ulster	10,200	1,430
5316519	Rathore School	Newry And Armagh	12,400	5,026
5316577	Lisanally Special School	Newry And Armagh	14,260	1,944
3316676	Castletower School	North Antrim	19,608	16,380

DENI REF	School Name	Parliamentary Constituency	2007/08	2008/09
3316510	Hill Croft Special School	South Antrim	11,400	1,590
4310019	Ardmore House Special School	South Down	4,000	4,872
4316516	Knockevin Special School	South Down	11,960	1,748
4310013	Killard House Special School	Strangford	20,470	2,625
4316273	Longstone Special School	Strangford	18,325	6,517
5316521	Ceara Special School	Upper Bann	13,915	1,921
2316528	Knockavoe School And Resource Centre	West Tyrone	10,465	7,952
2316661	Arvalee School And Resource Centre	West Tyrone	17,796	10,892

BREAKDOWN OF FUNDING BY PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY

	2007/08	2008/09
Belfast East	£406,485	£240,044
Belfast North	£923,110	£678,916
Belfast South	£284,633	£226,772
Belfast West	£1,265,961	£873,121
East Antrim	£335,252	£115,655
East Derry	£417,509	£178,406
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	£290,001	£218,105
Foyle	£1,317,010	£813,827
Lagan Valley	£421,279	£157,266
Mid Ulster	£404,048	£228,828
Newry & Armagh	£606,631	£531,432
North Antrim	£343,105	£190,776
North Down	£66,188	£34,285
South Antrim	£370,361	£103,693
South Down	£315,270	£95,908
Strangford	£433,112	£83,145
Upper Bann	£653,864	£281,625
West Tyrone	£825,836	£700,958

Education Targets

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to her answer to AQW 6298/08, what specific action she will take to address the figures which show that young male protestants are not meeting educational achievement targets and are well below the average in both rural and urban areas. (AQW 8563/08)

The Minister of Education: Under-achievement is found among Protestant boys in urban and rural settings but can also be found in other groups within our community.

As stated in my previous response, I am determined to establish an education system which ensures that each and every child reaches her of his potential.

I plan to do this through: -

- the removal of academic selection;
- having an effective policy in place to promote and support school improvement (Every School a Good School); and
- revising the literacy and numeracy strategy so that all schools ensure that no child leaves school with under-developed literacy and numeracy skills.

Tacófar leis na bearta seo trí chur chuige níos éifeachtaí i gcomhair Riachtanais Speisialta Oideachais agus foilseoidh mé moltaí s'agam sa i dtaca leis an ábhar seo le linn na scoilbhliana úire.

These actions will be supported by a more effective approach to Special Educational Need and I shall be publishing my proposals for this in the new school year.

Use of the Irish Language

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to her answer to AQW 6256/08, to detail the number of occasions and percentage of time spent in using the Irish language during meetings and visits since devolution; and whether the proposed post of Staff Officer - Irish language is justified by the amount of work involved. (AQW 8564/08)

The Minister of Education: Elements of business have been in conducted in Irish by me since devolution, but existing staff cannot provide adequate support in this aspect. It is not possible to provide the breakdown requested.

There is a pressing need for additional capacity at Staff Officer level to cope with a wide range of pressures in my Department's Top Management Support Unit. The work will not be exclusively on Irish Language support services. There will also be responsibilities in relation to the preparation of papers

and arranging meetings where North South co-operation on education matters is considered.

Tá an post-tuairisc iomlán cuimsithe i Leabhrán Eolais Iarratasóra Oifigeach Foirne (Teanga Ghaeilge) a cuireadh i Leabharlann an Tionóil.

The full job description is included in the Staff Officer (Irish Language) Candidate Information Booklet which has been placed in the Assembly Library.

Special Education Funding

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Education what action she is taking (i) to address the number of special education needs children; and (ii) to ensure that they are given the assistance needed to access mainstream education. (AQW 8580/08)

The Minister of Education: Provision for special educational needs (SEN) is matched to individual needs. It may be made in a range of settings including special schools, in special units attached to mainstream schools; or in mainstream classes themselves.

Cinntíonn na Boird Oideachais agus Leabharlann (BOL) leibhéal an mhaoinithe i gcomhair oideachas speisialta mar pháirt dá gcinntí bliantúla ar dháileadh a mblocdheontas. I dtaca le RSO, bheifí ag súil go gclúdódh buiséad an BOL na nithe seo a leanas:

The level of funding for special education is determined by the Education and Library Boards (ELBs) as part of their annual decisions about the allocation of their block grant. In terms of SEN, the ELB's budget would be expected to cover:

- ELB support for the provision for statemented and non-statemented (stage 3) children with SEN in mainstream schools, including those in special units;
- special schools, including external placements; and
- central costs e.g. educational psychology services, SEN peripatetic teachers, special education administration.

In addition, mainstream schools are funded by means of the Local Management of Schools (LMS) arrangements via the Common Funding Scheme. The Targeting Social Need component, also within the Scheme, includes an educational element for SEN-related factors.

Special schools are not included in LMS arrangements. ELBs retain the major element of special school expenditure (staff salaries) as a centre cost although each school is allocated a delegated budget to cover non-staff items, eg electricity, heating.

2006/07 is the last year for which full Board outturn figures are available;

- In 2006/07 around £171m was expended in the North of Ireland for provision for children with special educational needs;
- This includes some £141m expended by the Education and Library Boards for special schools (£92m) and to meet the additional costs of statemented pupils in mainstream schools and units (£49m);
- Also included is some £24m to address educational underachievement for pupils who do not have a statement of SEN, which was distributed directly to schools through the Targeting Social Need element of the LMS formula;

As well as funding provided through the voluntary grammar school (VGS) and grant maintained integrated (GMI) funding formulae, further amounts of £2.0m and £3.8m were provided to schools in the VGS and GMI sectors respectively in the 2006/07 financial year, to meet the costs of pupils with statements.

Arising out of the Education Order 1996 the Department issued a Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Education Needs. This provides practical guidance to parents, schools and Boards on the statementing process. The Department, in collaboration with the ELBs and the Education and Training Inspectorate, has also published guidance on various SEN including ASD, Dyslexia, Speech and Language, ADHD, Acquired Brain Injury, Deaf Friendly Schools and is currently preparing guidance on Vision Friendly Schools.

The introduction, in September 2005, of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Order (SENDO) has further strengthened the rights of children with SEN to be educated in mainstream education.

If no statement is maintained for a child he or she shall be educated in an ordinary (ie mainstream) school. If a statement is maintained for the child he or she shall be educated in an ordinary school unless that is incompatible with –

- the wishes of the parent, or
- the provision of efficient education for other children.

A Supplement to the Code of Practice has been issued by the Department as a result of SENDO. In 2004, the percentage of Statemented pupils in mainstream schools was 46.78% but this has now risen, post SENDO, to 67.6%.

It is accepted that there is a range of problems associated with the current SEN framework and in order to address these issues the Department

commenced a review of SEN and Inclusion in April 2006. The review's draft policy proposals have been approved by me and were presented to the Education Committee on 23rd May 2008. Central to the emerging recommendations are the key principles of equality of access and continuity, quality and consistency of assessment and intervention. The draft proposals have been circulated to members of the Health Committee and the Executive. Following progress through the Assembly structures, public consultation is planned for autumn 2008.

Donaghadee High School

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education when she will make an announcement on the future of Donaghadee High School. (AQW 8589/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá an tréimhse comhairliúcháin reachtúil 2 mhí díreach i ndiaidh críochnú ar 30 Meitheamh; cuireadh tús leis an tréimhse comhairliúcháin de bharr gur foilsíodh an Togra Forbartha le hArdscóil Dhomhnach Daoi a dhúnadh ó Lúnasa 2009. Déanfaidh mé cinneadh ar an togra chomh luath agus is féidir.

The 2-month statutory consultation period initiated by the publication of the Development Proposal to allow for the closure of Donaghadee High School from August 2009 has just ended on 30 June. I will make a decision on the proposal as soon as possible.

Increasing Fuel Costs

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education what additional funding has been provided to the Education and Library Boards to cover the additional costs resulting from rising fuel prices. (AQW 8606/08)

The Minister of Education: Education and Library Boards receive budgets to meet the cost of pupil to school transport under the Assessment of Relative Needs arrangements. I have recognised that there has been a significant increase in fuel costs in recent months. The Education and Library Boards have put forward details of pressures they are encountering with these increased costs and I will endeavour to consider how we can meet them.

Is féidir go dteastódh tairiscint ar bhreis acmhainní ag an chéad bhabhta foirmiúil faireacháin eile.

A bid for additional resources at the next formal monitoring round may be required.

Children of Army Personnel

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education what changes have been made to the funding formula in relation to children of Army Personnel, and when did the changes come into effect. (AQW 8641/08)

The Minister of Education: From 1st April 2005, all grant-aided schools have been funded under the Common Funding Formula arrangements set out in a Common Funding Scheme, which replaced the seven separate LMS Schemes previously used to distribute funding.

Ag an am sin, cuireadh fachtóir isteach san fhoirmle úr le tacaíocht bhreise a sholáthar do scoileanna a bhíonn ag teagasc páistí phearsanra na seirbhísí slándála mar gur aithníodh go mbíonn dúshlán agus costais bhreise i gceist do na scoileanna sin, nithe nach dtugtar aghaidh orthu trí fhachtóirí maoiniúcháin eile laistigh den fhoirmle.

At that time, a factor was included within the new formula to provide additional support for schools educating children of service personnel as it was recognised that these pupils provide extra challenges and costs for schools which are not addressed via other funding factors within the formula.

This funding is intended to support schools in inducting these children during their transition to a new school and curricular environment and in designing learning programmes to bring them to the same stage as other pupils already in the school.

The current arrangements provide for schools to receive an additional 0.2 of the basic Age Weighted Pupil Unit (AWPU) cash value (equivalent to £393 in 2008/09) for each of those pupils who are children of service personnel.

As the funding support for these pupils is directly linked to the AWPU cash value, the additional support funding for these pupils changes year on year with the changes to the AWPU cash value.

Children Diagnosed with Autism

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education how many children are diagnosed with Autism, broken down by Education and Library Board. (AQW 8642/08)

The Minister of Education: A diagnosis of Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is provided under the auspices of the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and not by the Department of Education. Provision for special educational need (SEN) does not depend upon such a diagnosis but is centred on the need of the individual child.

Chuir an Roinn ar fáil treoir do scoileanna agus do an Boird Oideachais agus Leabharlainne, "Taifeadadh

Páistí le Sainriachtanais Oideachasúla/Recording Children with Special Educational Needs”, ar mhaithe le comhordú eolais don Daonáireamh Bliantúil Scoileanna.

The Department has provided guidance to schools and the Education and Library Boards, “Recording Children with Special Educational Needs”, in order to

collate information for the completion of the Annual School Census. The following table, from the 2007/08 School Census, details the number of children, at Stages 1 to 5 of the Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of SEN, in pre-primary, primary and secondary education, whose primary SEN is ASD.

School type	ELB					Total
	BELB	WELB	NEELB	SEELB	SELB	
Preschool centres	*	0	*	15	*	22
Nursery schools	#	5	#	14	#	45
Primary	80	98	146	294	247	865
Post primary	10	37	45	40	98	230
Special	105	129	177	259	140	810
Total	210	269	379	622	492	1,972

Source: school census

Notes:

1. Primary includes nursery, reception and year 1 - 7 classes.
2. Figures relate to pupils at Stage 1 - 5 of the Code of Practice with autism recorded.

Some pupils at stages 1 and 2 of the code of Practice may have their needs recorded at a more general level.

* denotes fewer than 5 pupils.

denotes figure suppressed due to possible identification of individual pupils.

Autism Services

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education what services, other than those provided by the Autism Centre in Middletown, are currently provided for children with Autism in each Education and Library Board area. (AQW 8643/08)

The Minister of Education: Thug Príomhfheidhmeannaigh na mBord Oideachais agus Leabharlann le fios dom gur bunaíodh na seirbhísí seo a leanas i gcomhair uathachais i ngach ceann dá gcuid limistéa.:

I am advised by the Chief Executive Officers of the Education and Library Boards that the following services for Autism have been established in each of their areas.

Belfast Education and Library Board (BELB)

Children with ASD are educated in a range of settings both mainstream and special school across the education sector. The Board also supports a number of pupils currently in receipt of Applied Behavioural Analysis (ABA) provision.

Provision available within schools in the BELB for children with ASD can include:-

- The annual Transition support programme for parents, teachers and children at transfer from

nursery to year 1 and from year 7 to year 8 provided by the BELB;

- Assessment by an educational psychologist in liaison with Health and Social Care professionals;
- Schools visits/assessments by the BELB ASD Service and provision of written recommendations which are then incorporated into the child’s education plan and implemented by the class teacher/school staff;
- Reviews of these recommendations by the BELB ASD Service on request by school;
- In more complex cases the BELB ASD Service can provide an ASD trained adult assistant for the child;
- In the most complex cases a statutory assessment may ultimately lead to a statement of special educational needs.

South Eastern Education and Library Board

The Board provides a range of services to pupils with autism including:

- Pre-school advice and support to children with autism and their parents.
- Social Communication Units at Cumran PS, Belvoir Park PS, Knockmore PS and Killard House Special School.
- Speech and Language Units at Belvoir Park PS, Knockevin PS and Killard House Special School (many children with speech, language and

communication difficulties have a diagnosis of autism).

- Specialist teaching and non-teaching support at The High School, Ballynahinch and Fort Hill Integrated College.
- Additional adult assistance (teaching and non-teaching) for pupils with autism attending mainstream schools.
- An advisory and support service to pupils with autism, teachers, parents and other professionals.
- A specialist Senior Educational Psychologist.

North Eastern Education and Library Board

The North Eastern Board has established an ASD Support Service:

- The Service team is comprised of: 3 Assistant Advisory Officers, 1 Field Officer, 2 Autism Intervention Officers, one Senior Educational Psychologist and one specialist educational psychologist trained as a Board Certified Analyst on a part time basis.
- Core work involves providing support to pupils with ASD and their schools through: training, giving advice to teachers and offering individual input to pupils.
- Training is organised annually, on a rolling programme and covers general to very specific topics relating to ASD. Information is sent to schools in regard to this training and they select from this, as required. Longitudinal training for Teachers and Classroom Assistants and training on ABA Intervention is a recent addition to the training menu.
- One Assistant Advisory Officer from the Autism Support Service also leads within the TEACCH regional training programme.
- Within mainstream schools individual pupil support is provided at Stages 3-5 of the Code of Practice. Individual pupils also have access to individual levels of support classroom assistance, supervisory assistance or teaching time.
- Within Special Schools, advice and training can be accessed, on request.
- In addition is it sometimes more appropriate for a pupil to access support from other Board Services e.g. Behaviour Support, literacy teaching or Pre-school Home Teaching Service.

ASD Provision in Schools

- The majority of the SLD schools in the NEELB (four in total) have specialised classes for children with Autism and this provision is also available within the MLD schools. Staff in these classes have received additional training in ASD interventions to enable them to provide for the needs of pupils with a severe learning difficulty and ASD.

Multi-disciplinary Work

- The Senior Educational Psychologist (Sp ASD) is a member of the core multi-disciplinary Autism Assessment and Diagnosis Service for the former Homefirst Trust area. This work involves the diagnostic assessment of young people through a range of options (such as school, clinic and group assessment). Parent training runs alongside group assessment of the young people (usually for six sessions) and feedback is offered from two professionals. Individual Educational Psychologists provide psychological input within the former Causeway Trust area.
- Throughout the year there is a rolling programme of six evening parent training for parents of children already diagnosed and those awaiting diagnostic assessment (within the former Homefirst Trust). This group has also organised social skills training for adolescent pupils with ASD.
- Practical assistance and training is being provided to the Paediatric Dental Service within the former Homefirst Trust area, to develop a programme towards enabling children with ASDs to visit the dentist, without undue stress.

Voluntary Agencies

Close links have been established with PAPA (Autism NI) and contact with the National Autism Society has recently been established. Collaborative training is regularly provided by the ASD Support Service (with Autism NI) and the members of the Support Service make themselves available to speak to parents in the evenings at the local branches.

Western Education and Library Board

As with other Boards the Western Board has established a Support Service, the Autism Spectrum Advisory Service (ASAS) based in Robin House, Omagh. The Service is managed by an Advisor and has a team of ten officers who work on a Board wide basis to provide support from Early Years to 19 yrs. The Support Service works closely with other statutory and voluntary agencies to co-ordinate training and intervention in specific cases and has also established effective links with the Western Health and Social Care Trust to enable therapy services to be provided in ASD provision. The key elements of the service are:

- Advice and information – Telephone advice and information on general matters relating to ASD;
- INSET – Centre based courses for school professionals aimed at promoting the development of a range of relevant skills;
- School based training – Whole/part staff on-site tailored training for school;

- Parent training – Centre based courses for families aimed at promoting a range of skills;
- Teacher/classroom assistant support – Advisory visits to provide general advice and support and specific advice regarding classroom strategies for individual pupils and input into Individualised education plans;
- Parent support – Advisory visits/telephones advice to provide general advice and support to families;
- Pupil support – Support for individual pupils based on the level of need including assessment and intervention programmes.

The ASAS provides statutory advice in relation to pupils for whom a Statement of Special Educational Need is being undertaken. The service also provides input into the Annual Review Process of pupils with Statements of Special Educational Need.

The Board also has ASD specific classes as detailed below:

(i) Special Schools

Arvalee, Elmbrook, Knockavoe, Belmont and Foyleview Schools provide KSI autism specific classes. Each class is staffed with 1 teacher and up to 2 classroom assistants and caters for up to 8 pupils. Elmbrook and Arvalee have begun to develop autism specific classes for post-primary pupils on the basis of identified need.

(ii) Mainstream Schools

The Board has recently received DE approval to open 4 autism specific classes attached to mainstream schools at St Brigid's PS, Carnhill, Londonderry Model PS, Omagh County PS and Holy Trinity PS, Enniskillen. Each school will provide KSI autism specific classes with effect from September 2008. Each class will be staffed with 1 teacher and up to 2 classroom assistants and will cater for up to 8 pupils.

The Board is also progressing the establishment of a pilot programme for Autism in the Post-Primary sector on the basis of identified need.

Southern Education and Library Board

The Board established an Autism Advice and Intervention Service (AAIS) which is based in Silverwood, Lurgan. This service is managed by an Adviser and has a team of 10 officers who work on a Board wide basis. This support is provided by the AAIS Service for pupils from Early Years to 19 years. In addition to working with Board services, the AAIS works closely with other statutory and voluntary agencies to co-ordinate training and interventions in specific cases. Indeed, the SELB has established effective links with the Southern Health & Social Care Trust in particular so that Therapy Services can be provided in Autism Specific Provision.

The key elements of the work of the AAIS can be summarised as follows:-

- Advice and information – Telephone advice and information on general matters relating to ASD;
- INSET – Centre based courses for school professionals aimed at promoting the development of a range of relevant skills;
- School based training – Whole/part staff on-site tailored training for school;
- Parent training – Centre based courses for families aimed at promoting a range of skills;
- Teacher/classroom assistant support – Advisory visits to provide general advice and support and specific advice regarding classroom strategies for individual pupils and input into Individualised education plans;
- Parent support – Advisory visits/telephones advice to provide general advice and support to families;
- Pupil support – Support for individual pupils based on the level of need including assessment and intervention programmes.

The AAIS provides statutory advice in relation to pupils for whom a Statement of Special Educational Need is being undertaken. The service also provides input into the Annual Review Process of pupils with Statements of Special Educational Need.

The SELB also has Autism Specific Classes as detailed below:-

(i) Special Schools:

Ceara, Donard, Rathore and Sperrinview provide Autism Specific Classes. Each class is staffed with one teacher and up to 2 Classroom Assistants and caters for up to 8 pupils.

(ii) Mainstream Schools:

The Southern Board has 9 Autism Specific Classes which are attached to mainstream schools. These are located at:-

- Edenderry Primary School, Portadown;
- St Mary's Primary School, Banbridge;
- St Joseph's Convent Primary School, Newry;
- Kilkeel Primary School;
- Dungannon Primary School;
- Primate Dixon Primary School, Coalisland;
- Christian Brothers Primary School, Armagh;
- Cookstown Primary School; and
- The Armstrong Primary School, Armagh.

Each class is staffed with one teacher and up to 2 Classroom Assistants and caters for up to 8 pupils.

The Board is also progressing the establishment of a pilot programme for Autism in the Post-Primary sector on the basis of identified need.

The Inter-Board ASD Group

- This group is chaired by a Principal Educational Psychologist and an ASEO. Five Senior Educational Psychologists and Five Assistant Advisory Officers/Field Officers (all ASD specialists) meet monthly to promote consistency and commonality of practice – in meeting the needs of children with ASD across the North of Ireland.
- Present work includes the compiling of a core training menu of courses which can be made available to school staff and the completion of an early years programme for use with children with Autism.
- The Group is the identified link with the Middletown Centre for Excellence.

Utilisation of the Post Office

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Education what consideration has been given and what progress has been made by her Department to utilise the Post Office as a source, agency or outlet for the delivery of its services as outlined in the May 2008 report of the Assembly's Ad Hoc Committee, 'Report of the Committee's Consideration of, and Proposals for, Partnership that could Enhance the Economic Case for Viable Local Postal Services'. (AQW 8692/08)

The Minister of Education: The Ad Hoc Committee on Local Postal Services' Report made a number of recommendations to the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (DBERR) concerning the future of Postal Services and the Post Office network. Junior Minister Donaldson and Junior Minister Kelly wrote to Executive Ministers on 21 April asking them to consider whether any further public services could be delivered through post offices.

Leanfaidh Roinn s'agamsa le deiseanna a mheas de réir mar a thagann siad aníos le hoibriú amach cé acu an féidir aon seirbhís phoiblí úr a sholáthar trí Oifig an Phoist cé go mbeadh na seirbhísí sin faoi réir an pholasáí chuí soláthair.

My Department will continue to look at opportunities as they arise to consider whether any new public service could be delivered through the Post Office although these would be subject to the appropriate procurement policy.

Re-build of Ballywalter Primary School

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Education to provide an estimated start date for the re-build of Ballywalter Primary School, now that the Department has accepted the option for a new school on an alternative site. (AQW 8698/08)

The Minister of Education: Ar an ábhar nach ndearnadh aon chinneadh ar thráthúlacht an chéad fhógra maoiniúcháin eile, ní féidir dáta tosaigh mheasta a thabhairt ag an pointe seo i dtaca le hatógáil Bhunscoil Bhaile Bháltair.

As no decision has been made on the timing of the next capital funding announcement an estimated start date for a re-build of Ballywalter Primary School cannot be provided at this time.

Newbuild at Braidside Integrated School, Ballymena

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education when the Braidside Integrated School in Ballymena will be provided with a new building to replace the current mobile classrooms. (AQW 8703/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá scéim le haghaidh foirgneamh úr scoile d'Abhainn na Brád ag dul tríd na luathchéimeanna pleanála i láthair na huairé. Caithfear breithmheas eacnamaíochta bheith comhlánaithe ag an scoil agus aontaithe ag an Roinn sula mbeidh sí i dteideal an chláir chaipitil.

A scheme for a new school building for Braidside is currently in the early stages of planning. The school will need to have an economic appraisal completed and agreed by the Department before it is eligible for consideration for the capital programme.

Post-Primary School Places

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Education how many Year 7 pupils have obtained places in post-primary education for the year 2008-2009, for each post-primary school in the South Eastern Education and Library Board area, broken down by feeder primary school. (AQW 8714/08)

The Minister of Education: Cuireadh an t-eolas a iarradh i leabharlann an Tionóil.

The information requested has been placed in the Assembly library.

Selection of Post-Primary School Places

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Education to detail the first choice of post-primary school for 2008-2009, of year 7 pupils attending primary schools in the South Eastern Education and Library Board area, broken down by primary school. (AQW 8715/08)

The Minister of Education: Cuireadh an t-eolas a iarradh i leabharlann an Tionóil.

The information requested has been placed in the Assembly library.

Statements of Special Educational Needs

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to her answer to AQO 4020/08, to explain why the figures for the Southern Education and Library Board are much higher compared to other education and library boards. (AQW 8761/08)

The Minister of Education: I have been advised by the Chief Executive of the Southern Education and Library Board (SELB) that the SELB is the largest Board in terms of pupil enrolment. This may be one factor which could explain the higher number of Statements of Special Educational Needs.

The Chief Executive also reports that further to a review of the figure of 193 which was previously submitted the revised figure of 124 is now considered to be accurate. This figure decreased from 193 to 124 when officers updated the Capita System to take account of cases which had already been finalised, or where Notes in Lieu had been issued.

Maidir leis na 124 cás atá le críochnú go fóill, tá an briseadh síos seo a leanas i gceist:-

In relation to the 124 cases which have yet to be finalised the following break-down applies:-

- 18% (22 cases) are waiting to be drafted by Special Education Officers;
- 82% (102 cases) have been issued as Proposed Statements to parents and schools but a final response confirming acceptance of the Proposed Statement has not been obtained. In some cases there has been no response from the parent or school and in other cases details relating to the placement have to be finalised.

Waiting Lists

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Education what action she is taking to (i) reduce the waiting list in the Southern Education and Library Board area; and (ii) further reduce the waiting lists in the other education

and library board areas, before the school term begins in September 2008. (AQW 8764/08)

The Minister of Education: Bhain na figiúirí a tugadh mar fhreagra ar AQO 4020/08 leis na páistí úd, a ndearnadh measúnú reachtúil RSO orthu faoin dáta sin, agus a bhí ag fanacht lena ráitis deiridh RSO bheith críochnaithe .i. céim 4 den Chód Chleachtais maidir le Riachtanais Speisialta Oideachais a Shainaithint agus a Mheas.

The figures provided in response to AQO 4020/08 were in respect of those children on whom a statutory assessment of SEN had been completed, at that date, and who were awaiting completion of their final statement of SEN i.e. stage 4 of the Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs. I would refer to my answer to AQW 8761/08 which provides a breakdown of the figures relevant to the South Eastern Education and Library Board.

By way of further explanation I should explain that on completion of an assessment a Board has 2 weeks in which to issue a Proposed Statement or to inform the parent that they do not intend to make a Statement. If the Board issues a Proposed Statement it has a further 8 weeks in which to issue a completed Statement.

The Board will serve a Proposed Statement on the parent, who then has 15 days to make representations to the Board and to arrange a meeting to discuss any concerns they may have about the content of the Statement. After this meeting the parent then has a further 15 days to make further representations to the board. Therefore, within the statutory timeframe, there will always be a number of children whose assessment has been completed but whose final Statement has not yet been issued. Should the parent not reach agreement with the Board they may appeal to the Special Educational Needs and Disability Tribunal.

Initial Teacher Intake

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of Education, in light of the importance of the Shared Futures Agenda, to give an assurance that teacher training places at the University of Ulster will not be reduced. (AQW 8796/08)

The Minister of Education: I have reviewed, in consultation with the Minister for Employment and Learning the overall initial teacher education intake (ITE) numbers for the 2008/09 academic year.

I have made my decision on the revised intake figures for the 2008/09 academic year in the context of: i) the overall places made available for ITE across all of the institutions here in the north; ii) the wider

education reform agenda; iii) the Programme for Government key goal of increasing the number of students studying Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics; iv) the Department for Employment and Learning's review of funding for the two University Colleges; and, v) the "Stakeholder Review" of teacher training announced by the Assembly's Committee for Employment and Learning.

The numbers notified to the University of Ulster in February 2008 remain unchanged and, therefore, have not been reduced.

Teacher Training Places

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of Education how many teacher training places are allocated to (i) St Mary's University College; (ii) Stranmillis University College; and (iii) the University of Ulster. (AQW 8797/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá iontrálacha ar oiliúint tosaigh do mhúinteoirí (ITE) don bhliain acadúil 2008/09 do Choláiste Ollscoile Naomh Muire, do Choláiste Ollscoile an tStutháin Mhilis; agus d'Ollscoil Uladh leagtha amach sa tábla thíos:

The 2008/09 academic year initial teacher education (ITE) intakes for St Mary's University College, Stranmillis University College; and for the University of Ulster are set out in the table below:

ITE Institution	ITE Intakes (June 2008)
St Mary's University College	152
Stranmillis University College	145
University of Ulster	145

Initial Teacher Intake

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of Education, in light of the increase in teacher training places at St Mary's and Stranmillis University Colleges, if there are plans to increase teacher training places at the University of Ulster; and if not to detail the reasons why. (AQW 8798/08)

The Minister of Education: I have reviewed, in consultation with the Minister for Employment and Learning the overall initial teacher education intake (ITE) numbers for the 2008/09 academic year.

I have made my decision on the revised intake figures for the 2008/09 academic year in the context of: i) the overall places made available for ITE across all of the institutions here in the north; ii) the wider education reform agenda; iii) the Programme for Government key goal of increasing the number of

students studying Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics; iv) the Department for Employment and Learning's review of funding for the two University Colleges; and, v) the "Stakeholder Review" of teacher training announced by the Assembly's Committee for Employment and Learning.

The numbers notified to the University of Ulster in February 2008 remain unchanged and, therefore, have not been reduced.

Academic Selection

Mr Simpson asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to her answer to AQW 7869/08, to confirm that under devolution she has no power to unilaterally abolish (i) academic selection; and (ii) the Dickson Plan for education. (AQW 8811/08)

The Minister of Education: My powers are defined by the current legislative position, something which I have explained on a number of occasions. The legislation makes the commencement of Article 28(2) of the Education Order 2006 subject to an Assembly vote and it makes the introduction of new admissions criteria regulations contingent on resolution of the future of academic selection. Without this resolution and without these regulations there will simply be an absence of law and an unregulated system.

Chuir mé tograí faoi bhráid an Choiste Fheidhmiúcháin le plé a dhéanamh orthu agus tá mé ag iarraidh a ghabháil chun tosaigh ar bhealach a bheas comhthoilíoch agus bunaithe ar na tograí sin.

I have brought forward proposals to the Executive for discussion and I am seeking a consensual way forward based around those proposals. My proposals do not threaten the Dickson Plan structures, which are entirely compatible with my focus on age 14 as a key decision point, but I do not accept the need for academic selection as a component part of those structures.

Pattern of Attendance

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education how many nursery schools in the North Down constituency applied for additional places for the (i) 2008-09; and (ii) 2009-10, academic years; and to detail (a) the nursery schools that were refused additional places, and (b) the reasons for refusal. (AQW 8825/08)

The Minister of Education: Nursery schools and primary schools with nursery units have set numbers of places available and these numbers cannot be increased by applying for additional places. Instead, the Department considers applications for changes in pattern of attendance.

One school, Millisle Primary School, has requested a change in pattern of attendance in their nursery unit from 1 part-time class to either 2 part-time classes or 1 full-time class for 2008/09. The South-Eastern Education & Library Board's Pre-School Education Advisory Group (PEAG) has considered this request but does not support, as statistics indicate that there is adequate provision in the Millisle and neighbouring wards. This request is currently under consideration with the Department.

Tá an t-athrú ar phatrún tinrimh don bhliain 2009/10, dá dtagraítear thuas, iarrtha ag Bunscoil Millisle fosta. Tá an t-iarratas sin á bhreithniú ag an Roinn agus ag PEAG.

Millisle Primary School has also requested the above change in pattern of attendance for 2009/10. This request is under consideration with both the Department and PEAG.

Surplus School Places

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education how many surplus school places there are (i) in total; and (ii) as a percentage of the total number of places, in each sector. (AQW 8826/08)

The Minister of Education: Meastar go raibh farasbarr de 55,000 áit ann sa bhliain 2006/07.

Seo a leanas céatadán na n-áiteanna measta uile i ngach earnáil:

There were an estimated 55,000 surplus places in 2006/07. The percentage of the total estimated places in each sector was as follows:

PRIMARY

Sector	2006/07 enrolment (A)	Estimated Surplus places (B)	Surplus as a % of total (A) + (B)
Controlled	76,802	17,931	18.9
Maintained	73,661	18,193	19.8
Irish-medium	1,752	378	17.7
Grant Maintained Integrated	4,805	156	3.1
Totals	157,020	36,658	18.9

POST-PRIMARY

Sector	2006/07 enrolment	Estimated Surplus places	Surplus as a % of total
Controlled	51,475	7,933	13.4
Maintained	41,582	9,269	18.1

Sector	2006/07 enrolment	Estimated Surplus places	Surplus as a % of total
Irish-medium	489	0	0
Grant Maintained Integrated	8,725	213	2.4
Voluntary Grammar	47,494	1,049	2.2
Totals	149,765	18,464	11.00

Temporary Classrooms in SEELB Schools

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education what schools in the South Eastern Education and Library Board area have mobile classrooms; and how many there are in each school. (AQW 8832/08)

The Minister of Education: Sa tábla seo a leanas tá liosta de na scoileanna i gceantar Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an Oirdheiscirt a bhfuil seomraí ranga sealadacha acu:

The following table shows the schools in the South Eastern Education and Library Board area which have temporary classrooms:

School	Number of Temporary Classrooms
Abbey Primary	5
Andrews Memorial Primary	4
Ballykeigle Primary	1
Ballymacash Primary	1
Ballymagee Primary	1
Ballynahinch Primary	1
Ballyvester Primary	2
Ballywalter Primary	1
Brownlee Primary	1
Cairnshill Primary	4
Comber Primary	1
Conlig Primary	1
Crawfordsburn Primary	4
Glasswater Primary School	1
Derriaghy Primary	1
Donaghadee Primary School	2
Downpatrick Primary	2
Dromara Primary	1
Fort Hill Primary	1
Hollywood Primary	1

School	Number of Temporary Classrooms
Killinchy Primary	4
Killowen Primary	2
Knockmore Primary	3
Leadhill Primary	2
Londonderry Primary	1
Maghaberry Primary	1
Moira Primary	1
Portavogie Primary	2
Seymour Hill Primary	2
Tonagh Primary	1
Kindle Integrated Primary	3
Victoria Primary - Ballyhalbert	2
Riverdale Primary	1
Convent Of Mercy Primary	1
Christ The King P/S Drumaness	2
St Francis Primary (Drumroad)	1
Good Shepherd Primary	12
Holy Family Primary	3
St Patrick's P/S Legamaddy	4
Sacred Heart Primary	1
Saint Colmans P.S. (Lisburn)	9
Saint Colmans P.S. (Moira)	2
Saint Colmcilles Primary	1
Saint Comgalls Primary	3
Saint Josephs P.S. (Ballycruttle)	1
Saint Josephs Primary Carnacaville	5
Saint Josephs Primary Carryduff	16
Saint Josephs P.S. (Crossgar)	1
Saint Josephs P.S. (Killough)	1
Saint Josephs P.S. (Lisburn)	1
Saint Josephs P.S. (Strangford)	2
Saint Kierans Primary	13
Saint Macartans Primary Loughlisland	1
Saint Malachys Primary Kilcoo	1
Saint Marks Primary	4
Saint Nicholas P.S. (Ardglass)	1
Saint Patricks P.S. (Downpatrick)	6
Saint Patricks Primary Burrenreagh	1

School	Number of Temporary Classrooms
Hilden Integrated Primary	2
Portaferry Integrated Primary	2
Bangor Central Primary	2
Kircubbin Primary	2
Donaghadee High School	1
Laurelhill Community College	6
Newtownbreda High	5
Ballynahinch High School	3
Saint Colmans High	4
Saint Colmcilles High	5
Saint Columbanus' College	4
Saint Marys High	4
Saint Patricks High School	2
Down Academy	7
Fort Hill College	3
Down High School	21
Wallace High	4
Cedar Integrated PS	6
Oakwood Integrated Primary	1
Millennium Integrated PS	7
Scoil na Fuisseoige	8
St Patrick's PS Saul	5
St Malachy's Castlewellan	2
St Patrick's PS Ballygalget	3
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Replacement of Mobile Classrooms

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education what action she is taking to replace mobile classrooms in schools. (AQW 8833/08)

The Minister of Education: Déantar athsholáthar seomraí ranga soghluaiste a mheas ar bhonn measúnaithe ar riocht agus oiriúnacht na lóistíne ag gach scoil.

The replacement of mobile classrooms is considered on the basis of an assessment of the condition and suitability of the accommodation at each school.

Newly Qualified Teachers

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Education when she intends to put in place a scheme which guarantees newly qualified teachers a probationary year in teaching. (AQW 8852/08)

The Minister of Education: Faoi láthair níl na hacmhainní ag an Roinn seo le bliain phromhaidh faoi ráthaíocht a thabhairt isteach do mhúinteoirí nua-cháilithe. Meastar go gcosnódh ráthaíocht do mhic léinn a bheadh ag cáiliú tar éis 2008 breis agus £12 milliún sa chéad bhliain agus breis agus £20 milliún sna blianta ina dhiaidh sin.

The Department does not currently have the resources to introduce a guaranteed probationary year for newly qualified teachers. It is estimated that a guarantee to students graduating after 2008 would cost over £12 million in the first year and over £20 million in subsequent years.

Post-Primary School Places

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Education how many (i) places have been allocated to; and (ii) applications have been received for, each post-primary school in the South Eastern and Education Library Board area, for the 2008-09 academic year. (AQW 8862/08)

The Minister of Education: Tugtar mionsonraithe maidir le (i) líon na n-áiteanna a tugadh do; agus (ii) líon na n-iarratas a fuarthas do gach iarbhunscoil i gceantar Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlann an Oirdheiscirt don bhliain acadúil 2008/9 sa tábla atá ceangailte leis seo.

The number of (i) places allocated to; and (ii) applications received for, each post-primary school in the South Eastern and Education Library Board area, for the 2008/09 academic year are detailed in the attached table.

School Reference Number	School Name	(i) Approved Year 8 Places 2008/2009 School Year	(ii) Total Applications Received 2008/09 School Year
421-0012	Movilla High School	180	88
421-0029	The High School, Ballynahinch	76	64
421-0031	Donaghadee High School	76	11
421-0045	Nendrum College	80	116
421-0046	Glastry College	110	123

School Reference Number	School Name	(i) Approved Year 8 Places 2008/2009 School Year	(ii) Total Applications Received 2008/09 School Year
421-0051	Lisnagarvey High School	100	60
421-0063	Saintfield High School	68	112
421-0086	Knockbreda High School	120	124
421-0183	Newtownbreda High School	170	168
421-0194	Dunmurry High School	80	51
421-0201	Laurelhill Community College	175	152
421-0262	Dundonald High School	120	40
421-0296	Bangor Academy and Sixth Form College	242	296
423-0023	St Mary's High School	125	66
423-0067	St Columba's High School, Portaferry	104	51
423-0102	St Colmcille's High School, Crossgar	90	87
423-0107	St Columbanus' College, Bangor	90	128
423-0161	St Colman's High School, Ballynahinch	95	52
423-0165	St Patrick's High School, Lisburn	106	63
423-0211	St Malachy's High School	164	166
423-0223	St Colm's High School	132	130
423-0224	De La Salle Secondary School, Downpatrick	86	59
425-0024	Priory College	85	102
425-0072	Fort Hill College	160	139
425-0272	Blackwater Integrated College	80	50
426-0255	Lagan College	200	476
426-0281	Shimna Integrated College	80	112
426-0295	Strangford Integrated College	80	158
441-0063	Regent House School	210	258
441-0085	Down High School	128	197

School Reference Number	School Name	(i) Approved Year 8 Places 2008/2009 School Year	(ii) Total Applications Received 2008/09 School Year
441-0097	Glenlola Collegiate School	157	244
442-0015	Bangor Grammar School	125	173
442-0044	Sullivan Upper School	150	187
442-0050	Friends' School	140	214
442-0051	Wallace High School	170	237
442-0086	Assumption Grammar School, Ballynahinch	120	176
442-0088	St Patrick's Grammar School, Downpatrick	96	130
442-0259	Our Lady and St Patrick's College	180	266

School Enrolments

Dr Farry asked the Minister of Education what proportion of pupils enrolled in Controlled schools are from (i) a Catholic background; and (ii) a mixed religious or other religious background. (AQW 8864/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá an t-eolas a iarradh mionsonraithe sa tábla faoi iamh.

The information requested is detailed in the attached table.

CONTROLLED AND INTEGRATED PRIMARY AND POST PRIMARY PUPILS' RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND – 2007/08

Religion	Primary ¹				Post primary			
	Controlled		Integrated ²		Controlled		Integrated ²	
Catholic	4,009	5%	2,912	38%	1,481	3%	4,491	40%
Protestant	58,645	75%	2,882	38%	39,461	82%	4,946	44%
Other ³	15,454	20%	1,826	24%	7,054	15%	1,810	16%
Total	78,108	100%	7,620	100%	47,996	100%	11,247	100%

Source: school census

Notes:

1. Primary includes nursery, reception and year 1 – 7 classes.
2. Integrated schools includes controlled integrated and grant maintained integrated schools.
3. The 'Other' category includes 'other Christian', 'non-Christian' and 'no religion/religion unknown'.

Religious Background of Pupils

Dr Farry asked the Minister of Education what proportion of pupils enrolled at integrated schools are from (i) a Protestant background; (ii) a Catholic background; and (iii) a mixed religious or other religious background. (AQW 8865/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá an t-eolas a iarradh mionsonraithe sa tábla faoi iamh.

The information requested is detailed in the attached table.

Controlled and Integrated primary and post primary pupils' religious background – 2007/08

Religion	Primary ¹				Post primary			
	Controlled		Integrated ²		Controlled		Integrated ²	
Catholic	4,009	5%	2,912	38%	1,481	3%	4,491	40%
Protestant	58,645	75%	2,882	38%	39,461	82%	4,946	44%
Other ³	15,454	20%	1,826	24%	7,054	15%	1,810	16%
Total	78,108	100%	7,620	100%	47,996	100%	11,247	100%

Source: school census

Notes:

1. Primary includes nursery, reception and year 1 – 7 classes.
2. Integrated schools includes controlled integrated and grant maintained integrated schools.
3. The 'Other' category includes 'other Christian', 'non-Christian' and 'no religion/religion unknown'.

Information Requested from the South Eastern Education and Library Board

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to her answer to AQW 8048/08, what further information has been requested from the South Eastern Education and Library Board; and on what date it was requested. (AQW 8867/08)

The Minister of Education: Iarradh eolas faoi bhail agus faoi oiriúnacht reatha na bhfoirgneamh ag Bunscoil an Acadaimh ar Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an Oirdheiscirt ar 16 Meitheamh 2008.

Information on the current condition and suitability of the buildings at Academy Primary School was requested from the South Eastern Education and Library Board on 16 June 2008.

Reinstatement of the South Eastern Education and Library Board

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education when the South Eastern Education and Library Board is due to be re-instated. (AQW 8882/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá súil agam fógra a dhéanamh ar an ábhar seo gan mhoill.

I hope to make an announcement on this matter in the near future.

Primary Languages Programme

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education what finance, staff training, learning and teaching resources will be provided to support teaching Irish in those primary schools participating in the Primary Languages Programme who have opted for Irish. (AQW 8904/08)

The Minister of Education: Regardless of the language chosen by schools, all participating teachers and tutors receive the same high standard of training and support.

To date I have allocated £455, 000 to the primary languages programme, covering the period up to March 2009. This supports the provision of tutors, teaching resources, and training, which has so far included awareness-raising events, at which teaching resources were disseminated in both Spanish and Irish, and three in-service days for teachers. These received positive feedback and further opportunities for professional development will be provided as the programme develops.

De bharr thoradh Bhuiséad 2007, tá maoiniú breise aimsithe agam fosta i gcomhair theagasc na dteangacha i mbunscoileanna suas go dtí Márta 2011, mí an Mhárta san áireamh, agus leithdháilfear na hacmhainní chun tacú le forbairt an chláir sin sa bhliain 2008-09.

As a result of the Budget 2007 outcome, I have also secured additional funding for primary languages up to and including March 2011, and allocations will be made to support an expansion of the programme in 2008-09. When work to develop a wider strategy for the promotion of language learning in schools has been completed, I will, in the context of this strategy, be announcing how I intend to build on the initial stages of the programme in future years.

Primary Languages Programme

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education what finance, staff training, learning and teaching

resources will be provided to support teaching Spanish in those primary schools participating in the Primary Languages Programme who have opted for Spanish. (AQW 8905/08)

The Minister of Education: Regardless of the language chosen by schools, all participating teachers and tutors receive the same high standard of training and support.

To date I have allocated £455, 000 to the primary languages programme, covering the period up to March 2009. This supports the provision of tutors, teaching resources, and training, which has so far included awareness-raising events, at which teaching resources were disseminated in both Spanish and Irish, and three in-service days for teachers. These received positive feedback and further opportunities for professional development will be provided as the programme develops.

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Revised GCSE Irish

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education what progress has been made with commissioning two textbooks for the revised GCSE Irish, which will be taught from September 2009. (AQW 8910/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá an t-eolas seo a leanas curtha ar fáil ag Príomhfheidhmeannach na Comhairle Churaclaim, Scrúdúcháin agus Mheasúnaithe Thuaisceart Éireann.

The Chief Executive of the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) has provided the following information.

CCEA has negotiated with a local publisher with a view to producing a textbook to support the revised GCSE specification for first teaching in September 2009. The result of those discussions is that CCEA's role will be to provide advice and guidance as appropriate to the publishers and author on the content and structures of the revised specification and to

quality assure drafts accordingly. CCEA will endorse the final version of the textbook for distribution, aimed to coincide with first teaching in September 2009, but will have no role in the distribution and costs involved. An author has been appointed by the publishers who have now been briefed on the draft version of the specification. Progress on the writing of the textbook is at an 'early ideas' stage and cannot progress in earnest until the specification has been accredited in August 2008.

Education and Skills Authority

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education how much it would cost to establish an Education and Skills Authority. (AQW 8912/08)

The Minister of Education: Is é an phríomhaidhm a bheas ag an tÚdarás um Oideachas agus Scileanna (ESA) torthaí oideachasúla a fheabhsú do gach páiste, agus trí riarachán an oideachais a nuachóiriú, táthar ag súil go scaoilfidh sé £20m in aghaidh na bliana ó chostais riaracháin le hinfheistíocht a dhéanamh i seirbhísí bunúsacha.

The principal focus of the Education and Skills Authority (ESA) will be to improve educational outcomes for all children, and in modernising the administration of education it is anticipated that it will release £20m per annum from administration costs for investment in front line services. Upfront costs of £50million have been provided by the Executive over the Budget 2007 period to facilitate the establishment of the new ESA. Further significant savings will be achievable in the medium and longer term through innovation in service delivery, the rationalisation of the schools' estate and the introduction of area based planning.

Review of Public Administration

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education what specific responsibilities the advisory body for Maintained schools will have, as proposed in the Review of Public Administration. (AQW 8913/08)

The Minister of Education: The Trustees of Catholic schools have submitted a Business Case for funding under the Department's new Sectoral Support policy. This funding will be used by a new voluntary organisation to be established by the Trustees to support their work post-RPA. The organisation will have no statutory basis; therefore, it will not have any formal responsibilities in law.

The organisation may use the funding allocated to it by the Department to carry out a number of roles under the Sectoral Support policy. These are:

- Representation and advocacy;

- Development and maintenance of the collective ethos of the sector;
- Identifying/nominating foundation governors and encouraging others to put themselves forward as community governors;
- Participating in the planning of the schools estate;
- Building co-operation and engaging with other sectors
- Supporting the role of the ESA in raising educational standards in the sector.

Déanfaidh an Roinn monatóireacht ar chaiteachas an mhaoinithe seo le cinntiú go mbaintear an úsáid chuí as. Fáiltíodh roimh Chásanna Gnó den chineál céanna ó gach earnáil eile agus cuirfear isteach iad.

The Department will monitor the use of this funding to ensure it is used appropriately. Similar Business Cases have been invited from, and will be submitted by, each of the other sectors.

Education and Skills Authority

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education if she will ask for the Education and Skills Authority to become a Centre for Procurement Expertise. (AQW 8914/08)

The Minister of Education: Nuair a bhunófar an tÚdarás um Oideachas agus Scileanna, féachfaidh sé le bheith ina Ionad um Shaineolas Soláthair lena chinntiú go mbainfear ardchaighdeán amach i gcúrsaí soláthair agus go gcoinneofar na caighdeáin sin ag an leibhéal chuí, faoi réir na Rialachán um Chonarthaí Poiblí 2006.

The Education and Skills Authority, when established, will seek to become a Centre for Procurement Expertise to ensure high standards in procurement are achieved and maintained, in line with the Public Contracts Regulations 2006.

Mixed Education

Dr Farry asked the Minister of Education for her assessment of the desire for mixed education, based on the Northern Ireland Life and Times Surveys. (AQW 8915/08)

The Minister of Education: Sample surveys, such as the Life and Times Survey (NILT Survey), can be useful in the absence of other forms of evidence on which to base considerations.

However, my Department bases its assessment of the desire for particular forms of education upon the expression of parental choice for individual children.

Mar Aire Oideachais tá sé de dhualgas orm a chinntiú go dtugtar an rogha oideachais dá bpáistí nuair is féidir é.

As Minister of Education it is my duty to ensure that parents are provided with the choice of education for their children wherever possible.

Mixed Education

Dr Farry asked the Minister of Education for her assessment of the public's view on the performance of her Department in the delivery of mixed education, based upon the Northern Ireland Life and Times Surveys. (AQW 8917/08)

The Minister of Education: Sample surveys, such as the Life and Times Survey (NILT Survey), can be useful in the absence of other forms of evidence on which to base considerations. However, my Department delivers particular forms of education based on the expression of parental choice for individual children.

Maidir le soláthar oibríonn mo Roinn leis an earnáil chomhtháite ar gach mholadh ar leith a bhaineann le soláthar nua. Ón bhliain 1997, faomhadh 12 scoil nua chun stádais comhtháite faoi chothabháil stáit agus faomhadh 13 scoil chun aistriú go stádas comhtháite rialaithe.

In terms of delivery my Department works with the integrated sector on each individual proposal for new provision. Since 1997, 12 new schools have been approved for grant maintained integrated status, and 13 existing schools have received approval to transform to controlled integrated status.

Surplus School Places

Dr Farry asked the Minister of Education what steps are being taken to ensure that there is adequate provision of school places for children from mixed religious or other religious backgrounds. (AQW 8918/08)

The Minister of Education: There is a currently an overall surplus of places available due to a declining pupil population, and this surplus applies to all children regardless of religious background, due to the fact that places cannot be allocated on the basis of religious background.

San earnáil imeasctha tá eisceacht leis seo, áit a mbíonn cead ag scoileanna critéir iontrála a oibriú ar bhealach a bhaineann amach iontógáil chothromaithe a léiríonn an dá phríomh-thraidisiún, agus iad siúd a thagann ó thraidisiúin nach Protastúnaigh nó Caitlicigh iad.

The exception to this is within the integrated sector where schools are permitted to operate admissions criteria in such a way as to achieve a balanced intake which is representative of the two main traditions, and those from traditions other than Protestant or Catholic. The figures here indicate adequate levels of provision. For instance, in the post-primary integrated sector for 2008/09 there were 2010 places available at the outset of the transfer process and there were 1954 first preference applications. As the transfer process ran its course some first preference applicants were displaced by second or lower preference applicants who were unsuccessful in gaining admission to their first preference school (a natural part of the open enrolment process) resulting in a final position whereby 1510 (77%) of these 1954 first preference applications were successful.

Applications to Post-Primary Integrated Schools

Dr Farry asked the Minister of Education to detail the proportion of first preference applications to post-primary integrated schools that did not result in admissions for the 2008-09 academic year to these schools. (AQW 8920/08)

The Minister of Education: Fuair iarbhunscoileanna imeasctha 1954 iarratas príomhrogha san iomlán don bhliain acadúil 2008-09; ní bhfuair 444 acu sin (22.72%) isteach sna scoileanna sin.

A total of 1954 first-preference applications were received by integrated post-primary schools for the 2008-09 academic year, 444 of which (22.72%), did not gain admission to these schools.

Pupils Currently Enrolled in Catholic Maintained Schools

Dr Farry asked the Minister of Education to detail the proportion of pupils currently enrolled in Catholic Maintained schools who are from (i) a Protestant background; and (ii) a mixed/other religious background. (AQW 8921/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá an t-eolas a iarradh mionsonraithe sa tábla faoi iamh.

The information requested is detailed in the attached table.

RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND OF PUPILS ATTENDING CATHOLIC MAINTAINED PRIMARY AND POST-PRIMARY SCHOOLS – 2007/08

Religion	Primary ¹		Post-primary	
Catholic	75,110	98%	40,272	99%

Religion	Primary ¹		Post-primary	
	Number	%	Number	%
Protestant	486	1%	240	<1%
Other ²	884	1%	251	<1%
Total	76,480	100%	40,763	100%

Source: school census

Note:

1. Primary includes nursery, reception and year 1 – 7 classes.
2. The 'Other' category includes 'other Christian', 'non-Christian' and 'no religion/religion unknown'.

Transformation Fund

Mr Gallagher asked the Minister of Education for an update on the Department's plans for the Transformation Fund. (AQW 8923/08)

The Minister of Education: A paper on a proposed pilot Transformation Fund has been developed by the Early Years Organisation and submitted to OFMDFM which was then forwarded to my officials.

Eisíodh freagra ar 10 Meitheamh 2008 a léirigh na réimsí ina mbeadh gá le tuilleadh oibre le freastal ar na riachtanais bhreithmheasa sula mbeifí in ann breithniú a dhéanamh ar scéim phiolótach a cheadú.

A response was issued on 10th June 2008 highlighting the areas in which further work would be required in order to meet appraisal requirements before approval for a pilot could be considered.

Recruitment on Teachers

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education how many teachers on the substitute teachers' roll have not yet been in full time permanent employment in teaching. (AQW 8938/08)

The Minister of Education: The recruitment of teachers is the responsibility of teachers' employers. The register contains the names of qualified teachers who are registered with the General Teaching Council and who indicate they are available for employment as teachers in grant-aided schools. It includes not only those newly qualified but also those who have retired or who have previously been employed in the profession. In terms of advice, the Department has issued guidance to employers advising them that preference should be given to newly qualified teachers and experienced non-retired teachers seeking employment. Schools have also been advised that they should recruit to vacancies on a permanent rather than a temporary basis unless the vacancy is clearly of a temporary nature. Moreover, the capping of the levels of the central reimbursement of the costs of substitute

cover works in favour of and provides an incentive for schools to employ newly qualified teachers.

Déanann an Roinn monatóireacht agus athbhreithniú ar bhonn leanúnach ar na fachtóirí a bhaineann le soláthar agus éileamh sa ghairm bheatha.

The Department continues to monitor and review the supply and demand factors in the profession.

Teachers on the Substitute Teachers' Roll

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education what action she is taking to provide permanent employment in teaching for teachers on the substitute teachers' roll who have not yet been in full time employment in teaching. (AQW 8939/08)

The Minister of Education: The recruitment of teachers is the responsibility of teachers' employers. The register contains the names of qualified teachers who are registered with the General Teaching Council and who indicate they are available for employment as teachers in grant-aided schools. It includes not only those newly qualified but also those who have retired or who have previously been employed in the profession. In terms of advice, the Department has issued guidance to employers advising them that preference should be given to newly qualified teachers and experienced non-retired teachers seeking employment. Schools have also been advised that they should recruit to vacancies on a permanent rather than a temporary basis unless the vacancy is clearly of a temporary nature. Moreover, the capping of the levels of the central reimbursement of the costs of substitute cover works in favour of and provides an incentive for schools to employ newly qualified teachers.

Déanann an Roinn monatóireacht agus athbhreithniú ar bhonn leanúnach ar na fachtóirí a bhaineann le soláthar agus éileamh sa ghairm bheatha.

The Department continues to monitor and review the supply and demand factors in the profession.

Teachers on the Substitute Teachers' Roll

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education what advice in relation to employment her Department gives to teachers on the substitute teachers' roll who have not yet been in full time permanent employment in teaching. (AQW 8940/08)

The Minister of Education: The recruitment of teachers is the responsibility of teachers' employers. However, the Department has issued guidance to employers advising them that preference should be given to the appointment of newly qualified teachers and experienced non-retired teachers when they are filling vacancies. Schools have also been advised that

they should recruit to vacancies on a permanent rather than a temporary basis unless the vacancy is clearly of a temporary nature. Furthermore, the capping of the levels of the central reimbursement of the costs of substitute cover also provides an incentive to employ newly qualified teachers.

Thug Ciorclán na Roinne 2006/07, a eisíodh i Márta 2006, le fios do scoileanna nár chóir múinteoirí a fhostú mar mhúinteoirí ionaid ó 1 Meán Fómhair 2006 mura bhfuil siad cláraithe ar chlár na múinteoirí ionaid.

The Department's Circular 2006/07, which issued in March 2006, advised schools that only teachers registered on the substitute teacher register should be employed as substitute teachers from 1 September 2006. It is significant to note that the substitute teacher register includes not only young teachers but teachers of all ages who wish to be employed on a substitute teacher basis, together with teachers who no longer wish to be full-time members of the teaching profession.

Primary Languages Programme

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education how many teachers on the substitute teachers' roll, who have not yet been in full time employment in teaching, will be employed in the primary languages programme. (AQW 8941/08)

The Minister of Education: De réir mo chuid freagraí ar AQW8042/08 agus AQW8254/08, caithfidh gach oide atá fostaithe sa Chlár do Theangacha Bunscoile critéir chlár na bunscoile a bheith acu, is é sin cumas d'ardchaighdeán bheith acu i labhairt na Gaeilge nó na Spáinnise.

Further to my responses to AQW 8042/08 and AQW 8254/08, any tutors employed in the Primary Languages Programme must meet the primary programme criteria of having excellent oral language competence in Irish or Spanish. The tutor positions are subject to public advertisement procedures, and any person meeting the criteria is welcome to apply for positions, including unemployed newly-qualified teachers and teachers on the Substitute Teacher Register; it is a matter for the employing authority to determine who is employed. I am pleased that the programme may offer teachers who have not been in full-time employment in teaching the opportunity to gain experience of working in schools.

Review of Public Administration

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education what legislative restrictions there are preventing a continuing role for transferor representatives on the boards of governors of schools after the Review of Public Administration reforms have been implemented. (AQW 8967/08)

The Minister of Education: Faoi na tograí reatha le haghaidh an Athbhreithnithe ar Riarachán Poiblí, thiofadh le hionadaithe Aistreora iarratas a dhéanamh le bheith ceaptha mar ghobharnóirí scoile, faoi shocruithe arna n-oibriú ag an Údarás um Oideachas agus Scileanna.

Under the current proposals for the Review of Public Administration, Transferor representatives could apply to be appointed as school governors, under arrangements operated by the Education and Skills Authority. However, it would not be possible to legislate to permit the Transferors to nominate governors as of right. Such provisions would constitute discrimination on the grounds of religious belief and, as such, would be contrary to section 6 of the NI Act 1998.

EMPLOYMENT AND LEARNING

European Social Funding

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what mechanisms are in place for mainstream funding of supported employment services currently in receipt of European Social Funding or short-term funding. (AQW 8425/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning (Sir Reg Empey): The Disablement Advisory Service (DAS), on behalf of the Department, provides public match funding to a number of organisations that receive ESF funding to deliver training, supported employment and other services to people with disabilities. DAS also provides public match funding to an EQUAL research project – Supported Employment for All (the SEA Project). The SEA Project has membership from DHSS & PS, DSD and DEL as there are elements relating to all three departments that are required for the delivery of supported employment. DEL does not provide mainstream funding for the delivery of supported employment.

Renewing Communities Project

Mr Ross asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of the Renewing Communities project. (AQW 8695/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: The Renewing Communities Initiative, which was developed to tackle disadvantage across communities, was led by the Department for Social Development.

My Department had responsibility for 8 of the Initiative's 62 Actions. All 8 Actions have had a

positive impact on disadvantaged communities, offering over 24,000 educational opportunities.

An evaluation, to be carried out later this year, will provide more detailed information on its wider impact.

Renewing Communities Project

Mr Ross asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how much money has been given to the Renewing Communities Scheme in each of the last 3 years. (AQW 8696/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: The Renewing Communities Initiative, which was developed to tackle disadvantage across communities, was a two year programme launched in April 2006 and led by the Department for Social Development. My Department had responsibility for 8 of the initiative's 62 published Actions.

To date, since its launch, £16.744m has been expended on the Initiative, as follows:

Renewing Communities Action	Year ¹	Year ²	Expended
1.15 Step Up	£0.267m	£0.267m	£0.534m
1.16 Fast Track	£0.192m	£0.077m	£0.269m
1.17 Workforce & Economic Development Centre	£0.475m	£0.389m	£0.864m
1.18 WEDC Outreach Programme N&W Belfast	£0.140m	£0.155m	£0.295m
1.19 WEDC Outreach Programme E&S Belfast	£0.140m	£0.156m	£0.296m
1.20 Pre-Apprentice and Pre-Vocational Enhancement Training Programmes	£7.100m	£7.100m	£14.200m
1.22 Regeneration Through Skills	£0.132m	£0.140m	£0.272m
3.5 Community Service by FE and HE Students	£0.014m	£0.000m	£0.014m
Total	£8.460m	£8.284m	£16.744m

Renewing Communities Project

Mr Ross asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the areas in which the Renewing Communities Scheme is operating. (AQW 8697/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: The Renewing Communities Initiative, which was developed to tackle disadvantage across communities, was a two year programme launched in April 2006 and led by the Department for Social Development.

My Department had responsibility for 8 of the initiative's 62 published Actions.

The Table below identifies these Actions and the areas in which they took place:

Renewing Communities (DEL) Actions	Areas Delivered
1.15 Step Up	Belfast
1.16 Fast Track	Belfast
1.17 Workforce & Economic Development Centre	North and West Belfast
1.18 WEDC Outreach Programme N&W Belfast	North and West Belfast
1.19 WEDC Outreach Programme E&S Belfast	East and South Belfast
1.20 Pre-Apprentice and Pre-Vocational Enhancement Training Programmes	All areas of Northern Ireland
1.22 Regeneration Through Skills	Belfast
3.5 Community Service by HE and FE Students	North Belfast, Shankill

Departmental Underspend

Mr Ross asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what impact the £35.8 million budget underspend by his Department will have on the Renewing Communities Scheme. (AQW 8705/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: The Renewing Communities Initiative, which was developed to tackle disadvantage across communities, was led by the Department for Social Development.

My Department had responsibility for 8 of the Initiative's 62 Actions. Through my Department's Renewing Communities Actions, over 24,000 participants benefited from a range of educational and training opportunities.

Regrettably, demand for some of the Actions, which sought to engage particular client groups, did not fulfil expectations, and this resulted in an under-spend of £1.4m of the Department's Renewing Communities budget. Overall, there was no adverse impact in terms of the programme's capacity to include all those in the chosen client groups, who wished to participate.

Impact of Sectarian Divisions on Workforce Mobility

Dr Farry asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of the impact of sectarian divisions and segregation on labour market mobility. (AQW 8744/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

The available data suggest that there is a possible negative impact on labour mobility of sectarian divisions and segregation. My Department continues to assist individuals to access jobs wherever they are located and to assist employers to fill job vacancies. Research commissioned by the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister and published in 2005 shows that religion has declined substantially as an explanatory factor for labour market outcomes over the previous decade.

Departmental Funding in East Antrim

Mr Ross asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what projects his Department has funded in the East Antrim constituency in the last 12 months.
(AQW 8748/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

In addition to ongoing funding provided to the educational and training organisations based in the East Antrim constituency, such as the University of Ulster and the Northern Regional College, the Department for Employment and Learning has funded five projects in the last 12 months.

Four projects were funded under the EU Building Sustainable Prosperity Programme at the Jordanstown Campus of the University of Ulster. These included a Post-graduate Diploma/MSc course in Engineering, a Post-graduate Diploma/MSc course in Web Information Systems, and projects on 'Women in Enterprise' and 'Pathways to Education and Employment for Women'.

Also, a project from Carrickfergus Women's Forum was funded under the PEACE II Programme.

Cost of Teacher Training

Mr McClarty asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to give the costs of training teachers at (i) St. Mary's University College; (ii) Stranmillis University College; and (iii) the University of Ulster.
(AQW 8793/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

The cost of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) is met in the main through two sources. The Northern Ireland ITE providers receive grant funding from my Department. In addition to this, the providers also retain the majority of the tuition fee income from students.

The per-student units of grant for ITE for academic year 2008/09 are as follows;

	St Mary's University College (note 1 & 2) £	Stranmillis University College (note 1 & 2) £	University of Ulster £
Academic year 2008/09- Grant per ITE Student	6,648	6,648	£4,974

Source: Department for Employment and Learning

Note 1. Grant allocations for the 2008/09 academic year are not yet finalised and so the amounts shown are provisional. The amounts are derived from the new university college funding methodology which replaces the previous block grant funding mechanism.

Note 2 Base unit of grant £4,732. Premiums are applied to the base unit of grant plus non – retained fee income of £1,255 i.e. £5,987. Small Premium 10% Specialist Premium 20%. Historical Buildings Premium 2%.

As you will be aware, my officials have developed a new unit based funding methodology for the university colleges to replace the old block grant arrangement which was not fit for purpose. The new methodology, which will be implemented for academic year 2008/09 funding allocations, is based on best practice approaches developed by the Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA), the national body which funds teacher education in England, and also the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE). The units of funding for the university colleges include a base per-student unit of grant which is then augmented by premiums which recognise their small and specialist nature and the expected higher level of fixed costs resulting from this. A further premium in recognition of the historical nature of the university colleges' estates has also been applied. These premiums account for 32% of the amount included above.

The universities are funded in the main through the use of a formula developed by HEFCE. When responsibility for ITE transferred from HEFCE to the TDA, the ITE element of the Northern Ireland universities funding was separated out. Since then, the funding has been uplifted annually and pro-rated to reflect changes in student numbers. As large institutions with a diverse range of provision, the universities do not attract small or specialist premiums.

The ITE providers are free to allocate these resources as they see fit in order to deliver the outcomes expected of them, and in accordance with a Financial Memorandum which sets out the conditions which apply to the funding. The cost of teacher training at each provider therefore reflects the management decisions taken by each Governing Body as well as the individual characteristics of the institution. Amongst a

range of accountability information, my department receives and reviews the providers' annual financial statements.

On an annual basis, higher education institutions also provide financial information to the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA). This is used to generate unit expenditure statistics which are then published. Although these statistics are often referred to when the cost of ITE is discussed, it is important to note that HESA themselves stress that comparisons based solely on these unit expenditure statistics are liable to be seriously misleading.

Further and Higher Education in Coleraine

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what plans he has for the development of a new campus for Further and Higher Education to serve the Coleraine area. (AQW 8851/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: The former Causeway Institute submitted a business case to the Department, in March 2004, which confirmed serious accommodation deficiencies in its campuses, at Coleraine and Ballymoney. The business case proposed a single new build solution in Coleraine, to replace both campuses. Funding for the project was not available at that time. However, the subsequent merger of Causeway Institute with East Antrim, and North East Institutes required the newly appointed Northern Regional College's Senior Management Team and Governing Body to review the proposals. That review, across all campuses, is continuing and is expected to be submitted for the Department's consideration in the near future.

Concessionary Fees at Further Education Colleges

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the categories of individuals who qualify for concessionary fees at further education colleges, for courses commencing in the next academic year. (AQW 8925/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: All further education colleges in Northern Ireland have agreed that, as from the start of the 2008/09 academic year, they will adopt a consistent approach to the implementation of concessionary fees, and they are already using agreed criteria for the September 2008 intake to their courses.

Therefore, students enrolling on courses at a further education college in the next academic year who are in receipt of Income Support, Jobseekers Allowance (Income based), Guaranteed Pension Credit and

Rates Relief, and learners holding an income based NHS Exemption Certificate, will be entitled to concessionary fees.

Funding for Essential Skills

Mrs Long asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many places will be funded by his Department for Essential Skills at foundation level and level one for the 2008-2009 academic year, and how this compares with provision for 2006-2007 and 2007-2008. (AQW 8949/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: The number of Essential Skills enrolments at Entry Levels 1, 2 and 3 and at Level 1 funded by my Department in 2006/07 and 2007/08 are as follows:

2006/07	15,343
2007/08	14,444

Source: Essential Skills enrolment return.

Note: Figures are correct as at 29th February 2008, but are provisional and, therefore, subject to change.

Information for 2008/09 is not available in the format requested, because Further Education Colleges' enrolment targets for Essential Skills are not broken down by the different Levels of Essential Skills. Also, Essential Skills provision is available within other DEL programmes, such as Training for Success, Jobskills and New Deal, but is demand led according to the identified needs of participants on these programmes. Therefore, information on places and enrolments by different levels is only available retrospectively.

However, the Department has increased the budget for Essential Skills provision in FE colleges from £5m in 2007/08 to £6.6m in 2008/09, to help to meet challenging PSA targets in this area. This should lead to increased Essential Skills enrolments in 2008/09.

Funding for Essential Skills

Mrs Long asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline the plan for delivery of Essential Skills, with particular regard to foundation level and level one, in the context of a more difficult funding climate for community-based training organisations. (AQW 8950/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: My Department has set a challenging PSA target in respect of Essential Skills. This target is that, by March 2011, 42,000 adult learners will have achieved a recognised qualification in Essential Skills, including 4,000 in respect of ICT.

In future, Further Education Colleges will be the main providers of Essential skills for adults, and in 2008/09 college budgets in respect of Essential Skills have been increased to £6.6m, from £5m in 2007/08. Colleges' extensive network of outreach centres will ensure that Essential Skills provision is fully accessible to all. The Learner Access and Engagement pilot programme will help colleges to increase uptake on their Essential Skills provision, particularly at Entry Level and Level 1.

In addition, Training Organisations, including FE colleges, will continue to provide Essential Skills, where appropriate, as part of their delivery of DEL programmes such as Training for Success, Jobskills and New Deal.

ENTERPRISE, TRADE AND INVESTMENT

Northern Ireland Tourist Board

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what work her Department has done with its counterparts in (i) Great Britain; and (ii) the Isle of Man; with a view to attracting more tourists.
(AQW 8488/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mrs A Foster): Northern Ireland benefits from considerable ongoing contact with Great Britain and the Isle of Man on a range of tourism issues. Examples include:

The Northern Ireland Tourist Board's (NITB) strong working relationship with VisitBritain. The benefits to Northern Ireland of this link include access to valuable tourism market intelligence; presence on the VisitBritain website (www.visitbritain.com), access to PR platforms such as inclusion in press releases and media updates; and the distribution of Northern Ireland guides through the Britain and London Visitor Centre and overseas offices;

NITB's representation on a range of UK National Tourist Board Groups which deal with issues of mutual interest such as marketing, planning and performance, PR and quality standards;

Tourism Ireland Ltd's (TIL) engagement in co-operative marketing with VisitBritain and other GB tourism bodies regarding long-haul markets, for example Canada or Australia, where a visit to Northern Ireland is planned as part of a longer trip to Great Britain or to Europe;

TIL's work with VisitBritain on a Northern Ireland specific eCampaign to target those actively planning

a vacation to the UK in 2008. Northern Ireland will feature in three Visit Britain eZines (each sent to approximately 150,000 opt-in contacts);

TIL's co-operation in 2007 with the Isle of Man's Manx 2 radio station on a campaign promoting Belfast in the Isle of Man. Manx 2 estimated a 24 % growth in traffic from the Isle of Man to Northern Ireland in 2007 and considered the campaign a successful contributor to this growth; and

NITB's and TIL's work with VisitBritain to develop plans to help ensure that Northern Ireland maximises the tourism opportunities presented by the 2012 Olympic Games.

In addition, DETI has worked with tourism counterparts in the other administrations within the British Isles under the auspices of the Tourism Sub Group of the British Irish Council. This Group considered a range of areas of mutual interest such as tourism statistics, sustainable tourism, and emerging tourism markets.

Applications for Alternative Eco-Friendly Energy in the Strangford Constituency

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many applications there have been for alternative eco-friendly energy for the Strangford constituency.
(AQW 8609/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The most recent support scheme for alternative eco-friendly energy was Reconnect which closed to applications on 31 March 2008. There were 769 applications from private householders in the Strangford constituency.

Annual Twelfth Celebrations

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to quantify the value to the economy of the annual Twelfth celebrations.
(AQW 8652/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: No assessment has been made of the value to the economy of the Twelfth of July celebrations. However, the celebrations are unique to Northern Ireland and have the potential to be of interest to visitors from across the globe who want to see and learn more about local traditions.

The Northern Ireland Tourist Board and Tourism Ireland Ltd have been in contact with the Loyal Orders to explore the extent to which the celebrations might feature as part of Northern Ireland's tourism product.

Annual Twelfth Celebrations

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how the Northern Ireland Tourist Board and Tourism Ireland intend to market the annual Twelfth celebrations as a visitor attraction. (AQW 8653/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Over the last three years, the Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) and Tourism Ireland Ltd (TIL) have established good working relationships with the Grand Orange Lodge and have attended Orange Order parades.

NITB has been working with the Orange Order to help them broaden the appeal of this year's Twelfth of July demonstrations. NITB has identified four 'flagship' parades, Belfast, Tandragee, Dromara and Coleraine, as having the most potential to appeal to visitors.

NITB supports the development of world class standards of service and has organised Welcome Host Training for representatives from these parades to help maximise their tourism potential. The parades will also feature on NITB's consumer website discovernorthernireland.com.

Tourism Ireland has discussed the portrayal of the Twelfth of July demonstrations with the Orange Order, Orangefest and other relevant parties. In addition, TIL recently presented to representatives of ten District Lodges regarding this year's demonstrations.

Varney 2 Report

Dr Farry asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment which recommendations within the Varney 2 Report have been prioritised for action. (AQW 8660/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The information requested is not available at present.

I will write to the Member when the information is available, and ensure that a copy of the letter is placed in the Assembly Library.

Invest NI

Dr Farry asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what plans he has to review the workings and role of Invest NI. (AQW 8710/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The information requested is not available at present.

I will write to the Member when the information is available, and ensure that a copy of the letter is placed in the Assembly Library.

Local Postal Services

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what consideration has been given and what progress has been made by her Department to utilise the Post Office as a source, agency or outlet for the delivery of its services as outlined in the May 2008 report of the Assembly's Ad Hoc Committee, 'Report of the Committee's Consideration of, and Proposals for, Partnership that could Enhance the Economic Case for Viable Local Postal Services'. (AQW 8737/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The Ad Hoc Committee on Local Postal Services' Report made a number of recommendations to the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (DBERR) concerning the future of Postal Services and the Post Office network.

Junior Minister Donaldson and Junior Minister Kelly wrote to Executive Ministers on 21 April 2008 asking them to consider whether any further public services could be delivered through post offices.

I can confirm that there are no DETI services currently provided, or any that could potentially be delivered through the Post Office network in Northern Ireland.

Invest NI Office Space

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (i) what the is length of each contract/lease for InvestNI office space in the North Belfast constituency; (ii) for how long have each of these contracts/leases been in place; and (iii) how much has been paid to date on the contracts/leases for vacant office space. (AQW 8753/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Invest NI does not lease any office space in the North Belfast parliamentary constituency.

In the interests of clarity, information on all the property Invest NI pays or makes contribution to rental on can be found in AQW 7988-08.

Invest NI Office Space

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (i) what office space Invest NI currently leases in North Belfast constituency; and (ii) which of these locations is currently occupied by InvestNI client companies. (AQW 8755/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and

Investment: Invest NI does not lease any office space in the North Belfast parliamentary constituency.

In the interests of clarity, information on all the property Invest NI pays or makes contribution to rental on can be found in AQW 7988-08.

Energy From Renewable Sources

Mr B Wilson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, in the light of her Department's commitment to increase the amount of energy obtained from renewable sources, would she examine the possibility of generating electricity through a pump storage generation project, similar to that proposed in Camlough in the early 1970s.

(AQW 8790/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and

Investment: Pump storage facilities can be a cost effective, although not necessarily entirely renewable, means of generating electricity.

I am aware that the concept of a pump storage proposal at Camlough has recently been investigated again and that it could be developed if shown to be commercially feasible. However, it is important to note that the output of such a project will only be truly renewable if the electricity used to pump the water in the first instance is generated from renewable sources.

While Government encourages the development of renewable energy in Northern Ireland through the Northern Ireland Renewables Obligation (NIRO), it is left to private sector developers to make the investment based on the commercial feasibility of individual projects. This ensures that renewable electricity is produced in a cost-effective way that provides best value for consumers.

Cross-Border Illegal Trade

Mr Savage asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment if cross border illegal trade and smuggling will be addressed in the next meeting of the North South Ministerial Council, given the potential of such activities to undercut the work that has been achieved with InterTrade Ireland. (AQW 8794/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and

Investment: The issue of cross border illegal trade and smuggling does not fall within the remit of InterTradeIreland nor of the North South Ministerial Council and will not, therefore, form part of the business of any North South Ministerial Council meeting.

Nevertheless I wholly share concerns at the potential of such activity to undermine the work of

InterTradeIreland and indeed, all legitimate efforts to promote economic and business co-operation between the two jurisdictions.

The Organised Crime Task Force (OCTF) is a forum where partner agencies such as the Police Service of Northern Ireland and HM Customs & Excise meet to agree priorities and share information in relation to tackling organised crime in Northern Ireland.

I understand that recently published statistics by the OCTF provide strong evidence that this approach is having a significant impact in the fight against illegal trade and smuggling.

Clearly this is something that I welcome.

Inward Investors in Limavady

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many potential inward investors have visited the Limavady area since Seagate and HUCO announced their plans to close their production plants. (AQW 8850/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Three potential investors have visited the North West Travel to Work Area between 29th October 2007 and 4th July 2008.

The North West Travel to Work Area is defined as the areas in the North West Action Plan and comprises Derry, Strabane, Limavady, Coleraine and Magherafelt District Council Areas.

Economic Research Agenda

Ms J McCann asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment in light of the launch of the Economic Research Agenda, if she will give a commitment to include an audit of the Social Economy Sector and its contribution to the local economy. (AQW 8856/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: DETI's Economic Research Agenda, published on 27th June 2008, made an open call for research proposals in DETI's priority areas of: productivity growth, increasing employment and tourism. The Agenda sets out a number of themes to guide the research community in preparing proposals. One such theme is to develop our understanding of the Northern Ireland economy, including areas such as the Social Economy sector. The Department will assess all research proposals received before the closing date of 15th August 2008, with a view to identifying projects that can best inform policy development.

I recognise the importance of the Social Economy sector in Northern Ireland, and DETI has already

undertaken work to better understand the contribution of the sector to the local economy. In September 2006, DETI undertook a 'first steps' survey which provided baseline data for nearly 400 enterprises with a total of 6,700 paid employees, 5,000 volunteers and turnover of just over £355million. The survey database has been transferred to the Social Economy Network (SEN) for future development. DETI will continue to work with SEN and other stakeholders to develop the importance of the social economy sector to the NI economy.

Farm Accidents

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many people have been killed and injured in accidents on farms in each of the last 3 years. (AQW 8887/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: As the regulations regarding the statutory reporting of non fatal work related injuries do not apply to self employed persons, such as farmers, HSENI has very incomplete figures for the numbers injured on farms. On the other hand all fatal farm incidents are brought to HSENI's attention by the PSNI who respond to these on behalf of the Coroner.

23 people have been killed as a result of work related incidents on farms since April 2005. The breakdown is as follows:-

Year	Number of Fatalities
2007-08	7
2006-07	6
2005-06	10

Deaths Involving Cattle

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many people have been killed by bulls or cows on farms in each of the last 3 years. (AQW 8888/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: 9 people have been killed as a result of incidents involving bulls or cows on farms since April 2005. The break down is as follows;

Year	Fatalities
2007-08	4
2006-07	2
2005-06	3

Injuries Involving Cattle

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many people have been injured by bulls or cows on farms in each of the last 3 years. (AQW 8889/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Since the regulations governing the reporting of work related injuries do not apply to self employed persons such as farmers, HSENI has a very incomplete picture of the true scale of such incidents.

HSENI's limited records show that 3 people were injured as a result of incidents involving bulls or cows during the past 3 years.

Year	Number of injuries
2007-08	1
2006-07	2
2005-06	0

Contract Awarded to the Citizen's Advice Bureau

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for his assessment of the benefits of the new contract awarded to the Citizen's Advice Bureau. (AQW 8946/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The new contract awarded to Citizens Advice in April 2008 secures funding for the continuation of a free face to face debt advice across Northern Ireland for the period 2008-2011. This longer term contract provides ongoing face to face support to clients who typically require such assistance in order to regain control of their finances. The new contract enables the advisers to develop their skills through training and thus enhance the quality of the debt advice service. I made an announcement on 3 July 2008 of additional funding of £600,000 per annum for 2009/10 and 2010/11 for debt advice which will significantly enhance the provision already in place through the new contract.

Wind Farms

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many wind farms are in operation, broken down by district council area. (AQW 8960/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: There are currently 16 wind farms in operation in Northern Ireland. This covers all

developments of one or more turbines with a total capacity of at least one megawatt.

An analysis of these wind farms by District Council is shown in the table below.

District Council	Windfarms (No.)
Ballymena	2
Ballymoney	2
Dungannon	1
Fermanagh	3
Limavady	3
Omagh	2
Strabane	3
Northern Ireland	16

ENVIRONMENT

Waiting Times for MOT

Mr Bresland asked the Minister of the Environment what is the average waiting time for an MOT test in each of the test centres. (AQW 7927/08)

The Minister of the Environment (Mr S Wilson): Detail of the weekly and year to date average waiting time for a vehicle test in the 15 test centres is included in the following table.

AVERAGE WAITING TIME FOR A VEHICLE TEST IN DAYS

Test Centre	Weekly 01 June to 07 June 2008	Year to Date 01 April to 07 June 2008
Armagh	16	14
Ballymena	25	19
Belfast	17	18
Coleraine	19	18
Cookstown	26	23
Craigavon	16	14
Downpatrick	24	16
Enniskillen	16	17
Larne	20	16
Lisburn	18	17
Londonderry	29	23
Mallusk	14	16
Newry	24	21

Test Centre	Weekly 01 June to 07 June 2008	Year to Date 01 April to 07 June 2008
Newtownards	24	20
Omagh	17	15

Expired MOTs

Mr Bresland asked the Minister of the Environment how many vehicles' MOT certificate had expired by 1 June 2008. (AQW 7928/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The Agency's data shows that there are currently 8,388 vehicles (private cars and motorcycles) with an MOT certificate that had expired by 1 June 2008 and who currently have a vehicle test appointment. Many of these customers may not have applied for the vehicle test until after the expiry date of the previous certificate.

Vehicle Tests

Mr Bresland asked the Minister of the Environment how many vehicle (i) tests; and (ii) re-tests, were carried out at each MOT test centre, in each of the last 3 years. (AQW 7930/08)

The Minister of the Environment: Detail of the number of vehicle test full tests and re-tests carried out in each of 15 test centres in the years 2005/06, 2006/07 and 2007/08 is included in the following table.

Centres	2005/06		2006/07		2007/08	
	Full Tests	Re-tests	Full Tests	Re-tests	Full Tests	Re-tests
Armagh	20322	5911	22571	6451	24589	6759
Ballymena	41114	8981	48594	10928	52888	11793
Belfast	59859	15730	66581	15158	64401	14719
Coleraine	43189	10140	45079	9213	47612	9550
Cookstown	38834	12430	40991	12162	40538	11312
Craigavon	28763	8143	33242	8621	38103	9658
Downpatrick	26257	5644	27568	5727	31381	6014
Enniskillen	27530	6348	29661	6453	32299	7199
Larne	25163	4324	27368	4322	29892	4835
Lisburn	33235	8732	36974	7124	40344	7256
Londonderry	35757	9370	42517	10383	45890	10838
Mallusk	47933	13247	53562	12934	47930	11230
Newry	41830	10316	46824	9448	48386	9343
Newtownards	62464	15457	73520	17495	72670	18033

Centres	2005/06		2006/07		2007/08	
	Full Tests	Re-tests	Full Tests	Re-tests	Full Tests	Re-tests
Omagh	24757	7242	26161	6096	27843	6630
Totals	557007	142015	621213	142515	644766	145169

Unauthorised Developments

Mr Simpson asked the Minister of the Environment how many files relating to possible unauthorised developments his Department has (i) opened; and (ii) concluded, in each of the last three years; and the total number of possible cases still outstanding. (AQW 8341/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The number of files relating to possible unauthorised developments that have been opened and concluded (closed) in each of the last 3 years is as follows:

Year	Number of cases opened	Number of cases concluded (closed)
2005	4330	3199
2006	4378	3838
2007	3553	3068
Total	12261	10105

The number of summons and prosecutions are indicated in the table below:

Year	Summons	Prosecutions
2005	20	12
2006	28	33
2007	15	13
Total	63	58

I must stress that a relatively small number of cases require the Department to take formal enforcement action. Many cases are successfully resolved without the need for full action or in some instance do not warrant a breach/further investigation.

(iii) The total number of outstanding enforcement cases is 5877. These figures have been extracted from a live dataset which is continuously updated and validated. They should therefore be regarded as indicative only at this point in time and should not be compared with any previous figures published by the Agency.

Wind Farms

Mr Ross asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of wind farms; and what action he will take to assist planning applications in this area. (AQW 8443/08)

The Minister of the Environment: Windfarm developments have played a significant role in the drive towards securing renewable sources of energy generation.

Northern Ireland set itself a target of deriving 12% of energy consumption from renewable sources (equivalent to 400MW) by 2012 (of which 15% should be non wind sources). As of 26 June 2008 Planning Service has consented 480MW of power from windfarms alone.

To date 33 planning applications for windfarms have been approved. Currently there are 48 applications for windfarms in the planning system.

My Department has recently consulted on draft Planning Policy Statement 18 (PPS 18) which sets out updated planning policy for proposals to develop renewable sources of energy generation, including energy from wind. The primary aim of draft PPS 18 is to encourage and facilitate the provision and siting of renewable energy generating facilities in appropriate locations within the built and natural environment while assisting the diversification of energy supply and a more competitive energy market, and to encourage economic growth and rural diversification associated with the development of an indigenous renewable energy industry.

Areas of Special Scientific Interest and Special Areas of Conservation

Mr Ford asked the Minister of the Environment what areas of Special Scientific Interest and Special Areas of Conservation are affected by the A4, A5 and A6 roads. (AQW 8561/08)

The Minister of the Environment: No Areas of Special Scientific Interest or Special Areas of Conservation are currently affected by the A4, A5 or A6.

However, as you will no doubt appreciate there are a number of improvement schemes on the A4, A5 and A6 routes and that the various schemes are at different stages of planning and delivery. It is perhaps worth considering the schemes, and in particular how they affect Areas of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI) and Special Areas of Conservation (SAC), on an individual basis.

A4 – The A4 dual carriageway between Dungannon and Ballygawley, the realignment of the A4 Annaghilla

and the realignment of the A5 Tullyvar schemes do not affect any ASSI or SAC, nor does it pose a risk to them.

A5 – The upgrading of the A5 to dual carriageway status is by far the largest scheme ever undertaken in Northern Ireland and, because of its scale, there will no doubt be issues associated with ASSIs and SACs. However, I would point out that the scheme is at a very early stage and that it is envisaged that the preferred route will be published in mid-2009. While it is not possible to be more specific at this stage, I can confirm that Roads Service will liaise with interested parties including the Northern Ireland Environment Agency before deciding on the preferred route.

A6 – The upgrading of the A6 to dual carriageway standard will have a direct effect on the candidate SAC at the River Faughan and its Tributaries and at the River Roe. It will also have indirect effects on the ASSI at Ervey Wood and in the Lough Beg Area.

Ballymartin River Pollution Incident

Mr Burnside asked the Minister of the Environment what preventive measures his Department has in place to forestall any repeats of the Ballymartin River pollution incident. (AQW 8591/08)

The Minister of the Environment: My Department's Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA), formerly the Environment and Heritage Service, is already working on a number of initiatives to improve what is being done to prevent pollution occurring and to protect the aquatic environment.

NIEA undertakes Pollution Prevention Risk Assessments at any site that is causing, or has the potential to cause pollution, e.g. construction sites and various industrial and commercial sites. This includes an investigation of the catchments and water bodies that are at risk, or potentially at risk, from pollution or have historically had poor water quality. Through direct interaction with site managers and owners NIEA can, through education or enforcement, reduce the risk of these sites causing pollution or downgrading the water quality in the catchment.

NIEA has also established nine Catchment Stakeholder Groups to enable a wide range of individuals to participate in identifying and resolving issues related to pollution and water quality.

In addition three Catchment Officers were appointed last year with a specific role to liaise with site managers and owners in an attempt to advise and reduce the risk of pollution.

Development of National Parks

Mr Burnside asked the Minister of the Environment to outline his Department's ten year strategy for the development of national parks, outlining all areas under consideration, and detailing the formal links between his Department and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment in relation to tourism. (AQW 8593/08)

The Minister of the Environment: I will consider the range of issues in relation to National Parks and make my views known in due course.

It is my intention to explore with my colleague Arlene Foster the potential for developing the relationship between national parks and tourism. I am aware that the Mourne is one of the NI Tourist Board's signature projects and that the Tourist Board is a strong advocate of national park designation in order to maximise the tourism potential of the area.

10 Year Development of Lough Neagh

Mr Burnside asked the Minister of the Environment what are his plans and strategies for the 10 year development of Lough Neagh. (AQW 8594/08)

The Minister of the Environment: No single Department has the sole responsibility of producing a development plan or strategy for Lough Neagh. The Department of the Environment is responsible for guiding and regulating development on and around the Lough and, jointly with DCAL, sponsors the Lough Neagh Advisory Committee.

Environmental Protection Agency

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of the Environment to (i) review the case for establishing an independent Environmental Protection Agency in the aftermath of the pollution incident on the Ballymartin/Sixmilewater; and (ii) ensure that, in the interim, the Environment and Heritage Service assumes an advisory and preventative stance to deter such incidents on watercourses. (AQW 8636/08)

The Minister of the Environment: Arlene Foster made the right decision in relation to an Environmental Protection Agency and there is no need to review it. The Northern Ireland Environment Agency already works proactively to prevent pollution incidents on watercourses. It assesses pollution risk at sites where there is the potential for such incidents and advises and educates site managers and owners so that they can reduce the risk. Where necessary the Agency resorts to enforcement action.

Consequences of Pollution

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of the Environment what further preventative and protective measures he will take to ensure that residents, commercial and farming interests within river catchment areas are aware of the consequences of pollution incidents upon the eco-systems that are dependant upon the water quality of these waterways. (AQW 8637/08)

The Minister of the Environment: My Department will always seek to improve on what is being done to both prevent pollution occurring and to protect water quality. The Environment and Heritage Service (EHS) is already working on a number of initiatives as follows:

- Nine, locally based Catchment Stakeholder Groups have been established to enable a wide range of individuals to participate in resolving issues related to pollution and water quality in their locality.
- Three Catchment Officers were appointed last year specifically to liaise with a wide range of stakeholders at a local level and to work with stakeholders to identify and help resolve problems.
- The regulation by EHS of farming activities, to prevent pollution problems arising, is linked to award of the Single Farm Payment by DARD, under the EU Common Agricultural Policy.
- A Pollution Prevention Risk Assessment Database has been established. This records details of all site inspection visits and the findings in terms of the risk which these, mainly, industrial sites pose to the aquatic environment. This enables more targeted advisory visits and any necessary enforcement action.
- EHS publishes an annual report detailing statistics and other information about water pollution incidents. A series of 28 practical pollution prevention guidelines are also available on request. These guidelines, and many other publications, can all be accessed on the EHS website.
- In 1998, EHS established the freephone pollution hotline (0800 80 70 60) to enable members of the public to report any sightings of pollution. This facility has been widely advertised and is highlighted at every opportunity, eg, at the EHS stand which is present every year at the Balmoral Agricultural Show.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the European Union targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 20% by 2020 as part of a range of measures to halt climate change. (AQW 8676/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The UK Government has taken the lead in discussions within the European Union on emission reduction targets and measures. This has resulted in targets to reduce emissions by 20% through measures such as the EU Emissions Trading Scheme and increased renewables.

I am personally not convinced that man is the cause of climate change and I believe that efforts to reduce greenhouse gases should not be to the detriment of the economy. However, it is clear that whilst any move to alternative energy supplies such as renewables will not be cheap, it becomes more feasible economically as fossil fuel prices rise. Using alternatives to coal, oil and gas will reduce our demand on these finite resources and improve the security of our energy supplies.

Other emission reduction measures require improved energy efficiency which will reduce energy costs for both individuals and businesses.

Nitrates Action Programme Regulations

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister of the Environment what policy he will pursue in addressing situations where livestock owners are refused planning permission to build a collection tank in order to comply with the Nitrates Directive. (AQW 8683/08)

The Minister of the Environment: Under the terms of the Nitrates Action Programme Regulations farmers are required to have a minimum of 22 or 26 weeks storage depending on type of livestock.

While my Department has in place extended permitted development rights for farmers who are required to provide additional slurry storage arrangements under the Nitrates Directive there are some instances where they do not meet the necessary criteria for permitted development and a planning application is required.

In processing such applications Planning Service will take account of any adverse impacts on any occupied dwelling not on the farm holding. If an applicant was refused planning permission on this basis they have the right of appeal to the Planning Appeals Commission. Alternatively in view of the limited timescale for grant assistance Planning Service staff are available to advise on alternative locations to avoid detrimental impacts on other occupied dwellings. Any new application dependent on grant aid will be given priority by Planning Service.

A small number of applications have been refused where the proposal involved the construction of the slurry tank in close proximity to a dwelling because it would result in the creation of unacceptable living conditions for the residents by reason of severe odours and noise nuisance, based on advice from Environmental

Health Officials. In such situations, Planning Service would try to work with the applicant and his agent to find an acceptable alternative site for the tank, if this is possible. Where an application is refused it will be necessary for a farmer to make alternative arrangements for storage in order to comply with the requirements of the Nitrates Directive.

Rural Development Programme

Mr Doherty asked the Minister of the Environment if the Planning Service has informed all its staff of the Department's intention to give priority to planning applications which are dependent on grant aid, such as the Rural Development Programme. (AQW 8741/08)

The Minister of the Environment: All Planning Service staff are aware of the need to give priority to individual planning applications on which grant-aid may depend. Guidance for prioritising planning applications was issued to all staff in July 2006 by way of a planning circular, PC 11/06.

Staff are reminded in the circular of the circumstances in which certain types of application, including those on which grant-aid depend, may be given priority. It is important, however, that the applicant or agent advises Planning Service that an application is dependent on grant-aid when the planning application is submitted.

Divided Societies and Carbon Footprints

Dr Farry asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of comments from the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors that divided societies tend to have greater carbon footprints. (AQW 8746/08)

The Minister of the Environment: I have made no assessment of comments from the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors that divided societies tend to have greater carbon footprints. Whilst my Department has sponsored the Community Eco-Challenge project aimed at helping community groups in the Southern region of councils to reduce their ecological footprint by focusing on use of food, waste, transport and energy, it did not address the issue of the impact of divided societies on the ecological footprint as this was not an outcome that was to be measured.

Planning Policy Statement 13

Dr Farry asked the Minister of the Environment what plans he has to review the Northern Ireland planning framework to ensure that it maximises the development of new housing around current and future public transport nodes. (AQW 8749/08)

The Minister of the Environment: Planning Policy Statement 13 'Transportation and Land Use' provides strategic policy guidance and advice relating to the integration of land use and planning through the preparation of development plans. This also promotes higher density and mixed use developments in locations benefiting from high accessibility to public transport facilities.

This is complemented by policy and advice contained in PPS 3 'Access, Movement and Parking', PPS 7 'Quality Residential Environments' and PPS 12 'Housing in Settlements'.

I have no plans at present to review current planning policy on this issue.

Household Recycling Rates

Mr Ross asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the recycling rate of each District Council in each of the last 3 years. (AQW 8754/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The recycling rates for household, municipal and biodegradable municipal waste diverted from landfill for each of the 26 District Councils are set out in the tables below. Municipal waste represents all collections within the Councils' possession and control.

The names in bold within the table refer to the 3 waste management groups into which the District Councils are grouped.

HOUSEHOLD RECYCLING RATES

District Council	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07
	Household Recycling & Composting Rate	Household Recycling & Composting Rate	Household Recycling & Composting Rate
Antrim	38.39%	44.02%	47.11%
Ards	20.40%	24.02%	25.45%
Ballymena	23.39%	26.87%	28.15%
Belfast	8.86%	14.36%	18.95%
Carrickfergus	17.20%	17.41%	21.89%
Castlereagh	22.24%	32.53%	34.91%
Down	19.17%	33.69%	32.16%
Larne	16.49%	25.00%	31.63%
Lisburn	12.25%	19.83%	25.08%
Newtownabbey	19.90%	22.54%	24.79%
North Down	17.21%	24.63%	32.97%
ARC21	16.70%	22.90%	26.80%
Ballymoney	24.02%	24.44%	24.75%

District Council	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07
	Household Recycling & Composting Rate	Household Recycling & Composting Rate	Household Recycling & Composting Rate
Coleraine	18.60%	24.26%	25.67%
Derry	13.72%	28.07%	24.37%
Limavady	27.33%	35.88%	28.51%
Magherafelt	31.42%	35.66%	35.26%
Moyle	11.32%	25.51%	26.53%
Strabane	17.32%	21.30%	22.81%
NWRWMG	19.30%	27.60%	26.30%
Armagh City & District Council	23.30%	26.70%	32.83%
Banbridge District Council	39.21%	40.99%	45.13%
Cookstown District Council	20.06%	28.14%	31.57%
Craigavon Borough Council	23.35%	29.29%	29.96%
Dungannon & South Tyrone Borough Council	20.13%	19.54%	24.93%
Fermanagh District Council	21.04%	20.77%	27.83%
Newry & Mourne District Council	20.03%	24.86%	27.83%
Omagh District Council	19.62%	17.77%	27.95%
SWaMP	23.00%	25.90%	30.50%
Northern Ireland	18.90%	24.50%	27.70%

MUNICIPAL RECYCLING RATES

	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07
	Municipal Recycling Rate	Municipal Recycling Rate	Municipal Recycling Rate
Antrim	39.8%	45.8%	47.1%
Ards	19.4%	22.9%	24.5%
Ballymena	21.6%	25.7%	26.5%
Belfast	8.7%	13.0%	16.9%
Carrickfergus	14.6%	15.0%	19.5%
Castlereagh	22.7%	33.2%	35.6%
Down	16.8%	29.2%	27.8%

	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07
	Municipal Recycling Rate	Municipal Recycling Rate	Municipal Recycling Rate
Larne	14.5%	23.1%	28.4%
Lisburn	13.7%	21.1%	24.8%
Newtownabbey	18.0%	20.9%	22.8%
North Down	19.8%	20.1%	26.8%
ARC21	16.5%	21.5%	24.8%
Ballymoney	22.2%	21.4%	21.9%
Coleraine	17.8%	24.0%	22.4%
Derry	11.9%	28.3%	23.6%
Limavady	24.1%	33.2%	28.1%
Magherafelt	27.4%	32.1%	32.1%
Moyle	9.5%	18.0%	21.1%
Strabane	15.0%	18.7%	20.3%
NWRWMG	17.4%	26.0%	24.1%
Armagh	25.7%	29.1%	35.0%
Banbridge	40.0%	40.7%	44.1%
Cookstown	22.4%	26.8%	28.4%
Craigavon	21.6%	25.6%	26.2%
Dungannon and South Tyrone	19.1%	19.2%	23.8%
Fermanagh	18.9%	17.7%	24.3%
Newry and Mourne	18.2%	22.7%	25.8%
Omagh	17.9%	15.9%	23.6%
SWaMP	22.3%	24.2%	28.1%
Northern Ireland	18.2%	23.0%	25.5%

BIODEGRADABLE MUNICIPAL WASTE DIVERTED FROM LANDFILL

District Council	BMW sent to landfill for scheme year 2005/06 (As reported)	% Utilisation of Allowances	BMW sent to landfill for scheme year 2006/07 (As reported)	% Utilisation of Allowances
	Antrim	12,635	73.1%	12,402
Ards	25,851	81.2%	25,046	86.78%
Ballymena	19,355	90.2%	18,439	80.75%
Belfast	106,509	91.1%	96,063	93.27%
Carrickfergus	14,935	87.3%	14,116	95.10%

District Council	BMW sent to landfill for scheme year 2005/06 (As reported)	% Utilisation of Allowances	BMW sent to landfill for scheme year 2006/07 (As reported)	% Utilisation of Allowances
Castlereagh	15,496	67.1%	14,450	56.92%
Down	17,262	67.1%	17,382	68.58%
Larne	11,345	83.9%	10,259	86.49%
Lisburn	37,242	76.4%	34,186	81.00%
Newtownabbey	27,599	88.5%	28,024	90.69%
North	28,503	84.9%	25,257	85.31%
ARC21 – Total	316,732	83.3%	295,622	83.56%
Ballymoney	8,119	62.6%	87,241	96.30%
Coleraine	22,604	78.5%	234,112	99.98%
Derry	27,909	76.9%	33,509	81.52%
Limavady	8,016	65.4%	9,200	70.37%
Magherafelt	10,445	73.4%	10,977	69.20%
Moyle	6,043	87.7%	5,739	90.61%
Strabane	12,345	70.9%	12,697	85.24%
NWRWMG – Total	95,481	74.1%	104,258	84.25%
Armagh	14,296	83.6%	13,715	64.11%
Banbridge	10,213	79.2%	9,110	54.15%
Cookstown	10,402	89.1%	9,977	77.22%
Craigavon	27,624	89.2%	24,191	76.16%
Dungannon & South Tyrone	16,694	90.9%	16,223	86.33%
Fermanagh	21,740	100.0%	21,117	93.62%
Newry & Mourne	28,105	97.9%	27,608	79.49%
Omagh	16,722	87.3%	13,894	72.94%
SWaMP – Total:	145,796	90.8%	135,835	76.30%
Northern Ireland – Total:	558,009	83.3%	535,715	81.72%

Raw Sewage in the Closet River

Mr Savage asked the Minister of the Environment what action is being taken to clean up the discharge of raw sewage in the Closet River before it enters Lough Neagh. (AQW 8795/08)

The Minister of the Environment: It is the role of the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) to

conserve, protect and, where possible, improve both the freshwater and marine aquatic environment in Northern Ireland.

In Northern Ireland, NIEA issues consents for discharges for Northern Ireland Water (NIW) assets. Since 1 April 2007, the standards for NIW discharges have been regulated under the Water (Northern Ireland) Order 1999.

All sewer systems that contain an element of storm water require an overflow to prevent flooding and consequent damage to property during times of heavy rainfall.

A combined sewer overflow (CSO) discharges to the Closet River and this is consented as part of the Craigavon sewerage system. Under the terms of its discharge consent, NIW is required to effect a clean-up of sewage related debris following a discharge from the CSO.

NIEA staff have requested NIW clean-ups on various occasions as a result of reports of pollution incidents. However, if a clean-up is not undertaken promptly and effectively, then NIEA may consider taking enforcement action.

Halloween Bonfire Complaints

Mr Moutray asked the Minister of the Environment how many complaints his Department has received in relation to the possible adverse environmental effect of Halloween bonfires in each of the last five years. (AQW 8806/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The Northern Ireland Environment Agency received four complaints about Halloween bonfires in 2005 and two in 2008.

Planning Applications

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment when the green paper will be issued for planning application R/2006/0814 - the Finnebrogue Estate Farm Game Handling business; and to detail the reasons for the delay. (AQW 8835/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The decision will issue as soon as the remaining issues are resolved. Since the approval opinion was presented to Council in February 2008, the Department has been involved in discussions with the applicant to resolve outstanding matters relating to the conditions to be attached to the planning permission and other legal mechanisms available to secure the desired outcome.

Legal Fees for Area Plans

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister of the Environment what legal fees have been incurred for each area plan over the last five years. (AQW 8836/08)

The Minister of the Environment: In the last 5 financial years my Department has to date incurred an estimated total of almost £400,000 in legal costs for area plans. This figure includes an estimate of the costs incurred in the last financial year and will be subject to final adjustment.

These legal costs arise from legal advice and representation in regard to Public Inquiries and to court proceedings relating to judicial challenges to the Environmental Reports for a number of development plans.

The costs for each plan are as follows:

- Dungannon & South Tyrone Area Plan = £32,500
- Craigavon Area Plan = £38,351
- Draft Ards & Down Area Plan = £116,205
- Draft Belfast Metropolitan Plan = £85,200
- Draft Northern Area Plan = £87,494
- Draft Magherafelt Area Plan = £39,330

Legal proceedings in relation to the judicial challenge to the Draft Banbridge Newry & Mourne Area Plan have recently been resolved however an estimate of final costs is not yet available. Proceedings in relation to the Northern and Magherafelt cases are ongoing and it is therefore not possible to provide final costs at this point in time.

Delay in Adopting Ards and Down Area Plan

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister of the Environment to explain the delay in adopting the Ards and Down Area Plan 2015; and what steps his Department is taking to have the plan finalised and adopted. (AQW 8859/08)

The Minister of the Environment: My Department has only received the report of the public inquiry into the draft Ards and Down Plan, which closed in January 2007, at the end of March this year. A dedicated team of officers was in place at that time and is currently considering the implications of the report.

The content of that report is confidential until the formal adoption of the Plan, however I can say that it has raised a number of complex policy and procedural issues. One possible consequence may be the need for a formal modification of the Plan, prior to adoption. An alternative, which my Department is also considering, may be to proceed to adoption without the need for such a modification process to be followed.

I can assure you that considerable progress has been made towards the adoption of the Plan, however, in the circumstances I am reluctant to commit to a final date until my officials have fully considered the implications of each approach, perhaps by the end of July. It is my intention to complete the adoption stage as quickly as possible and to establish the certainty that this new Plan will bring to both Ards and Down Districts in terms of its local planning framework.

Belfast City Airport

Mr Newton asked the Minister of the Environment what measures are in place as part of an ongoing programme to monitor the quality of air in proximity to the George Best Belfast City Airport. (AQW 8870/08)

The Minister of the Environment: Air quality is managed by district councils in Northern Ireland under a statutory framework laid down under the Environment (Northern Ireland) Order 2002. Belfast City Council regularly reviews and assesses air quality throughout its Council area including monitoring at Sydenham and Knocknagoney. This is undertaken at particular locations, usually near domestic properties, and results to date have shown no exceedences of the air quality objective for nitrogen dioxide at these locations.

Litigation of the Northern Area Plan

Mr Paisley Jnr asked the Minister of the Environment how much his Department has spent on the litigation of the Northern Area Plan; and what the estimated full legal cost will be to his Department. (AQW 8877/08)

The Minister of the Environment: My Department has incurred to date legal costs at an estimated total of almost £87,500 in respect of the litigation of the draft Northern Area Plan (dNAP). This includes an estimate for the last financial year and further costs for this period can be expected.

My Department's ongoing appeal of the judgment in this case has now been referred by the Court of Appeal to the European Court of Justice (ECJ). In the judgement, costs were awarded against the Department; however the final position on costs, in the dNAP case, must await the outcome of the appeal and it is therefore not possible to give an estimate of total costs at this point in time.

Litigation of the Magherafelt Area Plan

Mr Paisley Jnr asked the Minister of the Environment how much his Department has spent on the litigation of

the Magherafelt Area Plan; and what the estimated full legal cost will be to his Department. (AQW 8878/08)

The Minister of the Environment: My Department has incurred to date legal costs at an estimated total of just over £39,300 in respect of the litigation in relation to the draft Magherafelt Area Plan. This includes estimates for the last financial year and further costs for this period can be expected.

The legal proceedings in this matter have only recently been settled while the court awarded costs against the Department are as yet unknown. It is therefore not possible to give an estimate of total costs at this point in time.

Pollution in the Glenavy River

Mr Burns asked the Minister of the Environment to detail all pollution incidents which have occurred in the Glenavy river in each of the last 10 years, including (i) the severity of each incident; (ii) the source of the pollution; and (iii) the sanctions that were imposed on those responsible. (AQW 8922/08)

The Minister of the Environment: My Department's Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA), is responsible for investigating water pollution throughout Northern Ireland.

The data presented in table A indicate the number of pollution incidents which have occurred in the Glenavy River in each of the last 10 years.

The data presented in table B indicate the source of pollution incidents which have occurred in the Glenavy River in each of the last 10 years.

TABLE A – THE NUMBER OF INCIDENTS BY SEVERITY

	High	Medium	Low	Total
1997	0	£3	£2	£5
1998	0	5	4	9
1999	2	4	6	12
2000	0	2	5	7
2001	0	2	7	9
2002	0	0	6	6
2003	0	4	5	9
2004	0	3	1	4
2005	1	3	4	8
2006	0	0	3	3
2007	0	2	2	4
Total	3	28	45	76

TABLE B – NUMBER OF INCIDENTS BY SOURCE 1997-2007

Domestic	Farm	Industry	Other	Water Service/ Northern Ireland Water	Total
12	21	26	2	15	76

Where pollution occurs it is the policy of NIEA, to take formal enforcement action, if this is warranted by the severity of the pollution and the circumstances which led to it occurring.

Between 1997 and 2007 NIEA issued 9 warning letters and has taken 11 cases for prosecution. Fines for the successful prosecutions ranged from £100 to £3,600.

Archaeological Finds in Strangford Lough

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment what archaeological finds have been discovered in operations carried out by the Environment and Heritage Service in Strangford Lough, in each of the last 4 years. (AQW 8926/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The then Environment and Heritage Service (EHS) undertook archaeological excavations in the vicinity of Strangford Lough using its contracted team, the Centre for Archaeological Fieldwork, Queen's University Belfast, at the following sites:

- In 2004 at Kilnatieerney, excavation of a shell midden with a collection of late mesolithic flint flakes, scallop shells, a boar's tusk and two pig incisors.
- In 2005- 2007 there were no finds.
- In 2008 at Castleward, EHS supported excavations to uncover the Queen Anne period house on the National Trust owned estate. The work is continuing with the Northern Ireland Environment Agency and the finds have yet to be reported.

Grey Squirrel Eradication

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment what action his Department is taking to eradicate the Grey Squirrel population from the grounds surrounding Parliament Buildings, in order to increase the Red Squirrel population. (AQW 8928/08)

The Minister of the Environment: My Department, in conjunction with the Republic's National Parks and Wildlife Service, published an all-island species action plan for the red squirrel in May 2008. This addresses various factors relating to the

decline in our red squirrel population, including the spread of the grey squirrel.

An action recommended in the plan is to provide funding for two posts of Squirrel Conservation Officer by 2009. Discussions between the Red Squirrel Forum and NGOs about these posts are ongoing. Their duties will include grey squirrel control in targeted areas as well as disseminating advice to landowners and the general public on red squirrel conservation.

The Department is not in a position to eradicate grey squirrels from lands at Parliament Buildings or on other publicly owned land. It will, however, offer advice on methods and best practice if required.

Blood Alcohol Limits for Drivers

Mr Craig asked the Minister of the Environment what plans he has to reduce the maximum allowable blood alcohol level while driving, from 80 mgs to the European standard of 50mgs, in line with the recommendations of the Association of Chief Police Officers. (AQW 8943/08)

The Minister of the Environment: I favour a reduction in the general drink driving limit to 50 mg/100ml. My officials are working towards consultation on this issue later this year and are liaising with colleagues in the Department for Transport in considering a range of measures to deter drink driving and reduce casualties and with counterparts in Ireland on their proposals.

There are other measures worth considering which might include even lower limits for some categories of driver, for example, inexperienced drivers or professional drivers, random breath testing and alcohol ignition interlocks.

Subject to general agreement and legislative arrangements, I would hope that we could have new limits in place during 2009/10.

Storage of Archaeological Finds

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment what the Environment and Heritage Service has done to store the significant archaeological finds in Strangford Lough. (AQW 8958/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) has conserved a considerable proportion of the finds from the excavations it sponsored at Nendrum tide mills, particularly those made of timber. It now stores these, along with other artefacts which are not in need of conservation, both at its Belfast headquarters and on specially set aside premises at works depots in County

Down. From time to time local museums accept items from the tidal mill excavation for display, but these are always returned to NIEA afterwards.

The then Environment and Heritage Service sponsored excavations in 2004 at Kilnatierny which revealed a shell midden with a collection of late Mesolithic flint flakes, scallop shells, a boar's tusk and two pig incisors. The finds are stored at the Queen's University of Belfast.

Effect of Wind Turbines on Birds

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister of the Environment what adverse effect the down draft from wind turbines has on grouse and other game birds. (AQW 8959/08)

The Minister of the Environment: There is no evidence available from studies of windfarms in Northern Ireland or from elsewhere that Red Grouse or other game birds are affected by the downdraft from wind turbines. Information from the windfarm industry indicates that there is no down draft specifically associated with the operation of wind turbines.

Number of Windfarm Applications

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister of the Environment how many proposals for new or extended wind farms are currently awaiting a decision, broken down by district council area. (AQW 8961/08)

The Minister of the Environment: There are currently 47 applications for wind farms in the planning system.

The breakdown by district council area is as follows:

District Council Area	No. of current windfarm applications
Omagh	9
Strabane	11
Londonderry	2
Limavady	5
Fermanagh	7
Dungannon	4
Cookstown	1
Newtownabbey	2
Ballymoney	1
Ballymena	2
Antrim	1

District Council Area	No. of current windfarm applications
Coleraine	2
Total	47

Planning Application for Buncrana Road Development

Mr McCartney asked the Minister of the Environment to outline the reasons for not supporting/approving the planning application for the proposed foodstore, car parking and servicing arrangements and associated works on the Buncrana Road, Templemore Road, Derry/Londonderry. (AQW 8962/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The application was refused on the grounds that the proposal is contrary to Planning Policy Statement 5 Retailing and Town Centres in that the development of this out of centre location would, if permitted, result in the vitality and viability of existing centres being adversely affected and undermine their convenience shopping function.

The proposal is also contrary to Planning Policy Statement 3 Access Movement and Parking Policy, Policies AMP3 (Transport Assessment) and AMP7 (Car Parking and Service Arrangements).

Advice in Planning Application Process

Mr O’Loan asked the Minister of the Environment what action he is taking to ensure that there is consistency of advice to applicants throughout the planning application process, to prevent the situation where an applicant is given a positive response from the case officer, but an eventual negative response as the application reaches its final stage. (AQW 8974/08)

The Minister of the Environment: During the processing of planning applications my Department will occasionally be asked by applicants to express an opinion on the acceptability of a proposal. My Department will always be as helpful as possible and attempt to answer questions from members of the public as accurately and fully as possible. However, any opinion given in advance of a formal decision notice, either written or verbal remains only an opinion. Final decisions on planning applications are taken corporately and opinions may be subject to change. I will remind my Department to make this clear when giving an opinion to applicants in these circumstances.

FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

Staff Sick Days

Mr Simpson asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what comparison his Department has made between the number of days off work annually due to sick leave in the (i) public; and (ii) private, sectors; and the average number of days off work in one period of absence in each sector. (AQW 8417/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr N Dodds): Central Personnel Group, a division within the Department of Finance and Personnel, routinely monitors sickness absence data from across the public and private sectors. This work would include comparisons with GB Departments and local Government and would also involve analysis of the annual absence surveys undertaken by the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) and the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD).

I can confirm that the number of days off work due to sick leave in the NICS was higher (13.7 days – 2006/07 figures) than in GB Departments (9.3 days). The table below provides some trend data reflecting the period 2002 – 2006/07.

TRENDS IN ABSENCE

Working days lost per staff year	2002	2003	2004	2005		2005-06		2006-07
				Original	Adjusted	Original	Adjusted	
GB	9.8	10.0	9.1	9.8	9.4	9.4	9.0	9.3
NICS ¹	15.4	15.5	14.2	13.4				13.7

¹ NICS fitted into calendar years for presentational purposes.

According to a Report published in January 2008, by the Chief Local Government Auditor, in 2006/07 the average absenteeism rate for NI Councils as a whole, was 13.82 days, slightly higher than the NICS figure for the same period (13.7 days).

The latest CBI / AXA Absence Survey showed that average absence levels across the public sector stood at 9 days, which is 55% higher than the 5.8 day average of the private sector. According to the CIPD annual survey on Absence Management, absence levels for public services organisations increased to 4.5% (10.3 days) from 4.3% for the previous 12 months. There was also an increase in the average absence levels recorded by private services sector employers, with the rate rising over the year to 3.2% (7.2 days) from 3%.

Some caution is needed when comparing information produced by organisations such as the CBI or Chartered Institute for Personnel and

Development. Their methods for gathering data differ from the NICS, which makes it difficult to draw statistically valid comparisons. For example, the CIPD Absence Report was based on 819 replies to a survey questionnaire, comprising 437 paper questionnaires and 382 on-line questionnaires.

Cost of Recent Equal Pay Settlement for Departments

Mr O'Loan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel (i) when the costs of the recent equal pay settlement for Departments were (a) anticipated; and (b) known; (ii) the manner in which the equal pay settlement was factored into the budget announcement for the current three year period; and (iii) what information was given during the budget discussions to the Finance and Personnel Committee and to the Assembly. (AQW 8491/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: As yet, no equal pay settlement has been agreed. The potential equal pay pressure has arisen as a consequence of the handling of pay issues for the relevant staff since 1996 when the Treasury delegated responsibility for pay negotiations to individual departments both in Great Britain and in Northern Ireland.

In June 2007, when the Trade Unions lodged equal pay questionnaires, officials engaged with the Northern Ireland Statistical Research Agency (NISRA) to assess the potential liability. The work that was carried out by NISRA examined two aspects of any potential equal pay settlement - back pay and the options for future pay arrangements. In addition, the Department of Finance and Personnel began the collation of all information relevant to the questionnaires in order to assess the potential for any future equal pay liabilities.

It was not until the NISRA exercise was completed and the Department had completed its assessment of all of the available information that a clear indication of the potential liability and its possible timing was known. Discussions with the trade unions about how this issue might be resolved will be progressed over the coming months and any precise estimate of a settlement figure will not be available until this process has concluded.

The costs of the potential equal pay liabilities were not factored into the budget as it was not until after the Budget process had been concluded and the allocations for 2008-11 approved by the Assembly that it became clear that there was a possibility that a liability in respect of equal pay claims could arise in 2008. Furthermore, an exact figure will not be available until further work is completed.

No information was given to the Finance and Personnel Committee and the Assembly during the budget discussions regarding this issue as, at that time, the work was under way to gather the relevant information and carry out the assessments indicated above. However, a letter was issued to the Finance & Personnel Committee on the 29th May which outlined the position and issues involved. The Minister, in his June monitoring statement to the Assembly on the 24th June made reference to the equal pay issue.

Zero-Based Budgeting

Mr Burnside asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel if he has applied zero-based budgeting (i) to any sections of his Department; (ii) to any of the operations of his Department; (iii) to his Department overall; (iv) to any agencies under the supervision of his Department; and (v) to any of the other Departments in the Executive or to any Agencies under their supervision. (AQW 8586/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: As part of the 2008-2011 Budget process a zero based approach was adopted with respect to decisions on the capital allocations to Northern Ireland Departments and their Agencies. This reflects the time bounded nature of most capital projects which means that they are more amenable to a zero based analysis.

Although all Government spending programmes should be regularly evaluated to ensure that the original rationale for intervention remains and services delivered efficiently, it was decided that it would not be appropriate to adopt a zero-based approach with respect to resource allocations in the 2008 Budget process. This was on the basis that a number of significant areas had already been subject to recent review and, importantly, it is simply inconceivable that the Executive would decide to not continue the provision of key services in terms of for example health, education or support to business. Therefore, it would be expected that the costs would outweigh the benefits from such an all encompassing approach.

However, in deciding upon how to deliver the 3% per annum efficiency savings target, it is expected that Northern Ireland Departments and their Agencies will have examined the whole suite of programmes they deliver in order to identify the required level of savings

In addition, the Performance and Efficiency Delivery Unit (PEDU) will examine the scope for departments to deliver high levels of cash releasing efficiencies, combined with parallel improvements in performance and delivery.

Gross Value Added of Belfast

Dr Farry asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how the Gross Value Added of Belfast compares to other major UK cities. (AQW 8632/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: Gross Value Added (GVA) is not produced specifically for the cities of the United Kingdom. The Office for National Statistics is responsible for producing estimates of GVA for the UK, its regions and sub-regions. GVA estimates are produced on the basis of the EU-wide geographies known as NUTS (Nomenclature of Units for Territorial Statistics) and are available for the UK at the levels of NUTS1, NUTS2 and NUTS3. A number, but not all, of the UK's largest cities approximate to NUTS3 regions. The attached table provides NUTS3 based estimates of GVA for 2005, where available, for the ten largest (by population size) UK cities and for Belfast.

NUTS 3 name	Total GVA £million, 2005	GVA per head £, 2005 #	Population
London*	206,324	27,672	7,456,073
Birmingham	18,038	17,984	1,002,982
Leeds	15,268	20,613	740,689
Glasgow City	14,108	24,375	578,790
Sheffield	8,265	15,823	522,368
Bradford	6,623	13,572	487,975
Edinburgh, City of	13,017	28,432	457,830
Liverpool	7,133	16,321	437,052
Manchester	No appropriate NUTS3 region		
Bristol, City of	9,506	23,434	405,641
Belfast	7,180	26,792	267,999

Source: Regional, sub-regional and local gross value added, First Release ONS December 2007

* Figures provided for London are for the entire NUTS1 region of London. London is broken down into two sub-regions at the NUTS2 level (Inner London and Outer London) and five local areas at the NUTS3 level (Inner London West, Inner London East, Outer London East and North East, Outer London South, Outer London West and North West).

Comparisons of GVA per head estimates must be treated with caution at this geographical level as they do not take account of commuting effects. GVA is calculated on a workplace basis, for example all of the activity generated within Belfast is included in Belfast's GVA. However, the GVA per head figures are calculated by dividing this workplace based activity by the number of people who reside in the area. GVA per head figures will therefore be artificially high in areas with high levels of net inward commuting and correspondingly low in areas with high levels of net outward commuting. For example, data from the 2001 Census show that over 173,000 people work in Belfast but only 77,000 of those also live in Belfast. Taking account of those people who live in Belfast but work outside of Belfast, there is a net inward commuting flow of around 73,000 workers to Belfast. These

workers will contribute to the GVA that is allocated to Belfast but will not be included in the resident-based population denominator for calculating GVA per head.

Gross Value Added of Belfast

Dr Farry asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what the methodology is for calculating the Gross Value Added of Belfast relative to other major UK cities. (AQW 8633/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: Gross Value Added (GVA) is not produced for the cities of the United Kingdom. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) is responsible for producing GVA for the UK and its regions. The methodology for producing Regional GVA involves the allocation of the UK National GVA totals (published as National Accounts in the Blue Book) to each of the UK regions whilst also ensuring that each UK industry GVA total is also allocated amongst industries in each of the UK regions. This involves a two-way balancing process between industry and region. Further details can be found in the ONS publication entitled Regional Accounts Methodological Guide which is available from the ONS website (http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme_economy/RegionalAccountsMethodologyGuide.pdf)

Local Postal Services

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what consideration has been given and what progress has been made by his Department to utilise the Post Office as a source, agency or outlet for the delivery of its services as outlined in the May 2008 report of the Assembly's Ad Hoc Committee, 'Report of the Committee's Consideration of, and Proposals for, Partnership that could Enhance the Economic Case for Viable Local Postal Services'. (AQW 8694/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The Ad Hoc Committee on Local Postal Services' Report made a number of recommendations to the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (DBERR) concerning the future of Postal Services and the Post Office network.

Junior Minister Donaldson and Junior Minister Kelly wrote to Executive Ministers on 21 April asking them to consider whether any further public services could be delivered through post offices.

Within the Department, Land and Property Services (LPS) currently offer ratepayers the opportunity to pay their rates at the Post Office using a rate payment card or the Transcash facility. Last year over 342,000 rate payment transactions were completed through the

Post Office. LPS continues to promote the payment of rates at the Post Office.

LPS recognises the potential opportunity to work with the Post Office as a channel to improve access to LPS services and information and officials will keep this under review.

The Department will continue to look at further opportunities as they arise to consider whether any new public service could be delivered through the Post Office although these would be subject to the appropriate NI procurement policy.

Rates Cap

Mr B Wilson asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what measures he will take to compensate councils for the loss of income resulting from the decision to cap rates at a maximum capital value of £500,000. (AQW 8724/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The decision to introduce a £500,000 maximum capital value was taken as part of the St Andrew's agreement, by direct rule Ministers, in anticipation of the restoration of devolution. This affected just under 2500 properties. The revenue loss to district councils was just over £1m. While some were more adversely affected than others, the relative impact for the majority was minimal, with an average revenue loss of just under £40,000.

This measure consists of a modification to the tax base and is not, in itself, a rate relief which would be compensated through any of the existing derating provisions. I understand that the Rates (Amendment) (Northern Ireland) Order 2006, which provided for the introduction of the new capital value system, did not contain any enabling powers that would provide for compensating payments to be made. Indeed, so far as I am aware there is no other legislation in place that would allow such payments to be made.

If the loss of revenue from the £500,000 measure is causing severe hardship to councils, in terms of service cuts or unacceptably high district rate increase, the longer term financial impact may be considered as part of the wider Review of Public Administration financial arrangements and its associated legislation. However, I would need to discuss the matter with the Minister responsible for local government issues, Sammy Wilson.

Rates Relief for Married Couples

Mr Savage asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel when he will provide rates relief for married couples over the age of 65. (AQW 8745/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: Within the Northern Ireland domestic rating system rate relief for married couples over the age of 65 can primarily be obtained through the housing benefit system and the low income rate relief scheme. Both provisions are means-tested, aimed at targeting rate rebates at those most in need.

While housing benefit is a long standing measure, the new low income rate relief scheme came into operation in April 2007, at the same time as the move to rating on the basis of individual capital values. It aims to provide assistance to those in receipt of partial housing benefit or just outside the housing benefit thresholds. The scheme was enhanced further for pensioners following the St Andrews negotiations, with a further £4.4 million of funding put into the scheme for those meeting the qualifying age for state pension credit.

An outcome of the Executive Review of domestic rating was, from April 2008, to increase the amount of savings pensioners are allowed under the scheme from £16,000 to £50,000. This formed part of an integrated package of measures aimed at pensioners which also included the lone pensioner allowance for those aged 70 or over living alone, a proposed rates deferment scheme for home owning pensioners and enhanced data-sharing powers aimed at increasing rate relief take up.

Flooding Compensation

Mr Savage asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how much money is expected to be received from the E162.4M European Union Solidarity Fund to deal with the consequences of the flooding which took place in June 2007. (AQW 8766/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The Northern Ireland Executive will receive £180,158 as a result of the successful UK application to the European Union Solidarity Fund (EUSF) following the flooding which occurred last summer.

Civil Service Career Breaks

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what steps he is taking to ensure that civil servants who request 1 to 2 year career breaks can find alternative job opportunities closer to their homes. (AQW 8782/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The objectives of the career break scheme are to provide new job opportunities in the NICS and to facilitate an officer who wishes to take a break away from work. A career break may be granted for most purposes including further education, domestic responsibilities,

starting a business, maintaining a family business or to work outside Northern Ireland.

Staff returning from career breaks will not normally be posted to their prior post/location but to vacancies as and when they arise. Departments will endeavour to absorb their own staff however exceptionally were a department is unable to accommodate a return they will negotiate with other departments to find suitable posts.

In summary due to the length of career breaks, which under our policy can be anything from one to five years, we cannot provide guarantees of where a member of staff will be posted on their return, regardless of personal circumstances.

Number of People Living in Segregated Areas

Dr Farry asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, based on figures from the 2001 census, to give the number of people living in segregated areas (i.e. areas in which more than 90% of people come from a particular community background), broken down by community background. (AQW 8816/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The 2001 Census showed that just over 484,000 people lived in Super Output Areas (SOAs)¹ where more than 90% of the population came from a single community background, where community background is defined as religion or religion brought up in.

The attached table details the number and community background of people living in segregated Super Output Areas.

TABLE - COMMUNITY BACKGROUND OF PEOPLE LIVING IN SEGREGATED² SOAS.

Community Background	People living in SOAs which are:		Total
	More than 90% Catholic	More than 90% Protestant	
Catholic	255,612	8,223	263,835
Protestant and Other Christian (including Christian related)	8,747	202,294	211,041
Other religions and philosophies	401	660	1,061
No community background	1,345	6,976	8,321
Total number of people in areas	266,105	218,153	484,258

¹ SOAs are geographical units, based on electoral wards, each with a population of around 2,000.

² For the purposes of this analysis a SOA was defined as segregated if more than 90% of the people living there came from a single community background

Civil Service Career Breaks

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what action his Department is taking to re-locate single mothers within the civil service, who take a career break due to the birth of a child, to positions that are closer to their home. (AQW 8829/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The objectives of the career break scheme are to provide new job opportunities in the NICS and to facilitate an officer who wishes to take a break away from work. A career break may be granted for most purposes including further education, domestic responsibilities, starting a business, maintaining a family business or to work outside Northern Ireland.

Staff returning from career breaks will not normally be posted to their prior post/location but to vacancies as and when they arise. Departments will endeavour to absorb their own staff however exceptionally were a department is unable to accommodate a return they will negotiate with other departments to find suitable posts.

In summary due to the length of career breaks, which under our policy can be anything from one to five years, we cannot provide guarantees of where a member of staff will be posted on their return, regardless of personal circumstances.

New Civil Service Payroll System

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to the answer to AQW 3437/08, for an update on the implementation of the new civil service payroll system, which will make the salary sacrifice childcare voucher scheme available to civil service staff. (AQW 8858/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: Work is ongoing for the Salary Sacrifice Scheme for Childcare Vouchers to be made available to staff following the introduction of the new NICS payroll system. It is currently planned that the new payroll system will be implemented by the end of September 2008 at the latest.

Rates Cap

Dr Farry asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what understandings were given to district councils on how the lost revenue, from the rates cap of £500,000 during the 2007-2008 financial year, would be funded.[R] (AQW 8868/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The £500,000 maximum capital value was introduced in the final days of direct rule, by direct rule Ministers, in anticipation of the restoration of devolution. While

a legislative enabling power would have allowed local Ministers to subsequently take this decision, the measure was introduced at the request of the local political parties to ensure that it was in place for April 2007, when bills issued for the first time using capital values as the basis of assessment.

This measure was always considered by the Department to be a modification to the tax base and not a rate relief applied to particular uses made of property (Reliefs such as sport and recreation and industrial derating are compensated through the derating element of the general grant).

At that time there were discussions with officials in district councils, (through the Association of Local Government Finance Officers) on the impact of the various reforms. Indeed, in October 2006, finance officers from a number of councils were provided with figures showing the number and value of properties above the £500,000 threshold, including Ards, Castlereagh, Down and North Down.

In addition, a consultation paper issued to all political parties, showing the potential impact of a maximum capital value at £500,000. These did not include the option of compensation for councils and the issue was not raised during the consultation process or policy finalisation.

I understand that the legislation which allowed the cap to be introduced, the Rates (Amendment) (Northern Ireland) Order 2006, did not contain any enabling powers that would provide for the lost revenue to be borne by the regional rate in its entirety or for compensating payments to be made to councils. Indeed, so far as my department is aware there is no other legislation in place that would allow such payments to be made.

If the loss of revenue from the £500,000 measure is causing severe hardship to councils, in terms of service cuts or an unacceptably high district rate increase, there may be an opportunity to consider any longer term financial impact as part of the new financial arrangements under the Review of Public Administration. However, I would need to discuss the matter with the Minister responsible for local government issues, Sammy Wilson.

Lost Revenue from Rates Cap

Dr Farry asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how the lost revenue from the rates cap of £500,000 during the 2007-2008 financial year is being funded.[R] (AQW 8869/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The introduction of a £500,000 maximum capital value was taken by direct rule Ministers shortly before, and

in anticipation of, the restoration of devolved power. The measure was considered to be a modification to the tax base rather than a relief and the revenue loss associated with the maximum cap affected both the regional and district rate. In terms of the district rate, while some councils were more adversely affected than others, the relative impact for the majority was minimal, with an average revenue loss of just under £40,000 (just over £1m in total). In terms of the regional rate, the loss of revenue was in the region of £1.5m and represented a marginal adjustment to the overall forecast rate revenue. No compensating payments were made to district councils, with the revenue loss borne by both the regional and district rate.

Protestant Males in Lower Grades of the Civil Service

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what action his Department is taking to address the under representation of protestant males in lower grades of the Civil Service. (AQW 8880/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: Since 2002, the NICS has included affirmative statements in all advertisements for AA and AO positions, to which applications from members of the Protestant community are particularly welcomed.

As well as being advertised in the 3 main local newspapers, the recent AA and AO competitions were also advertised on local radio stations, in public buildings and via the jobcentre network. The requirement for academic qualifications was also removed on a trial basis.

Initial analysis of these recent competitions has indicated that the number of applications from the Protestant community has increased by just over 10% but my officials plan to carry out further in-depth analysis, when all appointments have been made, and will consider what further action is required.

Females in Senior Grades of the Civil Service

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what action his Department is taking to address the under representation of females in senior grades of the Civil Service. (AQW 8881/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: In order to attract as wide an applicant pool as possible, the NICS makes extensive use of open recruitment to fill senior posts. Recruitment advertisements for senior posts include a statement welcoming applications from under-represented groups, including females. Appointments are, however, based on merit.

Across the NICS, as a whole, the number of female staff at Grade 5 and above has steadily increased from 16.8% in 2003 to 27.4% in 2008.

My officials plan to carry out further in-depth analysis of gender across the Service and will consider what further action is required.

Compulsory Energy Performance Certificates

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what obligations are placed on estate agents arising from the introduction of compulsory energy performance certificates. (AQW 8916/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The Energy Performance of Buildings (Certificates and Inspections) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2008 do not place any obligations on estate agents. Rather they identify a “relevant person” who is obliged to give or make available an energy performance certificate when a building is constructed, sold, leased or rented. For sales or rentals, the relevant person is the seller or landlord.

Charges for Inspecting Insulation

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what guidance has his Department given to local councils on the implementation of charges for inspecting the installation of loft insulation and cavity wall insulation. (AQW 8919/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The Building (Prescribed Fees) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1997 (the “Fees Regulations”) establish the types of building work that are subject to a fee and the amount of fee that may be levied.

The insertion of insulation material into a cavity wall of a building is exempt from fee. There is no such exemption for loft insulation, as the insertion of this material may impact consequentially upon other building matters such as roof space ventilation and which therefore normally requires inspection by a district council’s building control officers.

A district council may waive any fee if it feels it is appropriate to do so.

The Department will shortly be commencing a review of the Fees Regulations.

Rates Discounts

Mr Burns asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel why rates discounts are not available for

single person households, in line with other regions of the United Kingdom. (AQW 8968/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The possibility of introducing a single person discount was considered as part of the Executive’s Review of the domestic rating system. However, it was felt that such a widespread discount would be difficult to justify in terms of cost, need and vulnerability to widespread fraud and therefore should not be introduced. This was supported by the Committee for Finance and Personnel.

A single person discount would cost in the region of £30m a year, which would have to be paid for either through other ratepayers paying more or revenue foregone. It is difficult to argue that single person households represent a vulnerable group requiring this level of support and no evidence of such was provided during the Executive Review.

HEALTH, SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC SAFETY

Ministerial Visits

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many visits he made to North Down constituency in his first year in office. (AQW 8430/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Mr McGimpsey): I can advise that since the 8 May 2007 I have made 9 visits to the North Down Constituency area.

Review of Carers Support

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) what progress has been made on the review of carers support; and (ii) what is the Department’s initial response to the National Strategy for Carers. (AQW 8434/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My officials are continuing to engage with their colleagues in the Department for Social Development to determine how best this joint review can be taken forward.

I welcome the launch of the National Strategy for Carers in England. Like our own strategy which was published in 2006, it recognises the vital role played by the many thousands of carers in our society and provides a framework for the development of services that carers need and deserve to enable them to continue in their caring role.

Departmental Restructuring

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action he is taking to ensure that the restructuring of his Department is rural proofed. (AQW 8466/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Health and Social Care Reform Bill, which I introduced to the Assembly on 23 June, provides for the restructuring of the health and social care system, including the Department. Subject to the Assembly's consideration of the Bill, the current guidance on rural screening and impact assessment will be taken fully into account in the implementation of the various provisions contained within the Bill, alongside any other impact assessments that are required, such as equality, environmental, health, regulatory, economic, human rights, social, victims, and community safety.

Cataract Operations

Mr Simpson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many cataract operations have been carried out in each of the last three years. (AQW 8475/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The number of cataract operations carried out in Health and Social Care Hospitals in Northern Ireland in each of the past three years is detailed below:

Year	2004/2005	2005/2006	2006/2007
Cataract Operations	8,391	9,441	8,718

Source: Hospital Inpatient System

These figures do not relate to individuals, as a person may have more than one cataract procedure carried out in a year.

Cataract Operations

Mr Simpson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people have been waiting for (i) 3 to 6 months; (ii) 6 to 9 months; (iii) 9 to 12 months; and (iv) over 12 months, for a cataract operation (a) in total; and (b) broken down by Trust. (AQW 8476/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information on the number of people waiting over three months for a cataract operation in Northern Ireland, and in each of the five Health and Social Care Trusts, at 31st March 2008, is detailed below.

Trust	Number of People Waiting (Monthly Timebands)			
	>3-6	>6-9	>9-12	12+
Belfast HSC Trust	554	0	0	0
South Eastern HSC Trust	24	0	0	0
Southern HSC Trust	29	0	0	0
Western HSC Trust	72	0	0	0
Northern Ireland Total	679	0	0	0

Source: DHSSPS Inpatient Waiting Times Dataset

Anorexia and Bulimia Nervosa

Mr Simpson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many new cases of (i) anorexia nervosa; and (ii) bulimia nervosa, were reported in each of the last three years. (AQW 8477/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information requested is not available.

Heroin Abuse

Mr Simpson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people presented for treatment for heroin abuse for the first time in each of the last three years (i) in total; and (ii) broken down by Health and Social Care Trust. (AQW 8478/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The table below shows how many people presented for treatment for heroin abuse for the first time in each of the last three years by Health and Social Care Trust.

Health and Social Care Trust	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07
Belfast	12	9	11
Northern	30	19	13
South Eastern	7	5	0
Southern	4	13	9
Western	4	3	6
Prison	6	1	2
Total	63	50	41

Sexually-Transmitted Infections

Mr Simpson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many cases of (i)

HIV; (ii) chlamydia; (iii) gonorrhoea; (iv) syphilis; (v) genital warts; (vi) genital herpes; and (vii) AIDS, have been diagnosed in each of the last three years.
(AQW 8479/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The number of cases of (i) HIV; (ii) chlamydia; (iii) gonorrhoea; (iv) syphilis; (v) genital warts; (vi) genital herpes; and (vii) AIDS which have been diagnosed in each of the last three years is given in the table below.

	2004	2005	2006
HIV	62	62	56
Chlamydia	2,060	2,395	2,686
Gonorrhoea	159	277	292
Syphilis	67	87	82
Genital Herpes	328	366	418
Genital Warts	2,803	3,237	3,100
AIDS	<5	7	<5

Source: CDSC (NI)

Notes: The figures for Chlamydia, Gonorrhoea, Syphilis, Genital Warts and Genital Herpes are derived from statutory KC60 Returns made by NI Genito-Urinary Medicine (GUM) Clinics. These figures relate to episodes of diagnoses and/or treatment of infection or disease and not individual people. Thus one individual may contribute to more than one episode.

Renal Dialysis

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people will require renal dialysis in each of the next 3 years, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust.
(AQW 8482/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: We anticipate that around 40 additional patients will commence dialysis therapy throughout Northern Ireland in each of the next 3 years.

For planning purposes, this total is broken down by Health and Social Services Board based on the proportion of the population living in each board area as follows:

- Eastern Health and Social Services Board - 16
- Northern Health and Social Services Board - 10
- Southern Health and Social Services Board - 8
- Western Health and Social Services Board - 6

It is important to note however, that renal dialysis is a service required by relatively small numbers of patients and that actual numbers of patients may vary from year to year and may not be spread evenly across the Board areas.

Ambulance Service Pay Bands

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail each pay band for Ambulance Service staff.
(AQW 8483/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Emergency ambulance service staff employed in the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service Trust are paid according to the job undertaken and are currently paid on the Agenda for Change pay bands as follows: Emergency Medical Technicians Band 4 (pay range £17,316 - £20,818) and Paramedics Band 5 (pay range £20,225 - £26,123). Staff in both these groups are set to have their jobs evaluated under the Agenda for Change job evaluation system. In the event that this evaluation process demonstrates that either of these jobs merits a higher pay band the Trust will adjust the salaries for the staff involved and make back payments to 1 October 2004. Rapid Response Paramedics will be moved to the Agenda for Change rates of pay when the job evaluation process is complete.

Midwives and Maternity Staff at Craigavon Area Hospital

Mr Moutray asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on efforts to recruit midwives and maternity staff at Craigavon Area Hospital.
(AQW 8485/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Whilst specific recruitment and retention issues are a matter for the Health and Social Care trusts, the Southern Trust has assured me of a very positive response to recent advertisements in the press for Band 5/6 midwives. The Trust is confident that, following the interview process, the vacancies identified for staff midwives will be filled.

In addition, my Department is funding 10 Nursing Auxiliaries to train as Maternity Care Support Workers.

Ambulance Service Pay Increases

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the annual pay increase awards for each grade in the Ambulance Service, in each of the last 3 years; and how many staff were included in each award.
(AQW 8486/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: All staff in the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service, with the exception of senior executives, have received standard pay awards during the last 3 years in accordance with the terms and conditions introduced in the Health Service by the

Agenda for Change initiative. Details for each year are shown in the table below:

Year	Staff In Post (Whole Time Equivalents)	% Pay Award
2005/06	978	3.225
2006/07	1,039	2.5
2007/08	1,076	2.5

Adoption in Northern Ireland

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans he has to introduce legislation to take account of the recent House of Lords ruling on adoption in Northern Ireland. (AQW 8535/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department is giving careful consideration to the recent House of Lords judgement to identify what implications it may have in taking forward our ongoing comprehensive reform of adoption legislation.

Home-Help Staff

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety the number of Home-Help staff in the WHSCT area (i) who are still to receive a back payment under the Agenda for Change HPSS pay system for work undertaken between (a) 1 October 2004 and April 2005; (b) April 2005 and March 2006; and (c) April 2006 and April 2007; and, (ii) who have received this payment already for the same three years? (AQW 8542/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information is not available in the format requested. However, I understand that all 1,278 Home Helps employed in the Western HSC Trust have received arrears due to them. 283 were paid arrears in November 2007, a further 614 were paid in May 2008 and the remaining 381 received arrears due to them at the end of June 2008.

Food Safety Promotion Board

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans he has to address the imbalances in, and the location of, jobs in the Food Safety Promotion Board. (AQW 8552/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The review of North-South

Implementation Bodies as provided for in the St Andrews Agreement is currently underway. The terms of reference for the review include an objective examination of the efficiency and value for money of existing Implementation Bodies.

It would not be appropriate for me to speculate about the outcome of the review.

Food Safety Promotion Board

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the efficiency savings that can be made in the Food Safety Promotion Board. (AQW 8553/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The review of North-South Implementation Bodies as provided for in the St Andrews Agreement is currently underway. The terms of reference for the review include an objective examination of the efficiency and value for money of existing Implementation Bodies.

It would not be appropriate for me to speculate about the outcome of the review.

Genito-Urinary Medicine (GUM) Service at the Royal Victoria Hospital

Mrs Hanna asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many appointments are available each week at the Genito-urinary Medicine (GUM) drop-in service at the Royal Victoria Hospital; and the average number of people that are turned away each week. (AQW 8571/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: There are 412 slots available on a weekly basis for both new and review GUM patients attending the Royal Victoria Hospital. The service operates Monday to Friday and, since April 2008, evening clinics on Tuesdays and Thursdays have been added to make the service more responsive to needs. Most clinics operate on a combination of booked appointments and a walk-in service.

The number of patients presenting on a walk-in basis who cannot be seen is not available.

Speech and Language Services

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) how many people who suffered a stroke have been left with the inability to speak or understand language in each of the last 3 years; and (ii) what services are available to these

people, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust.
(AQW 8574/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: (i) The information requested is not available. (ii) All trusts have speech and language services; these are provided for patients with speech and language impairment on the basis of assessed need, including those needs arising from stroke. Following public consultation, the stroke strategy was launched on 9 June and it acknowledges that further work is required to provide specialist assessment, support and intervention in response to individual need. The recommendations will be implemented by 2010.

Agenda for Change

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if the implementation of Agenda for Change is now fully complete.
(AQW 8590/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The assimilation of staff to the new Agenda for Change rates of pay is complete and employers are continuing with the process of calculating arrears due to staff from 1 October 2004. There is a small number of staff where there are grading issues to be resolved and they are most likely to be subject to job evaluation; for those staff the process continues. There is also a number of staff that have requested that their employer carries out a review of their grading and for those staff this part of the implementation process also continues.

Cost of Maliciously Started Fires

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many maliciously started fires the Fire and Rescue Service has attended in the Borough of Carrickfergus, in each of the last 3 years; and what costs were incurred. (AQW 8611/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The table shows the number of 'deliberate'/'malicious' incidents attended by the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service in the Carrickfergus Station area together with the estimated cost for the last 3 years.

Year	No of 'Deliberate'/'Malicious' Fires	Cost
2007/08	370	£808,000
2006/07	285	£634,000
2005/06	181	£374,000

Information on Drug and Alcohol Abuse in Schools

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action he is taking to alert young people to the dangers of drug and alcohol abuse; and what information is being provided in schools.
(AQW 8618/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The New Strategic Direction for Alcohol and Drugs (NSD), which was launched in 2006, identified providing education and information for young people as a priority. Regionally, a range of public information campaigns have been undertaken to provide more information to children and young people on the dangers of alcohol and drug misuse – along with the publication of a range of targeted leaflets and websites.

At the local level, in support of the New Strategic Direction for Alcohol and Drugs, the four Health Board-based Drug and Alcohol Co-ordination Teams commission and fund a range of services, initiatives and programmes in support of their own local action plans. These provide support to children and young people's groups that are working directly and/or indirectly towards improving young people's awareness of the dangers of alcohol and/or drug misuse.

Examples include:

- Targeted education and prevention programmes aimed at vulnerable and at risk young people and adults across the localities;
- Community & Family Support Services;
- Cross-sectoral Training Programmes;
- Alternative Criminal Justice Options; and
- Drug and alcohol outreach services.

In respect of schools, the Department of Education has policies in place to educate and support young people and has issued guidance to all schools on drugs education, including alcohol. Schools are required to have a drugs policy, including education on alcohol and drugs misuse. Education boards provide support to schools and youth clubs with dedicated drug and alcohol education officers.

In addition, the revised curriculum gives every young person the chance to learn about the dangers of drinking and illicit drug use. It allows them to develop the skills they need to deal with peer pressure and the problems that may drive them to drugs and alcohol in the first place. This is supported through schools' pastoral care arrangements, including the new school counselling service.

Clostridium Difficile

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many (i) cases of clostridium difficile; and (ii) deaths resulting from clostridium difficile, have occurred in the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust in each of the last 3 years, broken down by hospital. (AQW 8635/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The number of cases of clostridium difficile and the number of deaths resulting from clostridium difficile in the Belfast HSC Trusts for the previous three calendar years are as follows;

- (i) Cases of Clostridium difficile which have occurred in the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust broken down by hospital.

	2005	2006	2007
Royal Victoria Hospital	109	108	89
Belfast City Hospital	165	167	107
Green Park	12	22	11
Mater Infirmorum Hospital	32	88	45
Cancer Centre	0	0	13

- (ii) Number of deaths with Clostridium difficile mentioned on the death certificate by hospital within the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust and registration year, 2005-2007.

Place of Death	Registration Year		
	2005	2006	2007P
Royal Group of Hospitals	2	1	5
Belfast City Hospital	3	8	8
Forester Green Hospital	-	-	-
Mater Infirmorum Hospital	-	2	1
Musgrave Park Hospital	1	1	-
All other Hospital	29	51	63
All Clostridium Difficile Related Deaths Registered in all places	35	63	77

P Data for 2007 remains provisional until the publication of the 2007 Annual Report of the Registrar General due to be released in November 2008

Support for Stroke Sufferers

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action his Department is taking to improve the support available to people with communication difficulties as a result of suffering a stroke. (AQW 8662/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Following public consultation, the stroke strategy was launched on 9 June and it acknowledges that further work is required to provide specialist assessment, support and intervention in community settings in response to individual need. The recommendations include enhanced availability of speech and language therapy will be implemented by 2010.

Health Centre Phone Call Targets

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if Health Centres have targets for responding to phone calls. (AQW 8664/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Health centres do not have targets for responding to phone calls. The Department has directed that Health and Social Services Boards offer an access enhanced service to all GP practices. The specification of this service includes a requirement that telephone systems should be able to cope with the normal volume of calls from patients and where there is a delay in answering calls, patients should be informed within a reasonable time about the situation.

Health Centre Call Charges

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action he is taking to ensure that Health Centres do not charge callers a premium rate. (AQW 8665/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: In August 2005 the Department, in line with the rest of the UK, introduced legislative amendments to the General Medical Services Contract. These amendments prevent GPs, who provide primary medical services to the public under contract to the Health and Social Services Boards, from being party to any contract or other arrangement under which the number for telephone services to be used by patients starts with the digits 087, 090, or 091 or consists of a personal number (personal number means a telephone number which starts with the number 070 followed by a further 8 digits), unless the service is provided free to the caller.

Health Centre Call Charges

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety which Health Centres use call waiting phone systems that charge callers premium rates for their calls. (AQW 8667/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: No health centres managed by Health and Social Care Trusts use telephone systems, which charge callers premium rates for their calls.

Free Car Parking

Mr B Wilson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if Health Trusts have fully implemented his proposals that patients suffering from cancer and other serious illnesses and their next-of-kin would receive free car parking, as outlined in his press statement of 21 May 2008. (AQW 8669/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Trusts are currently working to put in place the necessary operational arrangements to fully implement these proposals by September 2008.

Community Carers

Ms Anderson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to make a statement on the future role of community carers; and whether those currently providing this service have been told not to reapply for their positions if they do not have a valid driving licence. (AQW 8704/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Domiciliary care workers are vital to the current and future provision of services as we strive to provide support where the vulnerable members of our society want it most, and that is in their own homes. We are currently supporting more people in their own homes than in any other setting and I want to see that trend increase further. It is essential therefore that we have domiciliary care workforce which is regulated and trained to ensure the highest possible quality of care, and that domiciliary care workers are given the recognition they deserve for the important work that they do. My Department is currently taking steps to address these issues.

I have been advised by the HSC that no current HSC-employed domiciliary care workers have been told that they must secure a valid driving licence to continue their employment. It will be for each independent provider of domiciliary care to determine their own terms and conditions of employment within the context of their legal responsibilities.

People Receiving Physiotherapy from the SEHSCT Unit at Market Street in Downpatrick

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people are presently in receipt of physiotherapy from the SEHSCT unit located at Market Street in Downpatrick. (AQW 8716/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The SEHSCT reported that the total physiotherapy caseload in their unit located at Market Street in Downpatrick was 134 (122 children and 12 adults) at 1st July 2008.

Pay Changes for Medical Staff

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the progress made under Agenda for Change in changing pay for paramedics and emergency medical technicians; and when this process will be concluded. (AQW 8729/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I refer the member to the response I gave to AQW 7925/08 answered on 24 June 2008.

Sports Clubs and Defibrillators

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is the training offered to sports clubs that purchase their own defibrillators. (AQW 8736/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Department of Health and Social Services and Public Safety has no statutory responsibility to offer training to sports clubs that purchase their own defibrillators.

Post Offices Delivering Services

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what consideration has been given and what progress has been made by his Department to utilise the Post Office as a source, agency or outlet for the delivery of its services as outlined in the May 2008 report of the Assembly's Ad Hoc Committee, 'Report of the Committee's Consideration of, and Proposals for, Partnership that could Enhance the Economic Case for Viable Local Postal Services'. (AQW 8738/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Ad Hoc Committee on Local Postal Services' report made a number of

recommendations to the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (DBERR) concerning the future of postal services and the Post Office network. In the area of health and social care, the Post Office can play an important role in the provision of information and advice to the public. One example is the application for a European Health Insurance Card, which can be obtained at Post Offices. People can also use a Post Office service called "check and send" for this, in which Post Office staff will assist with the completion of the form. The utilisation of the Post office network for the provision of such information and assistance is kept under review by my Department.

Gynaecologist Employed by Belfast Health and Social Care Trust

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to confirm that the gynaecologist who has been the subject of recent reporting in the local press no longer works in any capacity for the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust. (AQW 8756/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: This gynaecologist is employed within the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust, but is working in a different capacity and in a carefully supervised role.

Procedures in Ulster Hospital

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action is being taken to review procedures in the Ulster Hospital, in particular the handling of laundry, to ensure the avoidance of contamination and infection. (AQW 8759/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Procedures for the handling of laundry in the Ulster Hospital are kept under continual review to ensure everything possible is being done to ensure the safety of patients, visitors and staff. These procedures are based on the NHS Guidance document, HSG (95)18; Hospital Laundry Arrangements for Used and Infected linen, which is applied in Northern Ireland. The Ulster Hospital Linen Services Department has been ISO 9000/2000 accredited with the British Standards Institute since 1998 and as part of this accreditation, all procedures are reviewed at least annually.

Procedures and Infections in Hospitals

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action is being taken

to reduce contamination and infection in hospitals, particularly in the handling of laundry. (AQW 8760/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: On 28 January 2008 I announced a £9 million investment in a range of measures including MRSA screening for high risk patients; a regional hand hygiene campaign; and unannounced hygiene inspections; with the aim of further reducing contamination and infection in hospitals. There are already rigorous policies and procedures in place to ensure that laundry is handled in a manner which seeks to ensure that infection risks to staff, patients and visitors are minimised.

Hospital Workers and Protective Clothing

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what protective clothing is provided to van drivers dealing with hospital laundry. (AQW 8762/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: All hospital laundry is bagged and infectious linen is double bagged. The risk of transport staff being in contact with dirty linen is therefore small and protective clothing should not be necessary. Nevertheless gloves are normally offered to van drivers dealing with hospital laundry.

Home-Help Care Worker Absences

Mr Gallagher asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) how many people were employed by the Western Health and Social Care Trust as home-help/domiciliary care workers; (ii) how many of these workers have been on sick leave for periods of more than 1 week; and (iii) how many of these workers were absent for periods of more than 1 month, in 2007-08. (AQW 8768/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information been supplied directly from the Western Health and Social Care Trust.

Year	Number of staff employed as homehelp/ domiciliary care workers
2007/08	1527

Year	Number of staff with days lost more than 5	Number of staff with days lost more than 20
2007/08	112	91

I have asked the Western Health and Social Care Trust to look into the levels of sick leave reported.

Gardasil Vaccination

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if his Department is aware of a vaccination called Gardasil, which is available for the human papillomavirus vaccination programme due to commence in September 2008. (AQW 8770/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department is aware of the vaccination 'Gardasil' which protects against human papillomavirus (HPV).

Review of Department of Health Decision

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he will review the decision made by the GB Department of Health to offer young women a bivalent human papillomavirus vaccine. (AQW 8771/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: It is not my intention to review the decision made by the Department of Health (London). A robust adjudication process was carried out by the Department of Health, on behalf of the four UK nations. This process carefully examined the human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccines offered, against a wide range of criteria such as their scientific qualities, technical attributes and cost effectiveness. The criteria used for the adjudication process had been shared in advance with both companies that tendered. Based on the national procurement process Cervarix was chosen.

The purpose of the HPV immunisation programme is cancer prevention. Cervarix protects against HPV types 16 and 18, which cause 70% of cervical cancer cases.

Review of Public Administration

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how regional health bodies will function after the Review of Public Administration, including the division between the Director of Public Health and Chief Medical Officer. (AQW 8773/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Health and Social Care (Reform) Bill, which passed its Second Stage in the Assembly on 1 July 2008, sets out the new overarching structures for Health and Social Care.

The Bill requires the Department to produce a Framework Document, which will cover all health and social care bodies. To produce this document further work is being undertaken by my Department to define system wide functions, roles and responsibilities.

Councillors on Regional Health Bodies

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans he has to involve councillors on the new regional health bodies; and what consideration has been given to the potential clashes of interest, given the accountability role of District Councils. (AQW 8774/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I can confirm my intention to ensure local government representation in the Regional Agency for Public Health and Social Well-being and the Patient and Client Council. There will also be 4 locally elected representatives on each of the 5 Local Commissioning Groups of the Regional Health and Social Care Board.

A number of responses to the February 2008 consultation document, "Proposals for Health and Social Care Reform" raised the issue of how local councillors would be appointed to the new organisations. Similar considerations are underway in other Departments and I therefore wish to take account of these and engage with the NI Local Government Association before reaching final decisions.

Cervarix Vaccine

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he has noted the disappointment expressed by patients' groups on the recent decision by the GB Department of Health to choose Cervarix as the vaccine for the human papillomavirus vaccination to commence in September 2008; and if he will outline how the vaccine was chosen. (AQW 8775/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The purpose of the HPV (human papillomavirus) immunisation programme is cancer prevention. Cervarix protects against HPV types 16 and 18, which cause 70% of cervical cancer cases. There are approximately 80 new cases of cervical cancer diagnosed annually in Northern Ireland with 30 – 40 deaths each year. The announcement of a national vaccination programme to protect young women from their future risk of cervical cancer should be viewed positively by all groups.

The contract to provide the vaccine against HPV was awarded by the Department of Health to pharmaceutical company GlaxoSmithKline for their vaccine 'Cervarix', following an EU procurement exercise.

A robust adjudication process was carried out by the Department of Health (L), on behalf of the four nations. This process carefully examined the vaccines offered, against a wide range of criteria such as their scientific qualities, technical aspects and cost

effectiveness. The criteria used for the adjudication had been shared in advance with the companies which tendered. Based on the national procurement process Cervarix was chosen.

Halloween Bonfire Damage

Mr Moutray asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many complaints his Department has received in relation to the possible damage to public health caused by Halloween bonfires in each of the last five years. (AQW 8805/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department has received no complaints in this regard.

Health and Social Care Councils

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when a final decision must be made on the number of Health and Social Care councils. (AQW 8813/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: In my announcement to the Assembly on the 1 July 2008, I confirmed that I am replacing the four existing Health and Social Services Councils with a single, independent regional body – the Patient and Client Council. This new body will have five area committees operating within the same geographical areas as the five integrated trusts, to provide a strong regional and local voice on behalf of patients, clients, carers and communities.

Out-of-Hours Provision in Strabane

Mrs McGill asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what the outcome was of the benchmarking exercise undertaken by the Primary Care Foundation into out-of-hours provision; and to give an assurance that out-of-hours provision in Strabane will be retained. (AQW 8819/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Currently all Out of Hours (OOH) services in Northern Ireland are subject to a review looking at their efficiency and effectiveness. The benchmarking exercise is part of the review process. During the exercise the Primary Care Foundation collected data across a broad range of indicators from both Northern Ireland and benchmark partners in other parts of the UK. This will provide a basis of evidence supporting the options for discussion in order to determine the most appropriate way forward for OOHs. Officials will be meeting with the Board sponsors of the project over the next few weeks to discuss the results of the

benchmarking exercise and the proposed way forward. It is expected that the final review will be published later this year. This being the case, no decisions have been made, although no commitment can be given at this time that there will be no change to the Strabane OOH service in the future.

Agenda for Change Rates of Pay

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if his target date of 30 June for Health and Social Care Employers to have all staff on 'Agenda for Change' rates of pay has been met. (AQW 8837/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Yes, the target date of 30 June 2008 for the assimilation of staff to the new Agenda for Change rates of pay has been met. Health and Social Care employers are continuing with the process of calculating arrears due to staff from 1 October 2004. There is a small number of staff where there are grading issues to be resolved and they are most likely to be subject to job evaluation; for those staff the process continues. There is also a number of staff that have requested that their employer carries out a review of their grading and for those staff this part of the implementation process also continues.

Health-Trust Solicitors

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to list the solicitors appointed by each Health Board and Health and Social Care Trust to deal with compensation claims; and to confirm if their appointment was made using public procurement processes. (AQW 8839/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information you requested is provided in the attached table:

HSS Organisation	Legal Firms appointed to handle compensation claims	Appointment made using public procurement processes
Eastern Health and Social Services Board	Directorate of Legal Services, Central Services Agency	Yes
Northern Health and Social Services Board	Directorate of Legal Services, Central Services Agency	No
Southern Health and Social Services Board	Directorate of Legal Services, Central Services Agency	Yes

HSS Organisation	Legal Firms appointed to handle compensation claims	Appointment made using public procurement processes
Western Health and Social Services Board	Directorate of Legal Services, Central Services Agency	Yes
Belfast Health and Social Care Trust	Directorate of Legal Services, Central Services Agency	Yes
	MSC Daly, Solicitors	No
	Carson McDowell, Solicitors	Yes
South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust	Fisher & Fisher, Solicitors	Yes
	Directorate of Legal Services, Central Services Agency	Yes
Northern Health and Social Care Trust	Carson McDowell, Solicitors	Yes
	Directorate of Legal Services, Central Services Agency	Yes
Southern Health and Social Care Trust	Directorate of Legal Services, Central Services Agency	Yes
	Carson McDowell, Solicitors	Yes
Western Health and Social Care Trust	Directorate of Legal Services, Central Services Agency	Yes
Northern Ireland Ambulance Service	Directorate of Legal Services, Central Services Agency	Yes

With the exception of the Northern Board and Belfast Trust, legal firms used are those appointed under the Framework. The appointment of the Directorate of Legal Services by the Northern Board and MSC Daly by the Belfast Trust to handle compensation claims was not made under a public procurement process as in both cases claims were transferring from Brangam Bagnall & Co, following its closure by the Law Society and pressing time constraints did not permit this to be undertaken.

Dental Services in Randalstown

Mr Burns asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail all dental services available in Randalstown; and to state which dentists provide Health Service treatment. (AQW 8842/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Currently there are 2 dental practices employing 8 dentists in Randalstown who are all registered on the dental list of the Central Services

Agency (CSA) to facilitate the undertaking of health service dentistry. An analysis of health service claims shows that all 8 dentists have been actively providing health service dentistry over the past 12 months. However, under current contractual arrangements, there is no obligation on dentists to accept patients for health service treatment, or to continue to offer health service treatment to existing patients, and the situation can change at any time. Dental practices in Randalstown (as elsewhere) are under no obligation to inform their local Health and Social Services Board of those patients whom they are treating under the health service or under a private contract.

The Community Dental Service provides health service dental care to three private nursing homes in Randalstown, which includes care for patients with a learning disability.

The Northern Board have advised that there are Health Service dentists in both Ballymena and Antrim who are still accepting Health Service patients.

Treatment for Parkinson's Sufferers

Mr Burns asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the availability of treatment for patients with Parkinson's Disease and to provide a comparison of available resources, including beds and nurse to patient ratios, between Northern Ireland and other regions of the UK. (AQW 8844/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: People with Parkinson's disease may be referred to consultants in the neurology or care of the elderly specialties for diagnosis, treatment and monitoring. Care may also be managed by their GP. Most people with Parkinson's disease are treated with medication; however, when drug treatment is not suitable for a patient, surgery may be considered. Patients may access a wide spectrum of health and social care based on their individual assessed needs and the severity of their illness, including primary and community care, acute hospital care, physiotherapy, speech and language therapy and occupational therapy.

It is not possible to quantify the resources available to people with Parkinson's disease. Health and social care resources are normally allocated on a service or Programme of Care basis rather than by specific medical condition. My Department does not hold information on the levels of resources available to patients with Parkinson's disease in other parts of the UK.

Resources for Parkinson's Disease

Mr Burns asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans he has to direct additional resources towards treating Parkinson's disease. (AQW 8845/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: It is the responsibility of the Health and Social Services Boards to plan and allocate resources to meet the needs of their local population, including those with Parkinson's disease. In determining their priorities for funding, Boards will take into account local circumstances, the strategic objectives established for the HSC, and competing demands and pressures for a wide range of health and social care services generally.

In June 2007 my Department issued a circular endorsing a National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence clinical guideline on the management of Parkinson's disease in primary and secondary care. I would expect the HSC to take account of the guideline in the future planning and delivery of services to those diagnosed with Parkinson's disease.

Tarceva Drug

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when he intends to make the drug Tarceva available on the Health Service. (AQW 8849/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) is currently appraising Tarceva (erlotinib) for the treatment of non-small-cell lung cancer, and issued its Final Appraisal Determination on the 24 April 2008. Subject to appeals against this determination, NICE expect to publish final guidance in November 2008.

My Department has established a link with NICE whereby all guidance published by the Institute from 1 July 2006 is reviewed locally for its applicability to Northern Ireland and, where appropriate, is endorsed by the Department for implementation in Northern Ireland. The guidance on Tarceva will be considered under local arrangements when NICE publishes its final guidance in November 2008.

Funding for People with Learning Disabilities

Mr Bresland asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what funding has been provided by his Department for people with learning disabilities, broken down by Health and Social

Services Board, in each of the last four financial years. (AQW 8855/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The spending, by Health and Social Service Board, on learning disabilities in the last four available years was as follows:

Year	2003-04 £000s	2004-05 £000s	2005-06 £000s	2006-07 £000s
Eastern Board	60,946	63,052	66,220	69,022
Northern Board	27,731	34,560	35,081	36,782
Southern Board	28,841	31,457	33,896	34,832
Western Board	19,455	20,676	23,249	24,424
	136,973	149,744	158,445	165,060

Air Quality in Sydenham

Mr Newton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) what action he is taking in relation to perceived health problems due to air quality within Sydenham district; and (ii) what are the causes of the air quality problems. (AQW 8871/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department is not aware of any health problems associated with air quality in the Sydenham area.

Stroke Patients' Survey

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he is aware of the results of the survey carried out by the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists into communication needs of stroke patients, published on 5 March 2008; and what measures are being put in place as a result of the survey's findings. (AQW 8885/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I am aware of the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapy's survey. After a period of consultation, the DHSSPS Stroke Strategy was published on 9 June. The Regional Implementation Group, which I have asked to be established, will be expected to take account of the recommendations contained within the 'Lost Without Words' report and Royal College of Speech and Language Therapy's survey. The Strategy sets a target that by 31 March 2010 every stroke patient should have access to appropriate community rehabilitation including specialist assessment, advice, support and intervention. This includes communication needs.

Hospital Admissions for Stab Wounds

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many hospital admissions there have been for stab wounds, in each of the last 5 years. (AQW 8886/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Hospital admissions with a diagnosis of stab wound are shown in the table below.

Year	Admissions
2002/03	194
2003/04	164
2004/05	183
2005/06	157
2006/07	171

Source: Hospital Inpatient System

Deaths and discharges are used as an approximation of admissions. These figures should not be used to denote individuals as a person may be admitted to hospital more than once in a year, or across a number of years.

Home Start in Newry and Armagh

Mr Irwin asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what areas are covered by the Home Start organisations in the Newry and Armagh constituency. (AQW 8891/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department currently provides core funding for central administration costs to Home Start NI in its capacity as a regional voluntary organisation that provides training, information, guidance and support to 25 local schemes across Northern Ireland. In 2008/09 this funding will amount to £49,190.

DHSSPS is currently supporting four locally-based Home Start schemes which were previously funded through the Children's Fund – Home Start Ards, Comber and Peninsula, Home Start Down District, Home Start Newry and Mourne and Home Start Armagh and Dungannon. We will continue to fund these until March 2009. We do not support any Home Start activity in the Poyntzpass area, and have no plans to do so.

Individual Home Start schemes provide local service delivery and as such fall within the responsibility of the Health and Social Services Boards and Trusts. Therefore, it is a matter for them to consider the provision of support for local schemes.

Home Start in Poyntzpass

Mr Irwin asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans he has to include the Poyntzpass area in the Home Start remit. (AQW 8892/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department currently provides core funding for central administration costs to Home Start NI in its capacity as a regional voluntary organisation that provides training, information, guidance and support to 25 local schemes across Northern Ireland. In 2008/09 this funding will amount to £49,190.

DHSSPS is currently supporting four locally-based Home Start schemes which were previously funded through the Children's Fund – Home Start Ards, Comber and Peninsula, Home Start Down District, Home Start Newry and Mourne and Home Start Armagh and Dungannon. We will continue to fund these until March 2009. We do not support any Home Start activity in the Poyntzpass area, and have no plans to do so.

Individual Home Start schemes provide local service delivery and as such fall within the responsibility of the Health and Social Services Boards and Trusts. Therefore, it is a matter for them to consider the provision of support for local schemes.

Capital Investment

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the strategic capital investment for projects in excess of £5m, in each Health and Social Care Trust area, over the past five years. (AQW 8893/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Capital investment over the past 5 years for projects in excess of £5m is detailed by Trust area in the table below. There were no capital projects in excess of £5m in the Northern Trust or Northern Ireland Ambulance Service Trust. I have recently commissioned a review of capital investment priorities over the next ten years, which is expected to be completed by September.

Trust	Project Details	Capital Expenditure in Last 5 Years (2003-2008) (£m)
Belfast	Muckamore Abbey Redevelopment	15.4

Trust	Project Details	Capital Expenditure in Last 5 Years (2003-2008) (£m)
Belfast	Health & Wellbeing Centres in North & West Belfast (Grove, Carlisle, Shankill, Beechhall)	19.5
Belfast	Community Treatment & Care Centres (Holywood Arches, Bradbury Place, Castlereagh)	18.7
Belfast	Regional Secure Unit, Knockbracken	8.3
Belfast	Regional Acquired Brain Injury Unit, Musgrave Park	9.5
Belfast	Regional Cancer Centre, Belfast City Hospital (inc car park)	52.4
Belfast	RVH Redevelopment - including Imaging Centre, Receipt & Distribution Centre, Critical Care building)	53.1
Belfast	RVH Central Decontamination Unit	11.6
Belfast	Victoria Pharmaceuticals	0.7
Total Belfast Trust		189.2

Trust	Project Details	Capital Expenditure in Last 5 Years (2003-2008) (£m)
South Eastern	Downe Hospital	32.1
South Eastern	Ulster Hospital Redevelopment Phase A	71.6
South Eastern	Lakewood Adolescent Secure Unit	8.8
South Eastern	Bayview - replacement day care facilities for the elderly	5.3
Total South Eastern Trust		117.8

Southern	Mental Health Inpatient Unit at CAH (Bluestone Unit)	13.3
Southern	Trauma & Orthopaedics Unit at CAH	5.7
Southern	Portadown Health & Care Centre	3.5
Total Southern Trust		22.5

Western	Stradreagh - replacement hospital based facilities for people with learning disabilities	5.1
Western	South West Hospital (inc land purchase, enabling works, project mgt costs)	24.2
Western	Omagh Local Hospital (inc land purchase, enabling works, project mgt costs)	16.5
Western	Altnagelvin Hospital	43.9
Western	Altnagelvin - Laboratories & Pharmacy Unit	18
Total Western Trust		107.7

Increasing Costs of Fuel

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what proposals his Department has to meet the increasing fuel costs incurred by Health and Social Care Trusts.

(AQW 8894/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I recognise that it is important that all practicable steps are taken to ensure that the recent increases in fuel costs have minimal impact on the provision of health and social care services. It is an integral part of the financial management of health and social care facilities and services that all cost increases, whether or not they are foreseeable, are managed within available resources

My Department has considered the impact of the recent increases on the Health and Social Care Trusts and I can confirm that I have made available a further £8m to help Trusts cope with the rising costs of fuel.

Nursing Vacancies

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for a breakdown of current nursing vacancies, by (i) Grade Band; (ii) Health Trust; and (iii) specialty.

(AQW 8898/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:

- (i) Information in the form requested is not readily available and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.
- (ii) Information on the number of Nursing Vacancies by Health and Social Care Trust as at 30th September 2007 is given in the table below.

Table 1: Number of Nursing Vacancies by Health & Social Care Trust as at 30th September 2007.

Health & Social Care Trust	Qualified Nursing Staff		Nurse Support Staff		All Nursing Staff	
	Head-count	WTE	Head-count	WTE	Head-count	WTE
Belfast	121	109.0	98	89.0	219	198.0
Northern	73	68.7	26	18.7	99	87.5
South Eastern	23	17.4	3	1.5	26	18.9
Southern	61	53.6	17	14.1	78	67.7
Western	21	19.5	1	1.0	22	20.5
Other Organisations	4	4.0	0	0.0	4	4.0
Total	303	272.2	145	124.4	448	396.5

Source: NI Health and Social Care Organisations.

Notes:

1. A current vacancy is an unoccupied post, which at 30th September 2007 was vacant and which the organisation was actively trying to fill.
 2. WTE = Whole-Time Equivalent
 3. Survey figures are now finalised following completion of validation exercise.
- (ii) Information in the form requested is not readily available and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Newry Day Care Centre

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what progress has been made in the provision of a Social Education Centre for Newry. (AQW 8903/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The new Day Care Centre in Newry remains a high priority for my Department. The Southern Trust has advised that planning consent for the scheme is expected on 11th July, subject to final sign off by Newry & Mourne Council. The construction of the new Centre is expected to commence in early 2009.

Cardiovascular Health and Wellbeing Service Framework

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on which service development frameworks are currently being pursued. (AQW 8911/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Cardiovascular Health and Wellbeing Service Framework is the first service framework to be developed for Northern Ireland, and it has recently been launched for public consultation. This consultation is due to finish on 30th September 2008. The Framework will then be finalised and it is anticipated to be launched for implementation before the end of this year.

There are currently four more Service Frameworks in preparation at various stages of development. These are;

- Respiratory Health and Wellbeing,
- Cancer Prevention, Treatment and Care,
- Mental Health and Wellbeing, and
- Learning Disability.

It is anticipated that additional areas for Service Framework development will be taken forward in 2009/10.

Maternity Units

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the revised training for midwives in the use of electronic foetal monitoring following the deaths of two babies at Antrim Area Hospital. (AQW 8933/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Department has asked all maternity units across the province to address a number of areas in training, including the use of electronic foetal monitoring equipment. All five Trusts are complying with these requests.

Midwives are trained in the use of Electronic Foetal Monitoring during their undergraduate studies. In addition to undergraduate training, annual training in Electronic Foetal Monitoring is mandatory.

Recently my Department issued a letter to the five Trusts on "The Use and Interpretation of Cardiotocography in Intrapartum Foetal Surveillance - Advice to Midwives". This letter outlined a number of issues to be addressed including Electronic Foetal Monitoring. All Trusts are currently in the process of complying with the measures set out in the letter.

Medical Records

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what procedures are in place to deal with lost records or where breaches in the Data Protection Act have occurred in relation to medical records; and how many lost or breached

medical record incidents have been recorded in each of the last 5 years. (AQW 8934/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Organisations holding medical records have records management procedures in place that are based on guidance issued by the Department. The organisations all have incident recording systems in place and where medical records have been lost or a DPA breach has been reported the incident is investigated and appropriate action is taken.

The number of recorded lost medical records incidents and the number of recorded Data Protection Act breaches relating to medical records in each of the last five years is shown in the table below. Not all organisations could supply information for 2003/04 and 2004/05 so figures for those years are incomplete.

	2003/ 04	2004/ 05	2005/ 06	2006/ 07	2007/ 08
Number of Incidents relating to lost Medical Records	3	0	25	32	39
Number of Incidents of DPA breaches relating to Medical Records	1	2	2	1	2

Infant Deaths

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what procedures have been put in place to safeguard the health of maternity patients and prevent a repeat of the circumstances that led to the deaths of two babies at Antrim Area Hospital. (AQW 8935/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Subsequent to the deaths of two infants at Antrim Area Hospital, the Northern Trust has commissioned an independent review of maternity services in their area, the outcome of which will help identify any action which can be taken to prevent such incidents in future.

The Northern Trust has also advised that they continuously review factors surrounding any adverse outcome to make sure that appropriate action is taken to reduce the risks to other mothers and babies. Furthermore, the Trust has implemented the Physiological Early Warning System (PEWS) in maternity services which will alert staff to the need for immediate action with patients who display signs of requiring urgent medical intervention.

In addition, the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) published a clinical guideline on Intrapartum Care in September 2007.

My Department has established a link with NICE whereby all guidance published by the Institute from 1 July 2006 is reviewed locally for its applicability to Northern Ireland and, where appropriate, is endorsed by the Department for implementation in Northern Ireland.

The clinical guideline on intrapartum care has been considered under these arrangements, and my Department will advise local health and social care organisations of the outcome of this shortly.

I also draw the Member's attention to the answer to Assembly Question AQW/8933/2008.

Support for Bereaved Parents

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what support the Health Service provideS to bereaved parents following the death of a baby close to the time of birth. (AQW 8936/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The care and support provided to bereaved parents will depend on their individual needs and circumstances. As part of the implementation of the Human Organ Enquiry recommendations, the Department issued a care pathway entitled "Care Plan for Women who experience a Miscarriage, Stillbirth or Neonatal Death". Trusts offer a wide range of support consistent with the recommendations of this care plan.

Each of the Trusts has in place an appropriate staff contact / contacts for families who experience the loss of a baby. These staff can guide the parents through arrangements and procedures and are a point of contact if the parents have any concerns they wish to discuss. Full support is provided and parents are given advice on how to avail of counselling if they choose to do so.

Infant Deaths

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many infant deaths have there have been in midwifery-led services over the last five years. (AQW 8937/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The number of infant deaths in midwifery-led services over the last five years is not available.

Ambulance Funding

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what cutbacks are planned for the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service to meet the 3% savings figures; how these cutbacks will effect frontline services; and which services will be affected.

(AQW 8944/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department is currently finalising challenging efficiencies amounting to £118m/£233m/£344m by 2010/11, as part of the Executive Committee's agreed approach to the Comprehensive Spending Review.

There are no plans to cut ambulance funding. I have yet to see and consider the Trust's proposals in respect of 2009/10 and 2010/11.

Dial-an-Angel Scheme

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what consideration his Department has given to the introduction of a scheme similar to the 'Dial an Angel' scheme in Australia.

(AQW 8963/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The 'Dial an Angel' scheme is a privately run enterprise which provides a wide range of domestic services, the core of which, insofar as they represent what we would regard as social care services, are broadly equivalent to those already provided by Health and Social Care Trusts. I have not therefore given consideration to the introduction of such a scheme. I do, however, expect the HSC to be innovative in service delivery, wherever possible, and to learn from best practice elsewhere.

Needs Assessment

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action his Department is taking to ensure flexibility in the Home Care provision for the elderly, so that the help given meets the needs of those that require assistance with independent living.

(AQW 8964/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The need to respond to the wishes of individuals to lead independent lives in the community, with appropriate support from Health and Social Care Trusts, is at the heart of my Department's community care policy. I have sent a very clear signal to the HSC that services must be flexible and respond sensitively and appropriately to the assessed needs of service users and carers. Service users and carers

have these assessed needs reviewed at least annually or more often if necessary to ensure the services they receive continue to meet their needs.

Care Workers

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action his Department is taking to ensure that those in receipt of Home Care have the same care worker on a regular basis.

(AQW 8965/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I expect Health and Social Care Trusts to ensure, wherever possible, that care is delivered by the same care workers. I recognise, however, that factors such as availability, reliability, changing needs of service users and competence of care workers may mean that this is not always possible. Where it is not, I expect the HSC to ensure that high quality alternative service provision is available.

CSR Funding

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what provision is being made for changes to respite care to ensure that more people can achieve independent living.

(AQW 8966/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The additional funding I secured under the Comprehensive Spending Review will be used to provide a range of additional services including: 200 new or enhanced learning disability respite packages by 2011, which will provide 800 people with respite care; 200 new or enhanced physical and sensory disability respite packages by 2011; 2,000 additional dementia respite places by 2011; and the development of a range of flexible and responsive community care services to support an additional 1,500 older people in the community.

Role of GPs

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what steps he is taking to stop attempts by some GPs who seek to charge patients for signing SmartPass applications.

(AQW 8969/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: In 2002, as part of the UK Government's commitment to reduce unnecessary approaches to GPs for non-clinical purposes, and therefore increase their availability for the delivery of clinical appointments, and treatment and care to patients, the Cabinet Office Regulatory Impact Unit,

in their Report “Making a Difference – GP Report 2”, recommended that GPs be removed from the list of authorised counter-signatories for a range of social and welfare-related administrative processes such as passport and driving licence applications.

There is no list of specific counter-signatories required for the completion of SmartPass applications: those fulfilling this task simply need to know the applicant and not be a relative. The signature of a GP is not required for any category of SmartPass within the Northern Ireland Concessionary Fares Scheme and the provision of such services by GPs is not covered in the General Medical Services contract between GPs and Health and Social Care in Northern Ireland.

GPs, as independent contractors to Health and Social Care, retain the choice to provide services outside the scope of primary care medical services, such as counter-signatures, and can charge a fee for this should they wish to do so. However, this is a private matter between the GP and the individual.

Dentists in South Belfast

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many dentists there are in the South Belfast constituency who offer Health Service treatment, broken down by electoral ward. (AQW 8970/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information requested is shown in table 1 below:

Table 1 Number of dentists¹ offering Health Service dental treatment² in the South Belfast constituency, by electoral ward.

Electoral Ward	June 2008
Ballynafeigh	2
Beechill	2
Blackstaff	1
Botanic	4
Malone	17
Musgrave	9
Newtownbreda	5
Ravenhill	8
Rosetta	6
Shaftesbury	6
Stranmillis	11

Source: Central Services Agency

Notes:

1. Figures include Principal dentists only - excludes assistants and

Vocational Dental Practitioners.

2. A dentist offering Health Service treatment is defined as a dentist who is currently registered on the Central Services Agency’s dental list, however, as independent contractors there is no obligation on these dentists to accept a patient for health service treatment.

MRSA Patients

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many cases of hospital-acquired Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA) have been diagnosed in hospitals in each of the past five years. (AQW 8971/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Number of MRSA patient episodes by Health & Social Care Trust 2003 - 2007

The format for recording the information has altered due to reconfiguration of the new Trusts therefore the data has been provided in two different formats.

Health Social & Services Trusts	2003	2004	2005	2006
Altnagelvin Hospital	17	22	21	11
Belfast City Hospital	55	47	39	32
Causeway	9	9	10	9
Craigavon Area Hospital	25	24	20	19
Down Lisburn	12	17	7	5
Green park health centre	5	2	3	5
Mater Infirmorum	25	9	23	29
Newry & Mourne	10	5	3	3
Royal Group of hospitals	42	44	49	49
Sperrin Lakeland	15	16	6	9
Ulster Community & Hospitals	23	34	25	37
United Hospitals	46	41	37	37
Totals	284	270	243	245

Health & Social care Trusts	2007
Belfast	
Belfast City Hospital	33
NICCO (Formerly at Belvior park)	3
Foster Green Hospital/Green Park	0
Musgrave Park Hospital	2
Mater Infirmorum	21

Health & Social care Trusts	2007
Royal Victoria Hospital	45
RJMh	0
RBHSC	4
Total	108
Northern	
Antrim Area Hospital	20
Mid Ulster Hospital	2
Moyle Hospital	0
Braid Valley Hospital	2
Whiteabbey Hospital	13
Causeway Hospital	8
Dalriada Hospital	0
Robinson Memorial Hospital	0
Total	45
South Eastern	
Ulster Hospital	32
Ards Hospital	0
Bangor hospital	0
Downe Hospital	3
Lagan Valley Hospital	4
Total	39
Southern	
Daisy Hill	4
Craigavon Area Hospital	7
Lurgan	3
South Tyrone Hospital	0
Mullinure	0
Total	14
Western	
Altnagelvin Area hospital	11
Waterside	0
Earne Hospital	7
Tyrone County hospital	5
Total	23
Overall Total 2007	229

MRSA Cases

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many cases of hospital-acquired Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus

aureus (MRSA) have been diagnosed, broken down by each hospital department, for each year over the past five years. (AQW 8972/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: This information is not available in the format requested. To gather this information would be very time consuming and would be at a disproportionate cost.

Equality Issues

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety pursuant to his answer to AQW 4503/08, for his assessment of existing consistency criteria in fulfilling the principle of equal pay for equal work across the Health Service. (AQW 8973/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Equal pay for work of equal value is one of the key aims of the Agenda for Change agreement and equality issues are paramount when Health and Social Care employers and staff representatives, both locally and regionally, assign a grading to a job. The equality features of the implementation procedures include; a detailed matching procedure to ensure that all jobs have been compared to the national benchmark profiles on an analytical basis, training in equality issues and the avoidance of bias for all matching panel members, job analysts and evaluators and a detailed Job Analysis Questionnaire to ensure that all relevant information is available for local evaluations. I am confident that this implementation process fulfils the principle of equal pay and provides for a fair system.

Ketogenic Diet

Miss McIlveen asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many patients require a kinogenetic diet as part of the management of their illness. (AQW 8975/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: It is assumed this question refers to the ketogenic diet for epilepsy. There are currently two patients on a ketogenic diet.

Ketogenic Diet

Miss McIlveen asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people are qualified to prepare, administer and supervise a kinogenetic diet. (AQW 8980/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: It is assumed this question refers to the ketogenic diet for epilepsy. Adherence to the diet normally requires the support of a doctor and a dietician, working in partnership with the patient and his or her parents/carers. In Northern Ireland, one paediatric dietician is trained to advise on ketogenic diet.

Ketogenic Diet

Miss McIlveen asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much has been spent on kinogenetic dietary specialists in each of the last five years. (AQW 8981/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: It is assumed this question refers to the ketogenic diet for epilepsy. The information requested is not available.

Ketogenic Diet

Miss McIlveen asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if there are any plans to commence or increase funding in the area of kinogenetic diets. (AQW 8983/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: It is assumed this question refers to the ketogenic diet for epilepsy. It is the responsibility of Health and Social Services Boards to plan and allocate resources to meet the needs of their local population, including those with epilepsy. It would be for Belfast Health and Social Care Trust to bring forward proposals for any expansion of the current ketogenic diet service and submit these to the commissioners for consideration.

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Breaks in Water Supply

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development how many breaks in the water supply have occurred in the Ards Borough Council area in each of the last 3 years. (AQW 8270/08)

The Minister for Regional Development (Mr Murphy): You will be aware of my previous answer to your similar question AQW 6416/08 in May 2008 that there were 92 planned and 92 unplanned interruptions to the water supply in the Ards Borough Council area in the 12 months to March 2008. These figures were derived from comprehensive interruption records, against office and depots compiled for regulatory

purposes since 1 April 2007. However, comprehensive interruption records prior to 1 April 2007 are not available. In April and May 2008 there were 12 planned and 12 unplanned interruptions of greater duration than 3 hours in the Ards Borough Council area.

In addition to the above, there were also planned interruptions to the water supply in the Ards Borough Council area associated with Northern Ireland Water's Capital Works programme. These are recorded on a Northern Ireland wide basis split across North, South East and West areas and detailed records can not be provided for the Ards Borough Council area.

Broken Fencing at Scrabo School

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development what action is being taken to address the breaks in the fence at the pumping station adjacent to the former Scrabo School site in Newtownards. (AQW 8287/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that the broken fence at the former Scrabo School, adjacent to Scrabo Wastewater Pumping Station, is not its property or responsibility. The perimeter fence at the Pumping Station has been inspected and is secure.

Traffic-Calming Measures

Mr Ross asked the Minister for Regional Development to list the (i) streets; (ii) villages; and (iii) estates, that Roads Service have assessed, scored and prioritised within the (a) Larne; (b) Carrickfergus; and (c) Newtownabbey, Borough Council areas; and for the score and priority given in each case. (AQW 8304/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: Details of traffic calming schemes for the Larne, Carrickfergus and Newtownabbey Borough Council areas assessed by my Department's Roads Service, that will be considered for inclusion in a future programme of works, are provided in the tables below.

ASSESSMENTS FOR TRAFFIC CALMING MEASURES IN LARNE BOROUGH COUNCIL AREA

Current Priority Ranking	Location	Score
1	Linn Road	140
2	Upper Cairncastle Road	125
3	Ballygalley Village	100

Work is also ongoing to implement a traffic calming scheme included in the 2008/2009 programme of

works within the Larne Borough Council area at Seacliff Estate (off Old Glenarm Road).

ASSESSMENTS FOR TRAFFIC CALMING MEASURES IN CARRICKFERGUS BOROUGH COUNCIL AREA

Current Priority Ranking	Location	Score
1	Windmill Avenue	60
2	Broadlands	45
3	Drumhoy Drive and Salia Avenue	40
4	Farm lodge	40
5	Minorca Drive	35
6	Marine Parade	30
7	Fergus Avenue	30
8	Kingsland	15

In addition, subject to the successful conclusion of the public consultation and legislative processes, Roads Service plans to carry out traffic calming schemes within the Carrickfergus Borough Council area at Alexander Road, Barn Road/Elizabeth Avenue, Prospect Heights and Station Road. These schemes have been included in the 2008/2009 programme of works.

ASSESSMENTS FOR TRAFFIC CALMING MEASURES IN NEWTOWNABBAY BOROUGH COUNCIL AREA

Current Priority Ranking	Location	Score
1	Rashee Park	85
2	Glebe Road	50
3	Ballycraig Road	50
4	Rosstulla Park /Glenbroome Park	45
5	Bridge End	45
6	Hazelwood Park	45
7	Beverly Road	40
8	Collinward Avenue	40
9	Glencairn Park / Drive	40
10	Beverly Gardens	35
11	Burnet Avenue	35
12	Huntingdale	35
13	Kimberley Road	35
14	Armoy Gardens	30
15	Swanston Road Crescent	30
16	Whitehouse Park	30
17	Henryville Manor	30

Current Priority Ranking	Location	Score
18	Ravelston Avenue	30
19	Glebecoole Park	25
20	Churchill Park /Crescent	25
21	Dorchester Avenue	20
22	Meadowbank Park	15
23	Wesleydale	15
24	Hillcrest Crescent	5

Further to the successful conclusion of the public consultation and legislative processes, Roads Service plans to carry out traffic calming schemes within Newtownabbey Borough Council area at Straid Village, Bracken Drive, Hazelburn Road, and Carnmoney Road North/The Glade. Again, these schemes have been included in the 2008/2009 programme of works.

In all instances the priority ranking indicated within the above tables does not take into account the ranking order of other existing/ongoing traffic calming schemes, within the respective Roads Service Division, or new schemes yet to be assessed and scored.

Religious and Gender Breakdown of Ulsterbus Personnel

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) the management structure and areas of responsibility within Ulsterbus; and (ii) the religious and gender breakdown of Ulsterbus personnel at each regional office. (AQW 8467/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: Ulsterbus is an operating company of the Northern Ireland Transport Holding Company and is managed by a General Manager of Bus Services. The General Manager has responsibility for bus operations, engineering and fleet maintenance. Operations are organised into three geographic areas: Central Area, with an Area Manager based in Belfast; Northern Area, with an Area Manager based in Derry; and Southern Area, with an Area Manager based in Craigavon. Each of these managers has responsibility for Ulsterbus operations and engineering at a number of locations within his area of responsibility.

Set out below is a table showing gender and perceived religious affiliation in each area.

Area	Central	Northern	Southern
Gender			
Female	200	106	104

Area	Central	Northern	Southern
Male	575	754	791
Total	775	860	895
Perceived religious affiliation			
Protestant	523	415	472
Catholic	235	424	393
Other	17	21	30
Total	775	860	895

B52 Largy Road Route Study

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the implementation of the B52 Largy Road Route Study. (AQW 8468/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that since my last response to the Member's Assembly Question, AQW 3835/08, it has fully completed the minor works scheme at Cashelton Crossroads. The purpose of this scheme was to improve the sight distance at the Kilcurry Road/Cashelton Road junction and to introduce a short length of one-way system on the Cashelton Road to prevent vehicles joining the Largy Road, where visibility to the right is limited.

As I advised in my previous response, an assessment of the remaining scheme proposals along this route is ongoing. Prioritisation of schemes will take account of technical merit, availability of funding, Council consultations and Roads Service priorities.

Troubles-Related Illegal Roadside Memorials

Mr Moutray asked the Minister for Regional Development pursuant to his answer to AQW 864/08, which statutory obligations arising under Section 75(2) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 influence his Department's attitude towards troubles-related illegal roadside memorials. (AQW 8484/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: Section 75(2) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 requires my Department's Roads Service, in carrying out its functions, to have due regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group.

Roads Service is acutely aware that taking action to remove illegally erected monuments, without the support of the wider local community, could have a negative impact on relations between such groups. Roads Service's experience in dealing with similarly contentious issues such as flag flying, kerb painting,

etc. has shown that community agreement is key to successfully resolving such sensitive issues.

Roadway at Shore Road in Ballyronan

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Regional Development if and when the roadway at Shore Road, Ballyronan, from and including the village of Ballyronan to Ballylifford, will be resurfaced. (AQW 8510/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has no plans to carry out resurfacing along the Shore Road, between Ballyronan and Ballylifford.

Some sections of the Shore Road are in a provisional programme for edge strengthening in 2009/10, and similar works are expected to be required in later years. However, the majority of the carriageway surface is in reasonable condition.

In Ballyronan village, the road has been affected by utility work associated with new developments and Roads Service is monitoring its re-instatement. Roads Service is also aware of additional developments and other utility works planned within the village. Resurfacing will be considered when these works have been completed.

Contracts for Surface Dressing

Mr Beggs asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the value of contracts that have been issued for surface dressing of roads during the summer months, broken down by divisional roads area. (AQW 8558/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: The table below illustrates the value of work to date issued to external contractors, under the term contracts for surface dressing 2008.

SURFACE DRESSING FOR THE 2008 SUMMER SEASON

Division	Amount (Issued as at 30 June 2008)
Northern Division	£800,000
Southern Division	£440,000,
Eastern Division	Nil
Western Division	£570,000
Total	£1,810,000

I should, however, explain that the surface dressing season will run until August 2008, and it is expected that the total value of surfacing dressing completed in 2008, will be around £3.7 million.

In addition, a sizeable proportion of the surface dressing activity is carried out by the agency's internal contractor, Roads Service Direct. There is no associated contractual value for this in-house work.

Residents Parking Schemes in Belfast

Mr Spratt asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the proposed residents parking scheme for areas of Belfast. (AQW 8578/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service extended the informal consultation period, in the first five areas under consideration for Residents' Parking Schemes, to 30 June 2008 and an assessment of the responses received is ongoing.

It is likely that the proposals will not be supported by the residents in any of the five areas under consideration. If that proves to be the case, Roads Service will then move on to consider schemes proposed for other areas.

However, Roads Service will continue to work with the five areas under consideration to find the best way forward in tackling the problems that all-day parking causes for the residents.

Flooding Risks

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development what measures he plans to reduce flooding risks in all areas which have proved susceptible to flooding over the past ten years, and to detail his plans for each area. (AQW 8601/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: Responsibility for the drainage infrastructure is shared between my Department's Roads Service, Northern Ireland Water (NIW), and DARD's Rivers Agency.

The Rivers Agency has taken the lead in the formulation of procedures, which has resulted in the development of Best Practice Guidelines and the Flooding Hotspot list, and for the liaison and co-ordination of the emergency response for localised flooding events.

The Flooding Hotspots register includes a list of key flooding locations across the North, identified by NIW, Rivers Agency and Roads Service. It also notes the nominated lead agency for dealing with the problem at each location. The criteria for inclusion on the Hotspot list require more than one agency to be involved and a history of flooding at a particular location. As you might expect, the problems at these locations are not always easy to resolve, i.e. are prohibitively expensive, relatively serious, or the

solution may not be immediately obvious and requires liaison between agencies. The flooding hotspot list is continually updated, as new locations are added and problem locations are dealt with.

With regard to my Department, Roads Service has emergency plans to deal with flooding related incidents, including details of where the risk of flooding is greatest, to ensure that a 24 hours, 7 days a week response service is in place. Roads Service also makes preparations in response to early warning of heavy rain, issued by the Met Office, to ensure, as far as is practicable, that it is ready to deal with the impact of adverse weather.

These preparations include putting operational staff on standby, checking that drainage outlets/culverts at identified hotspots are clear from debris, and checking the readiness of emergency equipment and stocks of sandbags.

Regarding preventative maintenance, Roads Service aims to inspect and clean, where necessary, all gullies in urban areas twice each year. Gullies in rural areas are inspected and cleaned, if necessary, once each year. This policy ensures that a reasonable level of maintenance is carried out to drainage systems, taking account of the Department's finite funding and staff resource levels.

NIW is continuing with its infrastructure improvement projects which will contribute to the long-term solution to local flood prevention. NIW is currently constructing the £126 million Belfast Sewer Project, which will substantially reduce the risk of flooding in the Greater Belfast area when it is completed in 2009. It is also undertaking a programme of 108 Drainage Area Studies across the North to identify improvements required to sewerage networks to reduce the risk of flooding and to meet environmental requirements. The sewer improvement recommendations resulting from these studies will be included in a construction programme requiring a total capital investment in excess of £300 million. However, given other funding priorities, the bulk of the construction expenditure is expected to be in the period beyond 2010.

Following the widespread flooding in June 2007 it was recognised that in more severe emergencies where a multi-agency response is required (i.e. more than the 3 main drainage organisations), wider co-ordination is necessary. This co-ordination can best be achieved by councils through the local resilience fora to ensure integration with the regional structures and coordination of a local response. The Belfast Resilience Forum is already established, the others, including the Northern Resilience Forum, are currently being developed.

Street Lighting Scheme for the Coast Road Area in Larne

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to his answer to AQW 2594/08, for an update on the street lighting scheme for the Coast Road area of Larne. (AQW 8610/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: Roads Service is arranging a meeting with a number of Councillors and the Chief Executive from Larne Borough Council. This meeting will be arranged for a suitable time that best demonstrates an innovative low level LED bollard lighting solution to illuminate the footway at Drain's Bay, Larne, without detracting from the Black Arch.

If this solution is acceptable, every effort will be made to have the lighting installed before winter 2008.

Traffic-Calming Measures in the Alexander Road Area of Carrickfergus

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the progress made in relation to traffic calming measures in the Alexander Road area of Carrickfergus; and when this work is due to commence. (AQW 8612/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that there are proposals for traffic calming measures at Alexander Road, Downshire Gardens, Carrickburn Road, Castleburn Road and Trailcock Road, Carrickfergus. The implementation of any such scheme is subject to the successful completion of residents' consultation and the legislative process. I understand that a number of residents of Downshire Gardens have indicated their opposition to traffic calming in their area.

Roads Service will now write to all households on Downshire Gardens to ascertain the level of local support. I have asked that the Divisional Roads Manager to write to you when the outcome of this consultation is known.

Departmental Response to Increasing Fuel Costs

Mrs Long asked the Minister for Regional Development what assessment he has made of the impact of the increase in (i) fuel costs; and (ii) fuel duty on the departmental budget and the realisation of efficiency targets; and what action he has taken to mitigate against these increased costs. (AQW 8628/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: My department anticipated increased fuel costs and fuel

duty when preparing spending proposals for Budget 2008-2011. An element of these increased costs has already been reflected in the departmental budget.

DRD is currently assessing the impact of the latest fuel costs and fuel duty on the departmental budget and the need to submit bids in the September 2008 Monitoring Round.

At this stage it is not expected that the increase in fuel costs will affect my department's ability to meet its efficiency targets.

Fencing Around the Kilcooley Estate in Bangor

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans he has in relation to fencing around the Kilcooley Estate, Bangor. (AQW 8644/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: I understand that the fencing around the Kilcooley Estate, Bangor, was erected by the roads authority at the time of the construction of the Belfast Road/West Circular Road, Bangor. This was prior to the creation of my Department's Roads Service, in 1973. It is believed that the fence was erected to provide accommodation works, delineation of the road boundary and to afford protection to footway users, where there is a difference in level between the footway and the adjoining property.

Responsibility for the maintenance of fences provided as accommodation works, normally reverts to the landowner abutting the road. While the Housing Executive is the current owner of this land, neither they nor the Department for Social Development have any records of responsibility for the fencing being transferred to them and they have not carried out any maintenance to the fencing, since its erection.

While Roads Services does not believe it is the owner of the fence, it has agreed, in the interests of road safety and on a without prejudice basis, that it will maintain the fence, where there is a perceived risk to road users.

Also, while Roads Service does not accept responsibility for the fencing at other parts, and has no plans to replace it, discussions with the Housing Executive will continue, in an effort to establish longer term maintenance or removal options. I have asked Roads Service to liaise with you directly on these options, before discussing them with the Housing Executive.

Proposed Roundabout at Maryland Crossroads Between Moneyreagh and Belfast

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister for Regional Development if the Roads Service has any plans to construct a roundabout at the Maryland crossroads between Moneyreagh and Belfast. (AQW 8645/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised me that it has recently completed a route study on the A23, Moneyreagh/Ballygowan Road. A number of potential schemes were identified to improve the safety and efficiency of the route, with Merrylands crossroads identified as one of the locations which may benefit from an improvement scheme.

Further development of proposals is now required to determine the most appropriate measures for the Merrylands crossroads. Due to the close proximity of properties, including Marylands Industrial Estate, to this junction, it is unlikely that a roundabout would be considered feasible.

It should be noted that route studies are for feasibility purposes only, with no guarantee that proposals will be implemented.

Caravan Park in Ballyhalbert

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development how many developers have to provide for a footpath within their planning application from the caravan park towards the mini-roundabout in Ballyhalbert. (AQW 8661/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it is now a requirement that any significant planning application for properties along the frontage of Shore Road, between the disused caravan park and the mini roundabout at High Street, must provide footways along their frontage.

Roads Service records show that at least 20 individual planning applications have been submitted over the past 12 years in the vicinity. A number of these would be in respect of single dwellings. Taking account of the limitations of the historic information available, the best estimate is that three of these applications have been required to make footway provision.

Drainage System on Killynether Road

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development further to correspondence with his Department, why has the Department delayed their

response to the Rivers Agency request for information of the drainage system of Killynether Road which had been requested 3 months ago. (AQW 8663/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: Officials in my Department's Roads Service have advised that they did not receive a request from Rivers Agency, for information on the drainage system at Killynether Road.

However, I can confirm that following a site meeting at Killynether Road to investigate the flooding problem, Rivers Agency advised Roads Service on the size of pipe required for a new road crossing to accommodate the run-off water.

This improvement scheme has been included on Roads Service's list of proposed schemes and it is hoped that it will be implemented before the onset of Autumn/Winter 2008, taking account of the availability of funding at that time.

Northern Ireland Water

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development further to AQW 6416, how many breaks in the water supply have occurred in each parliamentary constituency in the last 12 months. (AQW 8666/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that the information held in relation to this matter is inclusive of the geographical areas of the north of Ireland. NIW holds comprehensive interruption records, of duration greater than three hours, against office and depots for regulatory purposes. The number of interruptions to the water supply during the 12 month period to May 2008 is shown in the table below:

Local Area Office	All Interruptions >3hrs (1 Jun 07 to 31 May 08)
Antrim	47
Ards/Bangor	108
Armagh	82
Ballykeel	54
Clogher/Ballygawley	61
Coleraine	78
Downpatrick	80
Enniskillen	29
Londonderry	67
Lisburn	43
Magherafelt	52

Local Area Office	All Interruptions >3hrs (1 Jun 07 to 31 May 08)
Newry/Seagoe	151
Omagh/Strabane	97
Belfast/Carrickfergus	149
Total	1,098

In addition to this, NIW's contractors carry out other planned interruptions to supplies, associated with its Capital Works Programme. However, these cannot be broken down into parliamentary constituencies. The number of planned interruptions to water supplies during the 12 month period to May 2008 is shown in the table below based on water mains rehabilitations contracts across North, South East and West areas.

	All Interruptions >3hrs (1 Jun 07 to 31 May 08)
North	77
South East	730
West	2
Total	809
Grand Total	1,907

Offences Against Traffic Wardens

Mr Gallagher asked the Minister for Regional Development the number of occasions that traffic wardens have instigated court proceedings against members of the public for alleged offences against them in the course of carrying out their duties on behalf of the Department; and the number of cases that have been (a) successfully prosecuted; and (b) otherwise determined by the courts. (AQW 8680/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service does not maintain details of Traffic Attendants who have instigated court proceedings against members of the public for alleged offences. However, NCP Services Ltd, who employ the Traffic Attendants, have advised Roads Service, that there have been two offences against Traffic Attendants that have led to court proceedings, both resulting in successful prosecutions.

Culvert at Movilla Road in Newtownards

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development to explain the delay in the Roads Service contacting the Rivers Agency with the information, requested on Good Friday this year, in relation to the

pipe that crosses the Movilla Road in Newtownards. (AQW 8699/08)

The Minister for Regional Development:

Officials from my Department's Roads Service have advised that negotiations have taken place with officials from the Rivers Agency, regarding the culvert that crosses the Movilla Road in Newtownards. The outcome of these negotiations is that Roads Service will replace the existing stone culvert with a new pipe, set to levels agreed with Rivers Agency. This will enable the adjacent landowner to carry out the remedial work that is required on his drain, under the instruction of Rivers Agency.

This should result in a resolution of flooding problems, which have occurred at this location during spells of very heavy rainfall.

Roads Service plans to carry out their work within the next two months.

Weed Growth in Rural Areas

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development what steps he is taking to eradicate weeds along road edges to prevent Hogweed affecting nearby residents. (AQW 8700/08)

The Minister for Regional Development:

Officials from my Department's Roads Service have advised that they normally control weed growth in rural areas, by mowing roadside verges, prior to the weed flowering/seeding season, between May and June. A second cut is normally undertaken at the end of the summer.

Chemical control of weeds is undertaken for kerbed and paved areas. It is normally carried out on an annual basis in spring, with any significant re-growth being dealt with as necessary.

Spraying of highway surfaces or edges is carried out by trained personnel, in accordance with advice from the manufacturers of the products used and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, using the minimum treatment necessary, compatible with required results.

Water Loss at the Clea Lakes at Shrigley and Killyleagh

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development what steps he has taken to address acute water loss at the Clea lakes at Shrigley and Killyleagh, where water levels are already two feet below the minimum level. (AQW 8701/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: I have not taken any steps to address acute water loss at the

lakes at Shrigley and Killyleagh, as Northern Ireland Water are not responsible for extracting water from the lakes.

Responsibility for water level management in the lakes currently rests with the private land owners. I have been advised by DARD Rivers Agency that they have received written confirmation that the current controller of the water levels of the lakes, is content to relinquish control. Subsequently work is ongoing to finalise the formal legal transfer to Rivers Agency.

Once formal transfer has been completed, and subject to Drainage Council approval, control of water levels by Rivers Agency should provide for more consistent water management for drainage purposes.

Meeting at Innishmore and Benown, Killyleagh

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline the outcome of the meeting with NI Water and departmental officials that took place at Innishmore and Benown in Killyleagh earlier this year. (AQW 8702/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that following the site meeting earlier this year it was agreed that a CCTV inspection of the public sewer would be carried out. As a result of the inspection, it was confirmed that desilting of the local sewer system was necessary. This has been completed and it is understood the problem of sewage flooding has been alleviated.

NIW also advised that a Drainage Area Study for the overall Killyleagh sewer system is planned and that this study will further assess flooding problems, such as this specific complaint at Innishmore and Benown, to ensure that any recommendation for major capital spending fully resolves hydraulic capacity in the system.

Northern Ireland's Carbon Footprint

Dr Farry asked the Minister for Regional Development what is the expected impact of the transport aspects of the current Investment Strategy on Northern Ireland's carbon footprint. (AQW 8706/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: The transport aspects of the current Investment Strategy will be influenced by the commitment to undertake a review of the Regional Transportation Strategy. That review will consider a range of issues including the impact of

sustainable development and environmental issues such as carbon and other emissions from transport.

Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland

Dr Farry asked the Minister for Regional Development what fuel price assumptions lie behind the transport aspects of the current Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland. (AQW 8707/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: The Investment Strategy is a high level framework to support the planning and delivery of the infrastructure programme. The transport aspects of the Strategy will all be subject to their own economic appraisals prior to delivery or implementation. The price of fuel will be an element that will feature at that time to inform the decision making process.

Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland

Dr Farry asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans there are to revise the current Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland in light of the rise in fuel prices. (AQW 8708/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: The Investment Strategy will be reviewed in each three year budget cycle with the next review planned before April 2011. This will provide an opportunity to reflect on the over arching direction, progress to date and modify strategic plans if necessary to reflect the impact of a sustained rise in fuel costs.

Repairing Vandalism to Bus Shelters

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister for Regional Development how much has been spent on repairing vandalism to bus shelters in each of the last five years. (AQW 8717/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: In January 2001 Roads Service and the majority of district councils entered into a 15-year contract with Adshel (the bus shelter provider) for the provision of approximately 1500 bus shelters throughout the council areas involved. The provision and maintenance of these shelters are funded by Adshel through advertising revenue and at no cost to the Department. The contract covers the vast majority of the North bus shelters and the Department has no knowledge of the costs incurred by Adshel in carrying out their contractual commitments.

In addition to the above contract, Adshel installed a small number of bus shelters for Translink. This was funded through the Rural Transport Fund and under

the terms of the contract Translink paid for any related vandalism costs. The associated vandalism costs are as follows.

2003/04	£1,815
2004/05	£600
2005/06	£2,103
2006/07	£165
2007/08	£2,200

Illegal Signage

Mr B Wilson asked the Minister for Regional Development on how many occasions the Roads Service has used Article 87 of the Roads Order to prosecute bodies for illegally erecting signs within the curtilage of the road in each district council area. (AQW 8723/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: Officials from my Department's Roads Service have advised that they have been successful in securing four prosecutions in 2007/8, for the erection of unlawful advertising signs. Although all of these were located within the Belfast area, the overall beneficial affect of these prosecutions is expected to impact on other areas across the North.

Northern Ireland Water

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the proposal to centralise Telemetry Services in Northern Ireland Water to a single location; and to outline the criteria being used to select a specific site. (AQW 8725/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that it has completed the initial phase of the rationalisation of its Telemetry Services at a central location by amalgamating the duties previously performed at Altnagelvin, Derry and Ballymena at the Altnagelvin Telemetry Centre site, and the amalgamation of the Belfast and Craigavon duties at the Belfast, Westland House, Telemetry Centre site.

NIW is currently working on the vision for its future structure and completing its strategic planning in respect of its office and depot accommodation needs. This is a substantial amount of work and the elements contributing to the decision on the location of the centralised site for the Telemetry function will be included in this decision.

The centralisation of telemetry services will provide benefits for NIW and its customers, including standardised telemetry practice, improved monitoring services and savings on manpower costs. Therefore, in order to select the most appropriate location, the main criteria being considered are value for money and the location of functions and key decision makers. Other criteria also being considered include: the current telemetry coverage of physical assets and monitoring points; minimising the impact on telemetry staff; the ownership of Telemetry Centre premises and facilities; and the location of the Telemetry Development and Configuration Centre.

Northern Ireland Water

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Regional Development when staff working in Telemetry Services in Northern Ireland Water had a pay review; and to outline the other companies against which their pay was compared. (AQW 8727/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that there are 2 groups of staff who work within Telemetry Services in NIW who are subject to separate pay agreements.

The industrial employees are subject to the terms of a collective pay bargaining process which is subject to an annual review with effect from 1 July each year. Agreement has been reached with the industrial trade unions to apply a 3.2% uplift to all current pay and allowances covered by the collective pay agreement with effect from 1 July 2007. NIW expects the 2008 pay negotiations to commence in the coming weeks.

The non-industrial employees are subject to the terms of a collective pay bargaining process which is subject to an annual review with effect from 1 August each year. However the current pay agreement is tied into a 3-year pay agreement which runs from 1 August 2006 to 31 July 2009 and will not be subject for an annual review until 2009.

However negotiations between the company and the Water Group of Trade Unions on the terms of a new grading and pay structure are ongoing at present.

Local Postal Services

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Regional Development what consideration has been given and what progress has been made by his Department to utilise the Post Office as a source, agency or outlet for the delivery of its services as outlined in the May 2008 report of the Assembly's Ad Hoc Committee, 'Report of the Committee's Consideration of, and Proposals

for, Partnership that could Enhance the Economic Case for Viable Local Postal Services'. (AQW 8740/08)

The Minister for Regional Development:

The Ad Hoc Committee on Local Postal Services' Report made a number of recommendations to the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (DBERR) concerning the future of Postal Services and the Post Office network. Junior Minister Donaldson and Junior Minister Kelly wrote to Executive Ministers on 21 April asking them to consider whether any further public services could be delivered through post offices.

The Department for Regional Development has been unable to identify any services that could be delivered through Post Offices. We will continue to look at opportunities as they arise to consider whether any new public service could be delivered through the Post Office although these would be subject to the appropriate procurement policy.

Planning Framework and Shared Space

Dr Farry asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans he has to review the Northern Ireland planning framework to ensure that it maximises the potential to create shared space. (AQW 8747/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: AQW 8747/08

I [Conor Murphy, DRD] am answering this question as I have responsibility for the Regional Development Strategy.

The Regional Development Strategy (RDS) includes guidance in relation to shared space. It highlights the need to support the development of shared places which are accessible to all members of the community. The RDS is presently the subject of a major review which is planned for completion by the Spring of 2010.

Northern Ireland Water

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development what work is currently being carried out by Northern Ireland Water in Rasharkin; and when is this work due to be completed. (AQW 8751/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that preparatory work was initiated for the Rasharkin flood alleviation scheme, work beginning 23 June 2008, with a view to construction beginning in earnest following the July holidays on 4 August 2008. It had been hoped to commence before this date following

successful resolution of the pipe route with local landowners. However several did not avail of a clause to permit NIW early entry prior to the statutory 90-day notification period, so that period has had to run its course to mid July. In the absence of any objections, work will begin after that period. Most of the work is in fields, but any residents or businesses affected by work in roads will be notified in advance.

Rasharkin is also currently benefiting from a watermain improvement scheme that has a rolling programme to replace 37km of watermains in the area at a total cost of £4 million. This may affect some of Main Street but the majority of work is in the areas surrounding Rasharkin village.

Disabled Access to Public Transport

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development what provision is made in the Department's budget to provide increased access to, and usage of, public transport by people with disabilities. (AQW 8763/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: To provide increased access to, and usage of, public transport by people with disabilities my Department has made the following provisions in its budget:

Programme	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
Transport Programme for People with Disabilities	£4.63m	£4.63m	£4.63m
Upgrade of all railway stations and halts to meet accessibility standards	£8.65m	£1.32m	nil

In addition, provision has been made for the following programmes which are designed to offer significant benefit to people with disabilities:

Programme	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
Concessionary Fares Scheme	£22.05m	£28.95m	£30.02m
Rural Transport Fund	£3.75m	£3.75m	£3.75m

Also of benefit to people with disabilities are:

- the purchase of trains which are fully accessible to people with disabilities at a cost of £95 million (over next five years); and,
- the purchase of new buses which are fully accessible to people with disabilities at a cost of £45 million (over next three years)

Disabled Access to Public Transport

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development what action is he taking to provide increased access to, and usage of, public transport by people with disabilities. (AQW 8765/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department published the Accessible Transport Strategy for Northern Ireland 2015 which sought to address a wide range of barriers that impede use of the transport system by older people and people with disabilities. These barriers include physical, attitudinal or psychological, the availability of information, the type of services and affordability. The Strategy is being implemented through action plans containing measures to overcome these barriers. The Action Plan for 2007/09 was recently endorsed by the Executive and will be published shortly.

Old A1 Newry to Dundalk Road

Mr Brady asked the Minister for Regional Development if he will review the protected route status of the of the old A1 Newry to Dundalk Road. (AQW 8767/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: Officials from my Department's Roads Service have advised that they will review the protected route status of the old A1 Newry to Dundalk road.

Parking Surveys in Belfast

Mr Spratt asked the Minister for Regional Development which streets in (i) Lisburn Road; (ii) Lower Malone Road; and (iii) Stranmillis, are initial parking surveys to take place. (AQW 8777/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: In relation to AQW8777/08, my Department's Roads Service have advised that initial parking surveys will be carried out as detailed in the following table:

Lisburn Road	Lower Malone Road	Stranmillis
Adelaide Avenue	Cussick Street	Chlorine Gardens
Ashley Avenue	Eglantine Avenue	Colenso Parade
Ashley Drive	Eglantine Gardens	Elaine Street
Ashley Mews	Eglantine Place	Landsleer Street
Belgravia Avenue	Malone Avenue	Lennoxvale
Brookland Street	Malone Road	Mount Pleasant
Chadwick Street	Wellesley Avenue	Pretoria Street
Donnybrook Street	Wellington Lane	Ridgeway Street
Edinburgh Street	Wellington Park	Riverview Street
Ethel Street	Wellington Park Avenue	Sanhurst Drive
Fane Street	Wellington Park Mews	Sandhurst Gardens
Great Northern Street	Wellington Park Terrace	Sandymount Street
Lisburn Road	Lower Malone Road	Stranmillis
Lisburn Avenue	Windsor Avenue	St Albans Gardens
Lorne Street	Windsor Avenue North	St Ives Gardens
Lower Windsor Avenue		Strandview Street
Meadowbank Place		Stranmillis Court
Meadowbank Street		Stranmillis Gardens
Melrose Street		Stranmillis Mews
Mount Prospect Park		Stranmillis Park
Northbrook Gardens		Stranmillis Road
Northbrook Street		Stranmillis Street
Rathcool Street		
Rathdrum Street		
Rathgar Street		
Sandringham Street		
Sloan Crescent		
Surrey Street		
Tates Avenue		
Ulsterville Avenue		
Ulsterville Drive		
Ulsterville Gardens		
Ulsterville Place		
Windsor Drive		
Windsor Road		

In regard to AQW 8778/08, I understand that initial surveys to establish the extent of the parking problems in these areas are programmed to be undertaken during September / October 2008. These surveys will establish any parking problems and whether they can be addressed by the introduction of residents' parking schemes. If residents parking schemes are proposed, it

will be early 2009 before consultation with residents would commence.

It should be noted that residents' parking schemes are unlikely to be proposed for an area where the parking demand by non-residents is not high, or residents have adequate opportunities to park.

In relation to AQW 8780/08, initial surveys to assess the level of residential and non-residential parking in these areas were carried out during February 2006. An additional validation survey was also undertaken during March 2007 following the introduction of Decriminalised Parking Enforcement (DPE) in late 2006.

Consultants are currently working with Roads Service to produce indicative designs for the introduction of residents' parking schemes in these areas. This will enable informal consultation to commence, on proposals for the introduction of these schemes.

Parking Surveys in Belfast

Mr Spratt asked the Minister for Regional Development when will consultations for residents parking schemes commence in (i) Lisburn Road; (ii) Lower Malone Road; and (iii) Stranmillis.
(AQW 8778/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: In relation to AQW8777/08, my Department's Roads Service have advised that initial parking surveys will be carried out as detailed in the following table:

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Ashley Drive	Eglantine Gardens	Elaine Street
Ashley Mews	Eglantine Place	Landsleer Street
Belgravia Avenue	Malone Avenue	Lennoxvale
Brookland Street	Malone Road	Mount Pleasant
Chadwick Street	Wellesley Avenue	Pretoria Street
Donnybrook Street	Wellington Lane	Ridgeway Street
Edinburgh Street	Wellington Park	Riverview Street
Ethel Street	Wellington Park Avenue	Sanhurst Drive
Fane Street	Wellington Park Mews	Sandhurst Gardens
Great Northern Street	Wellington Park Terrace	Sandymount Street

Lisburn Road	Lower Malone Road	Stranmillis
Lisburn Avenue	Windsor Avenue	St Albans Gardens
Lorne Street	Windsor Avenue North	St Ives Gardens
Lower Windsor Avenue		Strandview Street
Meadowbank Place		Stranmillis Court
Meadowbank Street		Stranmillis Gardens
Melrose Street		Stranmillis Mews
Mount Prospect Park		Stranmillis Park
Northbrook Gardens		Stranmillis Road
Northbrook Street		Stranmillis Street
Rathcool Street		
Rathdrum Street		
Rathgar Street		
Sandringham Street		
Sloan Crescent		
Surrey Street		
Tates Avenue		
Ulsterville Avenue		
Ulsterville Drive		
Ulsterville Gardens		
Ulsterville Place		
Windsor Drive		
Windsor Road		

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In relation to AQW 8780/08, initial surveys to assess the level of residential and non-residential parking in these areas were carried out during February 2006. An additional validation survey was also undertaken during March 2007 following the introduction of Decriminalised Parking Enforcement (DPE) in late 2006.

Consultants are currently working with Roads Service to produce indicative designs for the introduction of residents' parking schemes in these areas. This will enable informal consultation to commence, on proposals for the introduction of these schemes.

Parking Surveys in Belfast

Mr Spratt asked the Minister for Regional Development what initial parking surveys and design processes have taken place for residents' parking schemes in (i) the Markets (East); (ii) Lower Ormeau Road; (iii) Holylands/University; (iv) Lower Lisburn Road; and (v) Donegall Road. (AQW 8780/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: In relation to AQW8777/08, my Department's Roads Service have advised that initial parking surveys will be carried out as detailed in the following table:

Lisburn Road	Lower Malone Road	Stranmills
Adelaide Avenue	Cussick Street	Chlorine Gardens
Ashley Avenue	Eglantine Avenue	Colenso Parade
Ashley Drive	Eglantine Gardens	Elaine Street
Ashley Mews	Eglantine Place	Landsleer Street
Belgravia Avenue	Malone Avenue	Lennoxvale
Brookland Street	Malone Road	Mount Pleasant
Chadwick Street	Wellesley Avenue	Pretoria Street
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Edinburgh Street	Wellington Park	Riverview Street
Ethel Street	Wellington Park Avenue	Sanhurst Drive
Fane Street	Wellington Park Mews	Sandhurst Gardens
Great Northern Street	Wellington Park Terrace	Sandymount Street
Lisburn Road	Lower Malone Road	Stranmills
Lisburn Avenue	Windsor Avenue	St Albans Gardens
Lorne Street	Windsor Avenue North	St Ives Gardens
Lower Windsor Avenue		Strandview Street
Meadowbank Place		Stranmillis Court
Meadowbank Street		Stranmillis Gardens
Melrose Street		Stranmillis Mews
Mount Prospect Park		Stranmillis Park
Northbrook Gardens		Stranmillis Road
Northbrook Street		Stranmillis Street
Rathcool Street		
Rathdrum Street		
Rathgar Street		
Sandringham Street		
Sloan Crescent		
Surrey Street		
Tates Avenue		
Ulsterville Avenue		
Ulsterville Drive		
Ulsterville Gardens		
Ulsterville Place		
Windsor Drive		
Windsor Road		

In regard to AQW 8778/08, I understand that initial surveys to establish the extent of the parking problems in these areas are programmed to be undertaken during September / October 2008. These surveys will establish any parking problems and whether they can be addressed by the introduction of residents' parking schemes. If residents parking schemes are proposed, it will be early 2009 before consultation with residents would commence.

It should be noted that residents' parking schemes are unlikely to be proposed for an area where the parking demand by non-residents is not high, or residents have adequate opportunities to park.

In relation to AQW 8780/08, initial surveys to assess the level of residential and non-residential parking in these areas were carried out during February 2006. An additional validation survey was also undertaken during March 2007 following the introduction of Decriminalised Parking Enforcement (DPE) in late 2006.

Consultants are currently working with Roads Service to produce indicative designs for the introduction of residents' parking schemes in these areas. This will enable informal consultation to commence, on proposals for the introduction of these schemes.

Water Charges

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development how much the average water charge is on bills issued. (AQW 8781/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that they calculate invoices for water charges either on the basis of the Net Annual Value (NAV) of the premises (unmeasured charges) or on the basis of water consumption recorded by a meter (measured charges). NIW also invoices its customers for sewerage charges, where the premises are connected to the public sewers.

The Net Annual Values of premises invoiced by NIW vary from less than £1,000 to over £100,000 and the calculated water charges vary depending on the NAV. NIW's first unmeasured annual bill run contained 28,667 bills. The average water charge was £109.50, the average sewerage charge was £108.09 and the total annual charge was £218.95 (including an average VAT charge of £1.36).

Measured customers' water charges depend on their water consumption. The largest water users use more than a million cubic meters per year and are billed on a monthly basis. Many customers use less than 100 cubic meters per year and are billed every six months so the disparity between invoice values

and invoice timing means that an average measured water bill is not representative of the bills received by the vast majority of NIW's customers. The tariff for 2008/09 for measured water is 95.53 pence per cubic meter. There is also a standing charge based on the supply pipe size diameter which varies between £63 and £1600 per year. Where applicable, measured sewerage charges are calculated on the assumption that 95% of water supplied is returned to sewer, unless the customer can demonstrate otherwise. The standing charge for sewerage varies between £31 and £800 for 2008/09 and the tariff for 2008/09 is 66.84 pence per cubic metre.

NIW is happy to work out the expected or average bills for individual accounts based on prior consumption history.

Discounts on Public Transport

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development why blind people are given full discount to use public transport, while partially sighted people are only given a 50% reduction. (AQW 8786/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: When the Concessionary Fares Scheme in the North was extended in 2004 to include half fare travel for people with disabilities, the Department used categories similar to those in the Transport Act 2000 which included that category of persons who were blind or partially sighted. However, in the North, the registered blind had been eligible for free travel since the introduction of the Scheme in 1978.

As part of the Comprehensive Spending Review I bid for the resources to provide free fares for the disabled. This would have included the partially sighted. Unfortunately, that bid was unsuccessful.

North West Gateway Initiative

Mr McElduff asked the Minister for Regional Development what engagement he has had with the North West Gateway Initiative; and what the focus of this initiative has been. (AQW 8787/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: As part of the OFMDFM lead North West Gateway Initiative my officials have been working with counterparts from the south to provide a strategic spatial framework for the North West. I will bring the spatial framework to Executive Colleagues shortly.

Royal National Institute for Deaf People

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development what discussions he has had with the Royal National Institute for Deaf People in relation to improvements to shared surface footpaths and roads. (AQW 8799/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: I can confirm that I have had no discussions to date, with the Royal National Institute for Deaf People.

However, my Department's Roads Service takes the needs of those with disabilities very seriously and works closely with officials in the Department for Social Development in matters of urban regeneration, such as Public Realm Schemes. The Belfast Public Realm – 'Streets Ahead' project has been designed in accordance with specifications, which include addressing the needs of disabled people.

Roads Service also has an ongoing programme of installing tactile cones at pedestrian crossings. These can assist both deaf and the visually impaired pedestrians to identify when it is safe to use the crossing.

Free Travel for Over 60s

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Regional Development what steps have been taken to ensure that the Smart Pass allowing free travel for pensioners is being recognised in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. (AQW 8800/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: Employees of transport operators on both sides of the border have been trained to recognise and differentiate between the Senior SmartPass, the 60 plus SmartPass and the South's Senior SmartPass. In the North, all three SmartPasses can be read electronically by Translink ticketing equipment.

Road Use

Mr Irwin asked the Minister for Regional Development for the average number of vehicles using, on a daily basis, the (i) A28 Armagh Newry Road; (ii) A3 Armagh Portadown Road; (iii) A29 Armagh Moy Road; (iv) A26 Armagh Killylea Road; and (v) A3 Monaghan Road. (AQW 8803/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: Officials from my Department's Roads Service have advised that some 270 traffic census sites are strategically located throughout the North, on both the major and minor road network. The annual average figure is calculated from information that is recorded for 365 days per year or for at least one week in every quarter of the year. The information is then published

in the Traffic and Travel Information Report, which presents the traffic volumes in a variety of formats for each site.

The most recent information on the daily average number of vehicles using the roads that you have specified was calculated in 2007 and is provided in the table below.

For your information, the road between Armagh and Killylea is the A28, and not the A26.

	Road No.	Description	Annual Average (5 day) Daily Traffic Count
(i)	A28	Armagh – Newry	10830
(ii)	A3	Armagh - Portadown (counter at Stoneybridge)	14322
	A3	Armagh – Portadown (counter at Armagh Rd, Portadown)	19261
(iii)	A29	Armagh - Moy	11312
(iv)	A28	Armagh - Killylea	4398
(v)	A3	Armagh - Monaghan	7171

UK Government White Paper ‘The Future of Air Transport’ 2003

Dr Farry asked the Minister for Regional Development what representations his Department made in the consultation process leading to the UK Government White Paper ‘The Future of Air Transport’ 2003. (AQW 8817/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department co-ordinated responses to the consultation from public and private bodies and individuals in the North and copied these to the Department for Transport but it did not make a separate representation. To inform the consultation process, my Department commissioned and published “The Northern Ireland Air Services Study”, a copy of which I have placed in the Assembly library.

Northern Ireland Water

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development when Northern Ireland Water will finish its co-ordination with Loch Cuan House in Newtownards, to enable it to fix the leaks in the water pipes in the Westwinds Estate, which have resulted in flooding in some parts of the estate. (AQW 8831/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that the

leaking valve near Loch Cuan House was repaired on the evening of Thursday 3 July. There was a short interruption to the local supply as a result.

School Buses

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Regional Development how many school buses operated by Translink were taken out of service over the last year, due to failures related to road safety. (AQW 8838/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: Translink does not operate a dedicated school bus fleet. However, I can confirm that no buses delivering school services were taken out of service over the last year due to failures related to road safety.

Rail Stop at Downhill in Coleraine

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans he has to introduce a rail stop at Downhill, Coleraine, particularly during the summer season to accommodate holiday makers going to and from beaches. (AQW 8840/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: At this time Northern Ireland Railways have no plans to reintroduce a rail stop at Downhill. The halt at Downhill was discontinued over 30 years ago due to a lack of patronage and it is considered that reintroduction of a stop would extend journey times and be detrimental to passengers presently travelling between Coleraine and Derry.

Traffic Management Schemes in Crumlin

Mr Burns asked the Minister for Regional Development what work is scheduled to be undertaken in Crumlin, Glenavy, Toome, Randalstown and Mallusk by NI Water and the Roads Service in July and August. (AQW 8846/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: The Department’s Roads Service has advised that there are a number of proposed Traffic Management schemes for the Crumlin area. Some elements of these schemes will commence during August, including the upgrading of lay-bys on Glenavy Road and Ballytromery Road, and the provision of footway links at Diamond Road. Northern Ireland Water (NIW) has advised that the reinstatement of pre-laid sewer pipe trenches will continue during July and August in the Crumlin area.

Roads Service has advised that there are no works scheduled to be undertaken in Glenavy in July and August. NIW has advised that the final reinstatement,

of an existing pipe track, in Main Street is planned for the week commencing 21 July 2008.

Roads Service and NIW have advised that there are no works scheduled to be undertaken in Toome during July and August.

Roads Service has advised that Traffic Calming proposals for Randalstown are currently being advertised in the local newspapers. As the summer closure of schools results in reduced traffic flows, works on the Barnish Road, Craigstown Road and Station Road will be carried out during August. Following the completion of these works the remainder of the Traffic Calming proposals for Randalstown will be undertaken. NIW has advised they plan to lay 400 metres of trunk watermain on the Randalstown Road, between the Rugby Club and the Enkelon Industrial Estate following Moleseye approval.

Roads Service has advised that during July and August work will continue on the M2 Improvement Scheme between Sandyknowes and Greencastle junctions.

Reconstruction of the Hightown Bridge will continue in conjunction with other main elements of the M2 scheme, including the lowering of the city bound carriageway under Hightown and Collin Bridges, and the associated alteration to road drainage, street lighting and motorway communication equipment. NIW has advised that they plan to lay 450 metres of storm sewer and 175 metres of foul sewer on Park Road and Antrim Road, Mallusk.

Public Transport Services

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Regional Development if the contractual arrangements between Translink and other operators that provide public transport services, provide equality to the (i) operators and (ii) public who use the services. (AQW 8847/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: I have been informed by Translink that the only contractual arrangement it has to provide public transport services is with Chambers Coach Hire Ltd. As such, the question of inequality as between operators does not arise. I can confirm that the service given to the public is the same as that on equivalent services provided directly by Translink.

New Road Linking Ballyhampton to the Antiville Road in Larne

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Regional Development when the new road linking

Ballyhampton to the Antiville Road in Larne will be completed. (AQW 8854/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the new road to which you refer, is known as the Larne West Spine Road. This is a developer-led housing distributor road, and will run west of Larne, eventually linking Millbrook to Killyglen.

Approximately two thirds of the Larne West Spine Road is already constructed. However, I am unable to provide an exact completion date of the remaining stretch, as the construction of is the responsibility of individual developers.

Northern Ireland Railways' Employees

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development if Northern Ireland Railways' employees are covered by the European Union Working Time directive; and if this directive is adhered to as standard practice. (AQW 8857/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: Translink advise me that Northern Ireland Railways' employees are covered by the European Union Working Time directive which is adhered to as standard practice.

Northern Ireland Railways' Employees

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of (i) the adequacy of a four hour rest between shifts for Northern Ireland Railways' employees; (ii) the possibility of such a short break posing a danger to public safety; and (iii) whether a break of this length complies with the European Union Working Time directive. (AQW 8863/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: Translink advise me that shift rostering arrangements within Northern Ireland Railways are designed to be fully compliant with the European Union Working Time directive resulting in a normal minimum rest period between shifts of 11 hours. Under specific abnormal circumstances e.g. weekly shift changeover or as a result of a major service disruption, this may be reduced to 8 hours.

Flooding in East Belfast

Mr Newton asked the Minister for Regional Development what steps he has taken to reduce the potential scale of flooding in East Belfast as experienced on 12 June 2007. (AQW 8873/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service have advised that the flooding which occurred in June 2007 was described by the Met Office as 'abnormal' and, that the storm water road gullies, drainage systems and watercourses were simply overwhelmed by the deluge of water.

This view was supported by the conclusions of an extensive study commissioned by DARD's Rivers Agency, following the flooding in June 2007. The recommendations of the study are currently being considered by all drainage providers with a view to implementing an integrated flood risk management strategy for East Belfast.

In addition to this study, prior to the flooding in June 2007, DARD's Rivers Agency had already been progressing two feasibility studies into possible drainage schemes in East Belfast. The design phase of a Flood Alleviation Scheme for a section of the Loop River system is expected to commence shortly, and the results of the East Belfast Feasibility Study are expected in autumn 2008.

Roads Service aim to inspect and clean storm water gullies in urban areas twice per year, and the scheduled maintenance operation for 2008 is ongoing. This policy ensures that a reasonable level of maintenance is carried out to the drainage system, whilst taking account of my Department's finite funding and staff resource levels.

Northern Ireland Water has advised that it is currently updating and reviewing a Drainage Area Study for the East Belfast Sewer Catchment. This study will assess the structural, hydraulic capacity and environmental needs for the catchment. The study will take account of out of sewer flooding locations and make recommendations for alleviation of this flooding. However, these recommendations will only identify upgrading works to cater for normal rainfall patterns. It will not be possible to provide enlargement of the pipework within the public sewer system to cater for excessive rainfall, events similar to those experienced in June 2007. It is expected that the review of the East Belfast Drainage Study will be completed by April 2009 and that the anticipated upgrading works will be implemented in the following years subject to the current expenditure review.

Traffic Congestion

Mr Burns asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the current level of traffic congestion at Sandyknowes roundabout and on the M2. (AQW 8895/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: AQW 8895/08

In relation to AQW 8895/08, my Department's Roads Service has advised that at present, on the Belfast-bound carriageway of the M2 approaching the Sandyknowes junction, there is only minor congestion for a short 15 minute period prior to 8.00am. Similarly on the country-bound carriageway of the M2 approaching the Greencastle junction and on the up hill section, there is only minor congestion during the evening peak period. This pattern is expected to continue throughout the summer months.

During the current closure of the Hightown Bridge, traffic is being diverted via a signed diversionary route. In addition to this, the measures that I announced on 7 January 2008 have helped to alleviate disruption in the Glengormley and Mallusk areas, and also reduced the level of traffic congestion on Sandyknowes Roundabout. At present, there is only minor congestion on Sandyknowes Roundabout and its approaches during the morning and evening peaks.

As with any section of road, there is always the potential for an unforeseen incident to occur, which could lead to serious congestion. Roads Service will continue to actively monitor traffic management measures connected with works on the M2 motorway, provide a free breakdown recovery service and co-ordinate work with contractors, to ensure that a minimum of two lanes are available for traffic in each direction.

In relation to AQW 8896/08, my Department's Roads Service has advised the following progress on the work taking place to upgrade the M2

Longlands Bridge & Collin Bridge

The former Longlands and Collin Bridges have been demolished, and traffic is presently running on a newly constructed half of each of the replacement bridges, under traffic light control.

Hightown Bridge

Construction of the new Hightown Bridge is ongoing. The new bridge foundations, central pier and abutments have been constructed and steel bridge beams placed. The reinforced concrete bridge deck, which will accommodate a right turning lane at the Mallusk Road / Hightown Road junction, is currently being constructed.

Bellevue Bridge

Work is presently underway to upgrade the existing substandard parapets of Bellevue Bridge.

M2 country-bound at Greenisland

Work is underway to upgrade the existing bridge parapets on the country-bound carriageway of the M2 at Greenisland Interchange. This is to facilitate construction of an additional traffic lane on the country-bound carriageway through the junction.

M2 Belfast-bound road works

Work has recently begun to lower the Belfast-bound carriageway of the M2 under the Hightown and Collin Bridges.

The overall M2 improvements scheme is presently on target for completion in summer 2009.

M2 Upgrade

Mr Burns asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the work taking place to upgrade the M2, including an estimated completion date. (AQW 8896/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: In relation to AQW 8895/08, my Department's Roads Service has advised that at present, on the Belfast-bound carriageway of the M2 approaching the Sandyknowes junction, there is only minor congestion for a short 15 minute period prior to 8.00am. Similarly on the country-bound carriageway of the M2 approaching the Greencastle junction and on the up hill section, there is only minor congestion during the evening peak period. This pattern is expected to continue throughout the summer months.

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The overall M2 improvements scheme is presently on target for completion in summer 2009.

Blasting on the A1 Road

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister for Regional Development for the full schedule of blasting on the A1 road. (AQW 8902/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: The contractor undertaking this work has provided Roads Service with the schedule below, detailing blasting operations at Cloghogue.

ROADS SERVICE DESIGN BUILD FINANCE OPERATE PACKAGE 2 : SCHEME 1 - BEECH HILL TO CLOGHOGUE

Schedule of Planned Rock Blasting at Cloghogue, Chancellors Road and Derrybeg Lane		
Week beginning	Date	Comment
Monday - 7 July 2008		Road expected to be closed on Wednesday and Friday for up to 20 minutes between 12.00am and 4.00pm - delays expected.
Monday - Derrybeg Lane	Wednesday - Cloghogue (south)	
Friday - Derrybeg Lane and Cloghogue (south)		
Monday - 14 July 2008		Although UIE will be closed this week, work will continue on blast drilling in all areas to make provision for future blasting operations.
No Blasts this week due to closure of Ulster Industrial Explosives (UIE) for holidays		

Schedule of Planned Rock Blasting at Cloghogue, Chancellors Road and Derrybeg Lane		
Week beginning	Date	Comment
Monday - 21 July 2008		Road expected to be closed up to 20 minutes between 12.00am and 4.00pm on the day that blasting takes place at Cloghogue (north) - delays expected.
Monday - Derrybeg Lane. Wednesday – Derrybeg Lane Friday - Derrybeg Lane		
Note: - Blasting will also start at Cloghogue (north) this week, but the Construction Contractor cannot be more specific currently and advises that only 1 blast at that location is anticipated.		
Monday - 28 July 2008		Road expected to be closed on Monday, Wednesday and Friday for up to 20 minutes between 12.00am and 4.00pm - delays expected.
Monday, Wednesday, and Friday; - Cloghogue (north), Chancellors Road and Derrybeg Lane		
Monday 4 August 2008 and following		The Construction Contractor advise that it is its intention to continue blasting at Cloghogue, Chancellor’s Road and Derrybeg Lane at frequent intervals over the next 12 months or so. Since the operations at both Cloghogue and Chancellors Road have the potential to impact significantly on the travelling public, the blasting operations at these locations will be restricted to Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays between 12:00 noon and 4:00 pm to enable the travelling public to better plan their journeys. On these occasions the road is expected to be closed for up to 20 minutes between 12.00am and 4.00pm - delays expected. Rock blasting remote from traffic on the A1 Newry Bypass (i.e. in the Derrybeg Lane area) may also take place on any day from Monday-Friday inclusive.
The Construction Contractor advised that a detailed programme for blasting beyond the current 4-week period (ie after week beginning 28 July) has not yet been prepared and is subject to many factors out with its control, including the availability of explosives from UIE, availability of PSNI personnel and the railway timetable, and progress on processing and clearing previously blasted material.		

Capital Works Projects

Mr Gallagher asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) what firms have been placed on the select list for tenders for Capital Works Projects in (a) 2005-2006, (b) 2006-2007 and (c) 2007-2008; and (ii) what firms have applied to be placed on the select list but have not been successful. (AQW 8924/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department’s Roads Service does not have a select list for tenders for Capital Works projects.

The A6 Dualling Scheme from Derry/Londonderry to Dungiven

Ms Anderson asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the deliberations in relation to the preferred route for the A6 dualling scheme from Derry/Londonderry to Dungiven. (AQW 8942/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department’s Roads Service is currently examining possible alignments for the proposed A6 Derry to Dungiven dual carriageway. These potential routes were communicated to the public during May 2008, through a series of Community Information Events. The public feedback received from these events, in conjunction with the results of a wide range of other surveys and assessments, will allow Roads Service to comprehensively explore all possible routes. This examination should allow an announcement of the ‘preferred route’ to be made in spring 2009. Once the alignment of this route has been finalised, an in-depth assessment will allow the publication of draft statutory procedures and an Environmental Statement in autumn 2010.

Roads Service expects that the timing for the construction of the dual carriageway will be determined by a Public Inquiry into the scheme held during 2011, and that planning will be completed in early 2012. The scheme is proposed to be delivered within the period 2013 to 2018.

Cycle Lanes

Mrs Long asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) how many miles of cycle lanes there are (a) in total; and (b) by constituency; and (ii) how many additional miles of cycle lanes have been added in each of the last three financial years (a) in total; and (b) by constituency. (AQW 8947/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: With regard to AQW 8947/08, my Department’s Roads Service does not maintain details of cycle lanes on a parliamentary constituency basis. However, the table below provides details, where available, of the total miles of cycle lanes in each Council area, where cycle lanes are in operation, and the additional miles of cycle lanes added in each of the last three financial years.

Council	Total Cycle Lanes (miles)	Miles of cycle lanes provided in		
		2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
Belfast	46.53	2.99	1.43	1.80
Carrickfergus	1.19	0.24	0	0
Castlereagh	12.67	2.32	0.25	3.86
Lisburn	21.64	0.31	1.73	2.21
Newtownabbey	12.00	0.62	0.88	0.24
North Down	11.71	1.09	0	0
Antrim	8.58	2.17	0	1.27
Ballymena	5.10	0	0	0.4
Coleraine	17.31	0.24	0.5	1.03
Limavady	6.90	0.44	0	0
Derry	18.00	1.93	1.20	2.20
Larne	1.24	0	0	0
Ballymoney	1.03	0	0	0.5
Craigavon	Not Available	0.63	0	0.07
Down	Not Available	0.18	0	0.31
Newry & Mourne	Not Available	5.46	1.49	0
Ards	Not Available	0	1.05	0.36
Banbridge	Not Available	0	0.42	0
Armagh	Not Available	0	0	0.12
Totals	163.90	18.62	8.95	14.37

In relation to AQW 8948/08, Roads Service does not maintain details of bus lanes on a parliamentary constituency basis. However, the table below provides details of the total miles of bus lanes in each Council area, where bus lanes are in operation, and the additional miles of bus lanes added in each of the last three financial years.

Council	Total Bus Lanes (Miles)	Miles of Bus lanes provided in		
		2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
Belfast	14.50	2.40	0	0.10
Carrickfergus	0	0	0	0
Castlereagh	1.40	0.30	0	0
Lisburn	4.10	0	2.10	0.20
Newtownabbey	2.70	0	0	1.40

Council	Total Bus Lanes (Miles)	Miles of Bus lanes provided in		
		2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
Antrim	0.01	0	0	0
Ballymena	0.21	0	0	0
Totals	22.92	2.70	2.10	1.70

Bus Lanes

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The Minister for Regional Development: With regard to AQW 8947/08, my Department's Roads Service does not maintain details of cycle lanes on a parliamentary constituency basis. However, the table below provides details, where available, of the total miles of cycle lanes in each Council area, where cycle lanes are in operation, and the additional miles of cycle lanes added in each of the last three financial years.

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Lisburn	21.64	0.31	1.73	2.21
Newtownabbey	12.00	0.62	0.88	0.24
North Down	11.71	1.09	0	0
Antrim	8.58	2.17	0	1.27
Ballymena	5.10	0	0	0.4
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Lisburn	4.10	0	2.10	0.20
Newtownabbey	2.70	0	0	1.40
Antrim	0.01	0	0	0
Ballymena	0.21	0	0	0
Totals	22.92	2.70	2.10	1.70

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Multi-Element Improvement for Annadale Flats

Mr Spratt asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to her answer to AQW 7551/08, how many of the 145 flats identified for the multi-element improvement scheme are currently 3 bedroom properties. (AQW 8302/08)

The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie): As these two questions are linked I shall answer them together. Of the 145 Housing Executive flats identified for multi-element improvement 45 are currently 3-bedroom. The waiting list for Annadale is predominately for singles, with only one family in housing stress requiring 3-bedroom accommodation.

The proportion of three bedroom accommodation proposed is considered sufficient for current needs.

Waterloo Place/Guildhall Square Public Realm Scheme

Ms Anderson asked the Minister for Social Development how she intends to utilize the new Procurement guidelines during the implementation of the Waterloo Place/Guildhall Square Public Realm scheme, and whether she plans to work with local communities when devising her implementation plans. (AQW 8408/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The Waterloo Place/Guildhall Square Public Realm scheme will revitalise an important part of Derry City Centre. The procurement guidelines will be used to support local inputs as far as possible and local communities will be involved.

Woodburn Housing Scheme in Carrickfergus

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Social Development what progress the Northern Ireland Housing Executive has made in relation to finding a new contractor to complete the Woodburn Housing Scheme in Carrickfergus. (AQW 8493/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The contractor previously responsible for the scheme in question, Ashley Decorators, has been wound up by the court. The Housing Executive has secured the 5 dwellings in which the contractor had been working but had not completed the required works. The Housing Executive is currently going through the normal procurement process required to get a new contractor appointed and on site and will seek to expedite the necessary works as quickly as possible.

Development at Hibernia Street, Holywood

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development what plans she has to complete the sale or transfer of public land in Hibernia Street, Holywood. (AQW 8536/08)

The Minister for Social Development: DSD officials are working with colleagues in DRD to bring forward a regeneration scheme which uses existing DRD owned land in Hibernia Street.

Development at Hibernia Street, Holywood

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development what action she is taking to tie down legal arrangements for the car park in Hibernia Street, Holywood. (AQW 8537/08)

The Minister for Social Development: DSD and DRD are working with solicitors from DFP to resolve a number of difficulties in relation to this development. Officials have briefed me on these issues and progress on discussions with our legal team. I have stressed to officials the need for urgency in resolution and have agreed to meet the developer to discuss progress

Development at Hibernia Street, Holywood

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development what progress the Department has made in the last year to resolving legal difficulties surrounding Hibernia Street in Holywood. (AQW 8538/08)

The Minister for Social Development: Progress has been made in relation to the form and nature of the proposed development contract and in relation to resolving errors and inconsistencies in relation to title to the various portions of land involved.

Development at Hibernia Street, Holywood

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development when the Department expects to have resolved all the difficulties surrounding the development at Hibernia Street, Holywood. (AQW 8539/08)

The Minister for Social Development: DSD and DRD are working with solicitors from DFP to resolve a number of difficulties in relation to this development. Although I would hope that these could be resolved in coming weeks I am not able to give a definitive date at this stage.

Social Housing Units in Belfast City Centre

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Social Development how many social housing units her Department expects to provide in or around Belfast city centre. (AQW 8545/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The Social Housing Development Programme for the next 5 years will provide 672 new homes within Belfast city centre. This will be complemented by re-lets of existing stock.

Fuel Allowances for People with Disabilities

Mr Adams asked the Minister for Social Development what plans she has to introduce a fuel allowance for people with disabilities. (AQW 8570/08)

The Minister for Social Development: Disabled people who satisfy the qualifying conditions are already included in the Winter Fuel Payment Scheme. Cold Weather Payments are also made to vulnerable groups, including those people who get a disability premium in their income support or income-based jobseeker's allowance regardless of age, when there is severe weather in their area.

Disabled people can receive disability benefits, and the disability premium in income-related benefits, in recognition of their extra costs. The care and mobility components in Disability Living Allowance for a person under 65 years old are used as broad indicators of the extra costs a disabled person has which include heating, laundry or special diets.

There are other schemes available to help with fuel costs such as the Warm Homes Scheme. Among the eligible groups for this Scheme are householders who claim disability related benefits such as Disability Living Allowance. This Scheme provides assistance towards insulating their homes with a grant of up to £850.

As a direct response to the recent rise in fuel prices I have established a Task Force to identify ways to help the most vulnerable in society. The Task Force will report back to me with recommendations before the end of the summer. On the basis of those recommendations I intend to have a set of practical and achievable proposals in place to bring to the Executive for consideration in the early Autumn.

Surplus Land at Breezemount Estate

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development why surplus land owned by the Housing Executive at Breezemount, North Down, was offered for sale to North Down Borough Council, rather than to a housing association for use as additional social housing. (AQW 8607/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The surplus land at Breezemount was not offered to a housing association because the Housing Executive assessment of need in the area showed that there is no requirement for additional social housing.

Housing Executive Applicants

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development how many Housing Executive applicants

have been in 'housing stress' in North Down, in each of the last 5 years. (AQW 8608/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The number of applicants in housing stress in North Down in each of the last five years was as follows:

2003/04	714
2004/05	730
2005/06	842
2006/07	978
2007/08	1,011

Departmental Response to Increasing Fuel Costs

Mrs Long asked the Minister for Social Development what assessment she has made of the impact of the increase in (i) fuel costs; and (ii) fuel duty on the departmental budget and the realisation of efficiency targets; and what action she has taken to mitigate against these increased costs. (AQW 8629/08)

The Minister for Social Development: Whilst the Department's fuel costs are regularly monitored, no formal assessment has been made to date of the impact of the increase in fuel costs and fuel duty on departmental budgets or efficiency targets. Staff are made aware – through the Energy Matters section on the local intranet – of the need to conserve energy in all our buildings.

My Department is also committed to delivering on 3 key sustainable development targets in relation to energy usage i.e. sourcing electricity requirements from renewable sources; reducing absolute carbon from fuel and electricity used in buildings; and increasing the energy efficiency of the buildings occupied in terms of fuel and electricity used per square metre of building floor area.

The most recent progress report against these targets indicates that the first 2 are being met, while the 3rd one is being actively pursued. The pursuit and achievement of good energy saving practices and the above targets, serves to mitigate against increased fuel costs, notwithstanding that increases would, in any case, have to be met from within existing budget baselines. In particular, the implementation of automatic electricity "power down" procedures this Autumn, is intended to help keep overall electricity usage down, thereby absorbing some of the increased costs anticipated.

Achieving Excellence in Construction (Egan Initiative)

Mr B Wilson asked the Minister for Social Development how many instances have occurred where contractors, that have been awarded tenders under Achieving Excellence in Construction (Egan Initiative), subcontracted these tenders to other contractors, since 2001. (AQW 8638/08)

The Minister for Social Development: Unfortunately the information requested is not readily available and could only be supplied at disproportionate cost.

Achieving Excellence in Construction (Egan Initiative)

Mr B Wilson asked the Minister for Social Development what is the average cost per home for heating replacement in Housing Executive houses under Achieving Excellence in Construction (Egan Initiative) for each year since the scheme's introduction in 2001. (AQW 8639/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The average cost per home for heating replacement in Housing Executive homes under Achieving Excellence in Construction (Egan Initiative) is:

2001/02	£3,125
2002/03	£3,259
2003/04	£3,694
2004/05	£3,927
2005/06	£4,187
2006/07	£4,753
2007/08	£4,905

Safety for Deaf and Blind Road Users

Mr Lunn asked the Minister for Social Development what proposals she is bringing forward to ensure the regeneration of town centres enhances the safety of deaf and blind road users. (AQW 8640/08)

The Minister for Social Development: My Department is responsible for town and city centre regeneration which includes public realm and environmental improvement schemes. As part of the design aspect of these schemes, there is an undertaking to consult widely including Disability Group representatives such as deaf and blind road users. Each scheme must also be Disability Discrimination Act compliant on completion and an

Equality Impact Assessment is normally carried out to ensure that the scheme meets guidelines on addressing disability and other equality issues.

The Department for Regional Development's Roads Service manages the implementation of a significant proportion of the public realm and environmental improvement schemes funded by my Department.

They ensure that the project is designed and implemented to conform to the required specifications including road safety for the blind, partially sighted and other disabled people.

In order to assist the visually impaired, Roads Service has an ongoing programme of installing tactile paving, tactile cones and also the use of audible signals, at pedestrian crossings, where this is deemed appropriate.

New Social Housing at Upper Crescent in Comber

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister for Social Development when it is anticipated that (i) construction of new social housing at Upper Crescent in Comber will conclude; and (ii) the Housing Executive will begin allocating these new homes. (AQW 8646/08)

The Minister for Social Development: This 50 house social housing scheme is scheduled for completion in February 2010. Houses will be handed over by the contractor on a phased basis with each phase pre-allocated some four weeks in advance.

Andersonstown Barracks Site

Mr P Maskey asked the Minister for Social Development for details of the original terms of the vesting order with which the Andersonstown barracks site was acquired by the British military. (AQW 8718/08)

The Minister for Social Development: My Department acquired the land from the Police Service of Northern Ireland under the Disposal of Surplus Land and Buildings by Public Sector Bodies Procedures. I am not aware of the details of the terms of the original acquisition of the site for policing purposes. This is a matter for the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Andersonstown Barracks Site

Mr P Maskey asked the Minister for Social Development to detail any legal arrangements that accompanied the original vesting order to return the

Andersonstown barracks site to public ownership; and to outline any subsequent changes in the legal framework. (AQW 8719/08)

The Minister for Social Development: My Department acquired the land from the Police Service of Northern Ireland under the Disposal of Surplus Land and Buildings by Public Sector Bodies Procedures. Following acquisition by my Department, and on legal advice, the land was subjected to a vesting order to provide clear title to the land. I am not aware of the legal arrangements that accompanied the original acquisition of the site for policing purposes. This is a matter for the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Andersonstown Barracks Site

Mr P Maskey asked the Minister for Social Development what impact falling land prices, particularly in relation to marginal urban land, are having on the current value of the Andersonstown barracks site. (AQW 8720/08)

The Minister for Social Development: My Department acquired the site from the Police Service of Northern Ireland in February 2006 at a value determined independently by valuers in the Department of Finance and Personnel's Land and Property Services. I have not sought to have the site revalued.

Andersonstown Barracks Site

Mr P Maskey asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the process, including precedents, by which the Andersonstown barracks site could be gift-aided to the local community. (AQW 8721/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The process covering gifting is set out in Government Accounting Northern Ireland (GANI) and this stipulates that DFP and Assembly approval is required for any gift exceeding £100,000. There may be circumstances in which the Department has in the past agreed to transfer land at a nominal or nil value. This however was for areas of residual land of little worth, for the creation of recreational land or when supported by the Land and Property Services. Under current GANI regulations the Department has an obligation to ensure that the consideration received for development land is the "best that can reasonably be obtained".

Andersonstown Barracks Site

Mr P Maskey asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the development proposals

for the Andersonstown barracks site which were rejected in favour of the Carvill group's proposal; and to outline any further consideration she has given to these proposals following the withdrawal of the Carvill group from the project. (AQW 8722/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The development brief process for this site resulted in six development proposals being received for a variety of mixed use developments including commercial, community, office and hotel developments. All proposals included an element for residential use. In October 2007, following the withdrawal of the private sector proposal for this site, I indicated my intention to consider the matter further before making a decision on the way forward. On 20 November 2007 I announced that I intended to explore the development opportunities for a commercial hub in the Andersonstown area including the former Barracks site. A feasibility study into establishing this gateway has been commissioned and is currently underway.

Andersonstown Barracks Site

Mr P Maskey asked the Minister for Social Development how much was paid by the Department for the acquisition of the Andersonstown Barracks site. (AQW 8726/08)

The Minister for Social Development: My Department acquired the site from the Police Service of Northern Ireland in February 2006 for £400,000.

Andersonstown Barracks Site

Mr P Maskey asked the Minister for Social Development how much has been spent by the Department on the development of the Andersonstown Barracks site since its acquisition. (AQW 8728/08)

The Minister for Social Development: No monies have been spent by the Department for Social Development on the development of this site since its acquisition. All demolition and site clearance works were carried out by PSNI in advance of purchase.

Andersonstown Barracks Site

Mr P Maskey asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the value of the tender awarded by the Department to Deloitte and Touche to undertake the community engagement process in the vicinity of the Andersonstown Barracks site. (AQW 8730/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The cost of the Deloitte MCS Ltd consultancy for community

engagement on the Andersonstown Gateway Feasibility Study is £37,698, excluding VAT.

Andersonstown Barracks Site

Mr P Maskey asked the Minister for Social Development how she has encouraged and facilitated the submission of the widest possible range of development proposals for the Andersonstown barracks site within the commercial and social sector. (AQW 8731/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The development brief process for the Andersonstown barracks site involved local consultation and advertisements in the three local daily newspapers seeking development proposals for the site.

The purpose of the Andersonstown Gateway Feasibility Study is to examine a range of site intervention opportunities in the Gateway area that will determine the feasibility of a commercial hub in this part of West Belfast. An output of the study, which will include community engagement as well as consultation with key stakeholders, will be a set of options for action in the Gateway area. This will help inform future decisions on both individual and assembled site development including the former Barracks site.

Andersonstown Barracks Site

Mr P Maskey asked the Minister for Social Development how the map that was submitted to Deloitte and Touche, to determine the boundaries of the consultation process in relation to the development of the Andersonstown barracks site, was generated; and the decisions underpinning the imposition of those boundaries. (AQW 8733/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The map contained in the terms of reference for both the Andersonstown Gateway Feasibility Study and the community engagement strand set indicative boundaries as a starting point for the Andersonstown Gateway Project Steering Group which has representatives from the statutory sector as well political and community representatives. Following the first meeting of the steering group it was proposed that the geography of the 'face to face' element of the community engagement be expanded outside the area described in the initial map. This has been agreed and is now within the terms of reference for Deloitte MCS Ltd.

Properties Offered by the Housing Executive

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Social Development how many properties the Housing Executive has offered to (i) Ballyloughan Community Initiative; and (ii) Durlston Pastoral Care Centre; how many offers the Housing Executive has withdrawn; and what action she is taking to ensure that this service remains in the Dunloy area. (AQW 8752/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The Housing Executive offered two properties to Durlston Pastoral Care Centre. Both were withdrawn when planning change of use was refused. It has been agreed that the Centre can remain in Durlston House until the lease expires in August 2010. Meantime, liaison will continue to identify alternative accommodation.

Communications Posts in North Belfast

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Social Development why she will not support the maintenance of the two communications posts in North Belfast despite unanimous support from the Community Empowerment Network that they remain. (AQW 8757/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The North Belfast Community Action Unit is currently in discussion with the Community Empowerment Network as to how to sustain the 2 communications posts in North Belfast.

Reallocation of Housing Funding

Mr Brady asked the Minister for Social Development what departmental funding for housing has been relocated to other areas within the Department, such as the Warm Homes Scheme. (AQW 8769/08)

The Minister for Social Development: There has been no reallocation of funding for Housing to other areas within the Department. The Warm Homes Scheme has been allocated £21.4m for the 2008/09 financial year.

Warm Homes Scheme

Mr Doherty asked the Minister for Social Development how many Warm Homes Scheme applications are (i) currently being processed; and (ii) awaiting assessment, broken down by District Council area; and (iii) what the average timescale is for the completion of a Warm Home Scheme application. (AQW 8779/08)

The Minister for Social Development: In an attempt to address the Warm Homes Scheme waiting list I asked Eaga to prioritise applicants so that those most in need get help first. Applicants with no central heating, solid fuel or Economy 7 heating will be treated as a priority and this makes it difficult to estimate the average timescale for a completion of an application as any new applications meeting this criteria will be completed first.

The information is not available in the format requested. Eaga collate information from geographical areas which can be subdivided into postcode area. There are a total of 4,867 live applications in the system. This figure can be broken down further; 1,619 referrals are currently with surveyors and 3,248 referrals are waiting to be allocated to surveyors. The information in the attached table shows the number of referrals waiting to be allocated to a surveyor.

	Area 1	Area 2	Area 3	Area 4	Area 5	Total
Works in Progress	798	537	676	495	742	3,248

	Area 1	Area 2	Area 3	Area 4	Area 5	
	BT60	BT45	BT1	BT3	BT2	
	BT61	BT46	BT13	BT4	BT7	
	BT62	BT47	BT14	BT5	BT8	
	BT63	BT48	BT15	BT6	BT9	
	BT64	BT49	BT29	BT16	BT10	
	BT65	BT51	BT36	BT18	BT11	
	BT66	BT52	BT37	BT19	BT12	
	BT67	BT53	BT38	BT20	BT17	
	BT68	BT54	BT39	BT21	BT24	
	BT69	BT55	BT40	BT22	BT25	
	BT70	BT56	BT41	BT23	BT26	
	BT71	BT57	BT42	BT30	BT27	
	BT74	BT81	BT42	BT33	BT28	
	BT75	BT82	BT43		BT31	
	BT76				BT32	
	BT77				BT34	
	BT78				BT35	
	BT79					
	BT80					
	BT92					
	BT93					
	BT94					

PricewaterhouseCooper and the Co-ownership Housing Scheme

Mrs Hanna asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the work carried out by Pricewaterhouse Coopers as specialist advisors on the Co-ownership Housing Scheme. (AQW 8788/08)

The Minister for Social Development: Responsibility for the day to day financial management of co-ownership, rests with Northern Ireland Co-ownership Housing Association (NICHA).

Although I have allocated £15m direct grant to the Association in the current year, in order to meet targets set, the Association will also need to borrow from financial institutions. NICHA has appointed PWC to advise on their borrowing configuration and future financing model and that work is progressing satisfactorily.

Homeless Figures

Mr Simpson asked the Minister for Social Development how many people are classed as being homeless for more than six months (i) in total; and (ii) broken down by district council area. (AQW 8809/08)

The Minister for Social Development: As these two questions are linked I will answer them together. The table below shows the number of people at the 31 March 2008 classed as being homeless for more than 6 months and in total, broken down by district council area.

Council area	Homeless for more than 6 months	Total Homeless
Belfast	2,877	3,426
Antrim	231	284
Ballymena	496	566
Ballymoney	87	114
Carrickfergus	188	251
Coleraine	274	345
Larne	97	117
Moyle	66	91
Newtownabbey	406	505
Armagh	104	132
Banbridge	161	197
Craigavon	186	265
Dungannon	169	218
Fermanagh	182	232
Newry	413	476

Council area	Homeless for more than 6 months	Total Homeless
Ards	340	426
Castlereagh	280	324
Down	284	366
Lisburn	697	854
North Down	442	538
Cookstown	38	53
Derry	528	697
Limavady	74	96
Magherafelt	128	158
Omagh	14	30
Strabane	44	72
Total	8,808	10,835

Homeless Figures

Mr Simpson asked the Minister for Social Development how many people are classed as being homeless (i) in total; and (ii) broken down by district council area. (AQW 8810/08)

The Minister for Social Development: As these two questions are linked I will answer them together. The table below shows the number of people at the 31 March 2008 classed as being homeless for more than 6 months and in total, broken down by district council area.

Council area	Homeless for more than 6 months	Total Homeless
Belfast	2,877	3,426
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Ballymena	496	566
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Council area	Homeless for more than 6 months	Total Homeless
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Cookstown	38	53
Derry	528	697
Limavady	74	96
Magherafelt	128	158
Omagh	14	30
Strabane	44	72
Total	8,808	10,835

Integrated Housing

Dr Farry asked the Minister for Social Development for her assessment of the desire for mixed, shared or integrated housing. (AQW 8814/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The Housing Executive undertook a Public Attitude Survey in 2006 which confirmed that for Northern Ireland as a whole:

50% of households expressed their desire to live/remain in a mixed religion area.

25% of households stated that the religious mix of the area where they lived was unimportant.

24% of households stated that they would prefer to live in an area of predominantly one religion, or the other.

1% of households stated that they didn't know.

The Housing Executive proposes conducting a survey of residents within the first Shared Future housing scheme at Carran Crescent, Fermanagh in late 2008 and will publish the findings when the research is completed.

Integrated Housing

Dr Farry asked the Minister for Social Development for her assessment of public views on her Department's performance in the delivery of mixed housing, based upon the Northern Ireland Life and Times Surveys and other reports. (AQW 8818/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The Housing Executive undertook a Public Attitude Survey in 2006 which confirmed that for Northern Ireland as a whole:

- 50% of households expressed their desire to live/remain in a mixed religion area.
- 25% of households stated that the religious mix of the area where they lived was unimportant.
- 24% of households stated that they would prefer to live in an area of predominantly one religion, or the other.
- 1% of households stated that they didn't know.

The Housing Executive proposes conducting a survey of residents within the first Shared Future housing scheme at Carran Crescent, Fermanagh in late 2008 and will publish the findings when the research is completed.

Disability Living Allowance

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Social Development how many people were in receipt of Disability Living Allowance in total, in each of the last 3 years, broken down by (i) parliamentary constituency; (ii) District Council area; and (iii) Social Security Office. (AQW 8820/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The information requested is set out in the attached tables. The numbers shown reflect the number of claims where an amount of Disability Living Allowance is in payment.

TABLE 1: DISABILITY LIVING ALLOWANCE RECIPIENTS BY PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY

Parliamentary Constituency	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
Belfast East	7,228	7,322	7,302
Belfast North	12,198	12,287	12,263
Belfast South	7,182	7,248	7,238
Belfast West	16,092	16,114	16,117
East Antrim	6,458	6,624	6,751
East Londonderry	6,851	6,977	7,095
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	8,692	8,612	8,748
Foyle	13,482	13,586	13,763
Lagan Valley	7,712	7,873	7,996
Mid Ulster	9,002	9,171	9,375
Newry and Armagh	11,322	11,369	11,416
North Antrim	7,644	7,880	8,027

Parliamentary Constituency	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
North Down	5,481	5,653	5,750
South Antrim	7,761	7,966	8,114
South Down	10,551	10,718	10,918
Strangford	7,558	7,714	7,842
Upper Bann	11,571	11,723	11,926
West Tyrone	11,763	11,775	11,966
Unallocated Postcode*	641	1,128	1,078
Total	169,189	171,740	173,685

* In producing this analysis, individual records were attributed to Electoral Wards and Parliamentary Constituency on the basis of their postcode. Not all records can be correctly allocated to a ward using this method, and some cannot be allocated at all.

TABLE 2: DISABILITY LIVING ALLOWANCE RECIPIENTS BY DISTRICT COUNCIL AREA

District Council Area	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
Antrim	4,033	4,151	4,190
Ards	5,836	5,998	6,074
Armagh	5,189	5,237	5,314
Ballymena	3,849	3,961	4,087
Ballymoney	2,432	2,536	2,544
Banbridge	3,965	4,056	4,118
Belfast	35,172	35,343	35,352
Carrickfergus	3,011	3,095	3,170
Castlereagh	5,047	5,125	5,136
Coleraine	3,835	3,945	3,999
Cookstown	3,929	3,999	4,053
Craigavon	9,179	9,263	9,448
Derry	13,482	13,586	13,763
Down	6,466	6,574	6,722
Dungannon	5,622	5,665	5,706
Fermanagh	4,996	4,893	5,021
Larne	2,256	2,341	2,398
Limavady	3,016	3,032	3,096
Lisburn	9,739	9,913	10,019
Magherafelt	3,147	3,226	3,343
Moyle	1,363	1,383	1,396
Newry & Mourne	10,016	10,071	10,080
Newtownabbey	6,529	6,641	6,707
North Down	4,676	4,803	4,905
Omagh	6,249	6,275	6,401

District Council Area	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
Strabane	5,514	5,500	5,565
Unallocated Postcode*	641	1,128	1,078
Total	169,189	171,740	173,685

* In producing this analysis, individual records were attributed to Electoral Wards and Parliamentary Constituency on the basis of their postcode. Not all records can be correctly allocated to a ward using this method, and some cannot be allocated at all.

TABLE 3: DISABILITY LIVING ALLOWANCE RECIPIENTS BY SOCIAL SECURITY OFFICE/JOBS & BENEFITS OFFICE BOUNDARY

Social Security Office / Jobs and Benefits Office	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
Andersonstown	7,606	7,548	7,574
Antrim	4,918	5,042	5,165
Armagh	4,575	4,600	4,646
Ballymena	4,335	4,448	4,582
Ballymoney	3,580	3,707	3,721
Ballynahinch	2,261	2,353	2,429
Banbridge	4,083	4,182	4,248
Bangor	5,080	5,255	5,324
Carrickfergus	3,016	3,101	3,176
Coleraine	3,836	3,941	4,002
Cookstown	3,365	3,424	3,450
Corporation Street	8,717	8,730	8,720
Downpatrick	3,235	3,276	3,342
Dungannon	5,193	5,231	5,265
Enniskillen	5,396	5,293	5,442
Falls Road	6,521	6,605	6,636
Foyle	8,877	8,877	8,968
Hollywood Road	6,901	6,957	7,023
Kilkeel	1,505	1,526	1,540
Knockbreda	5,688	5,755	5,705
Larne	2,262	2,347	2,403
Limavady	2,712	2,726	2,784
Lisburn	6,087	6,228	6,305
Lisnagelvin	4,976	5,086	5,169
Lurgan	6,258	6,356	6,509
Magherafelt	3,389	3,482	3,605
Newcastle	2,021	2,052	2,088
Newry	8,190	8,234	8,220
Newtownabbey	5,474	5,532	5,484

Social Security Office / Jobs and Benefits Office	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
Newtownards	4,719	4,820	4,883
Omagh	6,106	6,130	6,254
Portadown	4,173	4,195	4,272
Shaftesbury Square	4,299	4,361	4,385
Shankill Road	3,644	3,685	3,679
Strabane	5,510	5,493	5,562
Unallocated Postcode*	681	1,162	1,125
Total	169,189	171,740	173,685

* Disability Living Allowance is a centralised benefit and therefore has no Social Security Office/Jobs & Benefits Office indicator. Table 3 is a breakdown of customers whose postcodes fall within each of the 35 Social Security Office/Jobs & Benefits Office boundaries. "Unallocated Postcode" in this instance refers to those postcodes which cannot be referenced on the Geographic Information System and therefore cannot be assigned to a Social Security Office/Jobs & Benefits Office boundary.

Incapacity Benefit

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Social Development how many people were in receipt of Incapacity Benefit in total, in each of the last 3 years, broken down by (i) parliamentary constituency; (ii) District Council area; and (iii) Social Security Office. (AQW 8821/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The information requested is set out in the attached tables. The numbers shown reflect the number of claims where an amount of Incapacity Benefit is in payment at the date of extract.

TABLE 1: INCAPACITY BENEFIT RECIPIENTS BY PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY

Parliamentary Constituency	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
Belfast East	2,989	2,859	2,789
Belfast North	4,536	4,408	4,306
Belfast South	2,820	2,752	2,705
Belfast West	4,722	4,601	4,477
East Antrim	3,184	3,104	3,058
East Londonderry	3,495	3,382	3,394
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	3,522	3,313	3,242
Foyle	5,455	5,315	5,169
Lagan Valley	3,383	3,368	3,315
Mid Ulster	4,101	3,966	3,948

Parliamentary Constituency	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
Newry and Armagh	4,705	4,421	4,330
North Antrim	4,003	3,936	3,859
North Down	2,521	2,450	2,439
South Antrim	3,460	3,399	3,349
South Down	4,455	4,347	4,310
Strangford	3,640	3,482	3,472
Upper Bann	5,605	5,283	5,203
West Tyrone	4,722	4,475	4,462
Unallocated Postcode*	457	584	548
Total	71,775	69,445	68,375

* In producing this analysis, individual records were allocated to Electoral wards and Parliamentary Constituency on the basis of their postcode. Not all records can be correctly allocated to a ward using this method and some cannot be allocated at all.

TABLE 2: INCAPACITY BENEFIT RECIPIENTS BY DISTRICT COUNCIL AREA

District Council Area	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
Antrim	1,766	1,722	1,697
Ards	2,843	2,742	2,778
Armagh	2,489	2,287	2,231
Ballymena	2,061	2,049	2,033
Ballymoney	1,282	1,243	1,202
Banbridge	1,989	1,903	1,905
Belfast	12,292	11,925	11,659
Carrickfergus	1,474	1,432	1,411
Castlereagh	2,272	2,163	2,073
Coleraine	2,025	1,971	1,939
Cookstown	1,678	1,648	1,619
Craigavon	4,405	4,168	4,101
Derry	5,455	5,315	5,169
Down	2,586	2,549	2,508
Dungannon	2,285	2,157	2,109
Fermanagh	1,959	1,825	1,825
Larne	1,156	1,141	1,137
Limavady	1,470	1,411	1,455
Lisburn	3,741	3,746	3,669
Magherafelt	1,701	1,649	1,637
Moyle	660	644	624
Newry & Mourne	3,927	3,749	3,724
Newtownabbey	2,898	2,829	2,762

District Council Area	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
North Down	2,182	2,118	2,098
Omagh	2,444	2,278	2,296
Strabane	2,278	2,197	2,166
Unallocated Postcode*	457	584	548
Total	71,775	69,445	68,375

* In producing this analysis, individual records were allocated to Electoral wards and Parliamentary Constituency on the basis of their postcode. Not all records can be correctly allocated to a ward using this method and some cannot be allocated at all.

TABLE 3: INCAPACITY BENEFIT RECIPIENTS BY SOCIAL SECURITY OFFICE/JOBS & BENEFITS OFFICE BOUNDARY

Social Security Office/Jobs and Benefits Office	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
Andersonstown	2,148	2,117	2,080
Antrim	2,188	2,165	2,159
Armagh	2,113	1,920	1,870
Ballymena	2,322	2,315	2,312
Ballymoney	1,827	1,775	1,717
Ballynahinch	1,084	1,059	1,039
Banbridge	2,058	1,969	1,970
Bangor	2,327	2,271	2,262
Carrickfergus	1,478	1,436	1,415
Coleraine	2,042	1,984	1,942
Cookstown	1,398	1,383	1,368
Corporation Street	3,135	3,033	2,983
Downpatrick	1,260	1,243	1,227
Dungannon	2,106	1,989	1,941
Enniskillen	2,155	1,996	1,992
Falls Road	1,803	1,781	1,720
Foyle	3,276	3,197	3,081
Hollywood Road	2,901	2,758	2,671
Kilkeel	587	586	577
Knockbreda	2,447	2,340	2,291
Larne	1,157	1,144	1,140
Limavady	1,291	1,237	1,269
Lisburn	2,661	2,651	2,593
Lisnagelvin	2,375	2,310	2,289
Lurgan	2,948	2,820	2,747
Magherafelt	1,792	1,733	1,701
Newcastle	817	789	795

Social Security Office/Jobs and Benefits Office	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
Newry	3,159	3,001	2,970
Newtownabbey	2,389	2,283	2,188
Newtownards	2,329	2,249	2,265
Omagh	2,378	2,219	2,238
Portadown	2,114	1,982	1,980
Shaftesbury Square	1,586	1,589	1,558
Shankill Road	1,368	1,325	1,284
Strabane	2,284	2,198	2,169
Unallocated Postcode*	472	598	572
Total	71,775	69,445	68,375

* Incapacity Benefit is a centralised benefit and therefore has no Social Security Office/Jobs & Benefits Office indicator. Table 3 is a breakdown of customers whose postcodes fall within each of the 35 Social Security Office/Jobs & Benefits Office boundaries. 'Unallocated Postcode' in this instance refers to those postcodes which cannot be referenced on the Geographic Information System and cannot therefore be assigned to a Social Security Office/Jobs & Benefits Office boundary.

Complaints of Damp in Housing Executive Homes

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Social Development how many complaints the Housing Executive has received about (i) damp; and (ii) condensation problems, in each of the last 3 years, broken down by District Office. (AQW 8822/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The table below details the number of repair reports made by Housing Executive tenants regarding dampness or condensation by district office area, for the period requested. It is not possible to disaggregate these figures.

District Office	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
East Belfast	148	94	70
North Belfast	210	232	164
South Belfast	46	65	58
West Belfast	158	137	81
Shankill	61	50	55
Bangor	33	37	34
Castlereagh	67	40	33
Downpatrick	45	32	23
Lisburn/Antrim Street	45	52	49
Lisburn Dairyfarm	93	69	44

District Office	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
Newtownards	59	91	32
Armagh	41	70	22
Banbridge	31	19	19
Dungannon	10	13	11
Fermanagh	37	35	26
Lurgan	47	41	52
Newry	88	135	180
Portadown	50	67	42
Antrim	36	14	11
Ballycastle	7	5	11
Ballymena	17	41	25
Ballymoney	25	21	17
Carrickfergus	8	18	25
Coleraine	12	18	13
Larne	8	4	8
Newtownabbey 1	26	37	33
Newtownabbey 2	23	18	13
Collon Terrace	73	98	128
Cookstown	14	15	14
Limavady	7	17	25
Magherafelt	7	9	16
Omagh	22	38	22
Strabane	73	70	75
Waterloo Place	163	150	114
Waterside	48	83	45
Total	1,838	1,935	1,590

Alternative Development Organisations Created by Housing Associations

Mr Savage asked the Minister for Social Development what Housing Associations have created alternative development organisations for the purchase of land or buildings in Northern Ireland.
(AQW 8830/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The following Housing Associations have created alternative development organisations for the purchase of land or buildings in Northern Ireland:

- BIH
- Clanmil
- Connswater
- Fold

- Habinteg
- North & West
- Oaklee
- Trinity

Initiatives in South Antrim

Mr Burns asked the Minister for Social Development to detail any major initiatives being undertaken by her Department in the South Antrim constituency in the next 6 months. (AQW 8843/08)

The Minister for Social Development: Under urban regeneration my department expects to complete the masterplan of Antrim town centre and commence work on a significant public realm enhancement scheme in Ballyclare town centre. The department will also continue to proactively drive forward the implementation of the Neighbourhood Action Plans drawn up for the Ballyclare and Rathcoole Neighbourhood Renewal Areas and the construction of the Rathenraw Community Development and Health project.

Three social housing schemes at Toome, Crumlin and Antrim, with a total of 27 houses will also complete.

Independent Appeals Tribunal for Equality

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Social Development what plans she has to investigate the independent appeals tribunal for equality, value for money and competency when adjudicating on appeals.
(AQW 8853/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The appeal tribunals are independent judicial bodies, composed of members taken from a panel appointed by the Lord Chancellor. The Member may wish to write directly to the President of Appeal Tribunals at 6th Floor, Cleaver House, 3, Donegall Square North, Belfast, BT1 5GA for a response to his question.

Bids for Additional Funding

Mr Lunn asked the Minister for Social Development what bids she has submitted for additional funding for improvements to housing under the management of the Housing Executive.
(AQW 8872/08)

The Minister for Social Development: Bids were submitted to the June Monitoring Round but were not met. I will continue to bid in future monitoring rounds.

Shortfall in Funding for the Housing Executive

Mr Lunn asked the Minister for Social Development for her assessment of the shortfall in funding for the Housing Executive, against the expected budget forecasts for the 2008-09 and 2009-10 financial years. (AQW 8874/08)

The Minister for Social Development: I was able to secure an additional £205m for the Social Housing Development Programme over the next three years to deliver 5,250 new social houses.

The Housing Executive is facing a potential shortfall in its budget for 2008/09 due to a forecast reduction in capital receipts from house and land sales. Action is being taken to seek alternative sources of income

I will continue to make bids for additional funding in future monitoring rounds.

Saleable Housing Executive Assets

Mr Lunn asked the Minister for Social Development what assets the Housing Executive can release through sales of land and housing. (AQW 8875/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The Housing Executive has undeveloped land assets valued at some £197m which will be either sold to housing associations to provide social housing or where there is no social housing need, sold on the open market. In addition, sales of properties to tenants will continue.

Warm Homes Scheme

Mr Lunn asked the Minister for Social Development what the timetable is for a review of the Warm Homes Scheme. (AQW 8876/08)

The Minister for Social Development: My officials have been working for some time on a review of the Warm Homes Scheme, based in part on the emerging findings of the Northern Ireland's Audit Office Value for Money report published on 23 June. A new scheme document is currently being drafted and it is planned to publish this for consultation in the Autumn.

Benefit Uptake by Pensioners

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development what action her Department is taking to increase benefit uptake by pensioners. (AQW 8879/08)

The Minister for Social Development: In May 2008 I launched the 2008/09 Benefit Uptake Programme to increase awareness of social security benefits. This will build on the previous successful uptake programmes which have been in place since 2005. These programmes have resulted in £15 million of additional benefit paid to the most vulnerable in our society, £11 million of which was paid to pensioners. This Programme includes:

- three targeted exercises delivered by Citizens Advice focusing on over 18,000 clients, aged 60 years or over. Each client will be contacted by the Agency and encouraged to have a full benefit assessment through Citizens Advice;
- a client focused mail shot to approximately 80,000 households advising them of State Pension Credit and directing them to the Pension Service prior to the reduction of backdating of State Pension Credit from 12 months to 3 months in October 2008; and
- contact with up to 10,000 new State Retirement Pension clients who will be advised of their potential eligibility to State Pension Credit. Those deemed more at risk will receive follow-up contact to further encourage the making of a claim.

This is in addition to the range of services provided on a daily basis to ensure that people are advised of their potential entitlement to benefits.

Co-ownership Housing Association

Mr McClarty asked the Minister for Social Development if she has any plans to announce a new Co-Ownership Scheme. (AQW 8897/08)

The Minister for Social Development: Northern Ireland Co-ownership Housing Association is the only provider of co-ownership housing in Northern Ireland and there are no plans to duplicate the scheme. However, I remain concerned at the growing affordability gap, exacerbated in recent months by the cost of borrowing. I am, as recommended by my independent panel of experts, looking at how we could bring forward further affordable housing opportunities such as developer-led shared equity schemes. I hope to be able to provide further details on such initiatives in the coming weeks.

ASSEMBLY COMMISSION

Use of Blackberrys in the Assembly Chamber

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Assembly Commission what consideration it has given to allowing the use

of Blackberrys in the chamber, for e-mail use only.
(AQW 7590/08)

The Representative of the Assembly Commission (Rev Dr Robert Coulter): The Assembly Commission has not, as yet, received a formal request for the use of Blackberrys or any other electronic devices in the Chamber. If it were to do so the Assembly Commission would take advice from the appropriate Directorate with regard to any potential technical implications for implementing such a change.

Office of the Keeper Staff

Mr Attwood asked the Assembly Commission (i) how many staff are employed in the Office of the Keeper; (ii) the job titles of the Office of the Keeper staff; (iii) whether there are proposals to revise the staff structure in the Office of the Keeper, including any proposals for new positions; and (iv) how recruitment for any new positions will be conducted.
(AQW 8070/08)

The Representative of the Assembly Commission: (i) The total number of staff currently employed in the Office of the Keeper (Properties Directorate) is 80.

The current staffing breakdown is as follows;
(Please see attached organization chart)

- 1 x Clerk** (Acting/Grade 6 Director)
- 3 x Deputy Principals (Head of Security, Head of Business Services and Head of Estates)
- 5 x AAC (Deputy/Head of Security, Project Officer, Building Management**, Facilities Branch** and Health and Safety Officer**)
- 5 x Clerical Supervisor (Security Branch, Estates, Facilities Branch**, Building Management** and Stationery** – no specific job titles)
- 5 x Clerical Officer* (Security Branch x 2, Stationery x 3 – no specific job titles)
- 2 x Principal Doorkeeper (Managerial role, 1 Principal door keeper on temporary promotion)
- 4 x Senior Doorkeepers (Supervisory role, 1 Senior Door keeper on temporary promotion)

- 43 x Doorkeepers* (22 permanent and 21 agency, responsible for internal door keeping duties at Parliament Buildings and annexe ‘C’)
- 12 x Security Guards* (responsible for control room duties, search facility and external security)

* Includes Brook Street agency staff.

** Includes staff on temporary promotion

A number of vacant posts also exist as follows:

- 1 x Clerk (Project Manager – Accommodation, staff member to be appointed)
- 5 x Assistant Assembly Clerks (Health and Safety Facilities Branch and Building Management, Sustainability Officer and New Accommodation project.
- 3 x Clerical Supervisor – Stationery, Facilities and Building Management)
- 6 x Clerical Officer – Security Branch, Facilities Branch, Health and Safety, Building Management x 2 and Accommodation project
- 7 x Door keepers
- 4 x Security Guards

(ii) As above

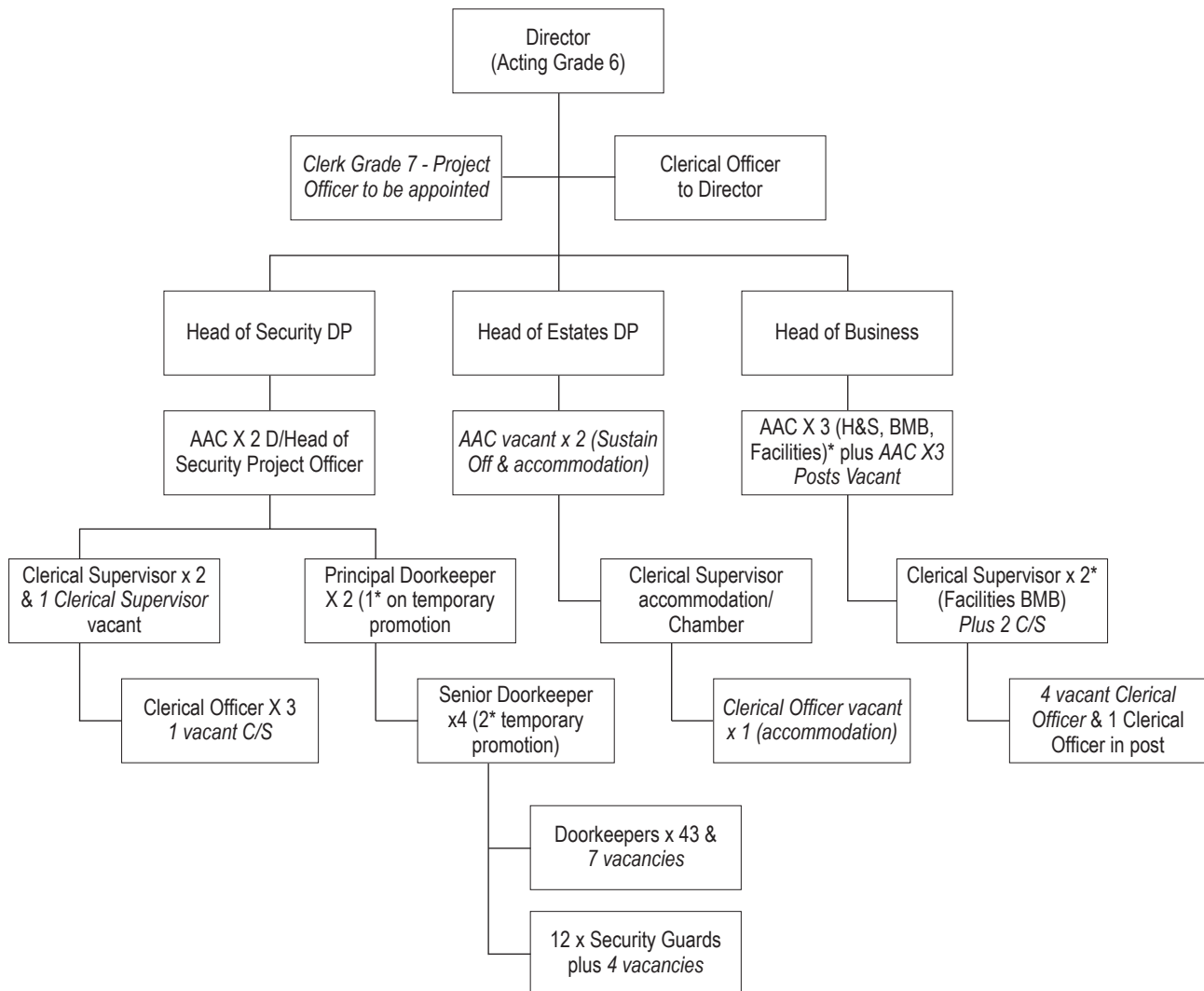
(iii) From 4th August 2008 a new Director post at Grade 5 level will be appointed, this post was filled by open competition. This new post will replace the existing Acting/Grade 6 post. As mentioned above a new Clerk post at Grade 7 (Project Manager, Accommodation project) has been created however; no appointment has been made to this post.

(iv) Recently the Assembly has been giving consideration to the possibility of moving to filling posts through a mix of external recruitment and internal promotion. The Assembly Commission has recently agreed, in principle, to consider a relaxation from its policy of filling all posts through external recruitment. Furthermore, it was agreed that the Commission would be consulted on the proposals for each competition including any associated legal and/or equality issues and risks.

Properties Directorate Present

* temporary promotion

ORGANISATION CHART INCLUDES CURRENT STAFFING IN BLACK WITH VACANT POSTS IN ITALIC.



Team-Building Exercises

Mr Weir asked the Assembly Commission how many staff hours have been taken up with Commission or cross-directorate away days, involving the Commission, or team-building exercises, in each of the last five years. (AQW 8605/08)

The Representative of the Assembly

Commission: With reference to your question, a total of 92 staff hours have been utilised during the three away days which the Assembly Commission has held from their appointment on the 9th May 2007.

Facilities in Parliament Buildings for People with Hearing and Visual Difficulties

Mr Durkan asked the Assembly Commission what are the facilities provided in Parliament Buildings for people with visual and hearing difficulties. (AQW 8732/08)

The Representative of the Assembly

Commission: While the Northern Ireland Assembly strives to ensure there are sufficient facilities for all building users and visitors to Parliament Buildings, due to the layout and nature of the building there are certain constraints.

The available facilities for people with visual difficulties are limited as current arrangements require visitors to the building to be escorted at all times. However, recent improvements to the building include the provision of contrast strips and continuous hand railing to all staircases. In addition to this, the existing lifts were upgraded, this included improvements to the internal lighting and colour contrasts, the addition of voice indication of the floor reached and the installation of tactile identification on all floor levels.

The facilities currently available for people with hearing difficulties include deaf alerters which are available at Reception. The deaf alerter will vibrate when the fire alarm is activated to warn the holder that they must leave the building immediately. For

all building users who feel that they need assistance during a fire evacuation there is a Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan (PEEP) which is to be completed in conjunction with the Fire Precaution Officer. The completion of the questionnaire and associated PEEP will ensure that building users requiring assistance will know what the emergency procedures are, how they will be alerted, who will assist them to evacuate the premises, what additional equipment, if any, is required and give precise details of the evacuation procedures and safe routes to use during practice and real evacuations.

There are deaf loop systems installed in the Great Hall, the Long Gallery, Committee Rooms 135, 144, 21 and 152, the Assembly Chamber and Senate. The Assembly Commission has recently upgraded the deaf loop system in room 152 and due to its success plans to upgrade the systems in the remaining committee rooms. This work is due to take place in conjunction with other planned work for the committee rooms. In addition to this there are portable deaf loop systems at Reception, in the Members' bar, the shop and the basement restaurant available for use.

The Assembly Commission has provided text phones to several offices within Parliament Buildings and there are plans to purchase additional ones as required.

The Assembly Commission has also produced a disability action plan and is keen to consult with interested organisations. Details of the plan are available on the Northern Ireland Assembly website: <http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/disability.htm>

Team-Building Exercises

Mr Weir asked the Assembly Commission how many away days and team-building exercises have been organised by the Commission for Assembly staff in each of the last five years. (AQW 8824/08)

The Representative of the Assembly Commission: In response to your question, there have been 6 away day exercises organised for members of senior management within the Secretariat. The table below displays the information by the year in which they occurred:

Year	Number of Away Day / team building exercises	Staff Involved
2008	1	Senior Management Team.
2007	2	Senior Management Team and Directors.
2006	2	Senior Management Team, Directors and Heads of Business.

Year	Number of Away Day / team building exercises	Staff Involved
2005	1	Senior Management Team, Directors and Heads of Business.
2004	0	

Legal Proceedings Initiated Against the Commission

Mr Attwood asked the Assembly Commission to detail the nature of any legal proceedings initiated against the Commission by (i) current; and (ii) former, members of Commission staff. (AQW 8884/08)

The Representative of the Assembly Commission: The details of legal proceedings initiated against the Assembly Commission by current and former members of staff are provided in tabular form attached.

(I) CASES INITIATED BY CURRENT MEMBERS OF STAFF

Nature of case	Outcome
Equal Pay - Discrimination on the grounds of Sex	Outstanding
Harassment on grounds of race	Following a formal investigation of the complaint, the perpetrator was dismissed and settlement reached with claimant
Unfair treatment on grounds of disability discrimination	Claim withdrawn
Discrimination on grounds of age, disability, gender and religion	Claim withdrawn

(II) CASES INITIATED BY FORMER MEMBERS OF STAFF

Nature of Case	Outcome
Harassment and Victimisation on grounds of Religious and Political Discrimination	Outstanding
Unfair dismissal	Claim withdrawn
Discrimination on grounds of Religion and political opinion	Claim withdrawn
Sexual harassment	Harassment complaint not upheld. The claim was settled and met jointly with Brook Street UK Ltd.
Application for judicial review of decision to seek termination of three secondments	Withdrawn

Nature of Case	Outcome
Unfair treatment on grounds of Religious and Political Discrimination and Sex Discrimination	Outstanding
Unfair treatment on grounds of Religious and Political Discrimination	Outstanding
Unfair treatment on grounds of Religious and Political Discrimination	Outstanding
Unfair Dismissal and discrimination on grounds of Sex, Age and Disability	Outstanding

Judicial Review

Mr Attwood asked the Assembly Commission if it intends to lodge in the Library, for the information of MLAs, copies of affidavits filed by, or on behalf of, the Commission by (i) Members of the Commission; (ii) Assembly staff; and (iii) other persons, in relation to the Judicial Review initiated against the Commission by former members of the Assembly Secretariat. (AQW 8899/08)

The Representative of the Assembly Commission: The Assembly Commission has not been asked to consider using the library to house copies of any material in relation to the judicial review. The Commission would be prepared to consider such a request, at the earliest meeting, following summer recess.

Judicial Review

Mr Attwood asked the Assembly Commission if it consulted its legal advisers on the advice provided by the Speaker to the Assembly on Tuesday 17 June in relation to the judicial review against the Commission initiated by former staff of the Secretariat. (AQW 8900/08)

The Representative of the Assembly Commission: The Assembly Commission holds no responsibility in relation to what the Speaker says in the Chamber. The Commission, as a general rule, does not confirm whether it has or has not taken legal advice.

Recruitment of Assembly Staff

Mr Attwood asked the Assembly Commission how many people successfully completed all stages of the recruitment processes for the posts of Clerk

and Assistant Assembly Clerk respectively; how many Assembly Clerk and Assistant Assembly Clerk posts the Commission intended to appoint; how many people have accepted offers of employment in respect of each post; and a breakdown in respect of each post between persons who have previously worked as Assembly Clerk and Assistant Assembly Clerk and those who have no such experience. (AQW 8985/08)

The Representative of the Assembly

Commission: To date (16 July), eight candidates have successfully completed all stages of the recruitment process for the position of Assembly Clerk and eleven candidates have successfully completed all stages of the recruitment process for the position of Assistant Assembly Clerk. Pre-appointment enquiries are continuing in respect of three further Assembly Clerk candidates and it is expected that offers of appointment will issue when completed.

At the time the recruitment competitions began the Commission envisaged filling nine Assembly Clerk and thirty one Assistant Assembly Clerk vacancies respectively. However since then two further Assembly Clerk vacancies have arisen which are expected to be filled from the list of successful candidates.

To date three candidates in the Assembly Clerk competition and seven candidates in the Assistant Assembly Clerk competition have accepted offers of appointment. A further five Assembly Clerk offers of appointment and one Assistant Assembly Clerk offer of appointment are still under consideration by successful candidates.

Of the nine offers of appointment made in the Assembly Clerk competition, two were to candidates with previous experience of working as Assembly Clerks; of the eleven offers of appointment made in the Assistant Assembly Clerk competition, four were made to candidates with previous experience of working as Assistant Assembly Clerks (one of whom declined). A further candidate in the Assistant Assembly Clerk competition has withdrawn.

Recruitment of Assembly Staff

Mr Attwood asked the Assembly Commission if persons appointed under the recruitment exercise for the posts of Assembly Clerk and Assistant Assembly Clerk are to be appointed on the same pay, terms and conditions relevant to each post and, if not, on what basis variations in pay, terms and conditions may arise at or after appointment. (AQW 8986/08)

The Representative of the Assembly

Commission: The NI Assembly Commission has committed to the development and introduction of bespoke terms and conditions of employment,

including pay and allowances, for secretariat staff by 2010. It is envisaged that this will be a progressive process. Currently, except where specific changes have already been negotiated, NI Civil Service Terms and Conditions of Employment apply to all secretariat staff. Those terms and conditions include limited, regulated, provision for variation on pay depending on individual and organisational circumstances.

Appointments from all ongoing recruitment competitions, including those for Assembly Clerk and Assistant Assembly Clerk, will be under the NICS Terms and Conditions relating to Starting Pay on Appointment and Starting Pay on Transfer to a Substantive Grade. A copy of these procedures is attached for your information.

The only variations which may be applied are in respect of staff currently seconded to the Assembly who have recently been successful in open competition for positions equivalent to their current NICS Grade. The Assembly Commission decided that, in the interests of business continuity and the need to retain relevant experience, these staff should suffer "no detriment" in respect of their current salary, terms and conditions etc upon appointment. They are however required to sever their employment status with the NICS and become permanent employees of the Assembly Commission.

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