



DÍOSPÓIREACHTAÍ PARLAIMINTE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DÁIL ÉIREANN

TUAIRISC OIFIGIÚIL—*Neamhcheartaithe*
(OFFICIAL REPORT—*Unrevised*)

Thursday, 1 April 2010.

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DÁIL ÉIREANN

Déardaoin, 1 Aibreán 2010.

Thursday, 1 April 2010.

Chuaigh an Ceann Comhairle i gceannas ar 10.30 a.m.

Paidir.

Prayer.

Requests to move Adjournment of Dáil under Standing Order 32.

An Ceann Comhairle: Before coming to the Order of Business, I propose to deal with a number of notices under Standing Order 32. I will call on the Deputies in the order in which they submitted their notices to my office.

Deputy Finian McGrath: I seek the Adjournment of the Dáil under Standing Order 32 to raise a matter of national importance, namely, the urgent need to support all people with a disability; the need to welcome the report by the Irish Human Rights Commission on how the way disability services are to be funded by the State needs to be radically changed; the need to welcome Down Syndrome Ireland's campaign, My Opinion My Vote, which demands easy-to-read information from all politicians; to support the urgent need for increased services including speech and language and occupational therapy in particular; and calls on all Members of the Oireachtas to defend and support services for all people with a disability.

Deputy Paul Connaughton: I wish to seek the Adjournment of the Dáil under Standing Order 32 to discuss the disastrous prices paid by Irish meat factories to beef farmers, whether the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food is aware that over the past 12 months similarly classified beef cattle are worth €150 per head more in the United Kingdom, if the Government is satisfied there is no collusion between the factories concerning price, if the dominant position of the Goodman Group is adding to unnecessarily depressed prices——

Deputy Pádraic McCormack: Hear, hear.

Deputy Paul Connaughton: ——if large multinational supermarket chains are creaming off profits at the expense of primary producers——

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: Hear, hear.

Deputy Paul Connaughton: ——and if the Government is aware there are likely to be many cattle houses empty next winter as winter fatteners have traded unprofitably for three consecutive years now.

Deputy James Bannon: I seek the Adjournment of the Dáil under Standing Order 32 to raise a matter of national importance, namely, the inequality of provision by the Fianna Fáil-Green Party Government, which sees social welfare benefits being cut across the board, while tax-

[Deputy James Bannon.]

payers' money to the tune of €8.3 billion is being ploughed into Anglo Irish Bank, which had——

(Interruptions).

Deputy James Bannon: Will I have the protection of the Chair?

Deputy Margaret Conlon: They are not taking him seriously. Deputy Bannon should start again.

An Ceann Comhairle: I am sorry for the interruptions but Deputy Bannon should continue.

Deputy James Bannon: Will I have to start again?

Deputy P. J. Sheehan: Deputies should give the man a chance.

Deputy James Bannon: It is no laughing matter for the public. The Deputies opposite can snigger all they like here but the people of Ireland will give an answer in the not too distant future.

Deputy Timmy Dooley: What about the people of Longford?

Deputy James Bannon: We have the——

Deputy Timmy Dooley: Steady. Good man, Deputy Bannon.

Deputy James Bannon: A sum of €8.3 billion is being ploughed into Anglo Irish Bank, which has recorded the largest corporate loss in Irish history of €12.7 billion, in what is a blatant exercise in cronyism, while those in extreme poverty are being refused their entitlements for the most suspect reasons. Shame on the Government for the way it behaved and shame on Government Deputies for the way they react to questions concerning the poorest in society.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Bannon should not provoke reactions.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: It is about time we provoked a reaction because there has been no reaction up to now.

An Ceann Comhairle: I call Deputy Jimmy Deenihan.

Deputy James Bannon: Deputy Timmy Dooley has the knives out for the Taoiseach.

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: Deputy Dooley should hang down his head.

Deputy Charles Flanagan: One of the few men in Fianna Fáil with a business background, we are told.

Deputy Jimmy Deenihan: This is an urgent matter. I seek the Adjournment of the Dáil under Standing Order 32 to raise a matter of national importance, namely, the Government's decision to withdraw Irish troops from Chad at a time when talks at the United Nations to renew the MINURCAT mandate are at a critical juncture and being mindful of the warnings from senior officers in the United Nations that the Government's decision has had the effect of damaging those talks and also in light of additional warnings from the UN Humanitarian Chief and Human Rights Watch who have expressed the fear that the withdrawal of troops from eastern Chad will lead to increased violence and human rights abuses.

Deputy Denis Naughten: They are needed on the streets of this country.

An Ceann Comhairle: Having considered the matters raised, they are not in order under Standing Order 32.

Deputy Seymour Crawford: The beef matter is in order.

Order of Business.

The Tánaiste: It is proposed to take No. 10, motion re proposed approval by Dáil Éireann of an initiative for a directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on the rights to interpretation and to translation in criminal proceedings (back from committee); No. 22a statements on banking; and No. 22b statements on obesity. It is proposed, notwithstanding anything in Standing Orders, that No. 10 shall be decided without debate and, in respect of No. 22a, the statements shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion after 90 minutes; the statement of a Minister or Minister of State and of the main spokespersons for Fine Gael, the Labour Party and Sinn Féin, who shall be called upon in that order, shall not exceed ten minutes; the statements of each other Member called upon shall not exceed ten minutes; Members may share time; a Minister or Minister of State shall be called upon to make a statement in reply which shall not exceed five minutes; immediately following the statements a Minister or Minister of State shall take questions for a period not exceeding 30 minutes. In regard to No. 22b the statements of a Minister or Minister of State and of the main spokespersons for Fine Gael, the Labour Party and Sinn Féin, who shall be called upon in that order, shall not exceed 15 minutes and the statements of each other Member called upon shall not exceed ten minutes and Members may share time; a Minister or Minister of State shall be called upon to make a statement in reply which shall not exceed ten minutes. On rising, the Dáil shall adjourn until 2.30 p.m. on Tuesday, 20 April 2010.

An Ceann Comhairle: There are four proposals to put to the House. Is the proposal for dealing with No. 10 without debate agreed? Agreed. Is the proposal for dealing with No. 22a agreed?

Deputy Enda Kenny: I welcome that time has been provided for statements on banking and for a questions and answers session in this regard, as agreed by Government on Tuesday. Perhaps the Tánaiste will provide clarification on the following matter. I note the Anglo Irish Bank report states: “We continually invest in the development and training of our staff as well as maintaining quality relationships with our stakeholders...”

An Ceann Comhairle: There will be a questions and answers session following the statements.

Deputy Enda Kenny: I know that. I am trying to be helpful.

Deputy Timmy Dooley: Is this the abridged version?

Deputy Enda Kenny: The report continues: “At Anglo Irish Bank we recognise our corporate obligations and responsibilities and are committed to fulfilling them.” In regard to the statements and questions and answers session, can we take it that in view of the comment by Mr. Peter Bacon, the architect in part of the structure of NAMA, who today described Anglo Irish Bank as the Celtic Chernobyl and in view of the extent of intensive activity—

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy is holding up progress towards the statements and questions and answers session.

Deputy Enda Kenny: I am not holding up progress. In view of the intense activity between Anglo Irish Bank and the Government after the guarantee date, does the Government propose to extend the scope of the inquiry beyond the guarantee date? This would be in the interests of everybody finding out the truth in this regard.

Will the Government respond to the fact that Anglo Irish Bank wrote off €109 million in loans for directors? Before the statements commence, will the Tánaiste confirm, in view of the employment situation in respect of the Quinn Group, if there has been contact between Anglo Irish Bank and the Government in respect of Mr. Quinn who is a major stakeholder in that bank?

An Ceann Comhairle: I must advise the Deputy that all of these questions can be posed during the questions and answers session.

Deputy Enda Kenny: I am entitled to ask these questions.

Deputies: Hear, hear.

An Ceann Comhairle: I do not disagree. I am just pointing out that for the proper order and running of the House——

(Interruptions).

Deputy Enda Kenny: With respect, the Ceann Comhairle——

An Ceann Comhairle: I am not in any way diminishing the Deputy's rights in these matters. I am just pointing out that the Deputy will have an opportunity to pose questions later.

Deputy Enda Kenny: ——is putting his foot in an area that is not his responsibility now.

Deputy James Bannon: Hear, hear.

An Ceann Comhairle: I have responsibility for the proper running of the House.

Deputy Enda Kenny: Yes, the Ceann Comhairle is responsible for the running of the House and I am fully in accordance with the rules in asking this question of the Tánaiste before statements commence.

An Ceann Comhairle: I call Deputy Burton.

Deputy Enda Kenny: I am fully in accordance with the rules of the House.

Deputy Joan Burton: The financial announcements yesterday by Anglo Irish Bank included a statement that the Government had issued an €8.3 billion promissory note, IOU, to the bank. The Labour Party has agreed to the arrangements as outlined by the Tánaiste but no detailed advice has been made available to us as the Opposition in regard to under what legislation the €8.3 billion promissory note——

An Ceann Comhairle: The observation applied to Deputy Kenny applies also to Deputy Burton.

Deputy Joan Burton: If the Ceann Comhairle will bear with me, I am making a point. We have accepted the arrangements and will not vote against them now——

An Ceann Comhairle: I do not disagree with the merit of the question but I am saying the opportunity will arise later to ask it.

Deputy Joan Burton: Momentous decisions have been taken in our name. I am asking the Tánaiste——

An Ceann Comhairle: All of those points can be made during statements on banking.

Deputy Joan Burton: ——if the Government will undertake to give more time to this issue when the Dáil returns. A commitment of €8.3 billion, signed without the Minister for Finance, Deputy Brian Lenihan, telling us yesterday that it was going into the Anglo Irish Bank accounts, payable at €830 million a year for the next ten years——

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Burton, this is not contemplated on the Order of Business.

Deputy Joan Burton: We were not told that. This is a milestone.

An Ceann Comhairle: This is not contemplated at all.

Deputy Joan Burton: Will the Government agree to come back to this and to allocate more time——

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy will have an opportunity to ask that question later on——

Deputy Joan Burton: ——to the bank discussion after Easter?

An Ceann Comhairle: ——if we could proceed to statements.

Deputy Joan Burton: We are agreeing to the order but will the Government say now that it will give the Opposition more information about the deal done with Anglo Irish Bank that appeared in the bank's accounts yesterday?

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy, there is provision for a questions and answers session following statements.

Deputy Joan Burton: Yes, but only 30 minutes have been allocated.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy will be able to put her questions within a short period.

Deputy Joan Burton: I want a commitment from the Government that it will give the Opposition a further briefing and come back after Easter and spend longer than 30 minutes on questions on this matter. This is the future of our country.

An Ceann Comhairle: I am not disagreeing with the Deputy. The opportunity will be available to the Deputy later——

Deputy Joan Burton: This is war reparations. This is similar to what happened after Versailles and after the Franco-Prussian War.

An Ceann Comhairle: This type of behaviour is not appropriate to the Order of Business.

Deputy Joan Burton: The Irish taxpayer is carrying a debt now——

An Ceann Comhairle: I ask Deputy Burton to resume her seat.

Deputy Joan Burton: ——that has been put on them——

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Burton, resume your seat.

Deputy Joan Burton: The Ceann Comhairle does not want us to discuss this.

An Ceann Comhairle: I do. I am pointing out to the Deputy that she will have ample opportunity to make these points later on.

Deputy Joan Burton: The Ceann Comhairle is like the guy who gets the debt collectors bill in the door and decides not to open it.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy, please resume your set.

Deputy Joan Burton: We want a discussion.

An Ceann Comhairle: I call Deputy Ó Caoláin.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: Before Sinn Féin indicates acceptance or otherwise of the proposition in regard to speaking time on the banking issue, on Tuesday this week Government Members of this House supported a motion which transferred €1.93 billion of debt from Bank of Ireland to NAMA yet——

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Ó Caoláin provision has been made for statements later——

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: Perhaps the Ceann Comhairle will allow me to finish my question.

An Ceann Comhairle: Provision has also been made for Deputies to ask questions.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: Give me a break. The situation is that on the back of that public aid to Bank of Ireland it has in the past couple of days increased the premia on its home insurance customers by in excess of 50%.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy will have to hold that question and seek that information later.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: Perhaps the Ceann Comhairle's letter will be there when he gets home this evening.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy, please.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: The Ceann Comhairle needs to understand——

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy is holding up the Order of Business.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: No. This is an important matter that needs to be publicly aired and to have public attention drawn to it.

An Ceann Comhairle: I do not disagree with the Deputy.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: This is happening at the same time as Government is pressing ahead with proposals to bail out these banks. The Minister signalled the Bank of Ireland as the strongest and most likely to survive in all the circumstances maintaining, yet at a time when property is valued at least 50% less than heretofore it has increased——

An Ceann Comhairle: I must ask the Deputy to co-operate.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: In some instances, there is a 50% increase in premia that I have noted during the past couple of days.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy is holding up the proceedings of the House.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: Our offices were in contact with the bank this morning and it has confirmed that it has done this.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy, please.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: Is it any wonder the Minister could say Bank of Ireland's future is rosy and profitable? The only way the people can deal with this is to withdraw their custom.

An Ceann Comhairle: Is the proposal for dealing with No. 22a, statements on banking, agreed?

Deputy Enda Kenny: No. I wish to be helpful. I asked the Tánaiste three questions to which I would like an answer.

The Tánaiste: I take the opportunity this morning to say that we are all appalled at what happened in Anglo Irish Bank.

Deputy Emmet Stagg: The Tánaiste's party caused it.

The Tánaiste: We are all appalled by that, lest it not be said in this House.

(Interruptions).

The Tánaiste: It is also important to say——

Deputy Charles Flanagan: They were not appalled in the tent.

A Deputy: We are not answerable to Deputy Flanagan.

The Tánaiste: There has perhaps been a misinterpretation of what is happening. I want to reaffirm to this House and the people that all of the company directors loans will be vigorously pursued.

(Interruptions).

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputies, please. One speaker at a time.

The Tánaiste: I reiterate that I have full confidence in the Garda investigation that has been taking place and in regard to which considerable progress has been made. The investigation has been vigorous and focussed.

Deputy Jim O'Keeffe: Some 62 people were imprisoned last year for not paying their television licence fees.

The Tánaiste: We await the outcome of the joint investigation by the Garda and Director of Corporate Enforcement.

(Interruptions).

The Tánaiste: It is important to say, on the issue of the scope of the inquiry, that the Government agreed to the holding of an inquiry to deal with the issues that arose heretofore on the basis that it is hugely important that this information is available to us.

Deputy Joan Burton: The inquiry stops on 30 September.

The Tánaiste: I say also to the Labour Party that there has been five hours of discussion on this matter.

Deputy Joan Burton: Tough.

Deputy James Reilly: And 50 years of repayments.

The Tánaiste: Provision has been made for statements and a questions and answers session in the House today on this matter. It is not the intention of Government to provide more time.

Deputy Joan Burton: A Cheann Comhairle, I object. That is a disgraceful answer.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Burton cannot come in any more. I ask the Deputy to resume her seat.

Deputy Joan Burton: They are disgraceful actions. No wonder they ruined the country. They are not even willing to discuss it.

Deputy Emmet Stagg: On a point of order——

(Interruptions).

An Ceann Comhairle: We need some co-operation.

Deputy Enda Kenny: I will co-operate fully with the Chair.

Deputy Emmet Stagg: On a point of order——

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Kenny is on a point of order.

Deputy Enda Kenny: I want to repeat my two questions to the Tánaiste which she did not answer. Will the Government extend the inquiry beyond the date of the guarantee? There was intense activity between Anglo Irish Bank and the Government. We need to know the truth about what happened in there.

Deputy James Reilly: Hear, hear.

Deputy Enda Kenny: I understand there is a great deal more to come out which will not be very edifying. We need the inquiry to be extended beyond that date. Will that be the case? In view of the many messages now coming through about people who are worried about their employment in the Quinn Group, was the Government, through the Minister for Finance, in contact with Anglo Irish Bank as it is the Quinn Group's bank?

An Ceann Comhairle: Very briefly, Tánaiste.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: On a point of order, in her reply the Tánaiste indicated that today's exchanges would be the conclusion of the discussion on the banking issue. As Deputy Burton has pointed out, we agreed yesterday to the 90 minute arrangement which is provided for today. Our understanding in agreeing to that was that the debate would resume on the issue

after Easter and would remain on the Order Paper in the same way as, for example, statements on the budget remain on the Order Paper and are returned to over a period of time. I would like the Tánaiste to clarify that point.

My second point also concerns a point of order. On the issue of the banking inquiry, the Government issued a statement yesterday evening in which it stated that it would make available papers and documents to the inquiry if it sought them. The papers and documents concerned are relevant to the Government's decision to include Anglo Irish Bank in the bank guarantee scheme. The problem with that, from the point of view of the Standing Orders of the House, is that the terms of reference of the inquiry exclude the Government's decisions in respect of the guarantee and the month of September 2008. I want the Tánaiste to clarify a point regarding this matter, namely, whether the Government will bring into the House a proposal to amend the terms of reference of the inquiry to allow for the Government's decisions to be subject to the inquiry and to allow September 2008, which was a critical month, to be subject to that inquiry.

An Ceann Comhairle: Those questions would be ideal for a question and answer period.

Deputy Michael D. Higgins: No, they would not.

The Tánaiste: The statements will wrap up this afternoon. The Central Bank Bill will be up for discussion when we resume after the Easter break. In normal circumstances, there are many opportunities to raise these issues during the questioning of the Minister during Question Time. If people consider other debates to be important, this matter can be discussed between the Whips. Today I am not in a position to give extra time.

An Ceann Comhairle: Standing Order 26 does not allow——

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: There was agreement.

An Ceann Comhairle: We cannot have it.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: I did not offer on this issue at the beginning of the discussion——

An Ceann Comhairle: This is contempt.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: ——because the arrangement whereby 90 minutes would be agreed for discussion of this issue today was agreed yesterday. The Labour Party agreed to that yesterday and I intend that it will honour that agreement.

Deputy Michael D. Higgins: Yes.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: Part and parcel of that agreement was an understanding that we would be enabled to return to this issue after Easter. I do not want that opportunity to be closed down because it would be quite different from what we agreed to yesterday. Statements on banking policy would remain on the Order Paper, in the same way statements on the budget and so on remain on it, and we would return to them as time allows in the period after Easter. That is all I am seeking. If the Tánaiste will confirm that the statements will remain on the Order Paper after Easter, then we are agreed.

The Tánaiste: The Whips had a meeting yesterday; no guarantee was given.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: There was no Whips' meeting.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Kehoe, please.

The Tánaiste: No guarantee was given that there would further be consideration. However——

Deputy Emmet Stagg: The Whips did not have a meeting yesterday.

The Tánaiste: Wait one minute.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Stagg, please.

Deputy Noel Dempsey: Have a bit of manners.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Stagg, we can only have one speaker at a time, otherwise people will not be heard in the House.

Deputy Emmet Stagg: The Tánaiste is inadvertently misleading the House. The Whips did not meet yesterday.

The Tánaiste: The Whips were contacted about this issue. No guarantee was given. However, there was an indication, which I gave——

Deputy Phil Hogan: Guarantees are only given to banks.

The Tánaiste: ——a few minutes ago and which the Deputy did not happen to hear, that the Whips can meet and discuss this matter. If there is a necessity for further discussion that can be agreed between the Whips. That is all I said.

An Ceann Comhairle: Is the proposal for dealing No. 22a, statements on banking, agreed? Agreed. Is the proposal for dealing with No. 22b, statements on obesity, agreed? Agreed. Is the proposal that the Dáil on its rising today shall adjourn until 2.30 p.m. on Tuesday, 20 April 2010 agreed?

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: It is not agreed. The proposal is that the Dáil shall adjourn until Tuesday, 20 April 2010. It has been the tradition that the Dáil adjourns for a fortnight for Easter. Whatever argument there may have been in the past about whether that is a good or bad idea or good or bad practice, it is certainly not acceptable for the times in which we are living. There is a range of things which we need to address, including the results issued yesterday regarding Anglo Irish Bank which is now in State ownership, the worst ever results in corporate history, the difficulties facing the Quinn insurance group and implications of that for health insurance and the release yesterday of the live register figures which would normally receive much more attention than they got.

It is a mark of the sign of the times that 435,000 people are on the live register, the tenth successive month which it has been over 400,000. We need to discuss the industrial relations situation and the cuts in the education service, some of which was debated yesterday in respect of SNAs. There is no justification for this. When we address this issue we should take account of how these decisions are seen by the public who send us here. The idea that, at a time like this with so many issues which require attention, the Dáil should be closed down for over a fortnight for Easter is not acceptable and credible. The Labour Party is opposed to this proposal.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: I share the same opinion. The proposal to go into recess for two weeks is excessive. A single week for Easter is more than adequate, appropriate and justifiable but to go into a second week, even though that has been the precedent heretofore is in the current circumstances, as has been well outlined, not in any way sustainable, no matter

what explanation can be offered. The Government has not shown the basic argument as to why we should take this decision. Sinn Féin will also oppose this proposal.

Deputy Finian McGrath: The Independents will be here next.

An Ceann Comhairle: Is the proposal that the Dáil on its rising today shall adjourn until 2.30 p.m. on Tuesday, 20 April 2010 agreed?

Question put.

The Dáil divided: Tá, 69; Níl, 64.

Tá

Ahern, Dermot.
 Ahern, Michael.
 Ahern, Noel.
 Andrews, Barry.
 Andrews, Chris.
 Ardagh, Seán.
 Aylward, Bobby.
 Blaney, Niall.
 Brady, Áine.
 Brady, Cyprian.
 Brady, Johnny.
 Browne, John.
 Byrne, Thomas.
 Calleary, Dara.
 Carey, Pat.
 Collins, Niall.
 Conlon, Margaret.
 Connick, Seán.
 Coughlan, Mary.
 Cregan, John.
 Cuffe, Ciarán.
 Curran, John.
 Dempsey, Noel.
 Devins, Jimmy.
 Dooley, Timmy.
 Finneran, Michael.
 Fitzpatrick, Michael.
 Fleming, Seán.
 Flynn, Beverley.
 Gogarty, Paul.
 Gormley, John.
 Grealish, Noel.
 Hanafin, Mary.
 Haughey, Seán.
 Healy-Rae, Jackie.

Hector, Máire.
 Kelleher, Billy.
 Kelly, Peter.
 Kennedy, Michael.
 Killeen, Tony.
 Kitt, Tom.
 Lenihan, Brian.
 Lenihan, Conor.
 McEllistrim, Thomas.
 McGrath, Mattie.
 McGrath, Michael.
 McGuinness, John.
 Mansergh, Martin.
 Moloney, John.
 Moynihan, Michael.
 Mulcahy, Michael.
 Ó Cuív, Éamon.
 Ó Fearghail, Seán.
 O'Connor, Charlie.
 O'Dea, Willie.
 O'Donoghue, John.
 O'Flynn, Noel.
 O'Hanlon, Rory.
 O'Keeffe, Batt.
 O'Rourke, Mary.
 Power, Seán.
 Ryan, Eamon.
 Sargent, Trevor.
 Scanlon, Eamon.
 Smith, Brendan.
 Treacy, Noel.
 Wallace, Mary.
 White, Mary Alexandra.
 Woods, Michael.

Níl

Bannon, James.
 Behan, Joe.
 Breen, Pat.
 Bruton, Richard.
 Burke, Ulick.
 Burton, Joan.
 Byrne, Catherine.
 Clune, Deirdre.
 Connaughton, Paul.
 Costello, Joe.
 Coveney, Simon.
 Crawford, Seymour.
 Creed, Michael.
 Creighton, Lucinda.

D'Arcy, Michael.
 Deasy, John.
 Doyle, Andrew.
 Durkan, Bernard J.
 English, Damien.
 Enright, Olwyn.
 Feighan, Frank.
 Flanagan, Charles.
 Flanagan, Terence.
 Gilmore, Eamon.
 Hayes, Brian.
 Hayes, Tom.
 Higgins, Michael D.
 Hogan, Phil.

Níl—*continued*

Kehoe, Paul.
 Kenny, Enda.
 Lynch, Ciarán.
 Lynch, Kathleen.
 McCormack, Pádraic.
 McEntee, Shane.
 McGinley, Dinny.
 McHugh, Joe.
 McManus, Liz.
 Mitchell, Olivia.
 Morgan, Arthur.
 Naughten, Denis.
 Neville, Dan.
 Noonan, Michael.
 Ó Caoláin, Caoimhghín.
 Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.
 O’Keeffe, Jim.
 O’Mahony, John.

O’Shea, Brian.
 O’Sullivan, Jan.
 O’Sullivan, Maureen.
 Penrose, Willie.
 Rabbitte, Pat.
 Reilly, James.
 Ring, Michael.
 Sheahan, Tom.
 Sheehan, P.J..
 Sherlock, Seán.
 Shortall, Róisín.
 Stagg, Emmet.
 Stanton, David.
 Timmins, Billy.
 Tuffy, Joanna.
 Upton, Mary.
 Varadkar, Leo.
 Wall, Jack.

Tellers: Tá, Deputies John Curran and John Cregan; Níl, Deputies Paul Kehoe and Emmet Stagg.

Question declared carried.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: The Government Chief Whip, the Minister of State, Deputy Curran, had responsibility for the national drugs strategy. In the reconfiguration of ministerial portfolios, the job previously held by the Minister of State, Deputy Curran, did not reappear. Which Minister is now responsible for the national drugs strategy?

The Tánaiste: The Minister, Deputy Pat Carey.

Deputy Tom Sheahan: Given the continuing decline in the tourism sector——

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy, we are hoping things will be in order on the Order of Business.

Deputy Noel Dempsey: There is some hope of that.

Deputy Tom Sheahan: Without interruption, a Cheann Comhairle. You need this holiday more than the rest of us.

Deputy Noel Dempsey: He certainly does, with fellows like you on the Order of Business.

Deputy Tom Sheahan: Are any issues that might arise from Ireland’s exclusion from the terms of the Schengen Agreement likely to be dealt with by way of primary or secondary legislation, and if so, to what extent? I refer specifically to the difficulties——

An Ceann Comhairle: That question would be more appropriate for the line Minister.

Deputy Tom Sheahan: ——experienced by people from the Orient in getting travel visas to this country. We are suffering because of that.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: That is true. It is a valid question.

An Ceann Comhairle: We are not disagreeing but we are suggesting the Deputy asks a parliamentary question.

Deputy Tom Sheahan: I am sure the Tánaiste is well up on the Schengen Agreement.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy.

Deputy Tom Sheahan: I would love to hear her thoughts on same.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy should submit a parliamentary question after Easter.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: We never get replies to parliamentary questions.

Deputy Tom Sheahan: We will not get an answer.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: You know the difficulties with parliamentary questions a Cheann Comhairle. It is a valid question.

Deputy Tom Sheahan: Our tourism season might be over by the time I get the answer.

Deputy Noel Dempsey: When Deputy Durkan is sitting on this side of the House he can decide on that issue.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: I have questions on three items of promised legislation. When will the legislation be introduced to the House to transpose EU directive 2008/6/EC which provides for the completion of the liberalisation of the postal sector in Ireland by 1 January 2011 and to consolidate all previous legislation? Have discussions taken place between the various interested parties? Has the matter been discussed in Cabinet and have the heads of the Bill been agreed? Perhaps the Tánaiste would reply to that question for a start.

Deputy Noel Dempsey: What about the other two questions?

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: I have other questions but I would like to get a clear run at that one first.

The Tánaiste: The heads of the Bill are being drafted at the moment. It is expected that the Bill will come to the House at the end of the year.

An Ceann Comhairle: What is the second query on promised legislation?

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: You do realise, a Cheann Comhairle, that the end of the year will be very close to the deadline.

An Ceann Comhairle: I know.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: Not for the first time. The next item relates to the national vetting bureau Bill. That is deemed to be a fairly urgent piece of legislation. I asked about it on 17 February and subsequent to that. The status of the Bill is that publication is expected in 2010. Given that it is serious legislation that is urgently required, what action is taking place to expedite the process through Cabinet?

The Tánaiste: This is a priority for the Minister of State, Deputy Barry Andrews. The Bill is being worked on as a priority and he hopes to bring it to the House as quickly as possible. It is very complex legislation.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: Everyone agrees that a great deal of crime is committed by persons while on bail. This has been an issue for some considerable time. Legislation is promised and publication is expected but at this stage it is not possible to indicate when. In view of

[Deputy Bernard J. Durkan.]

the fact that it is urgently required legislation, which everyone agrees is necessary, could the Tánaiste indicate to the House whether it has been discussed to date in Cabinet and if any action has been taken to try to bring it through this House at an early date?

The Tánaiste: The bail amendment legislation has not come before Cabinet as of yet but we will try to bring it forward as quickly as possible.

Deputy Noel Dempsey: That is a record. Three questions.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: What action does the Tánaiste intend to take to try to follow that up, other than just appeasing me? I am not a person for appeasement.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: It is a serious question.

An Ceann Comhairle: We received an answer to it.

Deputy Noel Dempsey: You did well by being in order up to now.

An Ceann Comhairle: It is being contemplated by the Cabinet.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: What action is being taken to bring it about?

The Tánaiste: I will raise the matter with the line Minister.

Deputy James Reilly: I wish to raise two matters. I hope you will agree, a Cheann Comhairle, that they are both in order. I asked the Taoiseach yesterday about “head shops”. All I got were dark mutterings under his breath in response. Could the Tánaiste tell us whether there are any plans to ask the Minister for Health and Children to issue a directive to ensure that all substances sold in “head shops” have to be passed by the Irish Medicines Board and the Food Safety Authority of Ireland. It is a ministerial directive; we do not have to wait for European approval and we can protect our young people immediately.

An Ceann Comhairle: That is a suitable question for the Minister for Health and Children.

Deputy James Reilly: I will leave it up to the Tánaiste, who has children herself, to answer the question if she wishes. If she does not, we will get the message.

The second issue I would like to raise is that of Tallaght hospital. We know there was a debacle there in regard to unread X-ray results and that the complement of radiologists at the hospital is half that in St. Vincent’s, although the former hospital sees twice as many patients, both outpatients and accident and emergency patients.

An Ceann Comhairle: Is the Deputy tying that into legislation?

Deputy James Reilly: The legislation I refer to is No. 66 on the clár and pertains to the licensing of health facilities. When this legislation is introduced, will it be the intention to address these issues to ensure our health facilities are safe? I am told today that the three posts put in place to address the X-ray issue are filled by locums——

An Ceann Comhairle: Will the Deputy submit a parliamentary question to the Minister for Health and Children?

Deputy James Reilly: ——and that there are no permanent positions approved for radiology.

An Ceann Comhairle: This is the Order of Business.

Deputy James Reilly: This will happen again unless this issue is addressed.

An Ceann Comhairle: The line Minister would help.

Deputy Pádraic McCormack: Yesterday in the Dáil, a remark made by the Taoiseach was very damaging to my reputation. He referred to me as a “gurrier”. I have looked up the Oxford English Dictionary and the Anglo-Irish dictionary and noted there is no explanation for the word. Therefore, it must be an awfully bad word entirely.

Deputy Noel Dempsey: It is not on the list so one can use it.

Deputy James Reilly: Did the Deputy find “Biffo” in there?

Deputy Pádraic McCormack: I suggest respectfully to the Tánaiste that she get the Taoiseach to withdraw his remark. I have always been very nice to the Taoiseach.

Deputy Noel Dempsey: Did the Deputy send him an Easter card?

Deputy Pádraic McCormack: I never in all my life called him anything derogatory so I suggest respectfully that his remark be withdrawn.

Is the word “gurrier” on the Ceann Comhairle’s index of unparliamentary language that should not be used in the Dáil?

An Ceann Comhairle: We would have to check it. We had some spirited exchanges yesterday and I did not hear anything that was said.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: “Gurrier in chief” was the term the Taoiseach used.

Deputy Pádraic McCormack: The Ceann Comhairle is being informed that the word is on the index of unparliamentary language.

An Ceann Comhairle: We will check the list.

Deputy Pádraic McCormack: In that case, it should be withdrawn.

Deputy Noel Dempsey: Only if it is on the record.

Deputy Pádraic McCormack: Some people in Galway might not understand what the word “gurrier” means. I do not even know what it means but I know——

An Ceann Comhairle: We had stormy exchanges yesterday.

Deputy Pádraic McCormack: ——it was said in a very derogatory manner.

Deputy Noel Dempsey: The Deputy is such a sensitive soul.

Deputy Pádraic McCormack: My reputation in this Dáil is being damaged by that remark.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: It is a fair point.

An Ceann Comhairle: Can Deputy McCormack put it on hold for the moment?

Deputy Pádraic McCormack: Will the Tánaiste, on behalf of the Taoiseach, withdraw the remark?

A Deputy: Deputy McCormack is chairman of the parliamentary party.

Deputy Enda Kenny: The remark should be withdrawn.

Deputy Noel Dempsey: Only if it is on the record.

An Ceann Comhairle: I did not hear it.

(Interruptions).

Deputy Pádraic McCormack: I heard it. Worse still, it is repeated in today's media.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: That is serious.

Deputy Noel Dempsey: So the Deputy finally made the paper.

An Ceann Comhairle: I call Deputy Terence Flanagan.

Deputy Pádraic McCormack: I will put it on my election literature.

Deputy Terence Flanagan: I have two quick questions for the Tánaiste on Cadbury Ireland.

Deputy Noel Dempsey: Deputy McCormack is running again.

Deputy Terence Flanagan: Although the Tánaiste is the Minister for Education and Science, will she outline to the House the progress made on meeting the management of Cadbury Ireland to secure the future of the 1,200 employees in Dublin and Kerry? This is a crucial issue and has been raised frequently in the House by Deputies Bruton and Sheahan of Fine Gael.

An Ceann Comhairle: Will we need legislation on this?

Deputy Terence Flanagan: The Ceann Comhairle should give me a moment. When the Taoiseach visited Chicago recently, did he have an opportunity to meet the management at Kraft? We found out yesterday an extraordinary amount of money, £17 million sterling, was awarded to the chief executive of Kraft.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy will have to take this matter up with the line Minister.

Deputy Terence Flanagan: She must have thought she must be worth it, despite all the debt.

Deputy Joan Burton: She must have thought she was working for Anglo Irish Bank.

Deputy Terence Flanagan: There are 1,200 jobs at stake. If the Tánaiste can do so, will she give us an update?

Has the Government plans to introduce legislation regarding homeowners who signed contracts over the past few years, particularly since 2007?

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy will have to pursue this in another way. The Parliament is——

Deputy Terence Flanagan: It is an urgent issue. There are only a few hundred people involved.

An Ceann Comhairle: I really do not doubt the Deputy's sincerity on the matter.

Deputy Terence Flanagan: They signed contracts at the height of the property bubble. They face financial ruin as a consequence of the honouring of those contracts.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: Hear, hear.

An Ceann Comhairle: I advise the Deputy that seeking detailed information on the Order of Business is inappropriate. The Deputy should submit a parliamentary question.

Deputy Terence Flanagan: My point concerns legislation for homeowners who signed a contract at the height of the property boom. They face financial ruin as a result of these contracts being honoured.

An Ceann Comhairle: The line Minister will be delighted to discuss the matter during Question Time.

Deputy Terence Flanagan: Only a few hundred homeowners, a small number, are involved. Will the Tánaiste state whether there is legislation to help these people?

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: There is promised legislation.

The Tánaiste: There is a group working on it.

Deputy Terence Flanagan: Is a miscellaneous provisions Bill being worked on?

An Ceann Comhairle: I call Deputy Stagg.

Deputy Terence Flanagan: That is not acceptable.

(Interruptions).

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy is seeking detailed information. A parliamentary question is the way to deal with the matter.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: That precise legislation was promised in the House by the Minister for Finance on Second Stage of National Asset Management Agency Bill.

An Ceann Comhairle: We will take it up after Easter.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: There will be no Easter eggs.

Deputy Emmet Stagg: When the Ceann Comhairle is dealing with the matter raised by Deputy McCormack, he might also look at the index to see if the word “felon-setter” is in it. The Minister for Foreign Affairs used it in the House on Tuesday to describe Deputy Burton.

Deputy Joan Burton: I did not know that. He did not tell me personally.

Deputy Emmet Stagg: It was not very nice.

Deputy Joan Burton: I will have to take it up with him.

Deputy Emmet Stagg: The Ceann Comhairle might check it.

An Ceann Comhairle: I can only adjudicate on matters that I hear. I wish all Members were conscious of their responsibilities under protection.

Deputy Emmet Stagg: I am aware of the diplomatic deafness that normally afflicts people given the position of Chairman.

Deputy Noel Dempsey: If one cannot take it, one should not give it.

Deputy Emmet Stagg: On secondary legislation, arising from the reconfiguration of Departments will it be necessary to have orders of the House or motions to regulate the position of committees that mark Departments directly?

The Tánaiste: There will be a Government order first but I will have to revert to the Deputy on the configuration of committees.

Deputy Emmet Stagg: I thank the Tánaiste.

Deputy Denis Naughten: My point refers to promised legislation. In light of the embargo on the recruitment of front line staff in the health service that sees one in five front line posts vacant and which is having a direct impact on services for the elderly, psychiatric services and acute hospitals, it has been brought to my attention that, in recent days, 50% of the staff of one intensive care unit were not present, thereby threatening lives. In light of this fact, when will the nurses and midwives Bill be published? Will the Minister ensure that the embargo on front line health service staff is lifted? It is not a question of finance because the finances are in place in many cases. Front line staff cannot be appointed because of the embargo, thereby putting lives at risk.

Deputy Jan O'Sullivan: The nurses and midwives Bill is actually on the pink list, which means it should be published before the next session. I do not know if staff will be working during the Easter period but I strongly urge that the Bill be published. A very serious issue is arising for hospitals that do not have enough expert professional staff to serve the public. This is putting patients in danger. We need to see the Bill published.

An Ceann Comhairle: Is legislation promised in this area?

The Tánaiste: There is legislation promised. It was approved by the Government on 20 January. There are some technical and drafting matters to be addressed by the Office of the Attorney General prior to publication. That is what has caused the delay. It is expected that the Bill will be published very quickly.

Deputy Joan Burton: Can I help Deputy McCormack by saying I believe “gurrier“ is derived from the French word “*guerre*”, which means “war”. “Gurrier” actually means “warrior”.

Deputy Pádraic McCormack: I am very pleased with that.

Deputy Joan Burton: The Ceann Comhairle should remove it from the list of banned words.

An Ceann Comhairle: Yes.

Deputy Noel Dempsey: It depends on how one says it.

Deputy Joan Burton: Deputy McCormack should take it as a compliment from the Taoiseach made in the heat of the moment.

Deputy Pádraic McCormack: I will.

(Interruptions).

Deputy Joan Burton: Deputy McCormack should tell the Taoiseach to bring it on. It is a compliment.

Deputy Noel Dempsey: The Deputy can certainly put it on his election literature now.

Deputy Joan Burton: Yesterday, the European Commission announced that, in the context of the horrendous amounts of money going to the banks, it will carry out an in-depth investigation into the banks, particularly Anglo Irish Bank.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy is aware we are to have statements on banking very shortly.

Deputy Joan Burton: I am talking about a Commission statement.

An Ceann Comhairle: They are to culminate in a questions and answers session.

Deputy Joan Burton: I am talking about a Commission statement. The statement states that in the earlier part of the year, the Commission——

An Ceann Comhairle: I am sure the Deputy will be well able to ask her questions at that time.

Deputy Joan Burton: ——had been informed of the €8.3 billion that was going into Anglo Irish Bank.

An Ceann Comhairle: I want some co-operation so we can get the statements under way.

Deputy Joan Burton: Has an agreement been reached between the Government and the European Commission on the terms of reference of the in-depth investigation it announced it was launching yesterday?

An Ceann Comhairle: That question is more appropriate to the Minister for Finance.

Deputy Joan Burton: No.

An Ceann Comhairle: There is to be a questions and answers session.

Deputy Joan Burton: The European Commission deals with the Government. The Tánaiste is the deputy Head of Government. It is a most appropriate question for the Deputy Head of Government. It is a most appropriate question for the Tánaiste.

An Ceann Comhairle: I am not arguing about the appropriateness of the question. I am just saying that the Minister for Finance will be in later. There will be a question and answer session and the Deputy should please ask the question at that stage.

Deputy Joan Burton: No, this is not a matter between the Minister for Finance and the Commission, but rather between the Government and the Commission. Its statement related to Ireland and it said it is carrying out an in-depth investigation. It said it had reached agreement earlier in the year about the €8.3 billion for Anglo. At that point, did the Government reach an agreement with the Commission about the in-depth investigation?

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy is seeking information on the Order of Business. She will have an opportunity to ask the question later.

Deputy Joan Burton: Will the Government publish the terms of the Commission investigation——

An Ceann Comhairle: Will the Deputy please desist?

Deputy Joan Burton: —and the agreement it has reached with the Commission?

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Burton, please pose the question.

Deputy Joan Burton: Will the Ceann Comhairle kindly explain to me on what possible grounds that might not be in order?

An Ceann Comhairle: It is seeking information on the Order of Business.

Deputy Joan Burton: It is the Government's business with the Commission.

An Ceann Comhairle: It is not appropriate to seek detailed information on the Order of Business, and it does not relate to promised legislation.

Deputy Joan Burton: The Commission announced yesterday an in-depth investigation into everything to do with the banking collapse in Ireland. That includes the Irish Government. Can we just be told whether the Government has been advised and if it has reached an agreement with the Commission?

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy's question is out of order on the Order of Business. It is as simple as that. I call Deputy Joanna Tuffy.

Deputy Joanna Tuffy: I want to ask the Tánaiste about a survey that has been carried out by the ASTI which found that one in three schools is dropping a science subject for the leaving certificate. The biggest casualty is physics, followed by chemistry.

An Ceann Comhairle: As an orderly Member of the House, would Deputy Tuffy please submit a parliamentary question?

Deputy Joanna Tuffy: If the Ceann Comhairle allows me to finish, he will see that it is in order.

An Ceann Comhairle: Very briefly.

Deputy Joanna Tuffy: Apparently, one of the barriers is the perception that science does not relate to everyday life. The Department for which the Tánaiste is responsible has dropped science from its title, so what type of signal does that send out in terms of how science is valued within the Irish education system and in terms of trying to get the economy moving again?

The Tánaiste: I am on record as Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment as saying that science, technology and innovation are very much to the forefront as regards the skills requirements of this country. How we support young people in taking decisions to participate in science subjects is very much to the forefront of my mind.

Deputy Joanna Tuffy: Will the Tánaiste reinstate the title?

The Tánaiste: The title has been changed to indicate greater synergy between the skills needs of this country and educational development. The Deputy may rest assured that the issue of science will be very much to the forefront of what I want to drive as part of the Department.

Deputy Michael D'Arcy: I want to ask the Tánaiste for her views on the education patrons Bill which, as she will know, facilitates the VECs in becoming patrons of primary schools. What are the Tánaiste's views on that Bill, because it seems to me this would be a perfect vehicle, in

terms of legislation, to allow Educate Together, which is a patron for primary schools, to become a patron for secondary schools?

The Tánaiste: I shall have to consider that when I am bringing the legislation to Government.

Guardianship of Children Bill 2010: First Stage.

Deputy Kathleen Lynch: I move:

“That leave be granted to introduce a Bill entitled an Act to vindicate the rights of the child pursuant to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.”

An Ceann Comhairle: Is the Bill opposed?

The Tánaiste: No.

Question put and agreed to.

An Ceann Comhairle: The motion for leave to introduce the Bill is agreed. As this is a Private Members' Bill, Second Stage must, under Standing Orders, be taken in Private Members' time. Deputy Kathleen Lynch should therefore move that the Second Stage be taken in Private Members' time.

Deputy Kathleen Lynch: I move: “That Second Stage be taken in Private Members' time.”

Question put and agreed to.

EU Directive: Motion.

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy John Curran): I move:

That Dáil Éireann approves the exercise by the State of the option or discretion under Protocol No. 21 on the position of the United Kingdom and Ireland in respect of the area of freedom, security and justice annexed to the Treaty on European Union and to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, to take part in the adoption and application of the following proposed measure:

an initiative for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on the rights to interpretation and to translation in criminal proceedings,

a copy of which was laid before Dáil Éireann on 20th January, 2010.

Question put and agreed to.

Banking System: Statements.

Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Deputy Dara Calleary): I am pleased to have the opportunity to address the House this morning on the final phase measures that the Government is taking to restore stability and certainty to Ireland's banking system. The banking measures announced by the Minister for Finance on Tuesday are the last in a series of successful measures taken to stabilise the banks, to protect the interests of the taxpayer and depositors and to put the economy in a position to benefit from the global economic recovery that is getting under way.

The decisive measures taken by the Government over the past 18 months mean that our international reputation is credible. Our efforts to restore stability have been positively received

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throughout Europe and around the world and we are now in a position to return to sustainable economic growth. With these latest initiatives, the Government has tackled the problems presented by the banking crisis head on. These measures will ensure that our banking system plays an important role in Ireland's recovery. There is no doubt that many of the decisions taken have been unpleasant, and are unpopular, but they will put us in a position to enjoy long-term stability.

In the Dáil on Tuesday night, the Minister for Finance, Deputy Brian Lenihan, stated that the initiatives he had announced provided a solid basis for fostering confidence in the future of our financial system. Despite the predictable negative response from the usual quarters, the wider international reaction has shown that the Minister was correct. In the international media, even the *Financial Times*, an organ that is never slow to criticise the policies of governments, has been most positive and commented that Ireland is managing the downturn well and beginning to claw back competitiveness. It went on to comment:

Taken together, and with the right policy tweaks, this could offer Ireland a route back to the authentically tigerish 1990s rather than the long recession of the 1980s.

Reports from our embassies also indicate positive international reactions. For example, in Germany there is praise that the Government is tackling the problems head on, and media articles note that the financial markets have responded positively and point to the reduced costs of Irish Government bonds compared to equivalent Greek bonds.

In the Seanad yesterday, Senator Fiona O'Malley correctly referred to the problems that negative domestic publicity can create with regard to attracting — and, indeed, retaining — foreign direct investment. Therefore, positive, independent, international reactions to our banking and economic policies are particularly welcome in this context. With regard to sovereign borrowing, the fact is that our spreads have been falling in response to positive views concerning our progress in grappling with our wide ranging problems. The international reaction to our policy mix is, therefore, positive but that is a message not a target. The key target is to deal with our domestic problems in such a way as to provide the most secure future for our people. We are all rightly concerned about the burden of the banks' recapitalisation on our citizens, but pretending that there are easier solutions does not ease the burden. The Minister's statement on banking represents a clear recognition of the problems that exist and it shows that this Government is determined to tackle the problems head on in order to ensure we get out of this crisis as quickly as possible.

I now want to deal specifically with NAMA. The House is aware that the first loans have transferred to the agency. NAMA must ensure the best possible return for the taxpayer and this is why it has taken such a careful approach to the valuation of the loans. The first tranche represents approximately 20% of the total amount to be transferred and comes from the ten largest borrowers. The banks will incur heavy losses on the loans which NAMA will acquire from them. This is as it should be and it is clear that NAMA is no bail out for the banks, nor indeed for the developers, who are still required to pay back their loans in full. The crystallisation of the loans has made the future of each of the institutions clearer and has forced them to deal with the resultant losses now.

The recapitalisation implications of these losses for each institution have been dealt with in detail over the past few days and I do not wish to restate them now. There is no doubt that recapitalisation requires substantial investment by the State in the banks, although payments will be structured in a way that eases the burden on taxpayers. These actions are being taken for a good reason, so that the banking system may return to its rightful role as provider of credit to the real economy. No other course of action would result in a swift return by the

banking sector to its function as a provider of finance. By forcing the banks to recognise their losses upfront, we can rid the system of these speculative loans and end the mismanagement of the banking system.

The suggestion remains that the nationalisation option would have been less costly. The argument seems to be that if only we nationalised AIB and Bank of Ireland it would have eliminated the valuation risk around NAMA, and as a result there would have been no need for the concept of long-term economic value. As the Minister announced on Tuesday, if the Government had opted to do this, the losses crystallised at the two main banks would still have had to be fully recognised, and real capital would still have been required. As the full owner of these institutions, the State would have had to cover the totality of this enlarged capital requirement, with no prospect of new private sector funds contributing. All in all, I firmly believe that the option chosen by the Government is the most beneficial to the taxpayer.

The subject of benefits leads me to the proposals for credit and lending. Recapitalisation of the banks is not for the benefit of the banks but rather for the benefit of the Irish economy. The primary function of the banking system must be providing credit to the real economy. Well-capitalised banks are in a much better position to lend. In this regard, the lending targets outlined by the Minister for lending to small and medium enterprises this year and next will play their part. Furthermore, the banks will be required to realign their business practices with the needs of the modern Irish economy. Properly targeted lending to SMEs provides growth and employment. The Minister stressed on Tuesday that working capital for businesses is essential. Entrepreneurs must be facilitated and given the scope to expand and develop. The target set, of €3 billion each in new lending in 2010 and 2011 from Bank of Ireland and AIB will see this objective met. To ensure the proper management of these funds the two banks will be required to submit SME lending plans both by geography and sector for 2010 and 2011.

In addition to this and in recognition of the essential role played by small and medium enterprises in our economy, today marks the launch of the credit review office, which will provide a simple, effective review process for SMEs, including sole traders and agricultural enterprises, who have had requests for credit refused or reduced, or indeed who have had credit withdrawn. The outcome for the review process for the borrower will be an independent and impartial opinion on the credit decision. Banks will be required to comply with recommendations from the credit review office or to explain why they will not do so. Mr. John Trethowan will head the office, with administrative assistance from Enterprise Ireland. Mr. Trethowan will also be reviewing bank lending policies and the banks' SME lending plans as part of his remit. If the Minister deems that further action is required on the part of the banks, he and the Government will not be slow to act.

There is no question but that there are large costs to resolving Ireland's banking crisis. However, Ireland enjoys the confidence of the international markets because of the determined and successful steps the Government has taken to place our public finances and our banking sector on a more sustainable footing. It is clear that facing up to the problems presented by the severe downturn in our fiscal position has paid off. The actions announced on Tuesday will have the same affect on our financial sector by compelling the banks to face up to their difficulties too. The banks have been forced to recognise their losses and this Government, on behalf of the taxpayer, has committed the capital that will ensure we have a banking system to serve this economy as it recovers.

The closely co-ordinated approach to the policy initiatives on banking is a clear indication of the determination of the Government and of all the State agencies concerned to work in a co-ordinated manner to secure the future of the financial system and to build for the future. It has drawn a line under the inadequate oversight of the past and is a clear indication that only

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the highest standards will be tolerated in our financial services sector into the future. At the risk of repeating what the Taoiseach and the Minister have already said, the certainty provided by these latest announcements will further boost international confidence in this country and they will smooth Ireland's path to economic recovery.

Deputy Richard Bruton: The first words of the Minister's statement, 1 April, are perhaps the most telling because it is something of an April fool's trick to give a speech on the banking crisis and never make a reference to Anglo Irish Bank, particularly the day after the EU said an in-depth study will have to be conducted into the Government's strategy on Anglo Irish Bank and the day after Anglo Irish Bank revealed the biggest losses ever sustained by a company in Ireland. That the Minister could present what is supposed to be an update on the banking situation and make no reference to Anglo Irish Bank is mind blowing.

There are very severe consequences of what we are learning each day about Anglo Irish Bank and they must be addressed in an honest way instead of being ignored in this fashion. The truth is that when the Government adopted the policy of treating Anglo Irish Bank as a going concern, the estimated cost was to be €4 billion in recapitalisation. The Government said this strategy was justified. Last week we were told another €6 billion to €9 billion might have to go into the bank. Then we discovered that amount has increased to €18 billion and yesterday we discovered that even the cumulative figure of €22 billion that will have gone into the bank might not be the bottom. There might still be a bigger hole. At what point does the penny drop that perhaps the Minister might have to consider other options than regarding Anglo Irish Bank as a going concern? That is the important question everybody is asking. Where is the scrutiny of the evidence about the different alternatives? The Minister quoted the directors of Anglo Irish Bank as the source of evidence about this, but overnight they have rewritten their estimates of the costs of all the options. Every day these options are becoming more expensive. The Government must get a handle on that and deliver some real evidence.

I welcome the comments about SME lending plans for AIB and Bank of Ireland. However, let us not forget that 70% of the recapitalisation money, which was supposed to be the silver bullet to get bank lending going again, is going into Anglo Irish Bank for which there is no SME lending plan. It will not lend a red cent other than to those it is already supporting and to whom it has recklessly lent money. What are the implications for the Minister's strategy of the EU deciding it will not accept the Anglo Irish Bank restructuring plan? It is now demanding that a fresh plan be resubmitted. It has effectively turned down the Minister's plan and is considering the closure option, but the Minister was not willing even to mention that.

We must get to grips with the scale of the challenges. The Minister made selective reference to what is happening and picked out some matters that appear to be good. Yes, the spreads have not increased overnight. They are still at 1.44% over the German rate. However, that is double the Spanish spreads, another country that is going through a property difficulty and having to unwind. We have double the spreads of Spain, so we are not in a robust position on spreads. The question that must be asked has been posed by Professor Lucey in today's newspapers. As he describes it, what NAMA is undertaking is the virus of funding short to buy long. The very tactic that brought down Lehmans is still rampant in NAMA. The Minister is proposing to borrow six month money on a rolling basis to fund NAMA. Where is the calculation of what the long-term funding cost of NAMA will be? That is something we must confront. There was a draft business plan from NAMA but it was a shambles. It was founded on assumptions into which nobody could buy. It was not just the Opposition that did not buy into it, nobody outside the House bought into the notion that 80% of these loans would be fully

repaid or the projected cost of funds. If we are to advance this debate and get to grips with what is involved, we must address those issues.

It is interesting that the Minister quoted the *Financial Times* as if it had endorsed the strategy the Government has adopted. I have a copy of the *Financial Times* editorial yesterday which discussed the bank strategy. It said that such a risk is only worth taking if the cost to taxpayers has been minimised and the assistance provided genuinely draws a line under the banks' losses. Unfortunately, it stated, in this case neither of these conditions has been clearly met, and the Government might have done more. It goes on to state that the resulting losses will not be shared beyond the equity holders. The *Financial Times* is saying precisely what Members on this side of the House and many others are saying, that the Government has fallen short. It expects the taxpayer to bear the entire load of this adjustment. It is pretending the taxpayer has a responsibility to people who drove the lending in Anglo Irish Bank. The debts run up by Seán FitzPatrick are not taxpayers' debts and we do not have an obligation to pretend that they are.

We must look cold-heartedly at the options. More and more people need to question this. What we have heard from Government is predominantly about fear of what might happen, such as the sky might fall in to bondholders who might never lend to us again. That is not analysis and it is not enough. As the cost of propping up Anglo Irish Bank has gone from €4 billion to €22 billion, surely there is a point where the balance of cost to benefit begins to tip over. Let us see the Government's analysis of where it begins to tip over.

We are continually seeing special spinning of the Government's view on this, not honest appraisal of where we are. I am disappointed the Minister has not added anything to the debate because we are in a very difficult time.

An issue also arises regarding the approach to Allied Irish Banks, which, as I understand it, is being given substantial time to ascertain whether it can come up with solutions to this. I see this as a prescription for Allied Irish Banks freezing lending for the remaining part of the year because it will be struggling to find how it can preserve its independence from the Government. Has the Government considered the option of taking a more direct approach and moving in, converting its preference shares and managing that process of generating capital so we would protect the taxpayer in that situation? If the Government has considered this option, what determination has it made on it? Allied Irish Banks has been viewing its problems through rose-tinted glasses for too long and the risk is that it will be Irish business and the prospects of Irish recovery that will suffer as it takes this rose-tinted view of its future.

On every front, the Minister has not addressed this issue. We need to see much more honest answers as to what are the options that face us. This is what I hope we will see as the debate moves to a questions and answers session.

Deputy Pat Rabbitte: In budget 2010, the Government announced it had approved a capital spending envelope of €39 billion for the seven-year period from 2010 to 2016. With some justification ever since, Ministers have taken shelter behind that commitment when criticised for not coming forward with stimulus measures to arrest unemployment and get new jobs going. That €39 billion is the same figure the Minister for Finance committed to Anglo Irish Bank on Tuesday, which gives some idea of the enormity of the decision taken — State support for a failed private bank is the equivalent of the capital programme for seven years.

The Minister for Finance told the Dáil on Tuesday:

The detailed information that has emerged from the banks in the course of the NAMA process is truly shocking. At every hand's turn our worst fears have been surpassed. Some institutions were worse than others but our banking system, to a greater or lesser extent,

[Deputy Pat Rabbitte.]

engaged in reckless property development lending. In far too many cases there were also shoddy banking practices. The banks played fast and loose with the economic interests of this country.

In that, the Minister spoke for everyone in this House. Imagine the shock and demoralisation outside of the House, where taxpayers and citizens are struggling to understand how the position in our banks could be even worse than they had imagined.

Let us not fool ourselves. What has been forced through this House by the Government on Tuesday ultimately rebounds to the Exchequer and dramatically increases the sovereign debt being imposed on this and future generations. Let us not fool ourselves about promissory notes, European Central Banks IOUs, special purpose vehicles and off-balance sheet accounting. I understand why the Government does not want this disaster reflected in the national accounts. However, there is no escaping the reality — the bank rescue will impose a huge debt burden on the shoulders of every taxpayer in the land and will virtually double the national debt.

Already, we are seeing how this bailout is feeding through into the industrial relations arena. The Government's rescue package for the banks has pledged more than three times the annual tax revenues of the country. Of this amount, ordinary people cannot understand why the Government would want to commit almost €40 billion to the Casino Royale on St. Stephen's Green. The Government is not only constraining its own capacity to govern this country in anything approaching a fair way, but is constraining the capacity of future Governments to do so.

The figures for Anglo Irish Bank are so enormous and debilitating for our economy and for the morale of our people that we can no longer rely on assertion in this House as the basis for decision-making. Neither the Government nor the banks have told us the truth to date. The bankers lied to the Joint Committee on Finance and the Public Service. They told us that the Irish banks were sound, adequately capitalised, professionally managed and did not have a sub-prime mortgage problem. Since then, they have refused to admit the truth, even to themselves. The chief executive of the country's largest bank, in a memorable phrase, said that he would rather die than accept State equity. The State is now the financier of last resort for the country's largest bank, which behaved with a recklessness that is breathtaking.

The Government took a similar drip-drip approach to revealing the truth. Although I am surprised it has not been adduced in this House, we should remember what the Taoiseach, Deputy Brian Cowen, said to Deputy Gilmore on the morning after the fateful decision of September 29:

The Irish banking sector has very well secured loans... It is important to make the point that in the event of any further call, it is my intention to ensure the Irish taxpayer will not be held liable in any way for any deficit that might occur in the event of there being a problem in the future. I intend that the sector will have to discharge any liability that may arise.

That was the Taoiseach on 30 September 2008. How far we have come since then.

Ever since that statement, the Government has been mending its hand. It never admitted the scale of the disaster until Tuesday of this week, 18 months after the guarantee, and has, time after time, made claims that simply do not stand up. Where now are the cross-collateralised loans we were reassured about? It would appear that, in the case of the Irish banks, cross-collateralisation means that the loans were secured on both a wing and a prayer.

The most serious of those claims has been the assertion that Government measures would get credit flowing again. That has not happened, with worsening consequences for jobs and the

real economy. It is for this reason the Labour Party published its proposals for the establishment of a strategic investment bank. Instead, it appears we are now irrevocably committed to investing unimaginable amounts of State funds that we do not have in the Casino Royale on St. Stephen's Green.

My point is that we cannot rely on mere assertions to justify the enormity of the decision forced through by the Government. The alternative Minister for finance, Deputy Eamon Ryan, has even gone so far as to make a fool of himself, and try to make a fool of the rest of us, by suggesting that to take any alternative view on Anglo Irish Bank was, in effect, to take a decision to leave the euro. That kind of assertion is no longer adequate to justify the decision that this House made at the behest of Government.

These assertions have proved baseless in the past. To assert now that it will cost more to wind down Anglo Irish Bank than to keep it on a life support machine is no longer acceptable. We need to see the evidence. It is not enough to roll out Mr. Alan Dukes who, unsurprisingly, sounds more like a politician than a banker. For all the praise heaped on him in recent days by Fianna Fáil spokespersons, he sounds less than convincing. His figures keep changing and the role envisaged for Anglo Irish Bank in the future configuration of Irish banking, seems fanciful in the extreme. We need to see the evidence on which the Government and the chairman-designate of Anglo Irish Bank are basing their assertions. We need to see the reports prepared by independent consultants. We need to see the assumptions made in these reports. We need to know the identities of the bond holders and the implications of having to negotiate with them. We need to know who is behind the outstanding €2 billion in subordinated debt.

It is not acceptable for the Government to come into this House and say that any alternative to the road the Government has taken is unacceptable. The only evidence produced is the assertion by the speaker at the time or by the chairman-designate of Anglo Irish Bank. I accept entirely that to talk about the orderly wind-down of a bank is not the same as talking about closing a restaurant. I accept entirely there are serious risks in funding, and serious risks to do with outstanding derivative contracts, and question marks about realising the assets. All these questions arise. However, we need to see the detail of the argument that is being advanced by the Government to suggest that we should make a commitment to this failed, non-trading bank that is the equivalent of seven years of the capital programme. This is seven years of the capital programme committed to a failed bank. Does anybody on the Government side seriously believe that this bank is going to be resurrected in some form so that it will have some niche market in the new world of Irish banking?

The onus of proof is on the Government. I know we cannot do it in a hurry but the figures revealed on Tuesday are so enormous that it is no longer unthinkable that we have to examine that possibility. What argument is there that every bank, whatever the circumstances, must be kept alive? That is what the Government is doing in the case of the Irish Nationwide Building Society, a building society that was supposed to pledging mortgages and which in fact has 80% of its loan book devoted to commercial property. The Government's plan is to close it down and that is a correct plan. Therefore, why is it unthinkable that we should have a serious examination in this House about whether Anglo Irish Bank should be allowed continue? How can we continue to throw money into it like one would into a furnace? How can one expect trade unionists, whose low-paid members have been taking serious wage cuts, to merely accept, on the assertion of the Minister for Finance, that we have to continue to throw money into this bank?

We have to see the reports. The chairman-designate of Anglo Irish Bank has to accept that it is now a semi-state company and that we are entitled to see what is the corporate strategy.

[Deputy Pat Rabbitte.]

We are entitled to see what these reports contain and on what assumptions they were compiled. This is the biggest decision that this House has ever made and it is not good enough to expect us to rubber-stamp it on the basis of assertion and without production of the detailed evidence.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: The Irish people are sick of the myths and mistruths about the economy and especially about the banks, being peddled by this Fianna Fáil-Green Government to suit its own political agenda. This morning, I was speaking to a customer who had just received a letter from Bank of Ireland. Her home insurance premium is about to increase by more than 50%. Despite never making any claim on the policy, her premium is going up from €375 to €577 per annum. On top of that, the excess on the policy is being increased from €152 to €350 and even €600 for many circumstances covered. This must be an April fool joke. Bank of Ireland has been instructed to raise some of its own capital but gouging and screwing ordinary customers who are already bailing out this bank via their pay cheques, is not the way to do it. This is happening in a situation where property values have dropped significantly and therefore, the cost of replacement or repair in the event of claims, has also decreased. Is it any wonder that the Minister in his speech on Tuesday singled out Bank of Ireland as the most profitable of the banks. He stated it has “a strong future” and that recapitalising Bank of Ireland will, “support our economic recovery”. I suggest the Government tells that to the customers who are trying to recover this morning from the shock of the arbitrary increases placed on their home insurance premia.

The consumer price index notes an increase in insurance premia of 13% over the year. Why is Bank of Ireland, in which the taxpayer has been forced to take a growing share, hiking its premia by over 50%? In return for their massive subsidies, what control have the taxpayers been given over the banks to stop this kind of robbery? The answer is, nothing, thanks again to the incredible incompetence of this Government. We have been told repeatedly that it would be more expensive to wind down the zombie Anglo Irish Bank than to pursue this current course. Leaving aside the fact we are, in all likelihood, witnessing a protracted wind-down, where is the cost-benefit analysis that shows this is indeed the more cost-effective option? So far, €4 billion has gone into the bank, another €8.3 billion is needed immediately and then another €10 billion. What happens then? Where does the splurge on Anglo Irish Bank end? It is clearly insolvent, owing approximately €2 billion in subordinated debt. AIB is being described as a dead bank walking by several economists. Rather than declaring both of these banks insolvent, the Government is doing everything possible to protect bond holders who provided equity at their own risk. That is the nature of their business. Allowing them to take a hit on their risk would not entail the end of Ireland as we know it. Throwing €80 billion into a black hole while inflicting it as debt on the Irish people, will devastate this State's economy. The Minister argues that he has moved as fast as he could on this issue and needed to put relevant pieces in place. However, as financial newspapers have pointed out, our banking system is one of the last to be recapitalised and we are recapitalising zombie banks. As the Central Bank report showed yesterday, the rate of lending fell again in February. These banks have paralysed the economy for more than 18 months while the Government has stood by and watched.

The figures being discussed by the Department of Finance regarding the amount the State will spend on recapping are misleading. For example, of the €7.4 billion need by AIB that we know of — at least for now — the Government hopes money can be raised from the sale of AIB's foreign subsidiaries. This is nonsense. Sale of a subsidiary considered an asset turns the asset into cash; it does not increase the bank's assets, particularly if that subsidiary goes for less than its value. The bank might shrink, making its relative capital requirement smaller as a percentage. It is not a magic solution, nothing of the kind.

There is also the myth that the Government is hard-balling the banks and their management. Hard-balling baloney. The annual accounts of Anglo Irish Bank released yesterday show that last year the bank made the largest corporate loss in Irish history. Most of this loss was incurred from the writing-down of loans. Most of this loss was incurred from the writing down of loans, among which were loans worth €85 million to its former chairman Seán Fitzpatrick. The bank expects it will never see €68 million of Mr. Fitzpatrick's loans. The figure for former chief executive David Drumm was just over €8.3 million, with the bank setting aside €6.7 million for possible non-repayment. Most of this is linked to a loan given to Mr. Drumm to buy shares in the bank. William McAteer, former finance director, owes the bank €8.5 million, of which more than €7.6 million is not expected to be repaid. This money also relates to a loan given to buy shares in the bank. The figures show that almost €13.9 million was jointly lent to Mr. FitzPatrick and former director Lar Bradshaw to facilitate an investment in oil exploration. The bank has set aside €11 million to account for possible non-repayment of this money. Some €3.1 million was also lent to Mr. FitzPatrick to fund a hotel investment. Provision has been made for the possible non-repayment of almost €22 million of the €27.3 million in loans to Mr. Bradshaw.

The Government is writing down these loans via NAMA and recapitalising the bank. Where are these men who benefited from the loans? Seán Fitzpatrick spent 24 hours in a police station in Bray. Is that the going time for someone who has effectively stolen €65 million from the State?

The Minister has a lot of questions to answer. For example, how much money in hard cash will be added to the budget sheet this December as a result of draw-downs on the recapitalisation promissory notes in 2010? I ask this because the Minister will start preparing us for this budget in September with his usual salvos of tough times and belt tightening. When he is making his sounds about further cuts to social welfare and nurses' and teachers' wages or hospital wards being closed because he has promised the EU to take another few billion euro off the deficit this year, how much will be added to the deficit for the banks? Will it be €1 billion or €3 billion? The public deserve to know how much pain they will be asked to take while this Government, supported by the EU, spends Irish taxpayers' money on the likes of Anglo Irish Bank.

The Minister also needs to answer the question being asked by several economists regarding the discount on NAMA loans. We know the first tranche is being discounted at 47% but that only applies to €16 billion of the €81 billion to be transferred. What discount will be applied across the board? It will hardly be 47% on average across the rest of the loans because surely that would require higher recapitalisation in certain banks. How certain can we be that the sums being done on AIB's sheets completely and adequately reflect the write down of their bad loans?

The Minister will know that people are holding their breath to see if the shocking figure of €80 billion announced yesterday is the final amount to be put into the banks. I fear that will not be the case, however, because it does not allow for further falls in property prices or defaults. AIB's interest rate hike represents the beginning of the squeeze on residential and business loan holders. The sad reality is that the Government's refusal to nationalise in order to put everything on the table for once and for all is dragging out the problem and potentially hurting this economy beyond repair. This Government is riding headless into the morass.

Deputy Michael Kennedy: I welcome the opportunity to speak on this issue. We have heard a lot of comments on Anglo Irish Bank and the actions of its bankers are regretted by everybody on this side of the House, despite the accusations that were thrown around the Chamber yesterday. The Minister for Finance spoke on behalf of everyone on the Fianna Fáil benches

[Deputy Michael Kennedy.]

when he alluded to reckless banking practices. Nobody condones in any way the actions of those reckless bankers.

The investigations to which Deputy Ó Caoláin referred are being conducted by the Garda rather than the Government, which is as it should be. I welcome the recent arrests and, like everyone else in this House and the general public, look forward to court actions.

Repayment will be sought on 100% of the value of the loans that NAMA takes over. Those who suggest otherwise are indulging in idle talk. Every developer and builder who owes money to the banks will be chased down for the full value of their debts.

The independent inquiry into the Central Bank, financial regulation and other issues in the banking sector is important because we need to know how and why the failings occurred. It is untrue to suggest that Members on this side of the House have no regard for the investigation.

The biggest issue we face is finding money to resolve the cash crisis that confronts businesses. I welcome the Government's provision of €6 billion to the two main banks over the next two years. It is important that we get cash flowing once again. Criticisms of past decisions will do nothing to achieve that end, however. The independent credit review process, which was launched this morning, is also important because people need the opportunity of having their cases reconsidered where their credit applications are not successful.

All the main institutions, including the EU, the ECB, the IMF and the OECD, have stated that the Government's plans are the correct ones. Recently, the French Prime Minister stated that the Irish Government was showing the way forward for Europe. Those who criticise us are not offering alternative solutions. What solutions do Fine Gael and the Labour Party propose? Once again, they say we should renege on our debt and thereby damage our international reputation. They would sell down the Swanee the people who have €80 billion on deposit in Anglo Irish Bank. Have they any regard for the small people who have money in credit unions and pension funds or the small business person and private citizen who invested their money in that bank? Are they suggesting we should throw them to the wolves and say "sorry lads, you made a bad decision by banking with the wrong corporation". I do not think so.

Greek politicians initially proposed reneging on their country's debt but recent experience has caused them to change their minds and go to Europe, as we did, for help in finding solutions to their problems. No country in Europe has reneged on its debt. I would draw a comparison to our nearest neighbours in the UK, which has pumped £850 billion into its banking system to stop banks failing and take over majority shareholding. The Labour Party Government in the UK has not gone down the road of nationalisation which would be the natural inclination of Deputies Burton, Rabbitte and Ó Caoláin. The Deputies should ask themselves why the British Government, a Labour Party Government, has not gone down the road of nationalisation. Instead, it has pumped in £850 billion sterling. Has anyone in the House of Commons from the Conservative or Liberal parties or the backbenches of the Labour Party questioned it? The answer is "No" because they realise it is necessary and vital for the UK economy and a functioning banking system.

Deputy Joan Burton: That is a complete fantasy.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Johnny Brady): Deputy Burton should have manners, please.

Deputy Michael Kennedy: If Deputy Burton wishes, I have chapter and verse in terms of the amounts of money the institutions received and it adds up to £850 billion sterling.

Deputy Joan Burton: The Deputy should audition for comedy hour.

Acting Chairman: The Deputy should have some respect for the House.

Deputy Michael Kennedy: I remind those in Fine Gael and the Labour Party of the banking crisis in 1984. An insurance corporation got itself into trouble and AIB was the major shareholder. The Labour Government came in overnight and bailed out the company, which was the correct thing to do. People on this side of the House agreed with the strategy because one could not have a bank failure even though there were reckless decisions made by insurance underwriters that involved underwriting risks on bush fires in Australia and so on. That is a fact. I remind Deputy Rabbitte that the current Labour Party MEP, Mr. De Rossa, asked numerous Dáil questions and the figure amounted to £450 million which is of the order of €600 million or in today's money probably €1 billion. That was the cost of the bailout for the AIB insurance corporation fiasco in the 1980s. The Labour Party Government took the correct decision in terms of not allowing a bank failure because our reputational interests were at stake.

We borrowed €24 billion last year from foreign bankers. Anyone with an iota of business acumen or a business brain is aware one does not allow one's reputation to be tarnished with a failure of non-payment of debt. If one reneges on a car mortgage, it is a black mark on one's record forever. Deputies can ask any small business person who has ever had the misfortune to have not paid a debt——

Deputy Joan Burton: The Deputy should ask Seán FitzPatrick. He has reneged on €150 million.

Acting Chairman: The Deputy should allow Deputy Kennedy to continue.

Deputy Michael Kennedy: It is on one's record forever.

Deputy Joan Burton: On a point of information, has Seán FitzPatrick informed the Deputy how he received a write-down of €100 million? He must have talked to Fianna Fáil about that.

Acting Chairman: Deputy Burton had her chance to speak yesterday.

Deputy Michael Kennedy: This is typical of the Labour Party. They shout one down because they do not wish to listen to the truth or the facts. Let the Labour Party put forward its alternative and explain what it would do because all it is good for is simply throwing out innuendo.

Deputy Joan Burton: We would cut out the corruption. That is what we would do.

Acting Chairman: Deputy Burton, please.

Deputy Michael Kennedy: No one on this side of the House stands over anything. We all wish to see corruption rooted out.

Deputy Joan Burton: We would cut out the Deputy's corruption.

Deputy Michael Kennedy: We all wish to see the investigation.

Deputy Joan Burton: That would be a start.

Acting Chairman: Deputy Burton, please.

Deputy Michael Kennedy: I was trying to make the point that no one in Fianna Fáil agrees with corruption. Every one in Fianna Fáil wants to see the report into how regulation failed

[Deputy Michael Kennedy.]

and how our banks failed us. I welcome that report and look forward to seeing it at the earliest opportunity.

The new Governor of the Central Bank, Professor Honohan, and the new Financial Regulator, Mr. Elderfield, are independent and came in after all these problems. They have effectively stated that what the Government is doing is correct because they realise there is no other option.

Deputy Pat Rabbitte: They have said nothing of the kind.

Deputy Michael Kennedy: Professor Honohan raised queries about NAMA in the initial stages. Now people on the other side of the House maintain NAMA is not correct because it has taken 50% deductions. When NAMA was introduced, the big problem was that it would do a fudge job. The reality is that NAMA has examined every individual loan and every bank and has brought forward the percentage deductions as it deems appropriate. The Government has taken action to give us functioning banks and enough money. I refer to the €6 billion that has been offered to AIB and Bank of Ireland to allow small, medium and large businesses and private citizens to access credit to carry out their business functions and the normal functions of buying a car or whatever they wish to purchase. I believe the Government has the correct strategy for the future.

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: Deputy Rabbitte remarked that this is one of the most defining days for the public in terms of the level of funding the ordinary taxpayer is being asked to put into various institutions, in particular, Anglo Irish Bank and Irish Nationwide Building Society, which are effectively defunct institutions. People are entitled to ask questions. The public has a great degree of common sense. A person running a household or who is in business and who is watching the debate may ask how has it arisen that the Government, on behalf of the taxpayer, is putting €22 billion into Anglo Irish Bank and €2.7 billion into Irish Nationwide Building Society, which will result in no return to the taxpayer.

Furthermore, other options have not been considered. Deputy Kennedy made reference to the fact that Fianna Fáil wishes to stamp out corruption and to deal effectively with the banking system. If this is his belief, then let the Government publish the advice and calculations done by Anglo Irish Bank and the advice received by the Government on the recapitalisation of Anglo Irish Bank to the tune of a further €18 billion. The Government should publish the advice and evidence given to the Taoiseach and the Minister for Finance on 29 September 2008 when the guarantee scheme was put in place.

I would have expected the Green Party, which put itself forward as the guardian of moral hazard for many years, to seek such publication. However, all we have seen in recent days is one Green Party representative after another coming out to defend the indefensible. I suggest the Green Party has paid a very high price for a second Minister of State position. It has come out and defended placing money into Anglo Irish Bank and Irish Nationwide and has been scare-mongering about leaving the eurozone. It has done exactly what Fianna Fáil has been doing but, at times, it has done so better. Shame on the Green Party. We need a proper debate because the people are entitled to know that all the options were viewed, in particular in respect of Anglo Irish Bank and Irish Nationwide. One could go through the institutions involved because we are here to make statements on banking. I refer to the recapitalisation of the banks and NAMA. Anglo Irish Bank has received €22 billion in total, made up of €18 billion by way of promissory notes.

The European Commission stated as late as yesterday that it is conducting an in-depth investigation into the funds put in by the Government on behalf of the taxpayer to date. It has

concerns in terms of the distortion of the competition represented by Anglo Irish Bank. Since the Government nationalised Anglo Irish Bank, the bank is paying interest at rates higher than other banks and it is putting other banks under pressure apart from the banks getting into this mess in the first place. They must increase deposit rates which follows an increase in mortgage rates to already hard-pressed mortgage holders. Anglo Irish Bank is a zombie bank, it is defunct and will never lend a red cent. As the Minister of State, Deputy White, is well aware €22 billion represents the combination of the health and education budgets combined each year. The Green Party extolled the virtues of the education budget, in particular. Now it is putting that at risk by supporting the Government in borrowing between €6 billion and €8 billion a year, being the requirement for the recapitalisation of the banks and for NAMA.

Irish Nationwide Building Society was set up to provide residential mortgages. In recent years it effectively ended up entering the commercial market. The Government is taking the bulk — €2.7 billion is being recapitalised — of its loan book to NAMA with no sign of a return.

AIB must raise €7.4 billion. For how much in further funds will the Government be going back to the taxpayer to cover the amount that it must put into AIB? We received many reports from the Minister for Finance that he would play hard ball with AIB, yet he has given it time to come up with a plan and to sell assets. Ultimately, for how much will the taxpayer be caught on the hoof for AIB?

Bank of Ireland falls into a different category, needing to raise €2.7 billion. Already, €3.5 billion has gone into the bank.

Then we come to NAMA. The Minister spoke of the haircut of 47%. Only 20% of the assets of the banks are gone into NAMA in the first tranche. How much will be the haircut for further recapitalisation? The question that must be asked here is, does the Government know what it is doing and is it in the best interests of the taxpayer? We have had no proper debate.

On the issue of the flow of credit, Mr. John Trethowan has been set up as the credit receiver. Once again, there are limits on this scheme. There is no time limit in terms of the review. People must go through an internal review process within the bank and there is no time limit as to when the credit reviewer will carry out their review. By that time, their business could be gone.

This scheme is limited to facilities of €250,000. Many businesses would have a facility far in excess of that figure. We want to look after the smaller business but we also must look after the medium-sized ones, which provide a great deal of employment like the smaller employers.

The scheme also has no statutory footing. It is founded on moral persuasion. We are being told by the Government that it will look at it based on how AIB and Bank of Ireland, the two main banks, react. I am not including Anglo Irish Bank in that category. Anglo Irish Bank is a developers' bank. It does not facilitate normal business such as personal accounts with ATM facilities, and it does not have a network.

Yesterday's report from Anglo Irish Bank was not an annual report in that it covered 15 months. The previous set of accounts were for the period up to 30 September 2008. It speaks of €15 billion of losses. It is horrific.

The report shows €2 million of payments to three directors. Mr. David Drumm got €654,000 in normal salary and a sum in excess of that amount in a bonus for a previous year, €659,000, amounting to €1.3 million in total. Mr. William McAteer got in total €240,000 in normal salary and pension, and not quite double that figure, €439,000, in a bonus payment for a previous year, amounting to €679,000 in total. Mr. Seán FitzPatrick got €131,000. One of these three individuals has a house in America worth \$4 million and he has taken out insurance on a claim against it. What about the ordinary taxpayer who, effectively, cannot take out insurance?

Acting Chairman: The Deputy has one minute remaining.

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: The Government is scaremongering about the professional investors. Many of the professional investors in Anglo Irish Bank will have insurance, unlike the taxpayer who must foot the bill.

To put into context exactly how the Government thinks, and its priorities, it is prepared to put €22 billion into a black hole in Anglo Irish Bank. It is like putting petrol into a car where the engine has seized — no matter how much petrol one puts in, it will never go. Then last night, when the Government lobby was full with Members seeking special needs assistants, they voted against a measure that would cost a small amount of money.

I hope that when the Minister comes in here he will shed light on a number of questions. I hope he will publish the evidence on putting money into Anglo Irish Bank and that he will tell us of his discussions with the European Commission because when he came in here on Tuesday last we were under the misapprehension that €8.3 billion had yet to go into Anglo Irish Bank. That money had already gone into the banks since 21 January. The European Commission states that of the €10 billion to be put in, the most it will look at is €2 billion. It has serious concerns and I want to know exactly what discussions the Minister had with it prior to coming before the Dáil on Tuesday.

I want to see the advice and evidence given on the guarantee scheme to the Minister and the Taoiseach on the night of 29 September 2008. Was it in the main from the bankers? Did everyone rely on the bankers? What exactly was the basis of the discussions?

I also want to know about the routine flow of credit. Will the Minister put the credit reviewer on a statutory footing with immediate effect?

What discounts will apply in respect of the further tranches to come into NAMA and how much does the Minister envisage the taxpayer being required to put in, additional to the €3.5 billion, to AIB? What percentage shareholding does he expect to take in AIB?

The flow of funds appear to be going one way, from the taxpayer directly into the banks. Many in Anglo Irish Bank and Irish Nationwide Building Society will never lend, yet we appear to have no flow of credit to the SME and the personal credit sectors. The Central Bank stated yesterday that private sector credit fell by €1.3 billion in February and it had fallen by €3.7 billion the previous month. It appears to be going one way.

This is a black day for the taxpayer — I do not know which is worse——

Acting Chairman: The Deputy is way over time.

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: ——whether the Government knows what it is doing or it is pressing ahead with something that would bankrupt future taxpayers and future Governments in this country.

Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Innovation (Deputy Billy Kelleher): I welcome the opportunity to speak on this issue. There has been much debate on the banking crisis that this country faced over the past number of years, and this is a continuation of that. At the outset, it is important that we reflect on how we arrived at this position. Much commentary, both inside and outside of this House, seems to forget the position in which Ireland found itself, particularly in September 2008. Much commentary is now suggesting that we should have acted differently.

Deputy Joan Burton: On a point of information, I seek clarification. We understood that there was to be a question and answer session with the Minister for Finance.

Acting Chairman: Yes, at five past one.

Deputy Billy Kelleher: I am taking an ordinary Government slot.

Deputy Pat Rabbitte: Is the Minister of State taking the slot, not replying to the debate?

Deputy Billy Kelleher: I am not replying to the debate.

Acting Chairman: The Minister will be in the Chamber at 1 o'clock to reply to the debate and then there will be a question and answer session.

Deputy Joan Burton: Will he?

Deputy Billy Kelleher: Yes, indeed.

Deputy Joan Burton: I thank the Acting Chairman.

Deputy Billy Kelleher: I could not fill the Minister's shoes, I can assure Deputy Burton.

Deputy Pat Rabbitte: The Minister of State got stuck with the slot.

Deputy Billy Kelleher: The Government guarantee to the banking institutions in September 2008 was of significant importance in ensuring that there was not a collapse of the financial institutions across this country. Now there is a bit of revisionism going on in the debate in the House to the effect that we should not have guaranteed Anglo Irish Bank or that we should not have guaranteed other institutions.

The fact of the matter is that in September 2008 there was international panic on markets. Banks, such as Lehman Brothers, had collapsed in July 2008. For the Government to allow the meltdown of our financial institutions would have put the whole economy in peril.

Some now claim the Government acted in an irresponsible way with the bank guarantee. Any fair minded person will accept that at the time the Government made a crucial decision which has stood well the test of the time. It now allows the Government to deal with the impaired balance sheets of the various financial institutions covered by the guarantee and, more important, to get credit flowing into the small and medium-sized business sector.

This is not about protecting the banks. The purpose of this exercise, painful and all as it is for the taxpayer and the Government, is to provide a functioning banking system. The Government would much prefer to be investing money in developing infrastructure and the broader economy. However, without a working banking system, it would not be possible to deal with the ongoing problems of rising unemployment and the investment requirements for infrastructure and other public services.

We must also consider the Government's subsequent decisions since the bank guarantee was introduced in September 2008. We had the first tranche of capitalisation to keep the banks afloat and functioning. With NAMA up and running now, we will see the transfer of impaired assets from those banks to allow them to function and credit flow to the small and medium-sized business sector.

Ensuring the two major banks will provide credit to small and medium-sized businesses was an important element in the Minister's statement to the Dáil on Tuesday. The provision of €3 billion to AIB and Bank of Ireland in 2010 and 2011 is welcome in this regard. It is important structures are in place to ensure continuing credit flow. The appointment of Mr. John Threthowan as an independent reviewer of credit supply is welcome.

[Deputy Billy Kelleher.]

The purpose of the exercise is not about bailing out the banks, as is loudly claimed in the House, but about ensuring a functioning banking system that can loan to small and medium-sized businesses, stem rising unemployment and ensure investment in the broader economy.

The Government's decision on the bank guarantee in 2008 and its subsequent decision to establish NAMA have been applauded internationally. People ask what difference international applause makes. It means Ireland's integrity as a sovereign state is accepted internationally and that it is seen to be willing to deal with the difficult decisions required. More important, it shows Ireland is not defaulting on payments, an action suggested by Members opposite which I find astonishing.

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: We have not said that.

Acting Chairman: Deputy O'Donnell, please allow the Minister to continue without interruption.

Deputy Billy Kelleher: I find it astonishing that any responsible political party would suggest a sovereign state should legitimately default on its payments. Such an action would send an appalling signal internationally, damage our credibility and mean the Government would have huge difficulty in borrowing for the day-to-day running of the State because of the current budget deficit. Such commentary is irresponsible and does not stand up to scrutiny.

It has already been pointed out that Fine Gael published a policy document with a stimulus package of an €18 billion investment to be funded by bondholders, the very same people it proposes we should default on now. Encouraging a default while asking the same investors to invest in the economy simply does not stack up.

It is important the tranche of transfers of impaired assets from the banks to NAMA is done on a case-by-case basis. When this was announced last April, it was asked whether due diligence and proper examination would apply to each individual loan. This is being done with absolute forensic analysis. The haircut in some cases may have been higher than anticipated, in others lower. The bottom line, however, is that we have a clear understanding of the bank's impaired balance sheets. We know what must be done to address these difficulties.

With the recapitalisation and transfer of assets, it is important the €3 billion to be loaned to the two major banks in 2010 and 2011 flows to the small and medium-sized business sector. Every Member knows the difficulties businesses are facing. The Mazars report adjudicated on the amount of lending from the major institutions under the guarantee scheme.

More must be done, however. The banks must step up to the plate to ensure they play their part in repaying the Irish people who stood by them with the guarantee and recapitalisation. We will be monitoring them closely and insisting they co-operate and are fully obligated in ensuring credit flows to the small and medium-sized business sector. We cannot have taxpayers funding the recapitalisation and transfer of impaired assets while the banks would not be playing their part in providing credit. Mr. John Threthowan will be used unsparingly to make sure any business refused credit will be able to go through an independent review.

There are difficulties in trying to retain economic activity. This is not just a problem for the Irish economy but felt globally. There has been a dishonest debate in the House and elsewhere claiming that Ireland is the only country finding it difficult to deal with the international recession. As Minister of State with responsibility for trade, I have visited and studied many economies abroad and it is evident many of them are struggling to retain employment and keep their trade balances intact.

Ireland has done well in this regard with competitiveness coming back into the economy. I accept the adjustments which had to take place were painful for people. Public sector workers with pension levies and salary reductions have borne a very heavy burden in the readjustment and reconfiguration of our economy to get back its efficiencies and competitiveness.

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: The Minister of State should try to explain the Anglo Irish Bank bailout to them.

Deputy Billy Kelleher: The fundamentals that brought us economic growth such as productivity, innovation and entrepreneurship are still ingrained in the people. I am confident that with the policies being pursued and the investment of the €5.5 billion stimulus package this year, the economy will turn the corner in the latter half of 2010 and growth will return in 2011.

These are the key parameters by which any Government policy should be judged. It has managed to stabilise the banking system, brought competitiveness back into the economy and adjusted and achieved more efficiencies in the public sector. The broader competitiveness of the economy will stand to us in time. With the considerable size of our exports, it is important competitiveness is at the core of all the Government's policies. This coupled with the flow of credit that will come from the banks will have a major impact on the economy.

It is important there is honest debate in the Chamber and that history is not revised. We cannot look back on the 2008 guarantee scheme in a different light. It must be recalled that there was panic internationally because of the collapse of banks in the United States and the part nationalisation of some in Britain. The Irish bank guarantee was the first and crucial step to ensure we did not have a financial meltdown which would have had a devastating impact on the broader economy.

I congratulate the Minister for Finance on his steadfast approach to this issue. He has not always had the support of and assistance from the other side of the House with party politics played out for the sake of it. It is accepted both at home and abroad that the Minister has acted responsibly in bringing about the stabilisation of the banking system and the economy.

Deputy Michael D'Arcy: I wish to share time with Deputy Reilly.

Acting Chairman: Is that agreed? Agreed.

Deputy Michael D'Arcy: It never ceases to amaze me how easy it is to astonish Fianna Fáil Ministers. When I hear the Minister for Finance talking about a haircut, it reminds me of a story. In a business, work had stopped because a particular gentleman was of great importance to the business and if he was not there, no work was done. The boss arrived and wondered where the man was. It turned out he had gone for a haircut. The boss was furious and when the man returned an hour later the boss challenged him and asked where he had gone. The reply was that he had gone for a haircut. The boss asked why he had gone for a haircut on the company's time and the smart response was that the hair had grown on the company's time. The boss replied that it had not all grown on the company's time and the man replied that he did not get it all cut. In my analogy, the business is the State, the boss is the Executive or the Government and the smart guy is the banks. The banks have run rings around the State and the Government. On a number of occasions they came to the Houses and told everyone it was fine and the fundamentals were sound. Does the Minister of State remember that? The Minister of State was not quite so astonished when it turned out the fundamentals were not sound.

AIB was the biggest company in the State, making billions in profits not so long ago. Now, it is effectively insolvent. In September 2008, Deputy Noonan asked if this was a recapitalisation issue. The Minister for Finance replied that it was not recapitalisation but purely a liquidity

[Deputy Michael D'Arcy.]

crisis and nothing else. I refer to the €3 billion that will be lent by Bank of Ireland and AIB to small and medium-sized enterprises. Mr. Richie Boucher stated bluntly that Bank of Ireland made €3 billion available to small and medium-sized enterprises in 2009. I do not know the figures for AIB but if a big play is being made of the fact that AIB and Bank of Ireland will make available €3 billion each there is nothing extra from Bank of Ireland because it made the same amount available in the previous calendar year. Anyone contacting the local branch manager of Bank of Ireland may as well be telephoning his secretary because the manager must contact the underwriters in Dublin to agree every matter.

An item on the news last night, where Charlie Bird was in Cape Cod, was distasteful. It is distasteful for the public to have to swallow the bitter pill of €80 billion between NAMA and recapitalisation but there is nothing more annoying or distasteful to citizens of this country than seeing the people who caused this crisis living in multi-million euro mansions. The Garda Síochána and the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement are using untested legislation and we do not know how well it will work until we come out the other end of this process. We know that it is slow. In other jurisdictions, these people would have been found guilty or innocent of wrongdoing. Within a matter of weeks or months, the case of Mr. Bernie Madoff was concluded.

The previous regulator was incompetent, as was his office. However, I do not blame it all on him because this is a single party State in which Fianna Fáil has been in Government for 21 of the past 23 years. How can the regulator, who was appointed by the Government, go against what the Government is saying? Every Minister and all the colleagues of the Minister of State, Deputy Kelleher, said that it was sound and that we should keep it going. The previous Taoiseach said to keep things going and that it was sound. How can anyone challenge us and how good and great we were? The Taoiseach, who was Minister for Finance at the time, said it was sound but it was not. The foundations were built on quicksand and the quicksand will swallow every penny of the nation's wealth for the next ten, 15 or 20 years. Children not yet born will be paying these taxes. That is nearly as distasteful as watching the likes of Mr. Drumm in a multi-million euro house in Cape Cod.

Deputy James Reilly: I welcome the opportunity to contribute to this debate because this issue is determining the future of this country for generations to come. The decisions taken in the past 24 hours will have consequences for ourselves, our children and our children's children. That is the harsh reality. Dr. Peter Bacon, the author of the concept of NAMA, said "Anglo Irish Bank is the Celtic Chernobyl". The figures we received so far are incomplete and may become much worse, to paraphrase Dr. Bacon. Anglo Irish Bank and the Government say it will be more expensive to close down the bank in an orderly fashion. On what basis is this assumption made and where are the figures to back this up? No one has had the opportunity to examine the figures and where they come from. We are asked to go on blind trust again with the Government whose subliminal message was, as pointed out by Deputy D'Arcy, that the fundamentals were sound. To go forward on this basis is deeply disconcerting for the people and Members on this side of the House.

Anglo Irish Bank is a dead bank that will never lend again. We previously injected €4 billion, then €8 billion and the Minister for Finance has indicated there will be a further €10 billion required. That is not the end of it. The ink was hardly dry on the paper before Mr. Dukes came out indicating the figure may be higher. We are supposed to trust this. With every passing week new figures are put forward and they are unexplained, as were the figures before. We are basing our assumptions on information given from Anglo Irish Bank to the Government, which takes it on face value and expects us to swallow it. Every figure from Anglo Irish Bank

to date has been grossly incorrect, out of date and underestimated. The Department of Finance got it wrong all the way up through the boom and is still getting it wrong all the way down. This is hardly something that leads us to have confidence in it.

The €18 billion, comprising €8 billion referred to yesterday and the €10 billion the Minister believes will have to be injected, is the same as the cost to create 105,000 new jobs according to the Fine Gael plans in NewEra. This plan would set up jobs and infrastructure to make the country competitive on broadband, communications and independent energy production. That is the stark choice the Government has made. A sum of €18 billion has been allocated to the banks with nothing to the 450,000 people unemployed.

The Fine Gael plan was to have a good bank and a bad bank. It was not going to default on the bondholders or sovereign debt. It was a matter of telling the people who invested in the bank that they did so expecting to make a profit and believing it was a good thing to do. We are prepared to take some of the pain but they must take some of the pain too.

1 o'clock In our plan the good bank remains responsible for depositors and the moneys owed to various central banks. The bad bank would be left with the bad loans and could sort this out with bondholders. Nobody would take all the pain but in the Government's deal the taxpayer takes all the pain and the bondholders walk away free. I do not know any investment that is 100% guaranteed. For the previous generation and the generations before they were the sayings "as safe as money in the bank" and "as safe as houses". Neither accounts for much any more.

The Government says the market will buck if the Fine Gael plan is adopted and our debt will be more difficult to pay. The market will see that we are taking a responsible approach. Our liabilities are less and, therefore, the markets will not take flight. The markets are the markets and will do what they do, namely, re-invest and turn around. We have seen on many occasions people going in and out of business.

The Government has engaged in the politics of fear in terms of our national debt. It has been confusing people with the moving target, trying to distract them from the realities of how we got here and who is responsible. I heard last night on radio a young woman say during "The Late Debate" that she wanted to see the culprits in this regard brought to book. Another person stated that while that might make us feel better, it would not cure the situation, which is akin to saying to the family of a murder victim that bringing the culprit to book would not bring back their loved one. This is about justice for the people and putting in place serious disincentives that will discourage people doing the same again.

The manner in which the Government is approaching this issue ensures there is nothing for bankers to fear. They can carry on regardless. Many of them remain in pole position. The boards of many of the banks have not been completely changed. Many of the same people remain involved. Mr. Maurice Keane, now a member of the board of Anglo Irish Bank is also involved in the selection of senior management for NAMA. What greater conflict of interest could there be than having a man who is a member of the board of a bank, who will be responsible for transferring billions of euro to NAMA, choosing the very people who will run NAMA? This is outrageous. The Government has learned nothing.

We must have a full inquiry of the events leading up to this, including the political decisions made and the relationships between politicians and Anglo Irish Bank, one that goes beyond the point when the guarantee was put in place. One can reach only one logical conclusion in terms of the Government's persistence in this regard, namely, this Government does not want to admit its mistake; it has too much political capital invested in this approach and will not acknowledge or accept it is wrong. It is not that we have not seen this before. The Minister for Finance, Deputy Lenihan, previously increased VAT, admitted subsequently it was costing

[Deputy James Reilly.]

€700 million but waited until the following budget to correct his mistake. What is the point of admitting one has made a mistake if one does not correct it? In this case, the Government will not even admit it has made a mistake.

There are other precedents in this regard such as in the area of health. The HSE has been a fiasco but the Minister for Health and Children, Deputy Harney, will not acknowledge this. Her collocated hospital plan, which was to be a fast track mechanism of another 1,100 beds into our system, has not alone not yielded a single bed but not one sod has been turned and not one brick for one of those hospitals has been put in place. I put it to the House that the Government's persistence with its hair-brained idea of NAMA, which is not, as has been outlined, receiving international support but is being questioned in several quarters, will cost the Irish taxpayer for generations to come, is grossly wrong and needs to be redressed. This concept whereby the taxpayer takes all the pain and everybody else gets off scot free is totally wrong.

An Ceann Comhairle: I call Deputy Burton.

Deputy Joan Burton: If time permits, I would like to make a couple of comments. Are we waiting for the Minister?

An Ceann Comhairle: Has the Deputy made her contribution yet?

Deputy Joan Burton: I have not yet made a contribution but if there is time available I would like to speak now.

An Ceann Comhairle: Yes.

Deputy Joan Burton: There are a couple of issues I would like to put on the record and will raise again with the Minister. In the context of the praise from international quarters, I remind Deputy Kelleher of the comment by Mr. George Soros in respect of zombie banks and the fall of the banks in the context of the events of two years ago. He said in relation to zombies, "Instead of stimulating the economy they [the zombie banks] will draw the life blood so to speak of profits away from the economy in order to keep themselves alive." I believe that comment, which is frequently repeated, captures the essence of zombies. We have two zombies in Anglo Irish Bank and Irish Nationwide Building Society.

I want to make clear to Deputy Kelleher and to his compatriot in Cork, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Deputy Martin, that of concern to the Labour Party in the period after the St. Patrick's Day 2008 fall in the share value of Anglo Irish Bank and what we knew about the reputational damage to Irish Nationwide Building Society coming particularly then from London was that at the heart of our system we were developing two zombies. This catastrophic error by Fianna Fáil was a result of its close political links with the banks, something which Fianna Fáil has never stepped forward to disprove. We do not want Allied Irish Bank and Bank of Ireland to become zombies. We do not want ordinary businesses in every town and village in the country which rely on mainstream, ordinary and, what the American's call, plain vanilla banking to be brought down by the George Soros description — which is well known in international banking — of zombie rotten institutions which bring down everything with them because they suck everything towards themselves. This is the reason Irish taxpayers are caught in a type of nightmare on Merrion Street.

The Taoiseach, when Minister for Finance, attended that famous dinner at Anglo Irish Bank headquarters on 24 April, which may have been the night former Taoiseach, Deputy Bertie Ahern, acknowledged he would step down as Leader of Fianna Fáil. He then went to Vietnam, which was followed by a week's holiday in Malaysia. The Carruth evidence had been given and

former Taoiseach, Deputy Bertie Ahern, was in his final period as Taoiseach and Leader of Fianna Fáil. The Taoiseach, Deputy Cowen, obviously had a big decision to make in regard to his future and that of Fianna Fáil but he still found time to attend this important dinner at Anglo Irish Bank headquarters.

I repeat the important question and request from my colleague, Deputy Rabbitte, in regard to what discussions took place between the Taoiseach when Minister for Finance, the Central Bank, in particular its Governor, the regulator, Mr. Neary and the Department of Finance senior officials in the period from mid-2006 and the collapse of shares on St. Patrick's Day? I stated when I spoke on this issue the other night that people in Fianna Fáil are as smart as everybody else. Many of them were Ministers in office at the time and they had to know this was a bank in deep trouble, which is the cause of horror in this country. This is like a Dracula story in that we have woken up to find it is not maidens who are being taken away but the life blood of business. We need more information. My first question to the Minister during the questions and answers session will be about information.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Minister might perhaps like to make a brief reply.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: I understood this was to be a questions and answers rather than a reply session. There is another five minutes available for questions.

An Ceann Comhairle: I call Deputy Bruton.

Deputy Richard Bruton: I thank the Minister for coming into the House to take questions.

The cost of Anglo Irish Bank continues to escalate. The Minister originally articulated the view that that bank should be kept as a going concern and the expectation was that it was to be given €4 billion by way of recapitalisation. This figure has now increased to €22 billion and is rising. The chairman has stated the bank does not yet know what will be the final figure required. Is there a trip point when the Minister will cease to hold the view that keeping Anglo Irish Bank open is the best option? Will he provide the House with the detailed assessment of all the different options, including options which he has to date found unpalatable because some of the bond holders might suffer losses? Will he put those on the table and let people assess them? What is the implication of the European Union's decision to not accept the Anglo Irish Bank restructuring plan?

Deputy Brian Lenihan: There is no such European Union decision, Deputy. He will have to stop misrepresenting these matters all the time. It is fundamental and I will deal with other matters too.

Deputy Richard Bruton: This is a questions and answers session and if the Minister wants me to impart information I will, with the permission of the Ceann Comhairle.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: There is no rejection by the European Union of any structural plan for Anglo Irish Bank.

An Ceann Comhairle: We need to be sensible about the matter——

Deputy Richard Bruton: Exactly.

An Ceann Comhairle: ——and not be imparting too much information but, most importantly, ask questions.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: It is hard to give information when it is stated on a premise of total inaccuracy.

Deputy Richard Bruton: We have information from the European Union that it has given temporary approval to put in €8.3 billion and it may allow another €10 billion, but it said it is not accepting the restructuring plan for Anglo Irish Bank, it is demanding a fresh restructuring plan be presented to it in May and it is having an in-depth investigation of the Anglo Irish Bank situation. Within any reasonable interpretation, that is evidence the European Union has not accepted the restructuring proposals of the Government. I am entitled to ask that question. The Minister wants to distort what I am asking.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: I will deal with our relations with the European Union by way of reply. I spoke to the Commissioner on Tuesday morning and I am in a position to deal with the situation. Deputy Bruton is not in a position to draw inferences which are unwarranted.

Deputy Richard Bruton: I am not drawing any unwarranted inferences. I am simply saying the Anglo Irish Bank proposal has not been accepted, there is now an in-depth inquiry and the Government plan to support the Anglo Irish Bank approach has not been accepted. There is no inference and nothing is distorted in saying that. Perhaps the Minister would be better occupied by allowing me to ask the questions and using his time to provide answers because our time is limited.

An Ceann Comhairle: There are several Deputies offering.

Deputy Richard Bruton: Exactly. I wish to ask the Minister about his strategy regarding AIB. Why does he believe it is advantageous to wait for the submission of a plan and the recapitalisation proposals until the end of the year? Why does he feel that will support getting credit flowing from AIB? Would it not be better for him to assume control of the process at this stage in order to get a better outcome for taxpayers and those who are looking for credit? Does the Minister accept that the guarantee, as originally drawn, was drawn too widely, as Professor Patrick Honohan has said? He said it should have been confined to liquidity which could leave and should only have applied to new injections and not existing funds which were committed and were in the banks. Does he accept that was a mistake?

Deputy Brian Lenihan: On AIB, the Deputy is wrong again because the Minister——

Deputy Richard Bruton: I am asking the Minister a question; I am not asserting anything.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: I replied to this already in the House, on the record, and the Deputy has not taken note of the reply. I do not set AIB's period for determining when it submits its plan, rather, the regulator does. That is the whole point about Tuesday's announcement. We now have an independent regulator who lays down capital ratios. I do not interfere politically with that; that is not my function as Minister for Finance. I thought everyone in this House could agree that is a desirable change for this country and the way we should operate as a country in regard to these bank matters.

A great deal of the burden of the Deputy's criticism regarding AIB has been that in some way, the Government has given it until the end of the year to sort out its problems. That is not the case and if one examines what the regulator has stated, one will find he has made it very clear that AIB has to formulate its capital plan by end of April. In fact, his initial determination was June but in the course of the days leading up to the announcement he made clear that it would have formulate its plan by end of April.

There is no question of AIB being given an extended period of time. It has a more extended period of time in order to put the funds in place, as is the case in any capitalisation and, if one studied the history of capitalisation in any other country one would find it would be remarkable to expect the capitalisation to take place in a month. As far as AIB is concerned, the regulator has given it until the end of April to formulate how this capital will be acquired by AIB. On the issue of AIB being given time demonstrating that in some way I am being soft on the bank, the position is that the regulator now decides these matters. That is essential for our national credibility, in terms of regulation and capital raising. It has been given until the end of April to provide a definitive plan, which is not an extended timescale.

On the European Union, I have very good relations with the Commission and at all stages my Department is in consultation with the European Union about the strategic plan for Anglo Irish Bank. Incidentally, the strategic plan is not submitted by the Department of Finance, rather, it is submitted by the bank itself. It does not necessarily have the endorsement of the Government. We are engaged in the closest possible discussions with the EU authorities——

Deputy Richard Bruton: The bank can only submit its plans through the Department of Finance.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: ——about the appropriate shape of that bank. The only anxiety expressed to me by the European Commission on Tuesday about the announcements regarding Anglo Irish Bank was that we would be saying the same thing and would not create problems regarding the financial stability of Ireland. We are delighted to work with the European Commission regarding the structural plan for Anglo Irish Bank.

Deputy Richard Bruton: How come the Minister did not reveal on Tuesday that there was to be an in-depth inquiry?

An Ceann Comhairle: Allow the Minister to reply, please.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: There is no in-depth inquiry.

Deputy Joan Burton: I have the Commissioners statement here.

Deputy Richard Bruton: Why are you looking for submissions?

Deputy Brian Lenihan: There is detailed consultation taking place——

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Bruton, resume your seat please. I will call on you to ask your question shortly.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: The Deputy has asked his question and I am entitled to answer.

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: Why is he looking for submissions on the issue?

Deputy Joan Burton: I have the Commissioner's statement here.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: We are working very closely with the Commission and when it makes inquiries it asks a question and we answer it. We have very close relations with the Commission.

An Ceann Comhairle: Allow the Minister to reply.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: The Deputy has often outlined that he has a plan——

Deputy Terence Flanagan: Yes, close it down.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: —which will save us money regarding Anglo Irish Bank. Give us the plan in writing. I would be delighted to have it evaluated—

Deputy Richard Bruton: Let us have your plan on the table and costed.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: I would be delighted to have my professional evaluators and advisors, the Department and the NTMA evaluate that plan and see whether it can save us any money.

Deputy Richard Bruton: You told us your plan for Anglo Irish Bank would cost €4 billion, then it was €10 billion and €18 billion. Now it is €22 billion.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: Nothing—

Deputy Richard Bruton: It is time—

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Bruton, resume your seat.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: I am sorry. Your party—

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy, please.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: Deputy Kenny announced he could get out of Anglo Irish Bank for €4 billion a few months ago. Give us the plan in writing. I would be delighted to make all my professional advisors available to the Deputy and have the NTMA discuss the implications involved.

Deputy Richard Bruton: The Minister has done nothing but pour scorn on anything else.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: We are not pouring scorn, but let us pour scorn on one option.

Deputy Richard Bruton: Let us see the options.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputies, the Minister has the floor.

Deputy Seán Barrett: Do not be lecturing us; be polite and answer the questions.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: I am trying to answer the questions.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: It is very difficult to conduct a debate on this subject—

Deputy Seán Barrett: There is no longer any debate, only lectures.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: If inaccuracies become part of the debate. We have to stick to the facts

Deputy Seán Barrett: This is lecturing.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Barrett, please.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: The facts are very serious regarding Anglo Irish Bank. On Anglo Irish Bank, we have new management and a designated chairman to take over as chairman from the current chairman. It will bring forward plans which we will discuss with the European Commission and come to a final view on the structural plan within a short timeframe. We have to do that. We are more than available to answer inquiries from the European Commission.

We have made our own inquiries in this matter. This is a serious position. It is clear that, as I indicated on Tuesday, we would all like to see the back of this institution, but it is not possible. The scale of the deposits, the exposures to the euro system and the exposures to senior debt are extensive and are in the order of €70 billion. That is a very serious liability to ask the taxpayer to pick up next week. Nobody in this House——

Deputy Richard Bruton: Are you now willing to consider that some of the professional investors would share the cost?

Deputy Brian Lenihan: I am not prepared to countenance default on senior debt for several reasons. First, half of the funding costs in Ireland for enterprise is funded from within Ireland. It is very important that Deputies acknowledge that. Ireland is not an Iceland which has somehow acquired a series of foreign obligations and saddled them on its taxpayers. Half of the funding requirement in our banking system is domestically sourced and 80% of the sovereign funding requirement for Ireland is externally sourced. Therefore, maintaining confidence in financial markets is an important issue for this country.

I will not come in here and talk lightly about defaulting on senior debt because, as a country, we are not doing that. It is not on the agenda. Were it on the agenda and had Fine Gael won the vote the other night, there would be an immediate loss of confidence in the country. It is easy to posture with a policy like that at present.

Deputy Seán Barrett: We are back to a lecture.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: That is not a policy and Deputy Bruton will have to face that. Where I believe there may be room for constructive discussion between us is on minimising the cost of Anglo Irish Bank because Fine Gael has always accepted and always maintained that the bank should be worked out over time. The question arises, and the chairman-designate has raised the issue, as to whether a good book can be identified within that institution, which can lessen further the cost to the taxpayer but they are the real options here.

The purpose of giving the figures on Tuesday afternoon was to give a measurement of this problem and to at least outline how the problem can be worked out over time. The promissory note device has been used to average the cost to the taxpayer over a period of time and to ensure there is no jeopardy to our sovereign position in working out this bank. It is clear there has been no jeopardy from the international reaction. There has not been a move in our bond spreads. Moody's marginally upgraded Bank of Ireland and Allied Irish Banks this morning. That is the position on that.

Deputy Bruton also asked about the formulation of the guarantee in September 2008. Let us be clear about this. The banks were running out of money. The approaches to the Government were made by both chairmen and both managing directors of Allied Irish Banks and Bank of Ireland. It was suggested during the debate and repeated in newspaper articles since by Deputy Noonan that approaches were made by other banks or bankers in connection with this guarantee.

Deputy Damien English: He only asked the question.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: There were no such approaches. It was asserted as a fact in this House that there were approaches from certain other bankers in regard to this guarantee.

Deputy Damien English: It was not.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: There were not approaches from anyone else about the guarantee. There was a funding crisis throughout the banking system and the experience of Northern Rock, which we could already learn from on the night of the guarantee, was that nationalisation on its own would not guarantee a flow of funds to an institution and that a guarantee was needed as well.

Deputy Richard Bruton: That is not what I asked. I asked whether the Minister accepted that he——

Deputy Brian Lenihan: There are two distinct issues.

Deputy Richard Bruton: Professor Honohan has clearly given——

Deputy Brian Lenihan: I do not accept the Deputy's suggestion that on the night of the guarantee it would have been possible to say that existing liabilities were guaranteed but if the banks sought fresh funds, they would be unguaranteed and that would have resolved the problems in the banking system.

Deputies: It was the other way around.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: On a point of order——

Deputy Joan Burton: Can the time for this debate be extended?

Deputy Richard Bruton: We need to ask the question. Professor Honohan said we should have a protection for the new money coming in and, therefore, only for deposits and new preference shares and bonds. That was the recommendation.

An Ceann Comhairle: A number of Members are offering

Deputy Brian Lenihan: I am trying to deal with Deputy Bruton's questions. There was never a question of guaranteeing preference shares.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: On a point of order, this is supposed to be a question and answer session and that is not what is taking place. Deputies are waiting to put direct questions to which we want direct answers.

An Ceann Comhairle: I will allow time to get to them.

Deputy Joan Burton: I assume the Minister is willing to extend the time because I have waited for more than two and a half hours for him and I hope he will do us that courtesy.

An Ceann Comhairle: Like most things in life, we will be sensible about it.

Deputy Joan Burton: We entered into these arrangements in good faith and, therefore, the Minister has to honour them.

Has he had an opportunity to read the European Commission statement regarding Anglo Irish Bank? The Commission temporarily cleared support for Anglo Irish Bank and Irish Nationwide Building Society and opened an in-depth investigation into Anglo Irish Bank, stating: "...the Commission opened an in-depth investigation into the total aid received so far by the Anglo Irish Bank and its accompanying restructuring plan." That indicates this started some time ago. What has the Minister not told the House about this?

An Ceann Comhairle: It is inappropriate to quote from documents.

Deputy Joan Burton: Second, Commissioner Almunia, stated: “. . . Anglo Irish Bank has to restructure profoundly in a way that effectively tackles the weaknesses of the past business model and ensures a sustainable future without continued State support.” Has the Minister implied to the Commission that the bank has a sustainable future without State support? That would be a highly misleading statement to make.

Third, Mr. Almunia further stated: “Earlier this year, Ireland notified a capital injection of €8.3 billion in favour of Anglo Irish Bank, one of Ireland’s largest banks, to be paid in successive tranches over 10 years.” The Commissioner’s statement implies the €8.3 billion was agreed by the Minister with the Commission some months ago. He has dealt with the Dáil and the people of Ireland despicably in that he signed up to this agreement and then he said——

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy should ask a question. This is a question and answer session.

Deputy Joan Burton: Is it true that former Deputy, Alan Dukes, did a misleading tour of television and radio studios in which the amount going to Anglo Irish Bank went from €3 billion to €6 billion to €9 billion and now stands at €18.3 billion?

An Ceann Comhairle: We are in question and answer mode. The Deputy should not make a Second Stage contribution.

Deputy Joan Burton: The Minister’s failure to tell the Dáil about a secret agreement he arrived at some time ago with the Commission is an absolute disgrace.

An Ceann Comhairle: Will the Deputy ask the question she needs answered?

Deputy Joan Burton: This is typical of Fianna Fáil’s play-acting in regard to all these events.

An Ceann Comhairle: Will the Deputy ask a question?

Deputy Joan Burton: Why did the Minister not inform the House about this secret agreement some time ago with the Commission to pump €8.3 billion into Anglo Irish Bank? Taxpayers only heard the news when he had to come before the House the other day.

The figures quoted by the Minister, which were given to us in supporting documentation, relate to the sectoral breakdown of tranche 1 in the transfer of loans to NAMA and they are seriously suspicious. Will he make an arrangement to have the Opposition briefed? He promised the other day that NAMA officials would brief the Opposition. Why was nobody from the agency available to us for a briefing? According to the tables in the documentation supplied on Tuesday, 65% of the tranche of loans transferred to NAMA was listed as investment property, including rented residential units. That is completed property because I have checked since in addition to another €770 million in loans relating to completed hotels.

An Ceann Comhairle: Will the Deputy ask a question?

Deputy Joan Burton: Will the Minister explain the meaning of this because NAMA was set up to deal with bad assets and loans?

An Ceann Comhairle: It is not necessary to embellish the question. The Deputy should just ask a question.

Deputy Joan Burton: I have asked the question. There is something seriously wrong with this documentation. Will the Minister make the figures available and provide for a detailed briefing of the Opposition on the figures and matters covered in the documentation?

[Deputy Joan Burton.]

He referred to the future of Anglo Irish Bank.

An Ceann Comhairle: Will the Deputy ask a question?

Deputy Joan Burton: According to his statements and the supporting documentation for the debate on Tuesday, €8.51 billion in loans has been transferred to NAMA but more than 70% of those loans relate to completed properties, which are earning an income. That means the bad loans remain for the most part in Anglo Irish Bank and in all the other banks. It means that we have a NAMA——

An Ceann Comhairle: This is a question and answer session. The Deputy should ask a question.

Deputy Joan Burton: Is the Minister giving us a NAMA bad bank, which will take the best income earning assets? Is he leaving bad banks in each of the other banks in order that we now have five bad banks.?

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy is abusing the opportunity she has.

Deputy Joan Burton: That is the consequence of what the Minister is doing.

Where has his proposal for a forced merger of INBS and the EBS gone? Has it vanished because of the level of debt in INBS and the fact that it is, to quote George Soros, “a zombie bank”?

An Ceann Comhairle: The Minister must be allowed to deal with the questions posed by the Deputy so far.

Deputy Joan Burton: Where is the marriage he referred to as a key element of his banking strategy? It has vanished from view. A total of €675 million is going into the EBS and €2.7 billion is going into Irish Nationwide but the marriage is off.

An Ceann Comhairle: Please, Deputy Burton.

Deputy Joan Burton: Will the Minister comment on that? That is another colossal waste of taxpayers money for another dead zombie institution.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: I must begin with the suggestion of a secret agreement. There is no secret agreement.

Deputy Joan Burton: The Minister did not tell the country.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: I am sorry——

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Burton, the Minister should be allowed to speak without interruption, please.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: I merely grimaced Deputy Burton suggested I was not listening to her. I did not interrupt her. The most serious suggestion made in Deputy Burton’s questions is that there is some secret agreement harboured by me or my Department which has come to light and which was not disclosed to Dáil Éireann. Let us be clear about this.

Deputy Joan Burton: Here it is.

An Ceann Comhairle: Please.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: I am sorry. Will Deputy Burton allow me to conclude? To use the correct term, this consent, not agreement, was obtained from the European Commission on Tuesday on the eve of the statement.

Deputy Joan Burton: Earlier this year.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Burton should please allow the Minister to speak without interruption.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: That is when the Commission agreed that the promissory note could be executed. It was not executed until the Commission gave that agreement and until this House approved the banking statements on Tuesday evening.

Deputy Joan Burton: No, in due deference to the Minister, that is not what the Commission said.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Burton, please.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: Of course discussions take place with the Commission given the proximity——

Deputy Joan Burton: Earlier this year Ireland notified a capital injection of €8.3 billion in favour of Anglo——

Deputy Brian Lenihan: There is no point——

An Ceann Comhairle: I will ask Deputy Burton to leave the House if she does not refrain from interrupting.

Deputy Joan Burton: Will I give the Minister the notice?

An Ceann Comhairle: No, the Minister should be allowed to reply. The Deputy has had reasonable latitude.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: The Deputy can give all the notices she wants.

Deputy Joan Burton: I will give the Commission statement to the Minister to read. It might help.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: The position is that the Commission sanctioned the promissory note last Tuesday. That sanction was for a capital injection of €8.3 billion. Earlier this year Ireland notified the possibility of such an event.

Deputy Joan Burton: Earlier. There is no possibility. The Minister is now adding——

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Burton.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: Notification is for a request for an approval. There is no agreement until there is consent. The Commission consented to those arrangements last Tuesday. The arrangements were not put in place——

Deputy Joan Burton: Earlier this year.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: —until the House sanctioned the arrangements on Tuesday night. There is no secret agreement.

Deputy Joan Burton: Yes there is.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: The burden of Deputy Burton's assertion today was that in breach of my duties as a Minister I am misleading this House and I concluded a secret agreement with the European Commission. There is no such secret agreement because an open agreement was arrived at with the European Commission on Tuesday morning. That is when agreement was finalised in this matter. It is important that is understood.

Deputy Joan Burton: Could the Minister answer any of the other questions?

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: Minister, they are in the accounts—

Deputy Brian Lenihan: Deputy Burton's allegation is a very serious one. Were it correct it would reflect very seriously on the Government and me. I am entitled to reject it and point out—

Deputy Joan Burton: I am sorry. The Minister indicated that he notified the Commission of the capital injection of €8.3 billion but he did not tell the Dáil.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: —its inaccuracy.

An Ceann Comhairle: If Deputy Burton does not refrain I will have to ask her to leave the House. I do not wish to do it but I will have to do it.

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: On a point of order. I have the published accounts of Anglo Irish Bank and €8.3 billion is in the accounts up to the end of December.

An Ceann Comhairle: With Deputy O'Donnell's co-operation I will come back to him and allow him to ask a question. He should allow the Minister to continue.

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: That money was in the accounts up to the end of December. How could—

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy O'Donnell should please resume his seat.

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: They must have worked very late at night. The €8.3 billion must have been committed to the bank.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: I am dealing with the charge that I concluded a secret agreement some time ago, which I concealed from the House.

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: No.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy O'Donnell, please.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: I have dealt with that allegation which was made on the floor of the House. It is inaccurate and untrue.

Deputy Joan Burton: No, the Minister has not.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Burton.

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: No, Minister. A total of €8.3 billion has been put into Anglo Irish Bank. It is in the bank's end of year accounts at the end of December but the Minister has said that did not happen.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy O'Donnell should resume his seat.

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: We need clarification. It is in the accounts in black and white.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy O'Donnell, please.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: I would like the Minister to shed some light in his answers on a couple of important matters specifically pertaining to the role of the auditing and accountancy firms, their role in NAMA and their previous roles in regard to some of those banking institutions. Little light has been shed on their particular roles. It is important that the Minister would use the opportunity to provide clarity to the House as to his understanding.

Could the Minister explain the current role of Ernst & Young in the loan evaluation process for NAMA and how it came to be given that role? Ernst & Young, as the Minister is aware, was the auditing team for Anglo Irish Bank when accounts were published in February 2009. That report effectively gave Anglo Irish Bank a clean bill of health, yet we now know that the 2008 year end figures included cash that had been transferred from Permanent TSB. We know that directors' loans were concealed and loans were given to shareholders to buy more shares. Loans were also given to directors, senior executive members of Anglo Irish Bank, to buy more shares yet none of those matters was exposed in the end of year accounts presented by Ernst & Young.

Let us take the situation in regard to KPMG. What role has KPMG now in the NAMA process and how did it come to be involved in that process? KPMG audited Irish Nationwide. Its 2008 results, announced in April 2009 showed a pre-tax profit of €300 million after having set aside €500 million for bad debts. Yesterday's announcement confirmed that Irish Nationwide requires €2.6 billion in funds from the Exchequer, a mere 11 months after KPMG gave it a clean bill of health.

It is very important that we have full transparency and disclosure of the roles of those particular auditing and accountancy firms and their current role in regard to NAMA. I have specified in regard to both of those that they have functions currently. How did that come about given the questionable role they have clearly played in presenting figures allegedly as facts when we now know they were nothing of the kind? Are those auditing and accountancy firms being investigated for their specific roles in what some would suggest was an orchestrated cover up of the facts pertaining to those financial institutions? If they are not being investigated, why not?

Deputy Brian Lenihan: The questions raised by Deputy Ó Caoláin are legitimate. I will ask NAMA, which is an independent body, to examine what he said about the professional advice. In addition, the banking inquiry should provide a context within which the general matters to which the Deputy referred can be dealt with. It is the case, for example, that Anglo Irish Bank no longer retains the original auditors to whom Deputy Ó Caoláin referred. The matters to which he referred are serious and will require investigation both by the accountancy bodies and the banking inquiry which is under way and which will account to this House.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: I thank the Minister for his reply. Could I interpret his previous remarks as indicating that they will be investigated and that the matters I have just highlighted will be the subject of full scrutiny in the course of the investigation under way?

Deputy Brian Lenihan: I entirely agree that these matters require full scrutiny because of the dramatic character of the change that took place when the public interest of the taxpayer was secured in Anglo Irish Bank and in any other institution where it comes to light.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: I welcome the Minister's assertion.

Deputy Pat Rabbitte: The Minister made reference in his main speech to the change of executives and boards at the top of the banks. I wish to ask the Minister about two positions I understand to be critical. One is chairman of the audit and compliance committee and the other is chairman of the risk management committee. Have those positions changed in the banks? I know for a fact they have not in one covered institution but I wonder if they have changed generally.

With regard to the exploding figures associated with Anglo Irish Bank, namely, €4 billion, €8.3 billion, €10 billion and €18 billion in terms of the purchase of the loans, something will be set off against them in terms of the valuation of the assets. Is the Minister standing by his position that he would find it unconscionable, in any circumstances, to consider alternatives to pouring money into Irish Anglo Bank in the context of an orderly wind-down of that institution?

I agree with what the Minister said about senior debt. Issues such as this are not the only issues involved. The figures have now exploded to such an extent that the difference between an orderly wind-down and maintaining the bank in some form is negligible. Therefore, since we are talking about a corporate strategy for a semi-State institution, is the Minister prepared to make available to us the documents that surround these questions? How else can we make an informed decision? On the matter raised by Deputy Burton, for example, can the Minister explain how the €8.3 billion to which he referred is in the accounts for 2009? I do not understand that; I am not alleging anything but asking the Minister to explain it.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: There are a few matters to address. With regard to the audit and risk-management committees, I am not certain which institutions Deputy Rabbitte was referring to but I will endeavour to obtain the information and have it conveyed to him clearly. It is an important issue.

Deputy Pat Rabbitte: I am just talking about the covered institutions.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: Yes.

With regard to Anglo Irish Bank, the fundamental question the Deputy is asking is whether the alternatives to providing capital to the bank have been explored. They have, including the alternatives of immediate liquidation, long-term wind-down and splitting the banking into a new banking entity and an asset management and recovery company. All these options have been examined.

The immediate priority of the board in the past year was to stabilise Anglo Irish Bank when it was nationalised. We are in a position to evaluate the options. I was anxious to point out on Tuesday evening that the option of an immediate wind-down is not viable, although it finds favour with the public for understandable reasons. Clearly, the various alternatives must be evaluated within a relatively short timeframe and in collaboration with the EU authorities in Brussels. I do not want to introduce a note of controversy in saying so. The Commission has a state aid section that supervises state aid provision to financial institutions and it has a view on this. It certainly has not pursued the position that, in some way, the Government is in the dock on this issue. That is far from the case. It, as with the Government, is anxious to find a common resolution to this problem.

This brings me to the issue raised by Deputy Rabbitte on the information that can be made available, subject to the usual commercial requirements, to the different political interests in this House. At various times, political interests in this House have advanced a proposal they believe would in some way make further savings in meeting the cost of the resolution of Anglo Irish Bank's difficulties. I have made it clear I am willing to make my officials available to any of the Opposition parties in that regard.

Deputy Joan Burton: The Minister did not let us meet NAMA.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: I am making that clear today.

Deputy Joan Burton: Is that for the future? He did not let us meet NAMA.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: I did not refuse the Deputy a meeting with NAMA. NAMA is an independent statutory body.

Deputy Joan Burton: I requested a meeting and did not get one.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: That is between the Deputy and NAMA.

Deputy Joan Burton: No, it is not. I was told by the Minister's senior civil servants that NAMA——

An Ceann Comhairle: Please, Deputy Burton.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: Short of exercising my power to give a statutory direction to NAMA to tell it to meet the Deputy, I do not instruct NAMA in what it does. That is not my function as Minister.

Deputy Damien English: Will he ask for a meeting?

Deputy Terence Flanagan: The Minister brought the legislation through the House.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: Having sat through the debates on the legislation, the Deputy should be well aware of that.

Deputy Joan Burton: The function of the Minister is to permit a democratic information flow.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Burton's issue can be dealt with at another time.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: Of course. We are having a highly democratic information flow here this afternoon.

Deputy James Reilly: Are they the smokes or the daggers the Taoiseach's predecessor referred to?

Deputy Brian Lenihan: I am sure NAMA has been extraordinarily busy in recent weeks. I assume that is why it was not able to find time to meet Deputy Burton whenever she made here request.

Deputy Joan Burton: Is that the position now? I understood its officials were willing to meet me but that the Minister's officials blocked the meeting.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: I assumed that to be the case. I am not saying I have any functions in regard to NAMA.

Deputy Joan Burton: I made other assumptions on the basis of what I was told.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: With regard to Deputy Rabbitte's question on how information can be conveyed to the Labour Party, Fine Gael and Sinn Féin on the options, the outgoing chairman made himself available to the Oireachtas Committee on Finance and the Public Service last year.

Deputy Joan Burton: Last year.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: I am sure the bank is willing to make itself available to the committee or a sub-committee thereof to explore the options and discuss them in a rational, structured way. It is important that we minimise the cost of this operation to the taxpayer, and we all agree on that. It is subject to commercial considerations of great importance that the maximum amount of information is put in the public domain in that regard.

An Ceann Comhairle: A number of Members are offering to contribute. I propose to allow them pose a question, after which the Minister will wind up.

Deputy Seán Barrett: Does the Minister agree that the Government is "in the dock", to use his own phrase, as a result of its decision to accept responsibility for the liabilities of Anglo Irish Bank? By the Minister's very actions, he has sent a message that any bank that gets into trouble in this country and is registered here will be bailed out by the Government, which will accept its liabilities.

Does the Minister agree that, as a result of his colleagues and him constantly sending a message to the electorate that we must accept responsibility for the debts of Anglo Irish Bank, it is implied we must accept the debts of any other financial institution in this State that gets into trouble? Does he agree it is time this matter were clarified once and for all?

Deputy Terence Flanagan: When will we see a revised business plan for NAMA in light of the decisions made this week on the cashflows to which the Minister has committed the taxpayer for the next ten to 15 years? We want to see a yearly plan. When will the first meeting of the NAMA committee or the Committee on Finance and the Public Service on NAMA be held? How many tranches of loans will be transferred to NAMA?

The Minister referred to householders and the mortgage debt group during the week. Does he have a date in mind as to when an announcement will be made on the decision made by the group in respect of ordinary homeowners who find themselves in difficulty on foot of having purchased homes at the height of the property boom?

With regard to the third banking force, will the Minister update us on whether Irish Nationwide and the EBS will join forces and become one unit?

Deputy Damien English: I asked the Minister about the NAMA business plan before and never really got an answer. He claims the plan will wash its own face and make profit eventually. I am concerned that, in respect of the debtors, including developers, who owe money to banks or NAMA, there is already a roll-up of interest amounting to nearly €10 billion. Why does the Minister or NAMA believe that, after the transfer of loans to NAMA, the debtors will begin to pay their debts? The Minister claimed a number of times he will chase debtors' assets and obtain what is owed. Even the "haircut" of 50% will not be enough because the market value is approximately 20%. How can debtors pay their debts?

I understand many debtors' assets are totally separated from their debts. Like the Minister in respect of NAMA, they also set up special purpose vehicles and companies. The Minister may laugh all he wants but he should note they were ahead of him in respect of NAMA. They

used such vehicles when borrowing money to separate their personal assets from their debts. It is unfair of the Minister to tell the taxpayer he will pursue them when he probably cannot do so. If he knows the percentage of loans he cannot pursue, I would like to have it. I have asked for it before but I have not got it.

The last part of my question relates to the banking inquiry. The Minister has an interview with Mr. Brendan Keenan in today's paper, although I have not read it yet. Mr. Keenan made a very good point some months ago to the effect that we have to investigate the relationship between the regulator and the then Taoiseach, Deputy Bertie Ahern and the Government. Was the regulator acting stupidly, on his own behalf, or was there a direction from Government as regards the manner in which he behaved? I just want confirmation that this will be investigated as part of the banking inquiry.

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: I am looking at the Minister's speech on Tuesday, where he said: "I am providing €8.3 billion this week to support the capital position." Did the Minister give a commitment to Anglo Irish Bank in December that it would get €8.3 billion? In other words, was the commitment given long before he came into the House, because the accounts show €8.3 billion in terms of share capital at the end of December and the chairman's report is basically stating that the Minister committed to providing €8.3 billion. That was not what was conveyed in the Minister's speech, however. At the least, he was economical with the facts and I should like to get clarification in that regard.

How much will Allied Irish Banks cost the taxpayer in extra funding over and above——

Deputy Brian Lenihan: Does the Deputy mean Anglo?

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: No, AIB, but Anglo Irish as well, since we are being told by the chairman that it will cost well above the €22 billion. How much, in addition to the €3.5 billion by way of preference shares, will AIB cost the Irish taxpayer? We do not want a situation whereby the Minister tells the Dáil on a certain date he is committing a certain figure to AIB and we find that this had been done three months before that date.

Is the Minister confident he will collect the €109 million in directors' loans made under a provision in the Anglo accounts? Incidentally, they are not annual accounts, but rather 15 month accounts. The public are outraged by the fact that €2 billion was taken by three Anglo directors, as reflected in the accounts, when families are effectively harnessing their children's future for Anglo.

Finally, the credit reviewer mechanism is extremely limited at €250,000 in terms of facilities. There is no statutory basis, just moral persuasion, effectively, and there is no time limit because, in essence, they will have to avail of the appeals system through the bank. Will the Minister not put this measure on a statutory footing?

Deputy Brian Lenihan: It is on a statutory footing.

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: It is not on a statutory footing, rather guidelines have been issued and if the Minister does not know this, then we have a major problem. It should be on a statutory footing, but it is not. Perhaps the Minister might deal with those questions, please, because what we want here is transparency and accountability.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: There is a very large number of questions and I shall try to deal with them as they were posed. Deputy Barrett raised the whole issue of moral hazard, which is a serious question, I accept. However, to take the example of Anglo, as I have already outlined, the €70 billion relates to liabilities to the European Central Bank, to our own Central Bank,

[Deputy Brian Lenihan.]

to depositors and to those who have loaned money in good faith to this institution, on the same basis as any other creditor and not on a subordinated basis. Ireland cannot afford to default on that scale, it is as simple as that.

Clearly, the protection against moral hazard is the system of regulation which we are all discussing in this House. We shall have ample opportunity to discuss it in the legislation before the House already on the Central Bank reform Bill and further amendments to the Central Bank legislation.

Deputy Terence Flanagan raised the question of the draft business plan, which I am advised by NAMA, will be published by June. I am sorry — was it Deputy English or Deputy Flanagan who asked that?

Deputy Terence Flanagan: It was I. I asked about the number of tranches as well.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: There are a number of tranches, but the intention is to complete all tranches by the end of this year. That is what I am advised by NAMA.

Deputy Terence Flanagan: Will NAMA report then, either to the finance committee or the NAMA committee? When will it come forward?

Deputy Brian Lenihan: That is a matter for the finance committee. There seems to be an assumption here that I will direct NAMA to do certain things. I presume NAMA will arrange to give a comprehensive briefing to the finance committee.

Deputy Terence Flanagan: Is there not quarterly reporting?

Deputy Joan Burton: A request has already been made to the Minister's officials in this regard. The senior deputy secretary seems to be in charge of NAMA.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: There are powers in the legislation for the Oireachtas to summon NAMA before it, as the Deputy knows, but it should not come to that.

Deputy Joan Burton: Fianna Fáil composes the committees.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: I assume that NAMA will be anxious to give all the information possible to the committee.

Deputy Joan Burton: That is not true.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: Members of the House should be aware the Opposition was consulted about the appointments to the board of NAMA and had a real say and input in that regard.

Deputy Terence Flanagan: It is another HSE.

Deputy Joan Burton: In what way?

Deputy Brian Lenihan: Through the party leaders and——

Deputy Joan Burton: The Labour Party has no nominees on the board of NAMA.

An Ceann Comhairle: Will Deputy Burton please stop interrupting the Minister?

Deputy Brian Lenihan: Fianna Fáil has no nominees on the board either. Persons were nominated to the board following a consultation process with the Opposition parties. I am

sorry, but some of the names put forward by the Opposition parties were appointed to the board. This board is not acting in bad faith, and neither am I.

Deputy Joan Burton: The Minister is acting as a lawyer now and putting up accusations that were not made.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: The Deputy has made some big accusations today.

Deputy Joan Burton: The Minister is not in the High Court now, so does not have to play the lawyer.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: We are in Dáil Éireann. As far as the statutory instrument Deputy O'Donnell referred to is concerned, it is SI 127 of 2010. It concerns guidelines issued under section 210(1) of the National Asset Management Agency Act regarding lending practices and procedures and relating to the review of decisions of participating institutions to refuse credit facilities. That is the statutory basis for the credit reviewer's role.

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: Based on whether they give it out.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: That is the statutory basis for the credit reviewer's role.

Deputy English had a number of questions, and perhaps he might refresh my memory. I believe he was concerned, first, about the value of the haircut imposed by NAMA. Everyone has recognised——

Deputy Damien English: It was a very dramatic haircut, but that was not my main concern.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: He was concerned about the recoverability of NAMA's loans.

Deputy Damien English: I am very concerned.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: It is clear from what NAMA has done to date that it has valued the loans at a very substantial discount, so it is making its own assessment about recoverability in that context.

(Interruptions).

Deputy Damien English: The Minister is not finished. I understand that values have bottomed to 50% or less in some cases. That is fair enough, and indeed better than we had thought. However, in some cases developers might never be able to repay any of that because, as is evident at the moment, there is already €10 billion of rolled-up interest. Why should they start paying tomorrow when the assets are with NAMA? That is my concern.

The Minister has said previously that he will chase personal assets, if necessary, to have this money recouped. My concern is——

Deputy Brian Lenihan: Can I reply to the Deputy, because he said I smiled at the time when he put the question? The reason I smiled is that I found it unusual for a child to be described as a special purpose vehicle.

Deputy Damien English: That is all right.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: However, there is power in the NAMA legislation to set aside transactions executed in favour of family members, that would attempt to defeat its purposes in the collection of the debts. That is the statutory position in that regard. The ingenuity of the

[Deputy Brian Lenihan.]

professional advisers who advise those who seek to arrange their affairs to avoid enforcement has to be matched by the ingenuity of NAMA in dealing with them.

On Deputy O'Donnell's question about commitments and the position on capital, of course I made it clear at all stages to the regulator — as I am bound to do as Minister for Finance — that the State would meet whatever minimum capital requirement was there for Anglo. Were the State not to give that undertaking, which is one that is frequently given by me in this House——

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: The Minister gave a commitment on Anglo and the €8.3 billion, specifically.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: All institutions in relation to capital, as I have outlined both in the supplementary——

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: The Minister is not answering the question.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: Will the Deputy allow me to answer the question? Regarding the supplementary budget last year, first of all, it was made clear that as a result of NAMA occasioning losses, the State stood ready to provide capital by way of ordinary shares, equity.

2 o'clock Likewise when the NAMA legislation was introduced last September, a similar undertaking was given on the floor of the House, and the Financial Regulator would have been assured at all stages with regard to Anglo Irish Bank, specifically, and any other institution in respect of which he made an inquiry that the State stood ready to provide capital. Otherwise——

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: Was there a specific figure?

Deputy Brian Lenihan: ——the institution would be faced with an immediate——

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: Was there a specific figure?

Deputy Brian Lenihan: Can I finish the answer? It would be faced with an immediate call, and the State would be faced with an immediate call as well.

With regard to the promissory note, it was approved by the Government last Tuesday and by the European Commission. That is the sequence of events. There is no hidden commitment or secret agreement or understanding. There is, of course, the working through of the accounts of the body. That had to take place, by way of forward planning, so the announcement could be made by the due date so financial stability could be maintained in our banking system.

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: Why did the Minister not say that in his speech last Tuesday?

An Ceann Comhairle: I call Deputy D'Arcy.

Deputy Joan Burton: Will the Minister answer my question about the third banking force?

An Ceann Comhairle: I am allowing Deputy Michael D'Arcy to ask a two sentence supplementary, no longer than that.

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: What about AIB?

Deputy Joan Burton: He did not answer my question about Irish Nationwide Building Society and EBS.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy, resume your seat.

Deputy Joan Burton: He is avoiding answering questions.

Deputy Terence Flanagan: He did not answer my question either.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: I am not avoiding it.

Deputy Joan Burton: Will you answer it now?

An Ceann Comhairle: Unless I get the co-operation of the House, the Minister will not be allowed to answer.

Deputy Michael D'Arcy: What is the Minister's opinion of the significant conflict that is taking place at present between his Department and the NAMA structure and the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, who is instructing planning sections, via departmental circulars, to de-zone land? There is an incredible conflict in that regard. It is important to hear the Minister's view——

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy will have to pursue that through a different avenue such as parliamentary questions to the line Ministers.

Deputy Michael D'Arcy: It is very important with regard to NAMA because property has already gone into NAMA where land has been de-zoned. The haircut we are discussing is already out of date and is on the way down. This is something both Ministers will have to sort out between them.

An Ceann Comhairle: We will conclude this after the Minister replies.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: I understand the point Deputy D'Arcy is making, although it is not directly relevant to this debate. It is an issue, but one we can discuss at another time. Deputy Burton asked about the future of EBS and Irish Nationwide Building Society. I outlined the position on an institution-specific basis with regard to both institutions in my speech last Tuesday. Each institution must submit a structural plan by the end of June to the European Commission for final approval. We will work with the institution and the Commission in that regard.

Deputy Joan Burton: So the third banking force is gone?

Deputy Brian Lenihan: A question about the third banking force was asked. The most important issue——

An Ceann Comhairle: We are moving on to statements on obesity.

Deputy Terence Flanagan: I asked a question about the mortgage debt group.

An Ceann Comhairle: We are moving on to statements on obesity. The Deputies have had a good innings. They will have to pursue the matter through parliamentary questions or Adjournment debates.

Obesity Levels: Statements.

Minister of State at the Department of the Health and Children (Deputy Áine Brady): I thank the Ceann Comhairle and Deputies for giving me this opportunity to make a statement on the subject of obesity. Obesity is a major public health problem internationally and is described by the World Health Organisation as a global epidemic. It is becoming one of the

[Deputy Áine Brady.]

fastest growing health problems in Ireland. It is a complex condition that affects and threatens to overwhelm virtually all ages and socio-economic groups. Body weight reflects nutrition and physical activity and is a key risk factor for cardiovascular disease and diabetes. The prevalence of the state of being overweight and obese is high in Ireland and it is increasing.

The most recent survey of lifestyles, attitude and nutrition, the Slán 2007 report, indicated that 38% of the population in Ireland were overweight and further 23% were obese. Essentially, therefore, two-thirds of the population were either overweight or obese. These figures are broadly similar to rates in England and Scotland, and approximately 5% lower than rates in the USA. Findings from the Slán 2007 report also demonstrated that the trend in obesity was greatest in the lower socio-economic groups. The best estimate of change in adult body weight over time is a comparison of the Slán 2007 report with the 1999 North/South Ireland Food Consumption Survey. This has indicated that the percentage of the population that is overweight or obese has risen from 57% to 61% in less than a decade.

Among children there is also evidence of increasing obesity. The latest data taken from the Irish component of the World Health Organisation childhood health growth surveillance initiative found that, overall, 26% of seven year old girls were overweight or obese with a corresponding figure of 18% for boys.

The Slán 2007 report also found evidence of over-consumption of foods high in fats and sugar, such as oils, butter, cakes and biscuits. On average, Irish adults consumed a little over seven daily servings of these types of food. According to the food pyramid, they should be used sparingly, that is, less than three servings daily.

People who are overweight or obese are at an increased risk of developing a chronic condition. For children who are overweight or obese before puberty, this reduces the average age at which non-communicable diseases become apparent and greatly increases the burden for individuals and the health services. While it must be acknowledged that there have been advances in recent years in tackling many chronic conditions, the fact that people are now living longer, together with the rise in obesity means that this progress is threatened. Information published by the Institute of Public Health earlier this year forecasts significant increases in coronary heart disease, stroke and diabetes as a result of smoking and high levels of obesity across the island of Ireland. It is estimated that obesity is responsible for approximately 2,000 premature deaths every year in Ireland. This reflects a burden not only for individuals and their families but also for the health services.

The national task force on obesity was established by the Department of Health and Children in 2004 as a direct response to the emerging problem of overweight and obesity. Its report, *Obesity — the Policy Challenges*, was published in 2005. The report's recommendations related to actions across six broad areas, namely, high level government, education, social and community, health, food and the physical environment. The recommendations highlighted the need for cross collaboration between all key stakeholders and real practical engagement with both the public and the private sectors.

An inter-sectoral group on obesity, comprising relevant Government Departments and key stakeholders, was established early in 2009 to oversee and monitor implementation of the task force recommendations. The inter-sectoral group published a report in April 2009, detailing progress on each of the recommendations. The examination by the group showed that significant progress was made in the case of 32% of the recommendations, partial implementation has occurred on 31%, and action is progressing on a further 28%, leaving only 9% where little progress was reported.

The report indicated that while significant progress had been made across all sectors, there is a continuing need for concerted action in order to halt the rise in obesity. The group also gave some consideration to key priority areas for action in the short to medium term. The overriding concern of the group was the need for concerted Government action, driven at the highest level, to ensure a consistent approach to the implementation of the task force's recommendations. Among the areas highlighted were: measures to increase physical activity among children; continued awareness programmes about the dangers of excessive consumption of foods high in fat, sugar and salt; increased control of the advertising and marketing of food and drinks aimed at children; improved training for health professionals in obesity prevention; and diagnosis and counselling for those at risk of obesity.

Since the April 2009 report a significant development has been the publication of the first national guidelines on physical activity and the accompanying "Get Ireland Active" website. This was considered a priority because the recent Slán survey indicated that only 40% of adults undertook regular physical activity while one in five were physically inactive. In children, the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children survey found that more than half of primary school-aged children in Ireland did not do the recommended level of physical activity. Based on best international practice, the guidelines specify the recommended levels of daily physical activity for people of all ages and abilities. There are a number of further initiatives which are ongoing and contributing to actions on obesity. For example, healthy eating guidelines have been developed for pre-schools and primary schools, and nutrition guidelines for hospitals have also issued.

On food labelling, the issue of a mandatory nutrition declaration is currently being considered in the context of the EU proposal for regulation on the provision of food information to consumers. This would mean the food business operator displays the food's energy value, the amount of fat, saturates, carbohydrates, sugars, proteins and salt. On the issue of marketing, my Department is working with the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland on revising and strengthening the nutritional elements of the children's advertising code with a view to restricting the advertising and marketing of unhealthy food aimed at children. The Department is also developing a nutrition policy which is due to be completed this year.

These measures will help to reduce consumption of foods high in fat, sugar and salt, as well as increasing physical activity among the populations. With regard to the inter-sectoral group on obesity, this work is currently being examined in the context of a wider review of policy in regard to lifestyle-related illnesses, to which obesity is a major contributory factor. Elements of this work will be also progressed in the forthcoming policy on cardiovascular disease which will be completed shortly.

Deputy James Reilly: I welcome the opportunity to speak on this subject, in which I have had much interest over the years. I presented a paper on the policy that should be followed at the World Medical Association which was adopted in 88 countries.

The Minister of State has outlined the importance of obesity in regard to the nation's health. It is a major public health problem and it has been described as a global epidemic. The issue for this country is that the prevalence of overweight and obesity is higher than in almost all other countries in the EU. We are not winning the battle. At one of the many talks on obesity I attended, I saw a frightening electronic map of the United States which begins in the 1960s and, as the incidence of obesity goes over 25% in each state, the state turns red on the map. The map went from having just two red states in the 1960s to the entire United States being marked red some years ago. There are many trends in the United States which we follow but this is certainly one we do not wish to follow.

[Deputy James Reilly.]

Children are of particular concern, and the increasing level of obesity in children is of major concern. This is multi-factorial in terms of the way Irish society is organised now and the way we worry about our children. I was in Dublin recently to launch a book for Monica Breslin. Much of it related to her time as a child living in Ballyboughal, when she could go down the fields to play — I have similar memories myself. If a child did not come back for lunch, nobody was particularly concerned whereas, nowadays, if a child is out of sight for more than 30 minutes, parents are extremely concerned. The opportunity for children to have opportunistic exercise is being continually limited by the way we fear for their safety, by the manner in which schoolyards are supervised and through concerns about insurance, for example, if a child falls, the school may be sued, as well as concerns around the safety of walking or cycling to school versus being brought by car. There is also the terrible situation where 75% of primary schools have no indoor sports facilities.

Other statistics are available to us from the Irish Universities Nutrition Alliance which suggest there could be more than 300,000 overweight and obese children in Ireland and the number is increasing by 10,000 annually. The increasing longevity we have seen in the past decade is multi-factorial. It has much to do with vaccination, improved living conditions and housing, safer food and cleaner water, and a little to do with our health service, but nothing to do with overcrowded wards, accident and emergency units and outpatient departments. Despite all that, in stark terms, we could be the first generation to bury our children in numbers. With the rise in obesity will come a rise in diabetes and with that will come not an increase in longevity but a decrease.

This is a major problem for our society and a major epidemiological issue that has to be addressed. I put it to the Minister of State that it is not being addressed in the manner in which it should be. While I accept the Minister of State is not long in her job and, therefore, we cannot point the finger at her, the Government has been extremely tardy in its approach, an issue I will deal with shortly.

A Department of Health and Children-HSE survey carried out in 2008 as part of the WHO childhood obesity surveillance initiative found that 22% of seven-year olds were overweight or obese — 26% of girls and 18% of boys. I have already outlined the major issue this brings with it, namely, diabetes, but there are many other problems. It signals increased risk of other problems such as psychological difficulties due mainly to widespread prejudice against fat people. We know children can be very unkind to each other but there is prejudice even in the workplace. The health consequences of obesity range from a number of non-fatal complaints such as respiratory difficulties, musculoskeletal problems, such as osteoarthritis of knees, hips and ankles, skin problems and infertility to complaints that increase the risk of premature death, including diabetes, gall bladder disease, cancers and cardiovascular problems. From other statistics, I know 10,000 people have died from stroke, so hypertension and high blood pressure, which is directly related in most cases to one's body weight, is a huge predictor for stroke and heart attack. For men, the incidence of erectile dysfunction increases as one's body mass index increases. The impact on our health service is grossly under-estimated, although we have some figures.

The psycho-social problems of the stigma and prejudice against people seems to border on the socially acceptable in Ireland. As the task force on obesity points out, the damage this causes to the welfare of citizens is extremely serious and, for this reason, Government intervention is necessary and warranted.

The direct and indirect costs associated with obesity are estimated at approximately €400 million annually. My view is that this is a major underestimate because diabetes alone last year

cost this country €800 million and much diabetes is related to obesity and being overweight, although not all of it, and type 1 diabetes has nothing to do with it. Nonetheless, the huge increase we have seen in diabetes has much to do with it. This is before one begins counting the cost in terms of osteoarthritis, cancer of the stomach and bowel and many other medical conditions that put people in hospital. The cost of treating the consequences of obesity, according to the task force, was €70 million in 2002 — eight years ago — which includes the cost of GP consultations, hospitals contracts and prescriptions. The cost of inpatient treatment was €30 million in 2003 — seven years ago. These figures are grossly out of date, if the House will pardon the use of that term.

The indirect costs associated with obesity include workplace costs through days lost due to illness arising from obesity and, for those who are obese, possibly lower wages because of discrimination arising from their obesity. Finally, there are output losses due to output foregone as a result of premature death. We have no reasonable estimates of this. For England, the Auditor General estimated the total indirect costs at £2.6 billion back in 1998. On a *pro rata* basis, and allowing for increased costs since, this would place the indirect costs at some €370 million, according to the task force. As the Minister of State noted, the number of premature deaths annually attributable to obesity is approximately 2,000.

The national task force on obesity was set up by the Government in 2005. It aimed to provide the policy framework for addressing the high prevalence and rising levels of overweight and obesity, in particular childhood obesity, in Ireland. The report provided 93 recommendations for action, aimed at six sectors. The Minister of State has outlined those sectors. She used words such as “partially” and “somewhat”. I have referred to the health sector part of the document which refers to significant progress in supporting healthy eating in the population. It may be significant progress by someone’s measure but the bottom line is it has not been implemented. It states the health services should recognise the maintenance of a healthy weight as being an important health issue and measurement of height, weight, circumference and body mass index should be part of routine clinical practice in primary care and in hospitals. It states this has been partly implemented but this means, in other words, it has not been implemented. I will not have time to list all the recommendations. Out of 93 recommendations, less than 20% have been implemented. The year 2005 was during the height of the Celtic tiger. At a time when we could build 350,000 houses and 15,000 extra hotel bedrooms we did not need, we could not manage more than a one-fifth implementation to deal with a national problem that will involve significant financial and, very sadly, significant personal loss for people. If there were a need for another metaphor for this Government’s priorities, this is it.

The programme for Government proposed a personal health check. It stated:

We will develop a freely available and personalised national programme to provide for the prevention and early detection of illnesses for both men and women. This will be called the Personal Health Check.

It lists points, but the bottom line is not alone has it not been implemented but it was dropped from the programme in 2009.

It is an integral part of the Fine Gael health policy, Fair Care, to have a national body test, and an age-appropriate annual checkup for every man, woman and child, for the very reasons I have highlighted. Diabetes is an illness that exemplifies this in a significant way. A national body test would identify people who are obese. Many people attend my clinic because they know of my interest in obesity. I check every patient’s weight. At least 50% of the people who are obese thought they had just a bit of a weight problem. Once they got over the initial insult of the descriptive word “obese”, they began to understand it as a medical condition which

[Deputy James Reilly.]

tripled their chances of premature death, stroke, heart attack, diabetes and a myriad of other things. At least they were taking the first step to recovery; they knew they had a problem because prior to that they did not think they had a problem.

For every patient diagnosed with diabetes, there is another patient in the community who has not been diagnosed and they will present late with complications relating to their eyes, kidneys, cardiovascular system and heart. I take this opportunity to advise anyone with diabetes that diabetes mixed with smoking means certain amputation of a limb. The two together are a toxic combination.

If there was true commitment on the part of the Government, we would have a national body test and a personal health check. These illnesses could be detected which would save many people a lot of suffering and save the State a lot of money.

The emphasis should be on prevention. However, we need to provide treatment for those who are grossly obese, on foot of a proper medical assessment. Only one place in the country, Loughlinstown, undertakes this treatment and the list is very long. Consequently, many people go to the United Kingdom and to Europe for these surgical procedures. Unfortunately, some suffer severe complications and consequences and there has been one death.

In 2008, the Commission on Patient Safety and Quality Assurance report, *Building a Culture of Patient Safety*, recommended the introduction of a licensing system for all health services whether they are delivered publicly or privately. To date this has not happened. The lady from Wicklow died in a private clinic in south Dublin.

Nothing has been done to implement the national nutrition policy. In November 2005, Deputy Seán Power, the then Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children, promised the policy would be published early in 2006. In February 2008, the Taoiseach, Deputy Brian Cowen, said it would be published “in the coming months”. Two months later, the former Minister of State and Deputy, Pat the Cope Gallagher, said it was “in the final stages” of development, and his successor in the Department, Deputy Mary Wallace, who is in the Chamber today, said in May that year it would be published “later this year”. In June 2009, the Department said the policy would be published by September. We are still awaiting same.

The Department of Education and Science has a significant role to play in changing the ethos with regard to school yard supervision to allow children to run freely, to avail of opportunistic exercise, in conjunction with and in addition to, physical education classes. I raised the issue that 75% of primary schools have no indoor exercise facilities even though these are essential in our climate. The Department needs to allocate more time to allow for the teaching of nutrition and good cookery habits.

I have a list of recommendations which should be implemented. The Minister for Health and Children was recently asked by way of a parliamentary question the amount of funding provided to tackle obesity over the past five years. She could not provide an answer because of industrial action in the Department. She was also asked if there would be a new policy for providing exercise facilities. There was no reply as this is a policy decision.

Vending machines in schools should dispense fruit. We need an investment programme for the provision of indoor facilities in primary schools, in particular. This could benefit the broader community as these facilities could be used after school hours.

I recommend the introduction of comprehensive food labelling information. I suggest the traffic lights system, with green for safe, healthy food, amber for food to be taken in moderation and red for food to be taken only in small amounts. The food industry may object to such designations but the health of our people and the health of our children is more important.

The calorie content of alcoholic drinks needs to be clearly displayed. There should be no advertising of fast food before the watershed hour of 10 p.m. We know that billions of euro are spent on advertising because advertising works. Years ago, my younger son always wanted to go to McDonald's. He would not eat the stuff but he wanted to be there because he saw it on television. The national body test should be introduced as a priority. The Government policy regarding running in the school yard should be clarified. If there is a need to change the legislation with regard to possible litigation, this should be done.

Deputy Jan O'Sullivan: I welcome the opportunity to speak on this subject. I think we have somewhat of a graveyard shift in the Chamber today, this being the last debate before the Easter recess and following a debate about the banks in which there was significant interest from the media. I do not know if there will be much of an interest in this debate. Perhaps I should not refer to the graveyard shift because once one ends up in a graveyard, one does not stay obese for very long.

This is a serious issue but we can do something about it, even in these straitened financial circumstances. Many of the 93 recommendations in the task force on obesity report do not cost much money or perhaps none at all. Society can take practical steps to deal with the problem and to prevent its occurrence, which may not cost any money.

I refer to the importance of a cross-departmental and cross-societal approach to this issue. I find no fault with either the current or former Minister of State in terms of their commitment to this issue. The responsibility for addressing it goes beyond the Minister of State, Deputy Áine Brady, and her predecessor, Deputy Wallace, but there is no evidence to indicate that it is being addressed in a serious manner at all levels of Government. I would contrast us with Finland, which managed to reduce its obesity levels because it took the issue seriously.

The Minister of State described the current state of obesity and compared us to other countries. I would not clap myself on the back because we are not as bad as the United States, which offer the best example of how awful obesity levels can become. I recently spoke to a friend who had just returned from the US and attested to the enormous portions served in restaurants there. How much rather than what one eats makes the difference in terms of obesity.

We have to adopt a broader approach. The latest report of the intersectoral group, which issued in April 2009, indicated that just over 30% of its recommendations had been implemented, a further third had been partially implemented and a 25% were being progressed. I ask the Minister of State when the next report will issue because considerable progress remains to be made. Five of the recommendations are aimed at high levels of Government and a number of them pertain to Departments, particularly in regard to the physical environment and the education, social and community and health sectors. We will not be able to make progress unless we engage with the recommendations at that level. I urge the Minister of State to ensure the intersectoral group engages the recommendations with a view to implementing them.

We have to address this issue from birth onwards and there is even evidence to suggest that problems of obesity can first emerge at the prenatal stage. It is vital that all new mothers and fathers are brought into educational programmes, which could be initiated in maternity hospitals and continued in the community. It is an obvious point that everybody in the world was once a young child but it is often missed in our focus on the problems that have already developed by the time children are attending school. We should be aiming at preventing obesity. One person I heard speak on his issue argued that we have created an illness industry rather than a healthy living policy.

[Deputy Jan O'Sullivan.]

Deputy Reilly correctly pointed out that the incidence of chronic illnesses such as diabetes and heart disease could be significantly reduced by addressing the problem of obesity. This would allow us to save huge sums of money on health services. The Irish Medical Organisation has called for medium to long-term goals for reducing obesity levels because we will not see overnight results from preventive measures, a system for measuring expected health gains and the ring-fencing of funding so that it is not syphoned off for other programmes.

Serious issues arise for the Department of Education and Science in regard to physical education. On rainy days, many schools lack the facilities to provide physical activities and while it is on the curriculum in theory, it is not taught in practice. Looking at school photographs from 30 and 40 years ago, I was struck by the size of children compared to today. We must ensure that funding for physical education facilities is ring-fenced in the Department's capital budget. Schools which lack their own facilities have plenty of scope to engage with community and sporting organisations to ensure young children can access physical education. This can involve paying for children's transport and entry to facilities such as swimming pools. We need to think outside the box if these facilities cannot be immediately developed in schools.

The free year of preschool education offers an opportunity for the Government to insist on healthy eating programmes. The Minister of State referred to the guidelines for preschool facilities and hospitals but given that they are funded out of public money, why do we not insist on the promotion of healthy living?

Deputy Penrose has permitted me to reveal to the House that he has lost a considerable amount of weight by following the guidelines that were made available to him. He told me that the most important action is to step back from the table. While a considerable amount of information is available to the public on obesity, this in itself is not enough if we do not incorporate the societal measures to which I referred.

There is scope for ring-fencing revenue from taxes on alcohol and other products. We should connect these stick taxes directly to spending on positive measures to improve our lifestyles and make us more healthy. If we made such connections we would be better able to ringfence the funding we need for such programmes.

In her speech the Minister of State outlined specific measures which were also part of the recommendations of the task force. However, a narrow consideration of this matter from the point of view of the Department of Health and Children will not get the results we require. We need a high-level, cross-Government, cross-departmental approach to the issue. We must engage the public and present a positive public message to the effect that we are serious about the issue and that, even in a recession, we can start to achieve our ends. Other countries have done so but not within such a narrow focus. They have done with a broad societal focus and this is the direction in which we must go.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: According to the report *Health in Ireland: Key Trends 2009*, published on 1 December 2009 by the Department of Health and Children, "obesity in Ireland is now one of the major challenges which faces the health services into the future. In 2007, 59% of men and 41% of women self-reported as either being overweight or obese". This is a fairly stark statement and it needs to be taken very seriously but it requires qualification. Many people see being overweight or obese as a question of appearance and for some, it will always be no more than that. Some people may be marginally overweight and this may cause no health difficulties or unduly restrict them from living their lives to the full. However, for too many people — the number is increasing — obesity seriously impairs health and quality of life or threatens to do so in the future. Of particular concern is the rise in levels of obesity among young people and children. The position was well stated in the report of the Inquiry into

Obesity conducted by the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety in the Six County Assembly and published last October, with which the Minister of State may be familiar. In its introduction, that report states:

Obesity has been variously described to us as a ‘well established epidemic’, a ‘tsunami’, a ‘crisis’ and a ‘population time bomb’. It is a problem that will have an enormous impact, not just on the health of the population, but something that threatens to engulf the entire health service and it will have a very serious impact on society and the economy. For many people obesity is seen primarily as a vanity or aesthetic issue. However, it has very serious and life-threatening health implications through a wide range of conditions, such as heart disease, type 2 diabetes, some forms of cancer, and high blood pressure. We were told that obesity could cause the present generation growing up to have a shorter life span than their parents.

All of this applies across the island of Ireland and is not unique to the six north-eastern counties of our country. We must take very careful note of the findings and recommendations of that report. Studies in the United States and elsewhere have shown a link between obesity and low income poverty. People on lower incomes in developed countries tend to have poorer diets in terms of quality, if not in quantity, with more junk food and less health-giving foods in their diets. Also, they have fewer opportunities for healthy leisure activities and fewer amenities to aid physical fitness. People on lower incomes are more likely to be smokers and to experience the adverse effects of abuse of alcohol and other drugs. Alcohol itself is a contributory factor to obesity.

Many respondents to the Assembly Inquiry into Obesity report from which I have cited highlighted the links between poverty and obesity. I refer to some examples. Action Cancer pointed to research which found that, “people on lower income have higher propensity for fast food diets and food with little nutritional value. Additionally, people with little disposable income are less motivated to engage in regular exercise due to the high costs associated with gyms or sports clubs”. Dr. Colin Hamilton of the British Medical Association suggested that, “looking back 50 or 60 years, one discovers that obesity was not a working-class problem, but, rather, one of the middle and other classes — the people who had money to spend on food. Nowadays, the situation has totally reversed”. John News of Sport Northern Ireland, agreed stating that, “the settings are important; not everyone wants to go to a council-owned leisure centre, but neither can everyone afford to go to a private health club or leisure centre. The health inequalities across Northern Ireland show a definite correlation between socio-economic status and participation in sport and physical activity”.

The Public Health Alliance for the island of Ireland, with which we are all familiar, is an all-Ireland organisation which addresses health inequalities. It pointed to research undertaken in 2007 to examine the scope and extent of food poverty in the North of Ireland. That research concluded that, “there is strong evidence to indicate that people living in food poverty almost always have a diet which predisposes them to the risk of obesity”. I refer to another example. Andrew Dougal, Northern Ireland Chest Heart and Stroke Association, has pointed out that success in preventing heart disease and stroke has been achieved in the higher socio-economic groups and while he agreed with the total-population approach he argued that, “there may be a need to focus on the more deprived groups in society to ensure that those people are empowered to change their lifestyles”.

Andrea Marnoch, Food Standards Agency Northern Ireland, reported on the findings of the low income diet and nutrition survey, LIDNS, carried out between 2003 and 2005, and published in 2007. Its aim was to study material deprivation in the diets of what it called the bottom 15% of the population. It concluded that:

[Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin.]

Compared with the general population, the low-income population was less likely to consume wholemeal bread and tended to consume more non-diet soft drinks, more processed meats, more whole milk and more table sugar. Consumption of fruit and vegetables fell well below the recommended level of five portions a day, and consumption of oily fish was very low.

While the rates of obesity have increased most among adults and children from poorer backgrounds, research has also found that the widening of obesity inequalities is more evident among women than men. The Fit Futures report in the North stated: “Higher rates of obesity have been found in adults, especially women, with mild to moderate learning disabilities that live in the community than in the general population”. The Royal College of Psychiatrists reported that “people with mental illness and those with learning disabilities are more likely than the general population to be obese”. It would be useful to put on record a summary of the recommendations of that useful Assembly report, especially those that can be applied to this jurisdiction, most of which can. It recognises that obesity is the most serious and most challenging public health issue that we face at this time and it is also one of the most complex. There is, therefore, an urgent need to develop and implement a comprehensive and robust strategy to address the issue.

Growing levels of obesity will continue to generate enormous costs to society, particularly the health and social care sector in the years ahead. Given this and the potential for significant cost benefits, it is imperative that substantial and sustained resources are provided to implement a life course strategy, in other words, a strategy that addresses people’s lives and health in the round to address obesity.

A joined-up approach is required across all Departments, public sector agencies, including local authorities, the private sector and the voluntary and community sectors to tackle obesity. There needs to be an audit of existing obesity-related initiatives so that the need for evaluation or further research can be identified and examples of good practice can be rolled out more widely.

There needs to be a range of evidence-based referral options for use by primary care practitioners. The Minister should undertake a comprehensive review of weight management services at all levels for adults and children. The review must address, for example, the need for dedicated obesity clinics. The review should also consider the merits of adopting examples of good practice from elsewhere, such as the Counterweight programme in Scotland and the Carnegie Weight Management programme in England. There is much that we can learn from international best practice. The problem is not unique to us; it is global, certainly in the developed Western society as we know it, and we can learn from the approaches employed in other jurisdictions.

The HSE and the Department of Health and Children should exert pressure at a national and European level to introduce regulatory controls on the levels of salt and saturated fat in manufactured foods. The Assembly report urged a single, consistent food labelling scheme and urged a system that could be made mandatory on all food retail products. It called for more action to enforce a similar, clear and simple nutrition labelling system at non-retail outlets such as restaurants, hotel and other catering establishments. Sinn Féin urges an all-Ireland approach to this aspect of food labelling and, indeed, to all food labelling.

While recognising the difficulty in regulating food portion sizes in catering and similar settings, we urge the Department to examine how issues such as food promotion and pricing impact on portion sizes, and how they might be influenced.

Significantly, the report recognised that there is confusion over what exactly constitutes five portions of fruit and vegetables daily, and particularly around the size and content of a portion. The Department and-or the HSE should examine how greater clarity and understanding about this health message can be achieved and how it might impact on levels of obesity.

Publicly provided sports and leisure facilities are vital in tackling obesity and overall health and fitness needs of the population. In some ways, the North is more advanced than this jurisdiction in that regard and much work needs to be done in the State in that area over the years ahead. Every Department should recognise that it has a crucial role to play in responding to the obesity epidemic, either through direct action or through policies and practices that impact on the factors that contribute to obesity.

We need to explore the feasibility of banning the advertising of food and drink products that are high in fat, salt or sugar before the 9 p.m. watershed. New and emerging media should also be used to engage with young people because they tend more to these new means of contact communication. Such media should be explored and opportunities identified in order to address more young people on the issues of health, fitness and obesity. Crucially, health inequalities must be recognised, and particularly the need to address the higher levels of obesity in areas of social deprivation.

It needs to be noted by so many across society that there are real benefits for both employers and employees in promoting healthy lifestyles in the workplace, and that employers have a role to play. They should consider initiatives, within or in association with the workplace, that promote healthy eating and greater levels of exercise.

The answers to all of the problems presented by obesity are at the end of the day relatively simple. The difficulty is getting everyone on board and signed on for the overall project of address of this major challenge that we face today and, ultimately, encouraging enough within society to recognise the importance of that address.

Deputy Jimmy Devins: I wish to share time with Deputy Mary Wallace.

I welcome this debate. I welcome the Minister of State, Deputy Brady, who has responsibility for obesity. Indeed, in her preamble, she outlined the frightening increase in obesity and its related dangers.

Urgent action needs to be taken. There is an epidemic of obesity sweeping the country. We can sit here and talk at length but, unfortunately, talking is not of any use at present. The following startling statistics, if put in front of the House, might clarify all our thoughts.

There are over 4,000 deaths every year in this country from obesity-related illnesses. If that was in any other sphere, for example, road traffic accidents, there would be justifiable public outrage. With 4,000 deaths every year from obesity-related illnesses, what are we doing about it?

Thirty years ago the weight of our children was average in comparison to those in Europe. Today, we have the fattest children in Europe. It is frightening. That is a time bomb which is building up and which will explode in all our faces, and particularly, unfortunately, in the health of our children as they mature into teenagers and young adults.

On a specific point, Professor Donal O'Shea, who was the medical adviser to "Operation Transformation" and is probably the leading weight-loss expert in the country, has a clinic in St. Colmcille's in Loughlinstown and St. Vincent's Hospital in Dublin. That, to my knowledge, is the only clinic trying to deal with the whole country. We need extra clinics.

I have been informed that the operations carried out for the morbidly obese, that is, those who are in severe danger of losing their lives due to obesity, have not been carried out since 1

[Deputy Jimmy Devins.]

January. There are approximately 400 of these operations needed every year in this country. I ask the Minister of State to inquire as to why there have been no operations carried out since January.

The task force to which she alluded is a good one. It has published over 90 recommendations. Significant progress has been made in respect of 30 of them, partial implementation has been achieved in respect of 29 and action is progressing on a further 26, leaving only eight where little progress was reported. Stripping away all the fine language, it means that out of 90 recommendations, there are approximately 30 on which there is decent progress being made. That is not good enough and it must be improved. It really is too easy to pay lip-service to this time bomb which is in our society.

I will outline briefly what I want to see done. We need action on two areas. The first of these is curative. For those who, unfortunately, have obesity-related problems, let us have a HSE clinic in each of the four HSE areas so that the load is spread all over the country. Second, we need an immediate resumption of the publicly-funded operations for those who need gastric by-passes.

On the preventative side, they say prevention is much better than cure and I would argue it will be cost neutral. First, let us all increase our exercise. Some of the Members who participated in “Operation Transformation” are present in the House. There is Deputy O’Dowd, who has——

Deputy Fergus O’Dowd: Fades away.

Deputy Jimmy Devins: ——done very well. Indeed, I want to pay tribute to all of my colleagues across all parties, both here and in the Seanad, who participated in it. We all agreed that exercise was the simplest, but most cost-effective, way to lose weight. Walking, or jogging for those who are younger, does not cost the State anything. Those who claim they cannot find the time, know well they can easily find it.

It would be wonderful to see a straightforward food labelling system with a green label for healthy foods, orange for those high in calories, and red for those to be avoided. Some argue it is more complicated than that but I believe it needs to be done.

Deputy Fergus O’Dowd: Hear, hear.

Deputy Jimmy Devins: Another preventive measure is to begin weighing every schoolchild annually. The weigh-ins can be done either by the teachers or the public health nurse. Then a note can go back to each child’s parents explaining their child’s weight is normal or abnormal for their child’s age and sex. If parents are made aware of a problem with their child’s weight, they can take preventive action with assistance, if needed, from various health agencies.

The public has much interest in the obesity issue. Up to 500,000 people watched “Operation Transformation” every week on television while its webpage received over 3 million hits in eight weeks. This has never happened before to a programme on RTE. I pay tribute to the programme, in particular Gerry Ryan, and the experts who helped us when we participated in it. It brought home to me that there is an interest in both Houses of the Oireachtas in a cross-party and non-political approach to tackling obesity. We can all work together and not be scoring political points in tackling this and other such issues.

I pay tribute to Don Rice and his catering staff in the Houses of the Oireachtas for putting healthy options on the menu, the take-up of which has been tremendous. Why can every restaurant not do the same? Chefs are the experts in the caloric content of a meal and are well

able to put one healthy option on every restaurant menu, allowing people to know a low-calorie meal is available when they eat out.

We do not need any more procrastination in tackling this issue. The public has a high interest in it. Action needs to be taken. The Minister of State, Deputy Áine Brady, is the right person to do it. I look forward to her leading the charge. Some high profile exercising events led by the Minister of State and celebrities should show most exercise can be done for free.

Deputy Mary Wallace: I thank Deputy Devins for sharing his time with me. I support the Minister of State, Deputy Áine Brady, in her work in this area. All Members across the House agree tackling obesity must be prioritised. The statistics are frightening with 38% of the population overweight and 23% obese, a total of 61% of the population in the overweight-obese category, a rise from 57% in just a decade. This epidemic needs to be halted.

Action is required in promoting good nutrition and physical activity. We must make it easier for people to make healthy choices. Yesterday I heard one advertisement from the Little Steps campaign on radio in which a man takes his kids for a walk instead of going to the pub. The Little Steps programme has a good television and radio advertising campaign.

Obesity among children is also a concern with associated chronic health conditions such as type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular diseases on the rise. More than half of primary schoolchildren do not get their recommended daily level of physical activity. Is this a school or family issue? That children spend 20% of their time in school means it is a family issue.

The change of school vending machine products to healthier options is important. A year ago the Department of Education and Science wrote to all schools on this matter. Will the Minister of State follow this up to establish what progress has been made?

Changes were made to the food served in the canteen in Leinster House for which I commend Don Rice and his staff. I hope it can happen in other workplace canteens across the country.

When I was Minister of State with responsibility for tackling obesity, I was impressed during my visits to Professor Donal O'Shea's clinic in Loughlinstown. The Minister of State should visit it to see the outstanding work done there. While it is serious when people get to the stage they must attend the clinic, there was a proposal to develop other units across the country. I hope this is still on course as it will be important in treating obesity.

More parents practise what they preach when it comes to family health. A recent survey showed 65% of children walk to their destinations, other than to school, in a typical week, a rise of 59%. Little steps go a long way but the battle is far from over. Individuals are responsible for their lifestyle choices but we can make it easier for them to lead healthier lives.

With over 61% of the population in the overweight-obese category, tackling obesity must be priority. I wish the Minister of State well in her work in halting this epidemic.

Deputy Olwyn Enright: I wish to share time with Deputy O'Dowd.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Joe Costello): Is that agreed? Agreed.

Deputy Olwyn Enright: While many other important issues had to be debated in the last while, obesity, which was given much attention several years ago, seemed to have dropped off the radar. It is a serious issue with long-term health and cost implications for the country.

It is welcome that Deputy Áine Brady is the Minister with responsibility for this area. It is the victim of a lack of joined-up government because it falls between many different Departments. Much mention has been made of the responsibilities of Departments of Health and

[Deputy Olwyn Enright.]

Children and Education and Science. I believe, however, the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has a responsibility too. Ireland has a strong agricultural sector producing healthy food products. People need to be made more aware of these and the role they can play in a healthy lifestyle. The new Department of Social Protection also has a role to play because of the higher incidence of obesity in areas of social deprivation. Less healthy foodstuffs also tend to be more expensive which compounds the difficulty.

Obesity has to be tackled in a holistic manner. It is easy to say responsibility for it should rest with schools. The primary responsibility, however, should be in the home. For that to happen we must examine how we get the message into the home.

The first port of call should be the public health nurse. They will be loathe to hear that I suggested they should have any more on their plates because they are already very busy. From my experience, I have found them to be well-qualified and good at imparting information to parents. Their first visit to a home is a good opportunity for them to instil in families the importance of healthy eating and lifestyles. The primary care centres are another good local point where facilities and information on healthy lifestyles and qualified personnel should be available.

I do not want to overload what must be done in schools because there is not much time. I question the PE programme in schools and I question the ability of primary schools in particular to deliver it. I recently had a conversation about how little PE there was when we were in school. That has improved dramatically but there are differences between schools, particularly between girls schools where there is not the same emphasis on competitive sports, which leads to less emphasis on all sports. If one is not good at sports, one is not picked because schools are in competition. That causes difficulty for children's participation and needs to be addressed.

Deputy Wallace referred to vending machines in schools. They should not be there. I remember visiting a public-private partnership school in Munster and being shocked because the school looked like McDonald's. The colouring and signage in the canteen area was like McDonald's. This should be outlawed in schools so that only healthy choices are available. A very good example of this is in Clondalkin, where two teachers took it upon themselves to drive this matter. There is a voucher system in place, with vouchers given to everyone to ensure there is no social stigma. It works very well and could be replicated.

I support labelling. I refer to Deputy Devins's comments on the school weigh-in. I agree with the sentiment but I have concerns about doing it in school. School is a very competitive environment and I have serious worries for children in general, and particularly young girls, about having this done in school when children will ask one another afterwards how they got on and where issues of bullying are rife. This could add to the difficulties experienced in schools.

I refer to the opposite of what we are talking about, eating disorders. When talking about obesity, we must be conscious that we do not make it seem that being skinny is the appropriate direction in which to go. It is about a healthy lifestyle. There is a chronic lack of bed capacity in this country for those who are obese and those who have eating disorders such as anorexia and bulimia. There are three beds in the entire country for people with anorexia or bulimia; this matter must be addressed.

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: I welcome my niece, Alana O'Dowd, who is in the Distinguished Visitors Gallery. She flew overnight from New York to be here and has not slept. She came here with my brother Niall.

Deputy Paul Connaughton: Especially to hear Deputy O'Dowd's speech.

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: Especially to hear me. She is awake. Her uncle — that is me — was 19 stone and now I am the right side of 15 stone and 6 lbs. The reason for this is Operation Transformation. I proudly hold my certificate, signed by Senator David Norris and Gerry Ryan. I am lucky, I am here and I have done it. I just have to keep off the weight. I was obese and I am now overweight and I must reduce my weight further. The key message I want to give to Alana and everyone else is that it is all in our minds. It is a case of making up one's mind that one is going to change. Going on a diet does not make sense because that suggests I will go back to the way I was before I lost weight. I am not going back there. One must change what one does. The job of the State is to aid and assist that through the Department of Education and Science and the Department of Health and Children.

I am convinced the answer lies in the fact that everyone watches television and sees people they like and know and they want to see if they have changed on Operation Transformation. A cross-party group of Deputies and Senators, along with taxi drivers from Galway and mothers from Louth and Meath, competed against each other to lose weight. We all won because we lost weight. We are all feeling much better as a result. Let us carry that forward in our public broadcasting policy. It is a simple issue that RTE has addressed successfully but it needs to continue. The key to Operation Transformation was the reaction from the community. Mothers in particular talked about losing weight and how to do it. My message is that if I can do it, anyone can do it. It is a matter of making up one's mind to do it. The supports are very important but the message must continue to go through RTE, broadcasting and radio stations.

I agree with my colleague Deputy Devins. Let us get the food interests together and agree that we will make food that is right and good for our bodies. If we produce and sell food that is not good for us, we should change our ways. We should put up the red light if there is too much fat in those foods. We need a small amount of fat as part of our diet. The system should be such that green is good, if it is orange we must think about it and if it is red we must be very careful. There are rows and rows of supermarket shelves full of soft drinks and crisps. This would disappear overnight or at least get smaller if everyone — regardless of education, background or size — understood that if it is green one goes there, if it is orange one goes there occasionally and if it is red one seldom goes there. Putting anything else on food packaging makes little sense because people will not understand it.

The message is clear that we will live longer, healthier lives. Exercise is the key. I cannot believe that in the past three months I have been rollerskating, skating, running and walking. I have been doing just about everything. The only other thing I want to do is chase this Government out of office and I am happy to do so, beginning with Deputy Seán Connick.

Deputy Paul Connaughton: Deputy O'Dowd should do some canvassing.

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: I am delivering leaflets and there is no better or fitter man than me. It is all about changing ourselves. This is an important policy debate. It involves everyone together. If I can do it, anyone can do it so let us all get together, push it as a policy, put it on the agenda in the general election and we will all sign off on it. Let us do it and our country will be better as a result.

Minister of State at the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Seán Connick): I am delighted to make my contribution to this debate, picking up where Deputy Fergus O'Dowd left off. We were all participants in Operation Transformation. I lost 20 lbs during the programme but I have lost approximately two stone at this stage. Last Christmas I was sitting at home thinking I was unfit and unhealthy. I was not feeling great and I had a medical checkup. I decided I would become fitter and it goes to show that with commitment and a little effort this can be achieved.

[Deputy Seán Connick.]

I came from a fitness background, having been in the industry for 14 years running a health club with my wife in New Ross. I was very conscious of the effort people make in trying to lose weight. It is a huge industry. Everybody is body wise and has difficulties with how he or she looks or is perceived. It is a massive industry and people are searching for solutions. The success of Operation Transformation was to mobilise the nation. In recent years it was on the national airwaves and people were watching it but this year, because of the involvement of outside groups, it took on a greater focus and momentum. I congratulate Gerry Ryan and his team on their efforts. I am not sure they thought the politicians would do as well as we did. We lost almost 27 stones among 15 people. This is a phenomenal amount of weight, if one imagines it as 27 one-stone bags of potatoes. That is a lot of weight among 15 people of mixed abilities, age groups and backgrounds. As I travelled around the country, it was an issue everywhere. Everyone wanted to know about Operation Transformation and it took the focus away from the economy and other things. The bottom line was how much we had lost each week and whether we had seen Gerry Ryan. There was a serious message being sent out and this message got through to many people. Deputy O'Dowd made the point that it is important to carry on this effort. I continue to exercise. Being appointed as Minister of State, which means being located on the fifth floor of Agriculture House, is very helpful because in the past few days I have been up and down Kildare Street non-stop. It is just as well my fitness levels had increased before I was appointed.

We are speaking in the context of two out of three Irish adults being an unhealthy weight, with almost 25% of people obese. This suggests that almost 60,000 Irish people could be medically eligible for weight loss surgery, a shocking figure. The figures concerning the banks are shocking, such as the €8 billion pumped into Anglo Irish Bank. Some 2,000 premature deaths were caused by diseases related to obesity. It cost the State more than €4 billion each year. That is half the amount we are putting into Anglo Irish Bank.

Deputy Paul Connaughton: It is one-quarter of what the Government will have to put into that bank.

Deputy Seán Connick: I am putting in context the scale of the amount involved and the impact it has in this area.

I want now to return to the healthy lifestyle we enjoyed as children although I accept that life was different then. When I was growing up in the 1970s and 1980s in most cases there was a parent at home which meant one enjoyed a balanced diet and regular meals on the table. Much of this has been replaced by pizza and processed foods which contain lots of salts and fats. There is a huge personal responsibility on each of us as citizens and parents to try to educate ourselves and our children in regard to having a healthy lifestyle.

While I do not like to refer to the young people of this generation as the “playstation or Xbox generation” that is to a large degree who they are. The Government has during the past number of years invested hugely in facilities such as sports halls and public spaces in terms of playgrounds, including playgrounds for older people, which is to be welcomed. We need to continue to encourage children to use them. I am conscious of the success of the schools' Green Flag programme, which is a good idea. We should perhaps consider the introduction of a healthwise flag which would encourage children at school to opt for a healthy lifestyle in terms of exercise and food.

I met on Tuesday in my new role as Minister of State with responsibility for fisheries with the fishermen groups and was shocked to hear from one fisherman that 120 boxes of white fish had been dumped at port this week because there was no market for it, which is incredible. I

made the point that it would have been better had they bagged it and given to schoolchildren in the area to bring home. Fish is a healthy option which is available in our ports but there is no market for it. We need to increase the amount of fish we consume. Likewise we need to encourage people to use our public parks.

Deputy O'Sullivan referred earlier to obesity levels and food menus in America. I travelled Route 66 last summer and as such I spent almost three weeks driving across America. I had a very interesting experience in terms of food portion sizes and access to public spaces. Often environmental issues in Ireland take precedence over people. I got the impression while in America that people come first and then the environment. America is the first country I have visited where I could wheel on the beach. I could do this because they had constructed on the beach a two or three metre wide concrete path which ran for 20 miles along a beach in Los Angeles. Under normal circumstances, one cannot access the beaches. There would be uproar in Ireland if we tried to construct concrete paths on any of the beaches here. We must examine how we can encourage people to use our outdoor facilities, of which we have many.

We need to also examine the size of our food portions. I was delighted to hear that the Irish Hotel Federation recently issued a food for kids programme which is to be introduced at its hotels. This is extremely important. When we were growing up we did not get to go to many hotels. When one goes to a hotel these days it is chips and sausages or chips and nuggets rather than a half portion of dinner that is listed as the children's menu. Years ago, when one went to a hotel for dinner it was possible for children to get a half portion of what the adults were having. This should be reintroduced. We should also consider the introduction of healthy options menus, which are more profitable. Members will be aware of the success of the "Operation Transformation" menu in the self service canteen. Unless one goes in early in the evening, the OT options are gone. People want to eat healthier. There is more we can do, including ensuring the availability of low fat milk and Benecols and so on, which are vitally important to us.

In Ireland, if one asks for a sandwich one usually gets a sandwich, half a plate of coleslaw and a bag of crisps so that instead of having a snack of 300 calories one has a snack of 1,200 calories. We need to be mindful of this and that exercise is key. When I started the exercise campaign ten or 11 weeks ago I could swim 20 lengths of the 25 metre swimming pool in approximately one hour. I can now swim 40 lengths, which is a kilometre, in 40 minutes, because my fitness level has improved. I also push two miles and cycle for one hour two or three days a week. I exercise seven days a week. The key to losing weight is to reduce one's portion size, reduce the level of fat intake in one's diet and to exercise. If I can do it, anybody can do it. It was amazing to watch the 15 people cross-party take on the challenge and succeed.

I welcome the multi-sectoral approach to this across all Departments. I acknowledge the huge amount of funding invested in facilities throughout the country. I agree with the previous speaker in regard to the traffic light scheme. I believe supermarkets have an opportunity to go ahead of the industry in terms of using the red-orange-green light system in their aisles. One can eat products from the red aisle but cannot eat too many of them. Many of us who visit families and relations will know of the "shop in the press", which usually contains Twirls, KitKat and bags of crisps. This is often in our own homes too. There is probably one in every house. We need to be mindful of this and try to encourage people to eat healthier. I believe the first supermarket to use the red-orange-green light system in its aisles will be credited for doing so and will see a huge uptake in people shopping there.

We, as consumers, have the power to change the industry. Coca-Cola, McDonalds and Tayto are three major companies. McDonalds has and continues to change its menu to meet consumer demand. However, we as consumers ultimately have the power to change the industry. If we

[Deputy Seán Connick.]

continue to choose the healthier option we will force their hands in terms of changing their products. “Operation Transformation” was a huge success — it has received a great deal of mention here today — and we should perhaps as a Government and a nation consider running, through the media and this House, a national campaign in the form of “Operation Transformation” which could perhaps be called “Mobilising the Nation” and would assist in encouraging people to get fit and stay healthy thus reducing the costs on our health service. We all have a personal responsibility in this regard.

The issue of children running in schoolyards and compensation claims and so on was mentioned earlier. We are to blame for some of this. We must ensure schools are not sued if children are hurt playing football or have fallen when running home from school in the evening. We must consider putting in place safe walkways and cycle lanes for school children. These are not huge cost options but are actions that could be taken as soon as possible. I commend the Minister of State for bringing this motion before the House and for giving us the time to contribute to it.

Deputy Paul Connaughton: I congratulate Deputy Connick on his appointment. I hope he does well in that office, in which I spent five years as Minister of State some time ago.

I wish in my contribution to move away from what has been said already. When I hear the word “obesity” I think of a killer of people, a destroyer of self-esteem and a robber of scarce Exchequer resources. There is no bigger health issue. There are disturbing trends emerging in terms of obesity. This is happening against the wishes and will of people who are doing their level best not to go that route.

Obesity is causing us huge problems. I have been informed that 2,000 deaths per year are attributable to obesity in one form or another, which is a huge issue. Perhaps the same type of psychology used to help people to give up smoking could be used to assist people in overcoming obesity, a problem that has played mental havoc with so many people I have known down through the years. The Minister of State and I met yesterday with people in regard to an interesting experiment in education. This programme is currently operated in England by primary and secondary school teachers. This new formula will not add to the curriculum but is integrated with mathematics. I do not have the time now to show how a teacher could integrate this formula with maths or science. However, it is possible to do so.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy’s time has expired.

Deputy Paul Connaughton: I hope this experiment will be taken up by Irish secondary schools at transition year level. I hope also it will be rolled out by some Department during the next couple of months.

An Ceann Comhairle: Will the Minister of State be able to reply in about 30 seconds?

Deputy Áine Brady: I am afraid it will be a slimmed-down reply. I thank the Deputies for their contributions which were most encouraging because of their sincere interest in tackling this problem. Will the Ceann Comhairle allow me to continue?

An Ceann Comhairle: I will give the Minister of State some latitude.

Deputy James Reilly: Allow some discretion.

Deputy Michael Ring: The Ceann Comhairle is keeping rural Deputies here. We would prefer to be in our constituencies.

Deputy Áine Brady: I am sorry about that. I will respond to some of the comments. According to the task force, approximately two thirds of the recommendations have been implemented. A sub-group of the intersectoral group on obesity is working to develop a treatment algorithm for adults and children. The new cardiovascular policy which will be submitted to Cabinet after the Easter break will address the health promotion and prevention aspects of cardiovascular disease, including stroke. It will set population targets for healthy body weight and other lifestyle risk factors.

Mandatory food labelling will be introduced and will allow for the use of national systems, including traffic lights, and guideline daily amounts.

Deputy James Reilly: When?

Deputy Áine Brady: It is being introduced very shortly. The food pyramid and healthy eating guidelines are being revised and the issue of the portion size, which was raised by Deputy Ó Caoláin, will be addressed in these and in the national nutrition policy. Deputy Sullivan referred to the national breastfeeding strategy operated by the HSE, which is working to give children the best possible start in life through its promotion of breastfeeding.

On capturing the public imagination in the fight against obesity, the little steps all-island campaign for making small but significant changes is in place, and research conducted for it by *safefood* indicates parents are increasingly aware of the dangers of sugary drinks and snacks and are now reducing the amount of these which they give to their children. SLÁN found no significant difference in participation among different socio-economic groups. The lack of facilities was not seen as a factor, but lack of time was. The most popular form of physical activity in the European Union was walking, which costs nothing. Trying to weigh schoolchildren in the manner suggested was piloted in the United Kingdom and ran into huge problems.

I commend “Operation Transformation” and the catering staff for the way they bought into it by providing healthier options for all of us. Healthy heart at work catering programmes encourage employers to provide healthy eating options in workplace canteens and is run by the Irish Heart Foundation.

On Deputy Connick’s point regarding green flags, the Department of Transport ran walk to school Wednesdays as part of the campaign and has the smarter travel programme, which promotes walking and cycling as key modes of active travel. I thank Deputies for their contributions.

An Ceann Comhairle: I thank the Members of the House for their indulgence in the matter.

Ceisteanna — Questions.

Priority Questions.

Departmental Priorities.

1. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs his priorities following the restructuring of his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14328/10]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Pat Carey): As the Deputy will be aware, the Taoiseach recently announced the restructuring of a number of Departments and agencies in order to group functions whose combination is more appropriate to the coun-

[Deputy Pat Carey.]

try's current priorities, to ensure greater coherence and produce more efficient delivery and to underline the priority issues for this Government in a way that mobilises a broad response. The Deputy will agree that while addressing the priority issues in responding to unemployment and driving economic recovery is necessary, it is also important that we do not lose sight of the importance of social development, the targeting of the most vulnerable and the support of those working to make a difference right across our communities. It is against this background that the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs will be restructured as the Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs and will incorporate responsibility for social inclusion policy and family policy from the Department of Social and Family Affairs, and for equality, disability, integration and human rights from the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform.

My priority over the coming period will be to progress the actions and commitments reflected in the Programme for Government and the revised Programme for Government that relate to my functions and areas of responsibility. In this regard, work will commence shortly on the preparation of a new statement of strategy for my Department. In developing the new statement of strategy, my Department will take stock of the progress made to date on meeting Government programme commitments and decide how best to focus its efforts over the coming period so as to achieve real results on the ground and deliver on our mandate.

Over its lifetime, the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs made significant progress in enhancing the cohesiveness and efficiency of delivery of various programmes that were transferred to it from other Departments. A similar challenge will face the new Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs, but I am confident that the experience garnered in that context over recent years will prove invaluable in further enhancing the delivery of the Department's new social development and social inclusion programmes to the benefit of all our customers and stakeholders.

Deputy Michael Ring: I wish the Minister, Deputy Carey, and the Minister of State, Deputy White, the best of luck. Today is their first day to take Priority Questions and I wish them well in their briefs. Rural, community and Gaeltacht affairs are very important to rural areas. I wish the previous Minister, Deputy Ó Cuív, who had a great understanding of rural life, well on his new appointment. I have dealt with him for a number of years, as have Deputies McGinley and Byrne, and I wish him well. I am not being disrespectful but I hope the Deputies will not be there very long. We hope to have them removed very shortly and to be over there dealing with rural affairs.

Under the new name of the Department, the term "rural" has been removed from the its title. Will the Minister of State still have responsibility for the delivery of aspects of the rural development programme? As responsibility for the rural social scheme has been transferred to the new Department of Social Protection, will Údarás na Gaeltachta and the Leader groups continue to have responsibly for the rural social scheme?

Deputy Pat Carey: I thank the Deputy for his good wishes. We will not be able to support him on the latter part; we will be around for a fair while yet.

On the term "rural" in the title of the Department, while it is no longer in the Department's title I consider the reference to "community" to be sufficiently broad and embracing in order that it can and will encompass urban and rural communities. While the term may no longer be part of the Department's title, I want to be clear that it in no way shows a diminution of commitment to rural communities on behalf of the Government. An essential element of

Government policy has always been, and will continue to be, maintaining vibrant, sustainable rural communities.

My Department will continue to manage and oversee a broad range of programmes which will impact positively on rural Ireland and rural communities across the country over the coming years. The programmes include the European Union co-sponsored rural development programme, through which investment of more than €420 million will be made over its lifetime across a broad range of social and economic measures. As Deputy Ring knows, the programme runs until 2013 and €40 million is available for allocation under that heading this year. The Clár programme, for which my Department has a budget of €8 million this year is included, and a range of initiatives in the area of rural recreation for which funding of €4 million is available for 2010, are also included.

Deputy Michael Ring: I ask the Minister to send to me and Deputies McGinley and Byrne the information on who has responsibility for what within his Department, what is included in the Department and what has been taken away. Deputy Byrne will raise further questions on this on another issue. What will it cost the Department to make the necessary changes to signage and the website as a result of the new title?

Deputy Pat Carey: I can give the Deputy the precise information now or at another time regarding who is responsible for what. I will pass it onto him. The cost associated with the establishment of the new Department will be kept to an absolute minimum. A written instruction has issued to all staff in this regard. It was one of the first actions I took. It is my intention to use all old stocks of stationery and supplies carefully held by the Department. The benefits of bringing together social development issues and functions under the aegis of one Department outweigh the minimum costs arising from the establishment of the Department.

With regard to the restructuring, a number of measures will need to be implemented. Following the announcement the following measures are being progressed by my Department and the Departments of Finance and the Taoiseach — an order to be made to change the title of the Department; an order to be made transferring functions in and out of the Department; and following the transfer of functions into my Department, delegation orders will be progressed through which functions held by the Minister can be delegated to the Minister of State. I will make available the other information, which will be useful to everybody, straight away.

National Drugs Strategy.

2. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the number of complaints lodged with his Department with regard to head shops; the number of head shops in each electoral area; the actions taken to date or planned by him to deal with the concerns raised; the meetings arranged or that have taken place with other agencies or Departments to deal with the concerns raised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14327/10]

3. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the action that he will take to combat the problem of head shops; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14329/10]

Deputy Pat Carey: I propose to take Questions Nos. 2 and 3 together.

My Department has received a large number of complaints regarding the operation of head shops and the new psychoactive substances being sold in these outlets. I covered many of these issues when replying to an Adjournment debate tabled by Deputy Ring last night. These range from letters from individuals, to correspondence in relation to motions passed by local auth-

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orities, to a copy of a public petition in the case of Roscommon town. My officials have also been made aware of such concerns through various meetings, including through a conference on “Legal Highs” organised by the regional drugs task forces, which was held at the end of January. I suspect a number of Members attended the conference in Mullingar. The number of head shops has increased significantly in recent times and it is estimated in excess of 100 such outlets operate in the State.

My colleague, Deputy Curran, when Minister of State with responsibility for the national drugs strategy, voiced concerns on a number of occasions regarding the activities of head shops and the legal highs and I very much share those concerns, which primarily relate to the potential health hazards arising from the use of these products and the possibility that their use may act as a gateway to the use of illicit drugs.

The National Drugs Strategy 2009-2016 includes two actions aimed at addressing the issues involved. As provided for under the strategy, the former Minister of State, Deputy Curran, held a number of meetings with the Ministers for Health and Children, Justice, Equality and Law Reform and Education and Science. He also met the Garda Commissioner and senior officials from various Departments and offices. Head shops and the sale of legal highs were discussed at many of these meetings, as were various approaches to addressing the activities of these outlets. While reading background information for Question Time, I noticed many meetings had been held with a range of agencies and groups.

Through the Misuse of Drugs Act 1977, the primary legislation through which these substances can be regulated, the Department of Health and Children is finalising regulations to introduce controls on a range of substances. These regulations will make the possession and sale of these substances illegal and subject to criminal sanctions. In preparing the required regulations, that Department is consulting the relevant authorities to ensure any legitimate uses of the substances involved are not impinged upon. Meanwhile, the Government has approved the commencement of a required notification process to the EU and it is envisaged that the regulations controlling the various substances will come into effect in late June, at the conclusion of the three-month process involved. As I stated last night, I assure the House this process will take three months and suggestions it will take longer are not correct.

Meanwhile, the national advisory committee on drugs was asked to carry out research in this area and this is under way. In addition, the activities of head shops are being closely monitored on an ongoing basis by An Garda Síochána and Revenue’s Customs Service with a view to ensuring that no substances that are currently illegal are being sold. My Department has been in contact with the Attorney General about a range of approaches to the matter and a number of issues arising in that context are being considered at senior level within an inter-departmental framework.

I assure the Deputies that the issue of head shops and new psychoactive substances is of serious concern to this Government and to governments in many other countries, given the international nature of this problem. A number of countries have taken certain actions, each adapting their approach to reflect their own laws and experiences. However, no EU member state has come up with a comprehensive response thus far. I also assure the Deputies that I will continue to work with my ministerial colleagues in vigorously pursuing all viable approaches to counter the potential threats posed by head shops and legal highs.

Deputy Jack Wall: Like Deputy Ring, I wish the Minister and Minister of State well in their new portfolios. I assure them we will do everything we can to work with them. I thank the former Minister, Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív, and the former Minister of State, Deputy Curran, for

the effort and time they put into Question Time. Question Time is an important occasion during which spokespersons and Ministers can interact and assist each other to improve the brief.

I thank the Minister for his detailed reply. The timescale for implementing legislation or guidelines is a major concern. It is of paramount importance that this happens. A recent newspaper article highlighted a 400% increase in applications to the Department of Health and Children seeking information about products that could pose health risks to young persons. That related to concerns about head shops.

Deputy Costello, my party colleague, introduced the Planning and Development (Amendment) Bill 2010 to make it difficult for head shop owners to acquire premises and set up immediately. The former Minister of State thought it was a good idea at the time and that it could be done. Will the Minister follow up on this and bring legislation forward, even if that means amending Deputy Costello's Bill?

News broke earlier that head shop owners want to form a representative association to defend their right to trade and so on. They will not go away because we think what they do is a bad idea. We must examine this issue and act quickly but we must also ensure that what we do is right in order that we can eliminate this threat for once and for all. It is intended the owners will form a group, having examined the legalities involved, and they will fight regulation every step of the way. The Minister can rest assured that the Labour Party will join him and other Ministers in doing everything possible to ensure our youth, the generation of tomorrow, is protected from head shops.

Deputy Pat Carey: I thank Deputy Wall for his good wishes. I also would like to be associated with the remarks made by Deputies Wall and Ring about the former Minister, Deputy Ó Cuív, and the former Minister of State, Deputy Curran. I agree they did excellent work in the Department. I wish my colleague, the Minister of State, Deputy Mary White, well and I look forward to working with her. I assure the House this will be the only time she will be present for Question Time as an onlooker. She will be an active participant in future.

Deputy Wall's final comments are relevant. When I served in the Department previously, head shop owners advanced the notion that self-regulation was the way forward for their operation. I did not agree with that then and I do not now. The Government is under no illusion about the determination of head shop owners, many of whom feel they are fulfilling a useful purpose. I do not share that view but they will do everything to ensure they can operate. I am equally determined, as is the Government, to make sure they cannot, which is all the more reason to ensure we take every step carefully. The three month notification period to the EU has been taken in clear recognition of the experience that if it is not done, it is easy to strike down any measures in the domestic courts.

On the legislation, following the advice of the Attorney General, the interdepartmental group to which I referred is looking at how best to draw up legislation that would be watertight and not subject to constitutional strikedown. That will not be easy but we believe it can be done. It was possible to do it with the Criminal Assets Bureau and I believe it can be done in this area also. Planning, consumer protection and insurance can be incorporated into the legislation.

I have not seen Deputy Costello's Bill but I will have it examined. I am aware of his experience, which is similar to my own in drugs task force areas, and that would inform some of our thinking. If Deputy Wall is aware of measures in the draft Bill that can inform, advise and strengthen the legislation I wish to advance, he should bring them to my attention and I will take them on board. A good deal of work is being done to prepare guidelines for parents, young people and those who are not so young. There are a number of "head shops" in my

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area and, contrary to the popular perception, it is not always 15 to 21 year olds who use them. I was taken aback to see that people approaching middle age have been consumers of those products. Equally, I do not suggest that every last item on sale in those shops is either illegal or damaging. My point is that customers of such shops are not all of a certain age.

These shops have almost spun out of control in a short space of time. I know the Deputies present are as determined as I am to ensure that does not happen because it is causing a considerable amount of legitimate concern. There are side effects, apart from the obvious ones of anti-social behaviour and damage to health and society. There is no doubt that many of those products, legal and otherwise, are gateways to the use of other drugs. Let no one be under any illusion but that this industry is highly organised and very determined. I am aware of that from my experience two years ago. We will have to proceed with great care and caution in order to ensure we have watertight measures to prevent such shops trading.

Deputy Michael Ring: I object to the name “head shops”. They are not “head shops”, they are drugs shops. People should stop calling them “head shops” and should call them drugs shops because that is what they are. Recently, a drugs shop in Dublin was burnt down, accidentally or otherwise, and €500,000 was found in the safe by the Garda, probably more than in any of the banks in the country.

The Minister said the Government had notified Europe in compliance with the three month notification period. Ms Marian Harkin, MEP, said in response to questions tabled in the European Parliament that when it comes to public health and safety there is no need to wait for three months, that we can introduce our own legislation. Deputy Catherine Byrne has raised this issue for several months. What she said is correct, namely, that we need to regulate this industry as a matter of urgency. Deputy Wall is correct also that given the amount of money they are making, the people behind those shops can pay for the best advice. I referred to the amount of money that was found in the safe of one such shop. One could ask what amount of money had been put into banks and elsewhere.

This is one of the greatest scourges to hit the country. I listened to the “Liveline” programme with Joe Duffy last week and I heard a parent from England outline what happened to her child. There are bound to be children in this country who are badly affected. Children will die if we do not do something about the matter. We must regulate the shops. If one has a chemist’s shop, one must have a licence and a pharmacist with professional qualifications to issue drugs. This area must be regulated as quickly as possible. I urge the Minister to make this his number one priority. Whether it is regulation or legislation that is required, I urge the Minister to bring it before this House as quickly as possible to help us deal with these gangsters. People are burning down shops in Dublin which means that someone has been hurt on the streets. We need regulation in this area and we need it fast. We need to protect our children and communities. The matter is getting out of hand. Fine Gael maintains that all of the products sold in those shops should be approved by the Food Safety Authority of Ireland and the Irish Medicines Board. I urge the Minister to make it his number one priority to ensure we have the regulation and legislation before this House as quickly as possible.

Deputy Pat Carey: I assure Deputy Ring that it is already a priority of mine and of the Government. The notification is in order for the measure not to be struck down subsequently. It is necessary for the notification to take place. At present, four draft statutory instruments have been prepared to bring a number of substances, including the so-called legal highs, under the control of the Misuse of Drugs Act. We believe the four draft orders are comprehensive. They will relate to the substances which are being sold in the shops referred to by Deputy

Ring. I refer to the so-called SPICE products, the BZP derivatives, mephedrone, methyldone and related cathinones, GBL and 1,4 BD.

The notification period commenced either yesterday or the day before. I will double-check that. I assure Deputy Ring that I am absolutely determined in that regard. A commitment to that effect already exists in the drugs strategy. Deputy Byrne has been engaged in this work for as long as I have. Many of us can go back to the days when glue was regarded as a gateway drug. Previous to that it was cider and other products. It might be a short-term phenomenon but I do not think that is the case. Unless we attack the surge in these shops with determination through whatever measures we can, they will continue to proliferate. The one thing on which I do not disagree with Deputy Ring is the determination of the sector to put it up to us to see whether we can put them out of business.

Deputy Michael Ring: Will the Minister also speak to his colleague in the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Deputy John Gormley? There must be regulation in the area of planning. We cannot allow a situation where every other business is controlled and restricted. If one has a takeaway shop, one is restricted in most towns in terms of opening hours. I urge the Minister to speak to his colleague to introduce the necessary amendment to deal with the matter and to prevent drugs shops from opening as they currently do. It is wrong for them to be open for such long hours.

Deputy Pat Carey: I will take what Deputy Ring has said on board.

Fostaíocht Gaeltachta.

4. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Dinny McGinley** den Aire Gnóthaí Pobail, Tuaithe agus Gaeltachta an eol dó an ghéarchéim airgeadais in Údarás na Gaeltachta agus na deacrachtaí a éiríonn as seo maidir le fostaíocht a chruthú sna ceantair Ghaeltachta agus an bhfuil sé ar intinn aige bualadh le bord agus feidhmeannaigh an údaráis chun an ghéarchéim a phlé agus a réiteach; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [14326/10]

Deputy Pat Carey: Tá soláthar iomlán de bheagnach €30 milliún curtha ar fáil d'Údarás na Gaeltachta ón Státhiste trí Vóta mo Roinne don bhliain 2010. Cé gur laghdú é seo ar an gcionroinnt iomlán de €37.6 milliún a cuireadh ar fáil ón Vóta i 2009, creidimse nach gciallaíonn sé seo go mbeidh ciorrú substaintiúil á dhéanamh ar ghníomhaíochtaí an údaráis, nó go mbeidh leas phobal na Gaeltachta ag fulaingt dá bharr.

Ar an gcéad dul síos, ní mór a chur san áireamh gur cuireadh méadú de €2 mhilliún ar fáil ag deireadh 2009, mar thacaíocht bhreise don eagraíocht, le cur leis an mbunsoláthar de €35.6 milliún a bhí fógartha i meastacháin 2009.

Chomh maith leis sin, ní mór a chur san áireamh go mbíonn teacht ag an údarás ar fhoinsí ioncain eile, ar a n-áirítear: ioncam a ghintear ó scéimeanna a fheidhmiú, ar nós na scéimeanna fostaíochta pobail agus sóisialta tuaithe; fáiltas ó Chistí an Aontais Eorpaigh, agus ioncam a fhaightear ó dhíol agus léasáil socmhainní, ó dhíbhinní agus ó tháillí.

Chomh maith leis sin, cuirtear maoiniú ar fáil don údarás tríd an Roinn Fiontar, Trádála agus Fostaíochta chun an Scéim Fóirdheontas Fostaíochta agus an ciste cobhsaíochta fiontar a fheidhmiú. Tá tábhacht ar leith ag na tacaíochtaí seo do chomhlachtaí sa Ghaeltacht chun cuidiú leo leanúint ag trádáil agus poist a choinneáil slán. Anuraidh, mar shampla, thacaigh an dá scéim seo le caomhnú 605 post.

Is eol dom go maith na dúshláin agus na constaicí a gcaithfidh an túdarás dul i ngleic leo sa timpeallacht dheacair gnó atá i bhfeidhm faoi láthair. Níl amhras ar bith ach go bhfuil an ghéarchéim eacnamaíoch náisiúnta agus domhanda ag cruthú deacrachtaí do chomhlachtaí sa

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Ghaeltacht agus tá impleachtaí dá réir ann do chúrsaí fostaíochta. É sin ráite, áfach, is údar misnigh é gur cruthaíodh 710 post nua i gcliant-chomhlachtaí de chuid an údaráis i 2009.

Ar ndóigh, ní mór féachaint ar chomhthéacs níos leithne ná an túdarás féin chomh fada agus a bhaineann sé le caiteachas sa Ghaeltacht. Chomh maith leis an soláthar de bheagnach €30 milliún atá curtha ar fáil don údarás i mbliana, tá €33 milliún eile le caitheamh trí Vóta mo Roinne ar scéimeanna éagsúla sa Ghaeltacht agus ar na hoileáin, a bhfuil formhór an daonra a chónaíonn orthu sa Ghaeltacht.

Anuas ar an gcaiteachas iomlán seo de €63 milliún, ní miste a chur san áireamh go bhfuil cúnaimh iomlán de luach €17.3 milliún agus €4.6 milliún ceadaithe faoin gclár forbartha tuaithe do mheitheal forbartha na Gaeltachta, MFG, agus do Chomhar na nOileán, faoi seach, chun tacú le réimse de ghníomhaíochtaí fiontraíochta agus forbartha sa Ghaeltacht agus ar na hoileáin go dtí an bhliain 2013.

Tá mé cinnte go n-aontóidh an Teachta, i bhfianaise an mhaoinithe shubstaintiúil atá á chur ar fáil — fiú san aeráid eacnamaíoch dhúshlánach seo — nach bhfuil neamhaird á déanamh ag an Stát ar an Ghaeltacht.

Tuigfidh sé freisin, tá súil agam, nach raibh deis agam castáil le hÚdarás na Gaeltachta go fóill ach beidh áthas orm é sin a dhéanamh a luaithe a bheidh deis fheiliúnach chuige sin.

Deputy Dinny McGinley: Déanaim comhghairdeas, mar atá déanta mo chomhghleacaí anseo, leis an Aire agus leis an Aire Stáit as na cúraimí úra atá tugtha dóibh. Tá súil agam go n-éireoidh go geal ar fad agus atá an bheirt acu ansin. Mar a dúirt an Teachta Ring, áfach, tá súil agam nach mbeidh siad ann ró-fhada.

Cuirim fáilte roimh an méid a bhí le rá ag an Aire sa fhreagra ansin maidir le hÚdarás na Gaeltachta. Tá mé cinnte go dtuigeann an tAire cé chomh tábhachtach agus atá an t-údarás ó thaobh na Gaeltachta de, ó thaobh fostaíochta sa Ghaeltacht de, agus ó thaobh shaol sóisialta na Gaeltachta agus ó thaobh chultúr na Gaeltachta de agus go n-aontóidh an tAire go bhfuil sé iontach tábhachtach go gcuirfear na hacmhainní cuí ar fáil don údarás le gníomhú go héifeachtach ina dhualgais i leith na Gaeltachta.

Dúirt an tAire go bhfuil titim mhór ar an chaiteachas d'Údarás na Gaeltachta i mbliana agus le cúpla bliain anuas, nuair nach raibh an tAire ansin. An dtuigeann sé na deacrachtaí atá ag an údarás i láthair na huaire? Tionscnaimh úra agus fostaíocht úr a cheadú sna ceantair Ghaeltachta mar de bharr an ghearradh siar, go speisialta ar an deontas caipitil. Go dtí seo, bhí Údarás na Gaeltachta in ann acmhainní a dhíol agus breis airgid a fháil isteach ach tá beagnach gach acmhainn díolta anois. Mar sin, tá sé tábhachtach san am atá romhainn amach go gcuirfear na hacmhainní ar fáil don údarás.

Dúirt an tAire go bhfuil sé ar intinn aige bualadh leis an údarás gan mhoill. Tá mé cinnte go ndéanfaidh sé na rudaí seo a phlé. An féidir leis an Aire aon tuairim a thabhairt dúinn maidir le an bhfuil sé ar intinn aige toghchán an údaráis a bheith ann i mbliana nó sa bhliain seo chugainn? An bhfuil socrú déanta aige faoi sin?

Má tá tionscnaimh ceadaithe ag an údarás, an gcuirfidh an tAire na hacmhainní ar fáil dó le tacaíocht a thabhairt do na tionscnaimh sin le fostaíocht a chruthú sna Gaeltachtaí?

Deputy Pat Carey: Gabhaim buíochas leis an dea-mhéin atá curtha in iúl ag an Teachta, ar mo shon fhéin agus ar son an Aire Stáit. Tá deacrachtaí ann ceart go leor. Is dócha gur comhartha dóchais é go bhfuil poist d'ard chaighdeán á chruthú sa Ghaeltacht. Tá níos mó eolais faoi sin ag an Teachta ná mar atá agam. Tá sé sin le feiceáil san earnáil seirbhísí agus déantúsaíochta nua-aimsirthe, ach go háirithe. Rinne an túdarás an-obair le blianta anuas chun tionscadail ar

nós an tionscadal closamhairc a fhorbairt. Léiríonn sé seo go bhfuil ag éirí le straitéis réamhghníomhach an túdarás chun fiontar dúchasach le postanna ard-oilte a chur chun cinn sa Ghaeltacht. Níl dabht ar bith ach go bhfuil athstruchtúrú ag teacht ar geilleagar na Gaeltachta de réir a chéile de bharr na straitéise seo. Tá athrú ar siúl ó earnálacha le beagán teicneolaíochta go hearnálacha déantúsaíochta agus seirbhísí a bhfuil ard-teicneolaíocht ag baint leo. Mar sin, bíonn fórsa oibre níos oilte ag teastáil uathu.

Luaigh an Teachta cúraimí fiontraíochta an údaráis. Déanfar measúnú ar aon leasuithe atá le déanamh ar chumhachtaí agus aidhmeanna an údaráis i gcomhthéacs an dréachtstraitéis 20 bliain don Ghaeilge. Mar is eol don Teachta, tá an straitéis á scrúdú ag an coiste faoi láthair. Nuair atá obair an choiste curtha i gcrích agus tuairisc faighte, tá sé ar intinn agam an dréachtstraitéis — agus í leasuithe más cuí — a thabhairt faoi bhráid an Rialtais, le ceadú.

Maidir leis an toghchán d'Údarás na Gaeltachta, mar is eol don Teach reachtáladh an toghchán deireanach i mí Aibreán 2005. Faoi réir na reachtaíochta faoina bhfeidhmíonn an túdarás, ní mór an chéad toghchán eile a reachtáil am éigin sa tréimhse idir inniu agus 1 Deireadh Fómhair 2010. Faoi láthair, tá moltaí éagsúla maidir leis an Ghaeilge agus an Ghaeltacht, a bheadh impleachtaí acu don údarás amach anseo, á phlé i gcomhthéacs an dréachtstraitéis 20 bliain don Ghaeilge, a fhoilsíodh le déanaí.

Sa chomhthéacs sin, níl sé i gceist agam cinneadh a thógáil ag an bpointe seo maidir le dáta don chéad toghchán eile. Más gá, áfach, agus má oireann sé do chúinsí an cháis, is féidir liom cás a bhreithniú maidir le Bille a thabhairt os comhair an Tí seo chun síneadh a chur ar thréimhse comhaltaí tofa an bhord reatha.

Deputy Dinny McGinley: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra chuimsitheach atá tugtha aige. Tá a fhios agam nach bhfuil an tAire i mbun na Roinne ach le breis agus seachtain anuas. Tá mé cinnte go bhfuil sé ar intinn ag an Aire cuairt a thabhairt ar na ceantair Gaeltachta chomh luath agus is féidir. Tá súil agam go mbeidh sé ábalta cuairt a thabhairt orainn ó thuaidh gan mhoill go dtí go bhfeicfidh sé céard atá ar siúl sna ceantair Gaeltachta ansin agus, chomh maith, sa chuid eile den tír. Mar sin, táim cinnte go mbeidh cúpla seachtain gnóthach ag an Aire ag taisteal ó cheann amháin den tír go dtí an ceann eile ag tabhairt cuairte ar na Gaeltachtaí, gan dearmad a dhéanamh ar na hoileáin, Tóraí, Árann Mór, Gabhla, Inis Meáin, Inis Bó Finne, Oileán Uaighe agus Inis Sionnaigh agus gach oileán eile idir sin agus Corcaigh.

Deputy Pat Carey: Táim ag súil le tosnú ar an taisteal sin go luath tríd na Gaeltachtaí go léir agus na hoileáin i dtreo agus go mbeidh seans agam bualadh le pobal na Gaeltachta agus seans a thabhairt dóibh na ceisteanna atá acu a phlé liom agus le m'Aire Stáit.

National Drugs Strategy.

5. **Deputy Catherine Byrne** asked the Minister for Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs if he will confirm that the Office of the Minister for Drugs is still in operation; if he will guarantee that a full-time Minister of State will continue to direct and oversee the implementation of the national drugs strategy, and in particular, the forthcoming new national substance misuse strategy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14314/10]

Deputy Pat Carey: I can confirm to the Deputy that the Office of the Minister for Drugs remains very much in operation with a clear focus on dealing with the issue of problem drug use in Ireland. I can confirm also that responsibility for the national drugs strategy will rest with me, as Minister. I look forward to working on it and enjoyed working on it previously. I am sure I will have the same engagement with the sector as I did in the past.

[Deputy Pat Carey.]

The Government remains fully committed to addressing the drugs problem and I believe that my appointment as a Minister with direct responsibility in this area will facilitate the implementation of the drugs strategy in a timely and co-ordinated fashion. Many at community level have been campaigning for some time that the Minister with responsibility for the drugs strategy should be a member of the Government with a seat at Cabinet.

During my previous period as Minister for State with responsibility for this area, significant steps forward were made in the drugs area. From my experience on the ground at that time, I am very familiar with the ongoing issues in terms of the drugs problem in communities and the initiatives being taken to address them. I acknowledge the excellent work done by my colleague, Deputy John Curran, while he was Minister of State, in driving the finalisation of the National Drugs Strategy 2009-16, the implementation of which is being pursued vigorously across a range of Departments and agencies.

I fully intend to build on this work and to implement a continuous assessment approach to progress the 63 actions in the strategy to ensure that we achieve successful outcomes. Furthermore, I believe that the structures now in place under the strategy will better facilitate me to effectively fulfil that role.

With regard to drugs and alcohol, I was one of the main advocates to Government on combining the approach as regards substance misuse. I was delighted with the decision to prepare a national substance misuse strategy and I look forward to this being put in place within the timeframe envisaged. As Deputy Byrne will be aware, a steering group, which is jointly chaired by officials of the Department of Health and Children and the office of the Minister of State with responsibility for drugs, has been established to develop proposals for submission to Government before the end of the year.

I can assure the Deputy of my commitment to press ahead with the ongoing implementation of the national drugs strategy and to support the timely finalisation and subsequent implementation of the national substance misuse strategy, incorporating both alcohol and drugs.

Deputy Catherine Byrne: I thank the Minister. There is no doubt in my mind that he is the right man in the right place. I concur with everybody who has paid tribute to Deputy John Curran who, although Minister of State with responsibility for drugs for a relatively short time, made an enormous impression on everybody, in the communities as well as in Leinster House.

I am delighted that the position has not been abolished and that it will continue. I have been contacted by a great many people working in community groups who were very worried that the situation we had worked so hard to establish last year, given that a Minister of State was in place, would be abandoned. The national drugs strategy needs a committed Minister to drive it forward. I have known for many years that Deputy Carey is such a Minister especially as regards communities.

The main reason people are so distraught over what is happening on the drug scene is because many of projects involved are facing major reductions in funding. This has been an enormous problem, particularly in my area, where people have been told that certain projects will have to close or be short of staff. It has put tremendous pressure on the small number of people who are left.

I have no doubt in mind that there was never a better time to control head shops, as referred to in Question No. 2. We are all singing from the same hymn sheet in the Chamber in that regard. The main thing is to protect our children, but having said that, the Minister, Deputy Carey, might intervene with the new Minister for Education and Science. Last week I asked whether she would consider mounting an awareness campaign, particularly in secondary schools, immediately, since 24 hours can have a major difference in the life of any child.

I welcome the Minister, Deputy Carey back to the driving seat and I hope we shall enjoy the same working relationship we have had over many years, because I really believe he knows what is happening on the ground. I and my party colleagues believe the only way to tackle the drugs problem is to have someone in charge who can lead the way.

Deputy Pat Carey: I thank Deputy Byrne for her comments. At the risk of a mutual admiration society emerging, I should say that Deputy Byrne has been around this particular area of community work for a long time and has a deep-rooted knowledge of it.

In terms of any doubts about the office, I assure Deputies it will continue and I am as committed to it as ever. There is no doubt that the levels of funding are not as generous as they were in the past, but the work groups are doing right across the country, whether in drugs task forces or any other area, are not driven by funding alone. Certainly, much of the work depends on proper and large-scale resourcing and perhaps we can never have enough. However, I will be working with my Minister of State and others in government to ensure the best use is made of available resources and indeed address as comprehensively as possible problem drug use and the issues associated with it, whether early school leaving, high levels of unemployment, anti-social behaviour etc. We need to focus on co-ordinating our approach even more sharply than in the past.

I agree with Deputy Byrne about the level of awareness that is needed. Only yesterday I was looking with my officials at the “Dial to stop drug dealing” campaign, which is quite successful. I certainly believe that is one area we can make use of to get the message across. I also believe, incidentally, that we should look at facilities such as Twitter, Facebook etc. — and I might even talk to colleagues in other parties in this regard — just to broaden the message, using more up to date media to get through to the target groups.

Deputy Michael Ring: The Greens will teach the Minister about that.

Deputy Joe Carey: I gather the Department of Education and Science is working on finalising work information books with the Department of Health and Children about drugs, generally, focusing in particular on the legal highs Deputy Byrne is concerned about, as I am.

The big challenge now is to drive through the new strategy and ensure that the substance misuse strategy is implemented as quickly as possible. Above all, I do not want to see a turf war between Departments as to whether the implementation of that strategy should be with the Department of Health and Children, my Department or whatever, because as many of us know, such a development has bedevilled many previous campaigns in terms of alcohol awareness programmes and so on. I certainly believe much ground work has been done. I have read through the files over the last couple of days about the progress that has been made and am actually very confident that we shall have a substance misuse policy that probably will be a leader in the approach to be taken on substances legal and illegal. It might be copied in time by many other jurisdictions.

Other Questions.

Inland Waterways.

6. **Deputy Jimmy Deenihan** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if he will provide a progress report on Waterways Ireland’s work throughout the country; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14166/10]

26. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the plans Waterways Ireland has to develop tourism along the routes for which they are respon-

[Deputy Ciarán Lynch.]

sible; the funding for such promotion; and if he will make a statement on the matter.
[14261/10]

Deputy Pat Carey: I propose to take Questions Nos. 6 and 26 together.

Waterways Ireland is the largest of the six cross-Border implementation bodies set up under the British-Irish Agreement of December 1999. Its statutory remit is to manage, maintain, restore and develop the inland navigable waterway system, principally for recreation purposes. The navigations under its remit are the Grand Canal, the Royal Canal, the Barrow navigation, the Shannon navigation, the Shannon-Erne waterway, the Erne system and the Lower Bann navigation. Waterways Ireland has continued to develop all of the waterways under its control and many projects have been completed to facilitate the increasing number of people who utilise the navigations for recreation purposes, such as boating, water sports, fishing, walking, etc.

The body has installed some 10,100 m. of moorings since 2000, thereby increasing the mooring capacity of the waterways by 67%. A major capital project to reconnect the Royal Canal to the Shannon and to reopen the canal to navigation is in its final phase. I am delighted that this programme is now completed and I look forward to the reopening of this historic navigation in due course. Work to progress the Ulster Canal project, which will see the restoration of the section from Upper Lough Erne to Clones, is ongoing.

Finally, Waterways Ireland continues to develop and implement projects under its marketing strategy to promote and support greater awareness and use of the waterways. In 2010, Waterways Ireland will invest more than €1 million in these activities. The investment is spread between joint activities, sponsorship, exhibiting at events and exhibitions, marketing collateral development and distribution, website, education, and press and media activity. Waterways Ireland has also engaged in a joint marketing initiative with Fáilte Ireland, Shannon Development, the Northern Ireland Tourism Board and Fermanagh District Council in promoting a 30 km wide corridor along the Shannon-Erne waterway from Limerick to Belleek.

I am satisfied that Waterways Ireland continues to make very good progress in the light of the available resources in discharging its responsibilities to manage and maintain our inland navigation network for tourism and recreational purposes.

Deputy Michael Ring: We are hoping to have representatives of Waterways Ireland appear before the Dáil committee. We have written to the organisation and I am anxious that its representatives attend a committee meeting shortly to discuss the issues being dealt with by the body.

There was a problem between the staff and Waterways Ireland which went to the High Court. Has that case been settled or is it still going through the courts? What is the position? Waterways Ireland has a budget of approximately €34 million, which is not a small amount of money. Last year, it spent €2.3 million on overtime and allowances, which is more than was spent on overtime and allowances in the Minister's Department.

Given the serious problems with flooding this year, what are Waterways Ireland's priorities for dealing with some of the problems that arose? Farmers in the midlands are concerned that Waterways Ireland is not doing enough to alleviate flooding. There was a very serious problem last year, so what will the body do this year to deal with the problems? What part of the budget will be spent on that? What will the Minister do about the €2.3 million spent on overtime and allowances? It is a great deal of money to spend on overtime and allowances in the current climate.

Deputy Pat Carey: On the first question, the recent action taken by a senior civil servant against Waterways Ireland and the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure on alleged mismanagement was settled in the High Court. The settlement was for a sum of £50,000 plus costs,

without admission of liability, shared equally at 50% each between the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure and Waterways Ireland. I am satisfied that the difficulties which Waterways Ireland experienced have been addressed and are behind it.

I will have to refer back to the Deputy about the overtime issue because I do not have the details to give him a comprehensive response. With regard to the flooding, Waterways Ireland's work at the end of last year also included an unexpected element when Ireland experienced the highest level of flood water on record. Although Waterways Ireland is not responsible for the water levels on the navigations, the organisation strived to minimise the damage to property and assisted where possible, often involving its team working in hazardous conditions. I will seek a more detailed response from Waterways Ireland on the matter and refer back to the Deputy as soon as possible on it.

Deputy Michael Ring: With regard to the settlement of £50,000, will there be further legal proceedings on this very serious issue or is that the end of the matter? This has cost Waterways Ireland a great deal of money. I do not know what the legal costs were but there were other payments made in the past. Are further legal proceedings due to take place? We will be returning to this matter at a later stage.

Deputy Pat Carey: There is no indication in the information available to me that there are any further proceedings pending. I will have that checked for the Deputy.

Deputy Michael Ring: That is fine. We can return to it at a later date.

Deputy Jack Wall: The waterways in south Kildare are the Barrow and the canal. However, I do not see their value in terms of the number of boats on those waterways. My concern is that we have wonderful waterways but we do not seem to get the number of tourists to match the amount of money put into them. In England and the Continent there appears to be far greater use of barges and boats on their waterways than is the case here. A survey in Athy found there were 65 boat owners in the area, but one never sees 65 boats on the waterways.

The Minister spoke about sponsorship and mentioned €1 million. I am not sure if he meant that was the total expenditure, but perhaps he would send me a breakdown of that expenditure in terms of working with other groups. In a recent parliamentary question I received a reply about sponsorship by Waterways Ireland but perhaps there was other sponsorship or dual funding that was provided to other areas. What can be done to generate more interest in the waterways? Does Waterways Ireland have a link with Fáilte Ireland to generate more interest and encourage more boats on the waterways or is there too much cost involved? It is a wonderful facility and there are wonderful walks along the waterways but we do not appear to benefit from them.

Deputy Pat Carey: I have always believed our waterways are very under-utilised resources. Waterways Ireland has engaged in joint marketing initiatives with Fáilte Ireland, Shannon Development, Northern Ireland Tourist Board and, as I mentioned earlier, Fermanagh District Council. There are probably other local marketing initiatives as well. I will find out more for the Deputy about the sponsorship. It is mentioned in the briefing material but there is no breakdown.

Since Waterways Ireland was established, the number of boats registered has more than doubled from 5,544 in 2000 to 12,344 in 2009, which shows there is great interest in the waterways. Anecdotally, there is an increase in the usage of the waterways but it is far less than occurs in our neighbouring country. A visit to that country shows the progress there.

Waterways Ireland has won many awards and nominations since its establishment, including, most recently, achieving the status of Ability Company in two categories in the prestigious O2 Ability Awards 2010. In my role as Minister with responsibility for equality, I am delighted

[Deputy Pat Carey.]

that an organisation under my Department's remit has succeeded in achieving such prestigious status and I compliment the staff in Waterways Ireland on making that possible. It has also won a sustainability award from the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors for its headquarters and the award for best marina development for Boyle marina in County Roscommon. The Minister of State and I will be investigating the potential for further development of the tourism potential of these waterways and canals. We will work with our colleague in Government, the Minister, Deputy Mary Hanafin, in that regard.

Deputy Jack Wall: There is a dry dock in Athy and the local waterways group has sought to have a cover erected over it so the facility can be used all year round. However, it has been unable to secure the goodwill of Waterways Ireland to do it. Perhaps the Minister might investigate and let me know the position with it at present. The group made an application to Waterways Ireland to have the work done. I will send the Minister a note about it.

Deputy Pat Carey: There was a note in the file about it when I read it last night, and I knew Deputy Wall would ask about it but I cannot find it at present.

Deputy Jack Wall: The Minister was correct.

Deputy Pat Carey: I will refer back to the Deputy.

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: Déanaim chomhghairdeas leis an Aire as an ardú céime. Ba mhaith liom ceist a chur faoin chanáil ó Harold's Cross chomh fada le Blackhorse Bridge. Cénuair a dhéanfar uasghrádú air? I refer to upgrading on the stretch between Harold's Cross and Blackhorse Bridge in Inchicore-Bluebell. We know the stretch from Bluebell up to Clondalkin is undergoing works at present and a cycleway and walkway will open later this year but that area has never had an upgrade whereas all the rest of Dublin has. Is there co-ordination with Dublin City Council and Luas in regard to the lighting along that stretch, which is covered by Waterways Ireland, considering the anti-social behaviour associated with the Luas stops? There is a further question in regard to a new steel bridge which was built across the canal during the Luas works and which is not wheelchair accessible from Davitt Road and Inchicore.

Deputy Pat Carey: I will have to come back to Deputy Ó Snodaigh with that detail. While I have plenty of general information, I cannot find the specific information he seeks. I will arrange to have it provided to the Deputy.

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: Go raibh maith agat.

Departmental Staff.

7. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the number and status of staff assigned to his Department; the location of such staff; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14254/10]

47. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the number of staff who will transfer from other Departments to his Department as a result of the reconfiguration of Departments announced by the Taoiseach on 23 March 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14274/10]

Deputy Pat Carey: I propose to take Questions Nos. 7 and 47 together.

As the Deputies will be aware, as part of the restructuring of Departments and agencies announced by the Taoiseach in Dáil Éireann on 23 March to ensure greater coherence and produce more efficient delivery, the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs

will become the Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs and will incorporate responsibility for social inclusion policy and family policy from the Department of Social and Family Affairs and for equality, disability, integration and human rights from the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform.

The Deputies will also be aware that the process of transferring functions and changing departmental titles is currently being progressed by the Department of Finance which, in consultation with the relevant Departments, will bring proposals in this regard to the Government for approval in due course. The Deputies will appreciate, therefore, that until the transfer of functions process is complete, it is not possible to provide the specific information requested in regard to the number and status of staff to be assigned and transferred to my Department, as well as the location of such staff.

Deputy Jack Wall: I thank the Minister for his reply. As with previous questions, if the Minister could give us the details at his earliest convenience, it would be a help.

An item was raised with regard to the national drugs strategy and the substance strategy. I made strong representations to the Minister of State, Deputy Curran, that before the strategy was brought to the House, all the national sports organisations would be consulted on it. He gave a commitment that this would happen and that the Minister would talk to all of the organisations with a view to including in the strategy that there is an alternative to drugs and drink, and that all the facilities we have should be used to attract young people, rather than letting them think only one thing is available to them. While I appreciate much is involved in this, I hope it will happen. I will talk with the Minister in this regard shortly.

Deputy Pat Carey: With regard to the last part of the question, last Saturday I spoke at the opening of the ASAP conference organised by the GAA in Croke Park, which was attended by some 250 co-ordinators from across the island. I agree with the Deputy. I spoke with the president of the GAA at the conference and know the Minister of State, Deputy Curran, has spoken to others. I propose, subject to diaries being sorted out, that the remaining sports organisations would be included. One of the great ways we can reach large numbers of young people is through the sports organisations. I remember the Deputy raising this point two years ago.

With regard to the proposed functions, divisions and agencies to transfer from the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform to the newly formed Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs, the numbers have not yet been finalised but approximately 190 staff will transfer with this work from that Department. Approximately 150 of these are civil servants and 40 are public servants. They come from the gender equality division, the disability equality division, the diversity and equality law division, the Office of the Minister for Integration, the Equality Tribunal, the Equality Authority, the National Disability Authority and the Irish Human Rights Commission. The line divisions transferring into the Department are currently based in Dublin. In addition, two of the agencies transferring into the Department are currently based outside of Dublin — the Equality Authority is based in Roscrea and the Equality Tribunal is based in Portlaoise.

The programmes transferring out of the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs to the new Department of Social Protection are the rural social scheme and the community services programme, which are two labour activation schemes. They are operated by my Department's offices in Tubbercurry and it is estimated that approximately eight staff will move with this work out of the Department.

Deputy Michael Ring: As the Minister of State, Deputy Mary White, will be the one to suffer, I hope we will not have a situation such as is already happening with this portfolio. We put down a number of priority questions and other questions but they have been transferred

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to other Departments. I hope, when the Department becomes the new Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs, that these questions will be dealt with by the Minister of State and will not be transferred to the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform. If that begins to happen, there will be some row in this House.

Deputies Jack Wall, Catherine Byrne and myself have a problem in regard to the questions we put down in regard to drugs because their transfer to the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform and Health and Children has created all kinds of difficulty for us. This is why I said earlier that we want to know clearly what the Minister of State, Deputy White, has responsibility for. Will we be able to put down questions to her or will they be transferred to the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform? With no disrespect to the Minister of State, if that is to happen, there is no point having her in the Department. We need to be able to ask her questions and I hope the powers will be granted to this Department so we will be able to ask questions.

Deputy Pat Carey: There are two stages. One is the transfer orders for the sections. At present, this Department is still known as the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs but, as soon as the new order is made, we will have the Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs. I will then be in a position to make delegation orders of specific functions to the Minister of State. There will also be other matters. For example, the Minister of State, Deputy John Moloney, will continue as Minister of State with special responsibility for disability issues and mental health at the Department of Health and Children as well as at the re-named Departments of Education and Skills and Enterprise, Trade and Innovation. We need to get this right so what the Deputy suggests will not happen.

Údarás na Gaeltachta.

8. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Brian O'Shea** den Aire Gnóthaí Pobail, Comhionannais agus Gaeltachta cén socrú atá déanta maidir leis an toghchán d'Údarás na Gaeltachta; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [14281/10]

Deputy Pat Carey: Reachtáladh an toghchán deireanach d'Údarás na Gaeltachta ar 2 Aibreán 2005. Faoi réir na reachtaíochta faoina bhfeidhmíonn an tÚdarás, ní mór an chéad toghchán eile a reachtáil am éigin sa tréimhse idir 1 Aibreán 2009 agus 1 Deireadh Fómhair 2010.

Mar is eol don Teachta, tá moltaí éagsúla maidir leis an Ghaeilge agus an Ghaeltacht á bplé i gcomhthéacs an dréacht-Straitéis 20 Bliain don Ghaeilge, atá faoi bhráid an Chomhchoiste um Ghnóthaí Ealaíon, Spóirt, Turasóireachta, Pobail, Tuaithe agus Gaeltachta faoi láthair. Sa chomhthéacs sin, níl sé i gceist agam cinneadh a thógáil ag an bpointe seo maidir le dáta don chéad toghchán eile d'Údarás na Gaeltachta. Más gá, áfach, agus má oireann sé do chúinsí an cháis, is féidir liom an cás a bhreithniú maidir le Bille a thabhairt os comhair an Tí chun síneadh a chur le tréimhse chomhaltaí an Bhoird reatha.

Deputy Brian O'Shea: Gabhaim comhghairdeas leis an Aire agus an Aire Stáit as ucht an ardú céime a fuair siad. Tháinig an tAire, an Teachta Carey, isteach sa Roinn ag am an-tábhachtach mar tá dréacht-straitéis 20 bliain na Gaeilge idir lámha agus an reachtaíocht atá bainteach leis sin a tharraingt suas. Tá súil agam go n-éireoidh go geal leis. Tá suim mhór ag an Aire Stáit sa Ghaeilge freisin.

An mbeidh Údarás na Gaeltachta nó údarás nua na Gaeilge i gceist nuair a thiocfaidh an reachtaíocht amach? An bhfuil an tAire chun reachtaíocht a chur os comhair na Dála le sainmhíniú nua a thabhairt ar cad is Gaeltacht ann? Cad faoi theorainneacha na Gaeltachta, an bhfuil sé ar intinn an Aire iad a aistriú? Cathain a bheidh an straitéis chríochnaithe ag an Aire go leanfaidh sé ar aghaidh leis an reachtaíocht?

Deputy Pat Carey: Tá an Teachta ina bhall den chomhchoiste a bhfuil an dréacht-straitéis faoina bhráid faoi láthair. Tá súil agam go mbeidh an comhchoiste réidh——

Deputy Brian O'Shea: Níl mé i mo bhall den chomhchoiste sin.

Deputy Pat Carey: Gabhaim leithscéal an Teachta. Bhí mé ag labhairt le Cathaoirleach an choiste sin i rith na seachtaine agus teastaíonn ón chomhchoiste deireadh a chur leis an scrúdú ar an straitéis chomh tapaídh agus is féidir. Ansin, tá fochoiste ag an chomhchoiste ag cur tuarscála le chéile agus cuirfear sin chugam.

Nuair a bheidh seans agam é a scrúdú agus leasuithe a dhéanamh air, más gá, tabharfaidh mé é faoi bhráid an Rialtais chomh tapaídh agus is féidir liom. Ba mhaith liom é sin a dhéanamh roimh an tsamhraidh, ach go réadúil níl a fhios agam an féidir an sprioc sin a aimsiú. Ba mhaith liom go bhféadfaimid í a aimsiú, más féidir. Tá sé sin ar intinn agam, ar aon chaoi.

D'iarr an Teachta mar gheall ar na teorainneacha freisin. Tá sé leagtha amach sa dréachtstraitéis go ndéanfaí athstruchtúru bunúsach ar Údarás na Gaeltachta mar gníomhaireacht náisiúnta — “údarás na Gaeilge” — agus a cheannáras sa Ghaeltacht. Beidh freagracht ag an údarás maidir le cúrsaí Gaeilge ar fud an Stáit. Coinneoidh an túdarás nua na feidhmeanna atá ag Údarás na Gaeltachta faoi láthair. Tuigfidh an Teachta mach mbeadh sé caoi dul ar aghaidh le socruithe le haghaidh toghchán Údarás na Gaeltachta go dtí go mbeidh na ceisteanna eile pléite go sásúil againn.

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: Tuigim an méid a dúirt an Aire. Chuir mé an cheist seo ar an Aire, an Teachta Ó Cuív, nuair a bhí an cúram seo aige. Ní fheicim aon loighic san argóint, áfach, os rud é nach mbeidh na cinnithe seo déanta go ceann dhá nó trí blianta. Feictear dom nach mbeidh toghchán Údarás na Gaeltacht againn san idir an dá linn. Cén fáth nach féidir toghchán an údaráis a eagrú ar an lá céanna ar a bheidh toghchán mhéara Átha Cliath, agus na fothoghcháin Dála, againn níos déanaí i mbliana? Is féidir linn athrú a dhéanamh amach anseo, taréis díospóireacht caoi sa Teach seo chun na struchtúir caoi a chur i bhfeidhm.

Deputy Pat Carey: Mar adúirt mé níos luaithe, séard a bhí ar intinn ag an Aire Ó Cuív, agus séard atá ar intinn agamsa a dhéanamh ná, má tá gá leis, Bille a thabhairt os comhair an Tí chun síneadh a chur le tréimhse chomhaltaí tofa an bhoird reatha. Níl ar intinn againn go mbeadh na toghcháin a luaigh an Teachta á rith ag an am céanna le h-aon toghchán eile a bheidh againn an bhliain seo.

Deputy Brian O'Shea: An bhfuil an ceart agam glacadh leis ón mhéid atá ráite ag an Aire nach bhfuil sé ar intinn aige go mbeadh díospóireacht sa Dáil ar an dréacht straitéis? Tá sé thar a bheith riachtanach go mbeadh an díospóireacht sin againn. De réir an mhéid atá ráite ag an Aire, an dealramh atá ar an scéal ná go rachaidh an dréacht straitéis ar ais díreach go dtí an Aire nuair a bheidh an comhchoiste críochnaithe leis agus go ndéanfaidh seisean pé athruithe atá i gceist aige a dhéanamh agus ansin go dtabharfaidh sé an doiciméad sin os comhair an Rialtais. Cuirfidh sin deireadh le scrúdú na dréacht straitéise agus beidh an straitéis chríochnaithe againn gan aon bhaint a bheith aici leis an Dáil. Ní dóigh liom gur ceart é sin a dhéanamh. Tá sé thar a bheith riachtanach go mbeadh díospóireacht iomlán sa Dáil maidir leis an dréacht straitéis sula mbíonn an dréacht críochnúil againn.

Deputy Pat Carey: Níl deacracht ar bith agam, go pearsanta nó go hoifigiúil, le sin. Bheinn i bhfábhar na díospóireachta sin a bheith againn chomh luath agus a bheidh an tuarscáil agus na moltaí réidh ag an comhchoiste. Níl aon bac ar sin. Is féidir leis an comhchoiste an tuarscáil a sheoladh go dtí Tithe an Oireachtais más mian leis sin a dhéanamh. Go pearsanta, bheinn i bhfábhar í a phlé anseo ionas go mbeidh seans againn plé níos déine a dhéanamh uirthi.

Written Answers follow Adjournment debate.

Adjournment Debate Matters.

An Ceann Comhairle: I wish to advise the House of the following matters in respect of which notice has been given under Standing Order 21 and the name of the Member in each case: (1) Deputy Ulick Burke — the need to provide humanitarian support and that provided to date to property owners and householders three months after the major flooding of 2009; (2) Deputy Mattie McGrath — the awarding of printing contracts from the OPW to companies abroad; (3) Deputy Pádraic McCormack — HSE proposals for the future of St. Francis Nursing Home, Newcastle, Galway; (4) Deputy Pat Rabbitte — the special report of the Ombudsman relating to the Lost at Sea scheme; (5) Deputy Michael D’Arcy — the establishment of a methadone clinic by the HSE at Civic Square, the Avenue, Gorey, County Wexford; (6) Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh — the need for the Minister for Education and Science to make a statement detailing her Department’s plans for the delivery of its obligations in relation to the national drugs strategy; (7) Deputy Frank Feighan — turf-cutting in designated bogs; (8) Deputy Timmy Dooley — the need to introduce legislation to allow for mandatory sentencing in respect of aggravated burglary in the retail sector; (9) Deputy Pat Breen — Ryanair services from Shannon Airport; (10) Deputy Thomas P. Broughan — the urgent need for the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, to initiate a commission of investigation into all aspects of the planning and building of the north fringe new urban district in Dublin North East; (11) Deputy Terence Flanagan — the need for the Minister for Finance to protect homeowners who signed contracts and are now unable to honour these contracts; (12) Deputy Róisín Shortall — the negative implications for school children in disadvantaged areas of the proposed abolition of the supply panel; (13) Deputy Joe Costello — the publication of the reports on the Dublin Docklands Development Authority and the action he will take on foot of these reports; and (14) Deputy Jimmy Deenihan — the decision to withdraw troops from Chad.

The matters raised by Deputies Michael D’Arcy, Jimmy Deenihan, Frank Feighan and Joe Costello have been selected for discussion.

Adjournment Debate.

Drug Treatment Programme.

Deputy Michael D’Arcy: A number of years ago, Wexford County Council, in conjunction with County Wexford VEC, agreed a transfer of land which was the former premises of Gorey technical school. I had the pleasure of being the vice chairman of Wexford County Council at the time and chairman of County Wexford VEC. The site contained an adult education facility, a library — for which a significant grant was received from An Chomhairle Leabharlann — the county council offices, Gorey Town Council offices, a courthouse and an office building. A construction project costing €21million was agreed between these bodies and the local authorities. The project is near completion and will be open in a few weeks. A civic square is located in the centre of the development.

A number of months ago, it came to my attention that the HSE intended establishing a methadone prescribing clinic in the HSE facility. The arrangement between the HSE and Wexford County Council was for a day care mental hospital and everybody was satisfied with that arrangement. However, the HSE proceeded to attempt to establish a methadone prescribing clinic within that facility.

I met with the HSE and informed it that this was a very inappropriate location for the establishment of such a facility. Unfortunately, the HSE chose to press ahead with the project, as it normally does, and tried to ignore the views of the entire body politic of north County Wexford, including the local area committee of Wexford County Council and practically all of

Gorey Town Council. I informed the HSE that I would object strenuously to the clinic. I was involved in the Part 8 planning application and it is clear to me that permission was not granted for the establishment of a mental day care hospital. The only planning permission granted is for office space. I did not want to enter into a conflict but I had no option given the complete absence of a meeting of minds. It is not listening to the opinion of the body politic, the VEC and everybody else concerned that a greater disservice could not be done to the town of Gorey than the establishment of a methadone prescribing clinic in that location. If the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government consulted local authority officials, he would find that I am factually correct.

It is unfortunate that the Minister for Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs, Deputy Pat Carey, has left the Chamber because I also raised the matter with him. I hope common sense prevails and that the HSE does not attempt to establish a methadone prescribing clinic at Civic Square. It is taking an outrageously belligerent attitude towards the entire body politic and for too long quangos of this type have ignored individual politicians and this House. I hope the Minister ensures this project does not proceed. I will be fighting in every forum available to me to demonstrate this is the wrong place to establish a clinic.

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): I am replying to this Adjournment matter on behalf of my colleague, the Minister for Health and Children, Deputy Mary Harney. As Deputy D'Arcy will be aware, the management and delivery of health and personal social services, including methadone services, are the responsibility of the Health Service Executive under the Health Act 2004. I thank the Deputy for raising this matter as it provides me with an opportunity to outline the actions being taken by the HSE to expand the availability and access to drug treatment services.

Under the interim national drugs strategy for 2009 to 2016, the HSE is implementing part of action 34 by providing methadone clinics in targeted areas where waiting lists have emerged. One of these clinics is being provided in Gorey, County Wexford. This clinic will be a methadone scripting clinic which will open only twice per week for three hour sessions. Methadone will not be provided in the clinic. It will be staffed by a methadone level two trained GP and support nursing and general assistance staff. This is a key action in the 2010 HSE national service plan and part of the comprehensive harm reduction programme being implemented by the HSE across the country.

There are an estimated 14,500 opiate users in Ireland. At the end of December 2009, some 9,047 clients received methadone maintenance treatment services, 5,382 of whom were dispensed methadone by pharmacists in the community rather than in specialist addiction clinics. The number of GPs providing methadone maintenance treatment at the end of December 2009 was 277 while the number of pharmacies involved was 480. The HSE is planning to expand these services in 2010.

Overseas Missions.

Deputy Jimmy Deenihan: It is extremely regrettable that Ireland is being criticised for the first time by the United Nations in regard to a peacekeeping mission but, as Mary Fitzgerald highlighted in *The Irish Times*, this is the result of the Government's unilateral decision to end our participation in MINURCAT. Over the decades, Ireland has earned a positive reputation for its work in peacekeeping activities, from Congo to Lebanon and elsewhere. This week, in one ill-thought out move, the Government has undermined that reputation, the entire MINURCAT mission, the security of the refugee camps and the negotiations between the UN and the President of Chad, Idriss Déby.

I accept the practical issues that arise if MINURCAT ends in May, including in particular the need to withdraw the Defence Forces before the onset of the rainy season. The issue is not

[Deputy Jimmy Deenihan.]

whether MINURCAT is needed in Chad. The UN humanitarian chief, John Holmes, has stated that he fears the consequences if the force is withdrawn. Human Rights Watch has also expressed fears of what might happen in the event of a withdrawal. The issue is whether the mission can remain. The President of Chad president wants the mission to end but human rights and refugee organisations want it to continue.

It was an ill-timed move on the part of the Government to announce during the negotiations that we were withdrawing. As the second largest component in the mission, we are a key force within MINURCAT. Announcing our intention to withdraw risked leaving Déby with the impression that the outcome of the negotiations was already decided. In her article, Mary Fitzgerald pointed out that the move could have a negative impact on continuing talks with Chadian authorities over the future of the force. We should not be creating this impression. I cannot stress enough my admiration for the work of our forces in MINURCAT. They have been crucial to the success of the mission, which was one of the most dangerous ever undertaken. For the Government to end the mission in such a way is unacceptable and unforgivable.

I urge the Government to make immediate contact with the under-secretary general of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, Alain Le Roy, to assess how we can help the UN in its negotiations and undo the damage done by the Government's decision. The feedback I am getting clearly indicates that work remains to be done in Chad. The Government must be mindful of the fate of the refugees left behind after a mass withdrawal of troops. Multinational missions are all about teamwork. It is wrong to undermine unilaterally a team in the way this Government has undermined MINURCAT. I regret deeply the untold damage that has been done to that mission. We owe it to our soldiers, to MINURCAT and, most of all, to the people our soldiers protect in Chad, to undo the mistake and work with the UN rather than undermine it while negotiations continue on whether to extend the mission.

I ask for clarification on the Government's current position on the matter. Yesterday, the Minister for Defence relayed what was obviously a Cabinet decision but I would have been more critical of his announcement had I known then that UN officials were in negotiations with the Chadian Government on continuing the mandate. I urge the Minister and the Taoiseach to review this decision in light of the possible extension of MINURCAT's mandate. If the Irish camp is dismantled and the equipment withdrawn, the mission may be unable to continue. This matter needs to be taken seriously and the Government must act immediately.

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley):

The decision of the Government to withdraw the Defence Forces contingent from Chad was only made following detailed consideration, a strong recommendation from the Defence Forces acting Chief of Staff and following full and frank engagement with the UN at the highest levels over several months. In the past week, the Minister for Defence also spoke twice and at length with under secretary general Le Roy in the UN Department of Peacekeeping. At no stage did the under secretary suggest that the timing was sensitive in terms of ongoing discussions or ask the Minister to withhold publicly announcing the decision. If anything, he indicated that he understood Ireland's predicament and the difficult position we faced.

MINURCAT, the United Nations mission in the Central African Republic and Chad, was established under the authority of the United Nations Security Council resolution 1861(2009) of 14 January 2009, to replace the EU-led EUFOR TCHAD-RCA mission in Chad and the Central African Republic with which in excess of 400 Irish Defence Forces personnel had been serving since May 2008. Ireland has participated in MINURCAT since the transfer of the EU-led force to the authority of the UN on 15 March 2009. On 9 March 2010, the Government approved continued participation by the Defence Forces in MINURCAT for a further period

beyond 14 March 2010 subject to renewal of UN authority for the mission beyond 15 March 2010 and subject to any further decisions which the Government may take in respect of continued participation in the force.

It had been the Government's intention to maintain the Defence Forces commitment to the mission until March 2012 subject to ongoing renewal of the UN mandate. However, on 12 March 2010 the Security Council extended the mandate of MINURCAT only until 15 May 2010 to allow for ongoing discussions on the mission's future with the Chadian Government. The Chadian Government has publicly sought the withdrawal of the UN military element of MINURCAT since January. The UN continues to meet with Chadian officials to discuss the future of the mission. However, unfortunately it is not yet in a position to clarify the situation. Therefore, significant uncertainty remains as to the extension of the UN mandate post 15 May, the number of troops that might be retained, the sectors to which they may be deployed and the nature of the mandate. Under national and international law Ireland cannot remain in Chad without a UN mandate. As a result of the uncertainty of the situation, the imminent onset of the rainy season and on advice from the military authorities, the Minister had no choice but to bring a memorandum to Government seeking approval to initiate a managed draw-down of our forces.

The Minister has stated on several occasions in the past week that our absolute preference is to remain in Chad and to continue to contribute to the creation of a safe and secure environment there. Since January, when President Déby announced that he wished to see the UN military element of the mission withdraw from Chad, staff in Ireland's mission to the UN have met UN officials and have outlined in clear and unambiguous terms the impact the rainy season will have regarding the withdrawal of Irish troops if there is no substantive renewal of the mandate before the end of March. Unfortunately, the MINURCAT mandate was extended until only 15 May 2010. Since we do not have the assurance regarding the renewal of the mandate post 15 May, nor does it seem an immediate prospect, the Government had to make the decision. I assure the Deputy this was not a decision we took lightly. Unless there is an immediate start to the drawing down of our forces, the onset of the rainy season could leave the Defence Forces personnel and equipment stranded in Chad without the benefit of a legal mandate contrary to national and international law.

In the past week, the Minister has personally spoken twice to Under Secretary General Le Roy regarding the situation and the future of the mission. The Minister informed Under Secretary General Le Roy that Ireland's clear preference would be to stay in the mission but he required assurances in respect of the future of the mission. Under Secretary General Le Roy fully understood Ireland's position as set out. Nevertheless, when the Minister spoke to him on Monday he was unable to give any clear assurances on the future of the mission. In addition, in the Minister's discussions with Under Secretary Le Roy the issue of the sensitivity of the timing of Ireland's withdrawal from the mission was never raised. Also, in a subsequent meeting with our UN ambassador the Under Secretary General stated there would likely be no final decision by the UN until May, in the knowledge that this would be too late for us to get out.

The Minister is aware that Human Rights Watch has written to the United Nations Security Council seeking an extension of the mandate for the MINURCAT mission and has outlined its concern that withdrawing the peacekeepers from this mission would expose civilians to increased violence and human rights abuses. The reality is that the Chadian government publicly stated it has no wish for the military component of the mission to be extended. Also, the Chadian Government is of the view that the Chadian police could provide security for internally displaced persons and refugees in eastern Chad.

[Deputy John Gormley.]

The MINURCAT mission is crucial to the overall effort to bring stability to the region. To date, the mission has had a positive effect in creating a safe and secure environment for refugees, displaced persons and the wider population. In this regard, Irish Defence Forces personnel have played a major role. However, the decision to withdraw our troops from Chad was not of our making. The safety and security of Defence Forces personnel serving in Chad is paramount. In the absence of an extension of the mandate to the end of December 2010, the Defence Forces could be left in a situation where they would be unable to extract themselves from the mission when the current mandate expires in May 2010. The Minister cannot risk having our troops and equipment stranded in Chad with no mandate until the end of the rainy season. The Minister and his officials will continue to monitor developments at the UN Security Council on the mission's future. The Minister has asked Under Secretary General Le Roy to revert to him urgently if there is any significant change regarding the future of the mission.

Turbary Rights.

Deputy Frank Feighan: I call on the Minister to clarify the situation and to present the findings of the interdepartmental working group set up to examine the issue of the cessation of turf cutting on 32 raised bogs in the special area of conservation, SAC. The restrictions affect 6,000 farmers and rural dwellers and has impacted seriously on the livelihood of families during the worst economic downturn for decades. Those affected live in an area which is impoverished in some respects. The country is almost in a state of emergency and the climate has changed dramatically in every respect. It is far too late for contractors preparing for the season ahead and too late for bog owners to convert to alternative sources of fuel. The country is so dependent on imported fuels and, considering the economic position, surely there exists a major opportunity to alleviate the dependency in the short term by lifting the ban. This is a European, economic, national and a local issue in Roscommon, Leitrim and throughout the west of Ireland and the midlands.

This is a challenge for new and beneficial thinking on a issue that affects mostly rural families who have an opportunity to continue to provide for their own fuel needs without recourse to imports. Effectively, this is our oil well but we are stopping people from using it in this country. I call on the Minister to approach the crisis in an enthusiastic manner and to have the derogation extended given the times in which we live. I call for support from everyone with a voice to influence and support our people on this issue.

Last year, the Minister gave an interpretation in the Dáil to the effect that the ban referred only to sausage machine cutting. Alarmingly, this view was later rescinded. Turf cutting on designated bogs must be continued for domestic purposes. There is no scientific evidence that turf cutting on domestic bogs is damaging to the bogs.

I refer to an area in which I believe the Minister can work with the people. The National Parks and Wildlife Service could offer a relocation to bog owners within one kilometre if there is a plan to designate a certain area. The Minister should put in place mechanisms to protect turf cutting for domestic purposes on the bogs.

Bord Na Móna has stated one acre of bog is worth between €280,000 and €285,000. The only compensation the Minister pays to farmers amounts to €3,000 per acre. Some of these farmers must wait up to five or six years because the Minister simply does not have the money to pay them. Effectively, the Minister is trying to force them to hand over the bogs to the State but he has no money to pay them. The bottom line is people do not seek compensation, they wish to continue cutting turf.

There are a few issues which I must raise. The Department used maps in drawing up these areas of conservation. For the past year and a half, we have tabled questions in the Dáil looking for the maps it used and so far we have got nothing but stony silence. How can the people trust the Department when it will not provide evidence of the maps it used? There is something fundamentally wrong and the people want to know the answers. They will not accept a ban on turf-cutting until the Department can come up with the maps it used to stop these people from cutting turf.

I ask the Minister, Deputy Gormley, to work with the people. These are elderly people who were using turf to heat their homes. They want to continue but they want to work with the Minister, and I ask his Department to work with the people. These people are angry. If this plan stops the people of the country from availing of their right to cut turf, that anger will boil over. I ask the Minister to work with the people but, most importantly, to back-up what he and his Department has stated by producing the maps because the people concerned believe they are being undermined and are being told untruths by this Department.

Deputy John Gormley: I appreciate the Deputy's concern and I share his wish to provide clarity to those turf cutters who are affected by the ending of cutting on raised bogs designated for conservation. It is important to point out at the outset that we are talking about only 32 bogs. There are thousands of blanket bogs and other raised bogs out there but, specifically, we are talking about 32 bogs.

The Inter-Departmental Group on Cessation of Turf Cutting in Designated Areas was established by me to examine and make recommendations on all the implications of achieving a cessation of cutting in these sensitive conservation areas. It had been hoped the group would be in a position to report back by the end of October. In the event, this did not prove possible because of the need for widespread and sometimes extended consultations with interested parties, and the need to consider fully the complex legal and administrative issues involved. The group has been very active and has consulted widely. It invited submissions from all interested parties. It met with the organisations representing turf cutting interests as well as conservation organizations. It sought expert advice from within the various Departments, agencies and offices represented on the group. It was not possible to finalise the report of the group while certain important issues remained to be clarified, including legal questions. For the most part, this clarification has now been provided.

I expect to receive the report and recommendations of the group in the coming days. I will then conclude my consideration of the matter under examination as quickly as possible with a view to making proposals to Government without delay. The preparation of the report has taken the group longer than originally expected for the reasons I outlined above. I should point out that, notwithstanding that the report is still awaited by me, it has been known for more than ten years that turf cutting on 32 raised bog special areas of conservation designated before 1999 would no longer be permitted after the expiry of the ten-year derogation given by the then Minister in 1999.

As regards the availability of maps of the bogs concerned, my Department has a complete set and has recently provided copies to the Oireachtas Joint Committee on the Environment, Heritage and Local Government. It is intended to send copies to all affected landowners and turbary rights owners who can be located. They are available also from the Department to anyone else who wishes to receive copies. There is also an interactive map viewer on the NPWS website where the boundaries and aerial photography of all nature conservation areas can be viewed.

Dublin Docklands Development Authority.

Deputy Joe Costello: I welcome the Minister, Deputy Gormley, to the House and thank him for taking this motion on the Adjournment.

As he will be aware, last year he commissioned two reports relating to the operation of the Dublin Docklands Development Authority. At the time, there were serious concerns about its governance and about planning issues, and the Minister requested the new chairwoman of the authority, Professor Niamh Brennan, to compile two reports on these two areas. I understand those two reports have been on the Minister's desk for four or five months. The former Senator, Déirdre de Búrca, castigated him for not publishing the contents of the reports, stated that they were quite explosive and suggested that perhaps he was deliberately refraining from publishing them for that reason.

Deputy John Gormley: The Deputy knows it is untrue.

Deputy Joe Costello: The Minister stated that he had to get the Attorney General to have a look at them. Nevertheless, it seems a considerable period of time has elapsed and I now seek a date for their publication.

It is inevitable that in the case of reports of such importance some of their contents will be eventually leaked to the media. In those leaked reports there were serious allegations that State money was recklessly squandered by the docklands development authority in the purchase of the Irish Glass Bottle site which took place at the height of the boom in January 2007 and that a proper evaluation of the site was not conducted.

There were equally serious — perhaps even more serious — allegations that a significant number of projects granted planning permission by the docklands development authority may well be flawed and subject to legal challenge, as has already happened successfully in one case.

I have further issues that may or may not have been addressed in the reports. I am particularly concerned about the failure of the docklands development authority to address its mission statement, which was to provide 20% social housing on the docklands. In all, 811 units were granted planning permission but only 300 plus were built, and there were only 37 built on the northside. We have been told lies by the docklands development authority about, for example——

Acting Chairman (Deputy Charlie O'Connor): The Deputy will be aware that we do not like that word. I am only following regulations. Do not be offended by me.

Deputy Joe Costello: ——the units that were constructed in Castleforbes, where the Department paid €4.5 million or €4.6 million to the local authority to purchase those apartments. We have been told that the reason the docklands development authority is not releasing them — this is over an 18-month period — is that it did not want them to be sold at such a high price and it was waiting for them to be reduced. Now we discover they have not been even completed and yet the capital subsidy has been requested from the Minister and has been paid to the local authority, but the docklands development authority will not release them. Therefore, we have been told mistruths on this issue.

I also have serious questions about the propriety of some payments which were drawn down, obviously without the Minister's knowledge, from his Department for social housing that was constructed by various developers under agreements with the docklands development authority. This involved sums in excess of €50 million, where capital funding payments were made by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government for social housing

where an agreement had been made on the gasometer site, which is a 27-acre site that was in the ownership of the docklands development authority. Of course, the agreement was made with the developer that the 20% social housing, when constructed, would be transferred without charge to the docklands development authority, but it still appears to have drawn down the capital subsidy from the Department. Has there been double payments in this respect and what has happened to the money that has been drawn down, I would regard, wrongly? Has it been used, as I have heard, to defray interest payments on the €127 million of the 26% share of the worthless Irish Glass Bottle site on which it must pay interest?

Have the reports addressed these additional issues. If they have not, I want the Minister to address them. I can give him what further information I have on these matters.

Acting Chairman: I ask the Deputy to conclude.

Deputy Joe Costello: I ask the Minister to publish the two reports immediately, state what action he proposes to take and address the issues I have raised.

Deputy John Gormley: While the Dublin Docklands Development Authority issue has been much discussed in recent times both in the House, as well as through the wider media, I am happy to clarify the matter for the Deputy.

As Minister and as a resident myself of the Dublin docklands area, I am committed to ensuring the authority's activities are compliant with its statutory requirements and its decisions are transparent and above board. I have taken the initiative in appointing Professor Niamh Brennan, an acknowledged expert in corporate governance, as chair of the authority. I also asked her to review the authority's corporate governance, reflecting the updated code of practice for State bodies published in May 2009.

On foot of this request, the board of the authority commissioned two independent reports to inform this review. The first was by Declan Brassil and Associates, chartered planning consultants, entitled, Review of DDDA Planning Structures and Functions, which examined the forward planning and development management procedures in the authority. The second supporting report, Report on Finance Functions — Particularly Procurement and Payroll, prepared by Ray King and Associates, incorporated public accountants and registered auditors, assessed financial control procedures, procurement and recruitment practices.

My Department received the authority's report on corporate governance, together with these two supporting independent consultants' reports, on 1 February 2010. They comprehensively examine how the authority's procedures and practices compare to best practice and the authority's board and chair have already addressed many of the issues identified in the reports, with a view to ensuring the current planning administration and financial management practices at the authority are robust.

I have repeatedly stated that I will publish these reports. I intend, however, to do it the right way, taking account of the advice of the Attorney General. I have been advised that before publication, the reports' findings should be put to the relevant former and current board members and DDDA employees to afford them an opportunity to comment. This consultation is already under way, and the executive board of the authority has committed to reporting back to me in late April. On foot of this, I will conclude my consideration of the reports, in consultation with the Attorney General, and report back to the Government.

It is not in anyone's interest to rush to hasty decisions which could jeopardise the reforms and measures that may need to be taken on foot of the reports. It is important that, as a

[Deputy John Gormley.]

responsible public representative, I follow the course of natural justice and allow potentially affected persons a right to be heard on these reports. In this regard, I am also mindful of the need to ultimately protect the taxpayer against any possible legal action arising.

A separate report from the authority regarding its participation in the Becbay joint venture and future decisions on the development of the former Irish Glass Bottle site was received in my Department on 5 February. I appointed independent financial advisers to assess the report, in consultation with my Department and the Department of Finance. It will be considered in the broader context of the corporate governance review of the authority.

Allegations were made across the floor of the House and outside it about the explosive nature of these reports and that they had some sort of political implications. The Deputy will see I was correct when I said these allegations were completely unfounded. Fine Gael has already published these reports and it is clear to most they do not contain explosive political material.

I want to ensure we get to the bottom of what occurred in the authority. The reports examined what happened. We need to find out why it happened and my commitment to the House is that I will do so in a thorough way. From the actions I have taken to date, I have done everything possible to ensure we have a properly functioning Dublin docklands.

Deputy Joe Costello: I fully agree with the Minister and he has done a fine job in this respect. Will he take on board the assertions I made earlier and look into them too?

Deputy John Gormley: Yes.

Acting Chairman: I wish the Minister, Members and staff of the Houses a happy and peaceful Easter.

The Dáil adjourned at 5.25 p.m. until 2.30 p.m. on Tuesday, 20 April 2010.

Written Answers.

The following are questions tabled by Members for written response and the ministerial replies as received on the day from the Departments [unrevised].

Questions Nos. 1 to 8, inclusive, answered orally.

National Drugs Strategy.

9. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the amount of funding provided by his Department to drug rehabilitation centres over the past three years; the location of centres that may have received funding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14268/10]

30. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs his proposals to support those involved in community based and support drug rehabilitation programmes; his intention to develop or expand such schemes in the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14201/10]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Pat Carey): I propose to take Questions Nos. 9 and 30 together.

Of the total drugs funding available in my Department's Vote in 2010, in the region of 93% is targeted at Task Force related activities. This funding supports a broad range of community groups involved in various drugs initiatives across the different pillars of the National Drugs Strategy and is channelled through the 24 Local and Regional Drugs Task Forces.

In excess of €31m is being made available to fund the activities of the Task Forces in 2010 and this will support approximately 500 initiatives. Of this funding, in the region of 50% will support projects with a treatment and rehabilitation focus or where treatment and rehabilitation forms part of a project's objectives. This also includes additional dedicated funds, originally approved in 2008, to support rehabilitation initiatives in Task Force areas.

The Task Forces had the discretion to fund projects and initiatives identified as priorities in their areas from the 2010 allocation from my Department. I would envisage the same principle applying for 2011 funding where Task Forces would, again, be in a position to develop or expand initiatives — including those with a treatment and rehabilitation focus — should they opt to do so based on identified local or regional needs.

[Deputy Pat Carey.]

With particular regard to funding for drug rehabilitation centres, I am assuming that the Deputy is referring to residential rehabilitation services. In this regard, I would draw his attention to the Residential Rehabilitation Framework Group established by my colleague, Mr John Curran, T.D., while he was Minister of State with responsibility for the Drugs Strategy. This Group, established in mid-2009, has been examining a range of issues around better service integration, quality standards and clarity and consistency in regard to funding arrangements for residential rehabilitation. The Group is chaired by the Office of the Minister for Drugs and also includes representatives from the HSE, the Probation Service and a number of voluntary sector residential service providers.

The Group's deliberations are nearing completion and will feed into the overall work of the National Drug Rehabilitation Implementation Committee (NDRIC). The NDRIC has overall responsibility for developing the comprehensive response in this area, in line with the recommendations of the Report of the Working Group on Drugs Rehabilitation.

The residential rehabilitation organisations in receipt of funding from my Department in the period 2008-2010 are detailed in Table 1 below.

Capital funding was also provided by my Department in 2008 to the following residential rehabilitation projects:

- Peter McVerry Trust/Whitworth Road Project — €0.579m;
- Arbour House Treatment Centre in Cork — €0.5m; and
- St. James Resource Centre, Enfield — €1.13m.

Table 1: Residential rehabilitation organisations in receipt of funding in the period 2008-2010

Organisation	Drugs Task Force Area	Funding allocated 2008-2010	Capital Funding allocated (2002-2009)
		€	€
Aiséirí — Cahir, Wexford and Waterford	South East RDTF	806,273	50,000
Aislínn Adolescent Addiction Centre, Kilkenny	South East RDTF	179,174	0
Merchants Quay Ireland, St. Frances Farm, Tullow	South East RDTF	455,504	63,487
Cara Lodge — Matt Talbot Adolescent Services, Cork	Southern RDTF	118,074	8,910
Cuan Mhuire, Cork	Southern RDTF	118,181	12,761
Talbot Grove, CastleIsland, Co. Kerry	Southern RDTF	117,012	0
Tabor Lodge, Belgooly, Cork	Southern RDTF	118,445	239,036
Cuan Mhuire, Athy	South Western RDTF	0	7,000
Cuan Mhuire, Bruree	Mid West RDTF	0	54,000
Bushypark Treatment Centre, Ennis	Mid West RDTF	115,000	17,978
Coolmine Therapeutic Centre	South Inner City & Blanchardstown LDTFs	2,166,423	660,577
Merchants Quay, Dublin	South Inner City LDTF	233,344	93,882
Hope House, Foxford, Co. Mayo	Western RDTF	216,654	95,000
Cuan Mhuire, Athenry	Western RDTF	35,610	0
White Oaks Rehabilitation, Lifford, Co. Donegal	North Western RDTF	185,287	0
Totals		4,854,981	1,302,631

National Drugs Strategy.

10. **Deputy Pat Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the number of meetings he or his Department have had with the gardaí and the Department of Justice and Law Reform in relation to the prevention of and spread of the sale of illegal drugs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14271/10]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Pat Carey): The Department of Justice, Equality & Law Reform and An Garda Síochána both play a vital role in the implementation of the National Drugs Strategy. In that context, my colleague, Minister John Curran, T.D., held numerous meetings and had on-going engagement with both organisations during his period as Minister for State with responsibility for the Drugs Strategy. Indeed, engagement with officials of my Department takes place virtually on a daily basis.

In line with the provisions of the Drugs Strategy, I intend to hold a further series of bilateral meetings with various Ministers and officials over the coming months and I anticipate that high-level meetings with the Department of Justice, Equality & Law Reform and An Garda Síochána will be included in that schedule.

However, while such high-level meetings are important to facilitate to smooth implementation of the Strategy, they are only part of much wider process. The Department of Justice, Equality & Law Reform and An Garda Síochána are fully engaged in the ongoing implementation of the Strategy, including through membership of the various structures involved. Both organisations are represented on the Drugs Advisory Group, through the assignment of officials on a half-time basis to the Office of the Minister for Drugs (OMD). In both cases, the representatives are directly involved in the implementation of the Strategy and provide a strong link between their organisations and the OMD. Furthermore, An Garda Síochána is represented on all Drugs Task Forces, while the Department of Justice, Equality & Law Reform, and associated agencies, are represented on a number of them.

Both organisations are also centrally involved on the Oversight Forum on Drugs. As Chair of the Forum, I intend to build on the work of monitoring progress at a high level and to address any difficulties and blockages that may arise, in partnership with the relevant bodies.

The importance of international co-operation is well recognised among our law enforcement agencies and the Gardaí, as well as Revenue's Customs Service, have been very active in this regard. I would also mention the significant contribution to the implementation of the Strategy being made by the Irish Prison and Probation Services.

I look forward to the continued co-operation of the Department of Justice, Equality & Law Reform and An Garda Síochána in the implementation of the Drugs Strategy and I have no doubt that this will be forthcoming.

Official Languages Act.

11. **Deputy Mary Upton** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the plans he has to review the operation of the Official Languages Act 2003; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14279/10]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Pat Carey): At the outset, I wish to confirm that my Department keeps the work of implementing the Official Languages Act 2003 under continuing review. Furthermore, there is an obligation on me, as Minister, to review the operation of the Act each year, as provided for in section 5 of the Act, and to report formally to the Houses of the Oireachtas in that regard. The reports for the years to 2008 are available in the Oireachtas Library and the report for 2009 will be submitted shortly.

[Deputy Pat Carey.]

While I am satisfied that considerable progress has been made to date in the implementation, on a phased basis, of the provisions of the Act, I agree with the view expressed by my predecessor that it will not be possible to achieve everything overnight. I can confirm that I am committed to the implementation of the Official Languages Act and to the achievement of its objectives. Indeed, the implementation of the Act is one of the principles set out in the Government's Policy Statement on the Irish Language, issued in December 2006, which forms the basis of the draft 20-year Strategy for Irish, which was published in November 2009 and is under consideration at present by the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Arts, Sports, Tourism, Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs.

I am also committed to ensuring that the Act be implemented in as cost-effective a way as possible, particularly having regard to the current economic climate. My Department will continue to approach the implementation of the Act in a realistic, flexible and pragmatic way, especially in relation to agreeing statutory language schemes. In this context, a significant number of resources are already in place to assist public bodies in meeting their obligations as cost-effectively as possible.

Decentralisation Programme.

12. **Deputy Paul Connaughton** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if he is committed to acquiring a permanent decentralisation site for his Department in County Mayo; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14191/10]

43. **Deputy Joe Costello** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the effect on the decentralisation programme of his Department of the changes in portfolios announced on 23 March 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14257/10]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Pat Carey): I propose to take Questions Nos. 12 and 43 together.

As the Deputies will be aware, my Department's headquarters are scheduled to decentralise to Charlestown, Co Mayo, under the Decentralisation Programme. To date, 100 staff have moved to interim accommodation in Tubbercurry, Co Sligo.

In December 2009, in light of budgetary constraints and affordability issues, the Minister for Finance decided to defer proceeding with permanent accommodation in Charlestown at this time. This location, along with 4 other deferred projects, will be considered as part of an overall review of the Decentralisation Programme in 2011.

I can assure the Deputies that I am committed to the policy of decentralisation, which I believe to be an important and positive policy put forward by Government, and my officials will continue to liaise appropriately with the Department of Finance in seeking to advance the relocation of my Department to Charlestown, Co Mayo.

Placenames Database.

13. **Deputy Tom Sheahan** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if he will provide an update on the progress on his Department's work in relation to placenames; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14147/10]

Minister for Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Pat Carey): The Placenames Branch of my Department undertakes research, with the support and guidance of An

Coimisiún Logainmneacha, in order to establish the correct Irish language forms of the placenames of Ireland and to publish them for official and public use.

The Department is engaged in a comprehensive research programme to provide Irish versions for all placenames in the State on a county basis. Seven counties have been completed and published under this programme to date, namely, counties Kilkenny, Limerick, Louth, Monaghan, Offaly, Tipperary and Waterford. Work is complete in counties Dublin, Galway, Cork, Wexford and Leitrim, while research is at an advanced stage in a number of other counties, namely, Sligo, Clare, Longford and Kerry.

The recent work of the Branch also includes providing Irish language versions of the administrative placenames in the Gaeltacht Areas of Cork, Donegal, Galway, Kerry, Mayo, Meath and Waterford and it has just completed work on some 6,200 non-administrative names in these areas shown on the Ordnance Survey's historical large-scale maps.

A signal achievement of the Placenames Branch in recent years has been the launch in late 2008, in collaboration with Fiontar DCU, of the Placenames Database of Ireland at www.logainm.ie. This free online searchable database has information on over 100,000 official placenames and has proved very popular with the public, with an average of 130,000 hits recorded each month.

Foclóir Gaeilge-Béarla.

14. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** den Aire Gnóthaí Pobail, Comhionannais agus Gaeltachta cén dul chun cinn atá déanta maidir leis an bhFoclóir Leictreonach Béarla/Gaeilge; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [14284/10]

Minister for Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Pat Carey): Tuigtear dom ó Fhoras na Gaeilge go bhfuil Céim a hAon den Fhoclóir Nua Béarla-Gaeilge — Céim na Pleanála agus an Deartha — curtha i gcrích agus go bhfuil Céim a Dó faoi lánseol i láthair na huaire. Baineann Céim a Dó le tiomsú an Fhoclóra féin agus tá trí fho-chéim ar leith i gceist:

- Céim 2(a) a bhaineann le cur le chéile bhunachar Béarla an Fhoclóra i bhfoirm creataí iontrála — tá 75% den obair seo déanta agus cuirfear bailchríoch léi i mí Iúil;
- Céim 2(b) a bhaineann le taobh na Gaeilge den Fhoclóir a sholáthar — tá tús curtha leis an obair aistriúcháin seo agus meastar go leanfaidh an obair ar aghaidh go ceann dhá bhliain eile; agus
- Céim 2(c) a bhaineann leis an obair eagarthóireachta — táthar ag súil le tús a chur leis an gcuid sin den obair roimh dheireadh na bliana agus meastar go leanfaidh an fho-chéim seo ar aghaidh go dtí an bhliain 2012.

Ach Céim a Dó bheith curtha i gcrích, leanfar ar aghaidh go dtí Céim a Trí, a bhaineann le táirgeadh an Fhoclóra féin. Mar sin, comhairlítear dom go bhfuiltear ag súil leis an leagan críochnúil den Fhoclóir a fhoilsiú i bhfoirm chlóite agus leictreonach ag deireadh na bliana 2012.

Mar eolas breise don Teachta, tá suíomh gréasáin ar leith ag an tionscadal — www.focloir.ie — áit a bhfuil cur síos cuimsitheach ar an tionscadal, móide samplaí den obair reatha agus den obair atá curtha i gcrích cheana.

Is fiú a lua go mbeidh mórchuid d'ábhar an tionscadail seo ina dhúshraith luachmhar do thionscadail eile foclóireachta amach anseo — Foclóir Nua Gaeilge-Béarla ach go háirithe.

Departmental Responsibilities.

15. **Deputy Olivia Mitchell** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the responsibilities his Department now holds in the areas of equality, human rights and integration; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14179/10]

20. **Deputy Emmet Stagg** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if he will list the functions for which Ministers of State attached to his Department will be responsible; if these will be formally delegated powers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14275/10]

24. **Deputy Seymour Crawford** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the cost implications of restructuring his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14184/10]

33. **Deputy Joe Costello** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if legislation is necessary to ensure the transfer of any section or agency of his Department; as a result of recent changes; if funding of the various agencies will be affected, and if so, if a mechanism is being prepared or in place to ensure that no delays take place in relation to such funding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14258/10]

34. **Deputy Emmet Stagg** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the cost of the rebranding that will be required as a result of the decision to change the number of his Department, including the cost of redesigning and reprinting stationary and other printed material, website redesign and changes in signage; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14276/10]

42. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the additional responsibilities his Department will take on as a result of the reconfiguration of Government Departments announced by An Taoiseach on 23 March 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14251/10]

45. **Deputy Michael D. Higgins** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the number and name of agencies now under the remit of his Department; the way in which responsibility for each agency is broken down; the number and name of agencies previously under the remit of the Department that have been reallocated to other Departments due to recent changes; the change in policy of sections of his Department and the Minister or Ministers of State responsible for each of the new policy sections; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14259/10]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Pat Carey): I propose to take Questions Nos. 15, 20, 24, 33, 34, 42 and 45 together.

As the Deputies will be aware, as part of the restructuring of Departments and agencies announced by the Taoiseach in Dáil Éireann on 23 March last to ensure greater coherence and produce more efficient delivery, the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs will become the Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs and will incorporate responsibility for social inclusion policy and family policy from the Department of Social and Family Affairs and for equality, disability, integration and human rights from the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform.

The changes in Departmental functions announced by the Taoiseach will have an effect on the Estimates of the Departments involved, including my Department. These changes will involve transferring the relevant programme expenditure from one Department to another. All such transfers of funds will be carried out strictly on an Exchequer-neutral basis. Some staff, and related administrative costs, may also be transferred between Departments, again on an Exchequer-neutral basis.

On the question of legislation, transfers of Departmental functions are carried out by Government Order under powers contained in section 6(1) of the Ministers and Secretaries (Amendment) Act 1939, while in some cases primary legislation may be needed. This aspect of the changes announced by the Taoiseach is still being examined in my Department and in the Departments of Finance, Justice, Equality and Law Reform, and Social and Family Affairs.

In relation to the Deputies' queries regarding the Minister of State appointed to my Department, Ms Mary White, TD, has been appointed Minister of State at the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, and the Department of Education and Science, with special responsibility for Equality and Human Rights, and Integration. Once the transfer of functions process is concluded, it is my intention to delegate the functions in respect of Equality, Human Rights and Integration to Minister of State White and to delegate functions transferred to my Department in relation to Disability to Mr John Moloney, TD, who will, of course, continue as Minister of State with special responsibility for Disability Issues and Mental Health at the Department of Health and Children, as well as the renamed Departments of Education and Skills, and Enterprise, Trade and Innovation.

The Deputies will appreciate that for the moment it is not possible to provide details in relation to changes in policy areas of my Department, the assignment/functions of agencies, any costs involved, funding implications for the various agencies transferring and other associated matters. I can assure the Deputies that I have directed the officials in my Department to ensure that any costs arising in this context are kept at a minimum. They will, of course, be met from within existing resources.

Community Development.

16. **Deputy Pat Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the amount of funding provided to the various RAPID areas over the past three years; the breakdown of such funding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14270/10]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Pat Carey): The RAPID Programme aims to ensure that priority attention is given to tackling the spatial concentration of poverty and social exclusion within designated RAPID areas nationally.

It is a matter for individual Departments to report on the provision of funding and progress on delivery with regard to projects under their responsibility in the different RAPID areas. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that Pobal collects data from each RAPID area in respect of funding allocations received by projects from Government Departments and State agencies.

The latest data in respect of the Programme is available on Pobal's website under the RAPID section at <http://www.pobal.ie/Funding%20Programmes/Rapid/Pages/Funding.aspx> and the Deputy may find it useful to access this information.

My Department administers the RAPID Leverage Schemes, which are designed to support small scale projects identified locally by Area Implementation Teams in each of the RAPID

[Deputy Pat Carey.]

areas. These schemes are co-funded by the relevant agencies and support projects that focus on estate enhancement, graffiti removal, traffic calming, community closed-circuit television, health and sports facilities and the provision of playgroups.

A table below provides a breakdown by county in relation to expenditure under the RAPID Leverage Schemes for the period 2007 to 2010 (to date). The payments listed are in relation to those schemes where my Department directly pays the final recipients.

Expenditure by county under the RAPID Leverage Schemes 2007-2010 (to date)

County	2007	2008	2009	2010 (to date)	Total paid 2007-2010
		€	€	€	€
Carlow	227,768.23	93,781.94	110,865.77	5,334.00	437,749.94
Cavan	27,000.00	157,000.00	83,085.50	35,000.00	302,085.50
Clare	57,794.91	0.00	110,863.00	0.00	168,657.91
Cork	470,985.78	716,044.05	824,354.07	358,858.96	2,370,242.86
Donegal	33,989.54	9,750.00	0.00	0.00	43,739.54
Dublin	1,263,917.97	1,143,771.20	2,441,638.50	539,560.32	5,388,887.99
Galway	359,931.75	279,860.61	622,966.94	66,000.00	1,328,759.30
Kerry	85,400.00	168,451.32	192,561.98	21,593.00	468,006.30
Kildare	146,995.58	6,942.50	165,758.15	0.00	319,696.23
Kilkenny	117,428.00	131,400.00	149,602.56	66,000.00	464,430.56
Laois	2,000.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	2,000.00
Leitrim	2,500.00	0.00	21,858.00	0.00	24,358.00
Limerick	248,274.08	188,085.50	678,709.64	0.00	1,115,069.22
Longford	81,612.93	0.00	150,445.15	0.00	232,058.08
Louth	220,019.27	132,031.16	442,797.54	0.00	794,847.97
Mayo	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Meath	104,042.70	0.00	69,820.23	66,000.00	239,862.93
Monaghan	5,000.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	5,000.00
Offaly	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Roscommon	45,000.00	0.00	12,900.00	8,000.00	65,900.00
Sligo	291,582.80	263,072.00	88,500.00	0.00	643,154.80
Tipperary	190,280.27	88,631.56	619,779.38	131,067.48	1,029,758.69
Waterford	370,500.03	221,500.00	173,967.05	66,000.00	831,967.08
Westmeath	169,162.73	19,500.00	73,500.00	57,815.20	319,977.93
Wexford	64,187.5	129,825.91	335,163.93	100,223.66	629,401.00
Wicklow	150,804.28	98,331.00	131,665.37	98,106.25	478,906.90
	4,736,178.35	3,847,978.75	7,500,802.76	1,619,558.87	17,704,518.73

Charities Regulation.

17. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the timeframe for the commencement of the Charities Act 2009; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14162/10]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Pat Carey): The Charities Act, which was signed into law on 28 February 2009, is structured in such a way to allow it to be commenced in whole or in part from different date(s) by way of Ministerial Order(s).

As the Deputy will be aware, the Act will, when fully commenced, introduce a comprehensive modern regulatory framework for charities in Ireland for the first time. The Act provides, *inter alia*, for the establishment of a new Charities Regulatory Authority, which will be responsible for establishing and maintaining a Register of Charities. Any organisation that wishes to operate as a charity within this jurisdiction will have to be on the Register. Only organisations that have been established exclusively for charitable purposes, and which have a public benefit, will be permitted entry onto the Register. The new Authority will also take on the functions of the Office of Commissioners of Charitable Donations and Bequests for Ireland, which is to be dissolved.

The Act further provides that any organisation that holds charitable tax exemptions from the Revenue Commissioners on the day the Register of Charities is introduced will be automatically deemed to be entered onto the Register, and thus such organisations will not have to apply to the new Authority for registration. In co-operation with the Revenue Commissioners, my officials are working to ensure that the information legally required to be published on the Register of Charities will be in place on establishment day. As there are well over 7,000 such organisations, the Deputy will appreciate that there is a considerable body of work to be done in this regard alone.

Another aspect of the implementation process is delivering on the commitment to consult with the charities sector in relation to the type of financial and activity reporting that charities will be required to make to the new Authority. This consultation is to be carried out parallel to, and will most likely be informed by, a broader review of the UK & Ireland Generally Agreed Accounting Principles (GAAP) that is being undertaken by the Accountancy Standards Board at the moment. The Charities Regulation Unit of my Department hosted a highly successful conference on this issue in January 2010 in Dublin Castle.

The majority of the provisions of the Charities Act are contingent upon both the new Authority and the Register of Charities being in place, though, subject to legal advice, some further individual provisions of the Act may be commenced before the bulk of the Act is commenced.

Thus far, section 99, which regulates the sale of pre-signed Mass cards, has been commenced. This came into effect from 1 September 2009. It has been the subject of a constitutional challenge, which failed in the High Court, but which, I am given to understand, is to be brought before the Supreme Court.

It should also be recognised that I have outlined only some of the elements of the implementation plan for the Act that is being rolled out by my Department to ensure that the essential elements are in place to enable the introduction of the statutory regulatory framework provided for in the Act. In other countries, for example, Scotland, it has taken a number of years after enactment of the legislation for the new regulatory system for charities to be formally introduced and this will be the case in Ireland also.

Community Development.

18. **Deputy Liz McManus** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the amounts of grants provided under the two programmes of grants for community and voluntary organisations during the past three years; his plans to expand this funding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14265/10]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Pat Carey): I assume that the question relates to the Programme of Grants for Locally-Based Community and Voluntary Organisations. This Programme, which was suspended at the end of February 2009, provided funding in respect of the refurbishment of community premises, the purchase of equipment for community and voluntary organisations and training to enhance the capacity of and activities or persons and organisations working in the community and voluntary sector. The Programme continues to meet commitments made to projects before it was suspended last year.

Funding of some €13m has been paid to Groups under the Programme since 2007 as follows:

- 2007 — €6.5m;
- 2008 — €3.5m; and
- 2009 — €3.1m.

Funding of €1.5m has been earmarked in 2010 to meet existing commitments. Given the ongoing pressure on public funds, I do not envisage re-opening the Programme in the foreseeable future.

Irish Language.

19. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the plans he has to promote a national debate, to include the population at large, on the draft 20 year strategy on the Irish language; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14277/10]

32. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs when he will present the final draft of the 20 year strategy on the Irish language; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14278/10]

46. **Deputy Mary Upton** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs his views on whether a full review of the State resources provided to preserve and develop the Irish language is a prerequisite to finalising the 20 year strategy on the Irish language; and his further views that such a review should be carried out by the Coimisinéir Teanga and or the Economic and Social Research Institute, and that the Coimisinéir Teanga and or the ESRI should have a continuing monitoring role in regard to the implementation of the 20 year strategy on the Irish language. [14280/10]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Pat Carey): I propose to take Questions Nos. 19, 32 and 46 together.

The draft 20-Year Strategy for Irish is a very important initiative for all citizens of the State. For that reason, a broad national public consultation process was carried out over a two-year period to seek input into its drafting, which included a series of public meetings, an online questionnaire and the provision of a dedicated website. Subsequently, my Department published a discussion paper and undertook a further round of consultations, including public meetings, to seek focussed suggestions and ideas for the draft Strategy.

As the Deputy will be aware, the draft Strategy has since been published and referred to the Joint Committee on Arts, Sport, Tourism, Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. I understand that the Committee discussed the draft with Irish language and Gaeltacht organisations on 20 January last, and held a further meeting in the Gaeltacht on 26 February, when key Gaeltacht organisations had the opportunity to express their views. I look forward to the oppor-

tunity to receive the outcome of the Committee's deliberations in due course. In that context, I hope, once I have received the Committee's views, to bring the draft Strategy to Government for approval.

The initial phase of the Strategy will focus on putting in place practical implementation and co-ordination arrangements, including the effective alignment of resources with strategic goals and arrangements for ongoing monitoring and evaluation.

Question No. 20 answered with Question No. 15.

Departmental Expenditure.

21. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the effect that the recent re-configuration of portfolios will have on the budgetary forecasts of his Department; if these changes mean that legislation will be necessary to underpin them; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14256/10]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Pat Carey): The changes in Departmental functions announced by the Taoiseach in the Dáil on 23rd March will have an effect on the Estimates of the Departments involved, including my Department. These changes will involve transferring the relevant programme expenditure from one Department to another. All such transfers of funds will be carried out strictly on an Exchequer-neutral basis. Some staff, and related administrative costs, may also be transferred between Departments, again on an Exchequer-neutral basis.

On the question of legislation, in most cases transfers of Departmental functions are carried out by Government Order under powers contained in section 6(1) of the Ministers and Secretaries (Amendment) Act 1939, while in some cases amending legislation may be needed. This aspect of the changes announced by the Taoiseach is still being examined in my Department and in the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform and the Department of Social and Family Affairs.

Security of the Elderly.

22. **Deputy Michael D. Higgins** asked the Minister for Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs if he will consider a house alarm as part of the community support for older people; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14260/10]

Minister for Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Pat Carey): The Scheme of Community Support for Older People (CSOP) focuses mainly on the provision of monitored personal alert equipment and it is not proposed to extend the scheme to cover house alarms at this time. The Deputy will be aware that my Department carried out a review of the CSOP in 2009. While it was evident from discussions with community and voluntary groups during the review that there is overwhelming support for the continued funding of monitored personal alert equipment, there appears to be no discernible demand to extend the scheme to cover house alarms. Personal alarms bring greater ease of mind to the user as they allow for direct two-way interaction with the monitoring station in the event of any concerns being raised by the user. They can also monitor many other features such as smoke detectors, carbon monoxide detectors and other telecare devices.

Arrangements for the introduction of a revised scheme — which will address a range of issues raised in the review — are at an advanced stage and I hope to launch it before the end

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of April. It should be noted, however, that the existing scheme will remain open until such time as the new arrangements are in put in place.

Irish Language.

23. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the amount and list of events for which his Department provided funding as part of Seachtain na Gaeilge; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14262/10]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Pat Carey): As the Deputy is aware, Seachtain na Gaeilge is a non-profit organisation, under the auspices of Conradh na Gaeilge, which promotes the use of Irish language and culture, both at home and abroad, within a two-week festival held in March every year. This year the festival took place between 2-17 March 2009. The festival has grown significantly in recent years and incorporates a very wide range of language and cultural events.

My Department, under its Scéimeanna Tacaíochta Gaeilge, did not provide direct funding to any events or organisations in respect of Seachtain na Gaeilge. However, I understand that Foras na Gaeilge did provide such funding and I have asked the Chief Executive to provide the relevant details to the Deputy directly.

Question No. 24 answered with Question No. 15.

Gramadach na Gaeilge.

25. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** den Aire Gnóthaí Pobail, Tuaithe agus Gaeltachta cad iad na teagmhálacha a bhí aige le hoifigigh sa Roinn Oideachais agus Eolaíochta maidir le gramadach na Gaeilge a shimpliú chun cabhrú le daltaí scoile an Ghaeilge a labhairt go luath ina saol scoile; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [14283/10]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Pat Carey): Faoi mar is eol don Teachta, tá cinneadh déanta go ndéanfar Athbhreithniú ar an gCaighdeán Oifigiúil agus is féidir liom a chinntiú go dtionólfar an chéad chruinniú inniu den Choiste Stiúrtha atá bunaithe chun próiseas an athbhreithnithe sin a thabhairt chun cinn. Ghlac an Rialtas cinneadh maidir leis seo i mí na Samhna 2008 mar chuid de bhunú an Lár-Aonaid Aistriúcháin i mo Roinn féin. Beidh duine ón Roinn Oideachais agus Eolaíochta ainmnithe ar an gCoiste seo.

Tá comhaontú forleathan ann gur gá an Caighdeán a athbhreithniú lena chinntiú go mbeidh sé fós in ann freastal ar riachtanais na teanga amach anseo. Tá mo Roinnse ag súil go mór le bheith ag obair leis na páirtithe leasmhara ar fad, an Roinn Oideachais agus Eolaíochta san áireamh, leis an sprioc seo a bhaint amach.

Question No. 26 answered with Question No. 6.

National Drugs Strategy.

27. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the number of meetings that the steering group, established to develop proposals on the national substance misuse strategy have had; the make up of this group; the number of submissions received; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14267/10]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Pat Carey): The Steering Group established to develop proposals and make recommendations on a National Substance Misuse Strategy has had four meetings to date, the most recent of which was on 19 March 2010.

The membership of the Group, comprising representatives of the statutory, community, voluntary and industry sectors, is set out in the Table below.

Steering Group to develop proposals for a National Substance Misuse Strategy	
Dr. Tony Holohan (Joint Chair)	Department of Health and Children
Kathleen Stack (Joint Chair)	Office of the Minister for Drugs
Michael Conroy	Office of the Minister for Drugs
Eddie Arthurs	Office of the Minister for Drugs
Robbie Breen	Department of Health and Children
Dr John Devlin	Department of Health and Children
Kathleen Connolly	Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform
Conor O'Malley	Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism
Joe Barry	Health Service Executive
Eddie Matthews	Health Service Executive
William Ebbitt	Health Service Executive
Noel Brett	Road Safety Authority
Rosemary Garth	Alcohol Beverage Federation of Ireland
James Doorley	National Youth Council of Ireland
Cliona Murphy	Alcohol Action Ireland
Tony Geoghegan	National Voluntary Drugs Sector
Willie Collins	National Voluntary Drugs Sector
Theresa Donohue	Department of Environment, Heritage & Local Government
Fergus McCabe	Community Sector
Dr. Eamon Keenan	Irish College of Psychiatrists
Dr William Flannery	Irish College of Psychiatrists
Denis Bradley	National Advisory Committee on Drugs
Jean Long	Health Research Board
Deirdre Mongan	Health Research Board
Michael O'Sullivan	An Garda Síochána
Rolande Anderson	Irish College of General Practitioners
Dr. Declan Bedford	Royal College of Physicians in Ireland
Kieran Sludds	Health & Safety Authority
Fionnuala Sheehan	MEAS
Sadie Grace	Family Support Network
John Devlin	Department Health and Children
John Moloney	Department Education and Science
Elizabeth Canavan	Office of the Minister for Children & Youth Affairs

28. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs his views on whether the prevention pillar of the national drugs strategy cannot be properly implemented as a result of policy choices by the Department of Education and Science in view of his Department's responsibility for the national drugs strategy. [14065/10]

Minister for Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Pat Carey): At the outset, I want to confirm to the Deputy that the National Drugs Strategy 2009-2016 will continue to

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be implemented across all of its five pillars, in line with the Government's commitment to addressing the drugs problem in Ireland.

The objectives of the prevention pillar focus on the need to foster greater understanding of the dangers of problem drug and alcohol use across the general population. The promotion of healthier lifestyle choices to the wider society is a key part of this, along with targeting interventions to those at particular risk of problem substance use in our communities.

The progress being made by the various statutory, community and voluntary agencies responsible for implementing the 17 actions under the prevention pillar is being monitored on an ongoing basis. While good progress is being made in many areas, it has to be acknowledged that some initiatives are more long-term in nature and will be progressed over the lifetime of the Strategy. The Department of Education & Science is fully involved in this process and, indeed, is represented on the Drugs Advisory Group through the assignment of an official of that Department on a half-time basis to the Office of the Minister for Drugs.

That Department is also centrally involved on the Oversight Forum on Drugs. As Chair of that Forum, I intend to build on the work of my colleague, Minister John Curran, T.D., in monitoring progress at a high level and in addressing any difficulties and blockages that may arise.

In line with the provisions of the National Drugs Strategy, I intend to hold a further series of bilateral meetings with various Ministers and officials over the coming months and I anticipate that a high-level meeting with the Department of Education and Science will be included in that schedule.

I look forward to the continued co-operation of the Department of Education & Science in the implementation of the Drugs Strategy and I have no doubt that this will be forthcoming.

29. **Deputy Jim O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if, in view of the recent controversy surrounding headshops, proposals are in place to increase awareness of the negative effects of consuming psychoactive substances, which can be bought legally in headshops; if not, if measures will be put in place to highlight the downside of using such substances; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14059/10]

44. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if, in view of his Department's responsibility for the national drugs strategy, he will introduce legislation to address problems associated with headshops; his views on the establishment of a regulatory authority with the power to fast track the banning of dangerous substances, to provisionally ban substances in the interest of public health while further research on a substance is conducted and to otherwise restrict and control the production and sale of all non-medicinal psychoactive substances. [14067/10]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Pat Carey): I propose to take Questions Nos. 29 and 44 together.

I can assure the Deputies that I share the concerns to which they refer regarding the activities of headshops and the new psychoactive substances, represented as "legal highs", which are being sold in these outlets.

Indeed, my colleague, Mr John Curran, T.D., while Minister of State with responsibility for the National Drugs Strategy, voiced similar concerns on many occasions and held a number of meetings with the Ministers for Health & Children, Justice, Equality & Law Reform and Education & Science. He also met with the Garda Commissioner and with senior officials of various Departments and Offices. Headshops and the sale of "legal highs" were discussed at many of

these meetings and various approaches to addressing the activities of these outlets were considered.

Through the Misuse of Drugs Act — which is the primary legislation through which these substances can be regulated — the Department of Health and Children is currently finalising regulations to introduce controls on a range of substances. These regulations will make the possession and sale of these substances illegal and subject to criminal sanctions. In preparing the required regulations, that Department is consulting with the relevant authorities to ensure that any legitimate uses of the substances involved are not impinged upon.

Meanwhile, the Government has approved the commencement of a required notification process to the EU and it is envisaged that the regulations controlling the various substances will come into effect in late June, at the conclusion of the three month process involved. Such notification is required under the relevant EU Technical Standards Directives, as controls under the Misuse of Drugs Act involve a restriction on trade. For example, some of the products involved can be used in the manufacture of plastics and industrial solvents, and the European Medicines Agency reported in late January that one such product — mephedrone — has the potential to be used in the manufacture of some medicines. While the establishment of a mechanism to fast-track the banning of dangerous substances would have some appeal, this is not envisaged at present as it is seen as vital that all regulatory controls introduced meet all requirements and are fully robust to meet any legal challenges subsequently arising.

Meanwhile, the National Advisory Committee on Drugs has been asked to carry out some research in this area. In addition, the activities of headshops are being closely monitored on an ongoing basis by An Garda Síochána and Revenue's Customs Service with a view to ensuring that no substances that are currently illegal are being sold.

My Department has also been in contact with the Attorney General about a range of possible approaches to the matter and a number of issues arising in that context are being considered at senior level within an inter-departmental framework.

In relation to increasing awareness of the negative effects of consuming psychoactive substances, the HSE, in association with its partners under the Drugs Strategy, are currently finalising a National Drugs Awareness Campaign that will focus on psychoactive substances legally available through headshops. This campaign will be aimed primarily at 15-40 year olds, as well as at parents and service providers. The key message of the campaign will be that “legal does not mean safe” and it will aim to raise awareness of the risks to mental and physical health associated with these substances.

National and local initiatives will be integrated under the campaign, with Drugs Task Forces playing a key role in publicising the information in their respective communities. The upgraded www.drugs.ie website will also be promoted as a primary source of relevant and accurate information, along with utilising existing HSE help/information lines. The HSE is also updating the ‘Facts about Drugs’ booklet and their Parent Information Guide to include information on psychoactive substances. An information booklet for service providers will be available in conjunction with the launch of the campaign in the coming weeks.

In conclusion, I can assure the Deputies that I will continue to work with my Ministerial colleagues in vigorously pursuing all viable approaches to counter the potential threats posed by headshops and “legal highs”.

Question No. 30 answered with Question No. 9.

31. **Deputy Eamon Gilmore** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the position regarding the national drugs strategy; if he will clarify which Minister or Minister of State now has overall responsibility for the operation of the strategy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14273/10]

38. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if he will make a statement detailing the person who will be taking on responsibility for the overall delivery of the national drugs strategy in view of the Taoiseach's decision not to expressly assign any Department. [14063/10]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Pat Carey): I propose to take Questions Nos. 31 and 38 together.

I can confirm to the House that, while the formal processes transferring functions between, and changing the titles of, Departments on foot of the recent announcement by the Taoiseach has yet to be completed, responsibility for the National Drugs Strategy will rest with me, as Minister.

The Government remains fully committed to addressing the drugs problem and my appointment as a Minister — with direct responsibility in this area — will facilitate the implementation of the Strategy in a timely and co-ordinated fashion. Indeed, many at community level have been campaigning for some time that the Minister who is assigned responsibility for the Drugs Strategy should be a member of the Government with a seat at Cabinet.

During my previous period as Minister for State with responsibility for the Drugs Strategy, significant steps forward were made in the drugs area. From my experience on the ground, and from my time as Minister of State, I am very familiar with the ongoing issues in terms of the drugs problem in communities and the initiatives being taken to address them.

I want to acknowledge the excellent work done by my colleague, Minister John Curran, T.D., in driving the finalisation of the Drugs Strategy 2009-2016, the implementation of which is being pursued vigorously across a range of Departments and agencies.

I fully intend to build on this work and to implement a continuous assessment approach to progress the 63 Actions in the Strategy so as to ensure that we achieve the successful outcomes that we all desire.

Question No. 32 answered with Question No. 19.

Questions Nos. 33 and 34 answered with Question No. 15.

Teorainneacha Gaeltachta.

35. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Brian O'Shea** den Aire Gnóthaí Pobail, Comhionannais agus Gaeltachta cén dul chun cinn atá déanta maidir leis an reachtaíocht ar an sainmhíniú nua ar an rud is Gaeltacht ann agus ar teorainneacha na Gaeltachta; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [14282/10]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Pat Carey): Mar atá a fhios ag an Teachta, tá an dréacht-Straitéis 20-bliain don Ghaeilge faoi bhráid an Chomhchoiste um Ghnóthaí Ealaíon, Spóirt, Turasóireachta, Pobail, Tuaithe agus Gaeltachta faoi láthair. Cuimsíonn an dréacht-Straitéis seo forbairt córais pleanála teanga chuimsithigh ag leibhéal an phobail sa Ghaeltacht agus moltar inti go mbeidh stádas na Gaeltachta bunaithe ar chritéir teanga. Nuair a bheidh obair an Chomhchoiste thart agus tuairisc faighte ar ais uaidh, tá súil agam an dréacht-Straitéis, agus í leasaithe más cuí, a thabhairt faoi bhráid an Rialtais le ceadú. Is sa chomhthéacs sin a dhéanfar cinnithe maidir leis an gcineál reachtaíochta atá luaite ag an Teachta.

Charities Regulation.

36. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs

the timeframe for the commencement of the Charities Act 2009; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14315/10]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Pat Carey): The Charities Act, which was signed into law on 28 February 2009, is structured in such a way to allow it to be commenced in whole or in part from different date(s) by way of Ministerial Order(s). As the Deputy will be aware, the Act will, when fully commenced, introduce a comprehensive modern regulatory framework for charities in Ireland for the first time. The Act provides, inter alia, for the establishment of a new Charities Regulatory Authority, which will be responsible for establishing and maintaining a Register of Charities. Any organisation that wishes to operate as a charity within this jurisdiction will have to be on the Register. Only organisations that have been established exclusively for charitable purposes, and which have a public benefit, will be permitted entry onto the Register. The new Authority will also take on the functions of the Office of Commissioners of Charitable Donations and Bequests for Ireland, which is to be dissolved.

The Act further provides that any organisation that holds charitable tax exemptions from the Revenue Commissioners on the day the Register of Charities is introduced will be automatically deemed to be entered onto the Register, and thus such organisations will not have to apply to the new Authority for registration. In co-operation with the Revenue Commissioners, my officials are working to ensure that the information legally required to be published on the Register of Charities will be in place on establishment day. As there are well over 7,000 such organisations, the Deputy will appreciate that there is a considerable body of work to be done in this regard alone.

Another aspect of the implementation process is delivering on the commitment to consult with the charities sector in relation to the type of financial and activity reporting that charities will be required to make to the new Authority. This consultation is to be carried out parallel to, and will most likely be informed by, a broader review of the UK & Ireland Generally Agreed Accounting Principles (GAAP) that is being undertaken by the Accountancy Standards Board at the moment. The Charities Regulation Unit of my Department hosted a highly successful conference on this issue in January 2010 in Dublin Castle.

The majority of the provisions of the Charities Act are contingent upon both the new Authority and the Register of Charities being in place, though, subject to legal advice, some further individual provisions of the Act may be commenced before the bulk of the Act is commenced. Thus far, section 99, which regulates the sale of pre-signed Mass cards, has been commenced. This came into effect from 1 September 2009. It has been the subject of a constitutional challenge, which failed in the High Court, but which, I am given to understand, is to be brought before the Supreme Court. It should also be recognised that I have outlined only some of the elements of the implementation plan for the Act that is being rolled out by my Department to ensure that the essential elements are in place to enable the introduction of the statutory regulatory framework provided for in the Act. In other countries, for example, Scotland, it has taken a number of years after enactment of the legislation for the new regulatory system for charities to be formally introduced and this will be the case in Ireland also.

Departmental Expenditure.

37. **Deputy Kathleen Lynch** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the amount of funding provided by his Department to rural tourism in the past three years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14264/10]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Pat Carey): The Deputy will be aware that primary responsibility for tourism matters rests with my colleague, Ms Mary Hanafin, T.D., Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism. However, my Department does support

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certain complementary actions in the area of rural recreation. For example, my Department has lead responsibility for implementing the National Countryside Recreation Strategy and, in this regard, the following funding has been provided over the last 3 years:

Year	Amount
	€m
2007	1.195
2008	3.440
2009	3.806

In 2010, funding of €4.3m is being provided to continue to support a range of rural recreation activities. In addition, under the previous LEADER Programmes, funding of over €2.76m was provided by the locally-based LEADER Groups under the Rural Tourism measure between January 2007 and March 2008. Under the new round of LEADER funding, which commenced in late 2009, it is anticipated that support of up to €45.4m over the lifetime of the Rural Development Programme will be available through the ‘Encouragement of Tourism Activities’ measure.

Question No. 38 answered with Question No. 31.

National Drugs Strategy.

39. **Deputy Catherine Byrne** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if he will report on the recent ministerial meeting of the British-Irish Council on the Misuse of Drugs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14234/10]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Pat Carey): The most recent Ministerial Meeting of the British-Irish Council (BIC) on the Misuse of Drugs was hosted on 24 February in the Isle of Man by their Minister for Home Affairs, Mr Adrian Earnshaw, MHK. The meeting was chaired by my colleague, Mr John Curran, T.D., then Minister of State with responsibility for the Drugs Strategy. I understand that the primary focus of the meeting related to issues facing BIC Administrations in addressing substance misuse in prisons and they looked at four main areas:

- Supply Reduction;
- Prevention;
- Treatment/Harm Reduction and Rehabilitation Responses; and
- Continuity of Treatment Post-Release.

There was acceptance across all of the Administrations that there needs to be a real focus on preventing the supply of drugs to prisons, but that this needs to go hand in hand with the provision of drug treatment. Various initiatives in regard to supply reduction, and the outcomes arising, were outlined and discussed. There was agreement on the importance of providing a programme of treatment in the prison setting that is of equal standard to that offered in the community. The need to provide a seamless continuum of care from prison to the community was also stressed in view of the fact that those leaving prison can be at risk of overdose in the period immediately following their release.

The issue of new psychoactive substances (so-called “legal highs”) was also discussed at the meeting. Minister Curran outlined the concerns around head shops and the products they sell in Ireland and the approaches being considered in that regard. Other administrations also

outlined their concerns and responses they are pursuing. The UK initiative of December 2009, which involved the classification of a number of substances under their Control of Drugs legislation, was noted. The Administrations agreed on the importance of consulting with the relevant authorities to ensure that any legitimate uses of the substances involved are not impinged upon as a result of the introduction of any regulations. Other standard agenda items were also dealt with and the 2010 Work Programme of the BIC Senior Officials Sectoral Group on the Misuse of Drugs was agreed.

Departmental Expenditure.

40. **Deputy Liz McManus** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the amount of money provided under the dormant accounts fund in the past three years; the amount of money not drawn down by grantees; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14266/10]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Pat Carey): The Dormant Accounts Fund Acts provide for an annual transfer by credit institutions and insurance undertakings of monies in accounts determined to be dormant into the Dormant Accounts Fund (DAF). Since its establishment in May 2003 up to the end of February 2010, the net transfers to the DAF have totalled nearly €327m. The total amount approved by the Dormant Accounts Fund Disbursements Board and by Government to date is €267.8m.

The value of the Fund at the end of February 2010, net of liabilities, was some €41.65m. This excludes the amount of approx. €47.3m currently maintained in a Reserve Account to meet reclaims and to cover expenses. The reserve is currently set at 15% of the total moneys received by the Fund and not yet reclaimed. The balance of Fund to be disbursed on foot of approvals is €44.07m.

Table 1 below sets out a summary of the total disbursements from the DAP for the period 2007-09. Table 2 provides a profile of the Fund showing yearly inflows, reclaims, disbursements etc. from 2003 to 2010. This table is available on my Department's website (www.pobail.ie) and is updated regularly.

Table 1: Summary of disbursements from the Dormant Accounts Fund for the years 2007, 2008 and 2009:

Entity making disbursements	2007	2008	2009
	€	€	€
The former Dormant Accounts Fund Disbursements Board	11,755,948	10,524,631	4,264,446
Dept of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs — Rural Social Scheme	16,000,000	16,000,000	0
Dept of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs — Other measures	5,446,907	9,563,454	7,739,459
Dept of Education and Science	3,155,143	18,771,252	8,403,730
Health Service Executive	3,659,859	13,397,028	8,804,948
Dept of Arts, Sport and Tourism	1,823,473	874,483	1,304,000
Office of the Minister for Children	2,338,500	2,999,978	5,240,455
Dept of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources	900,778	517,259	774,457
Dept of Justice, Equality and Law Reform	251,924	129,960	193,105
Irish Prison Service	178,880	272,660	419,735
Dept of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government	0	0	500,000
	45,511,412	73,050,705	37,644,335

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Table 2: Value of Dormant Accounts Fund at 28 February 2010

Year	Inflows					Gross Inflow of Funds	Outflows			Net Funds
	Banks/ building societies	An Post products	Insurance products	Intestate Estates	Interest earned		Reclaimed by account holders	Disbursed by NTMA	Expenses & Compliance Costs	
2003	105,802,747	90,406,394	0	0	2,778,039	198,987,180	24,002,874	0	148,048	174,836,258
2004	18,387,604	14,642,260	22,994,803	0	3,802,846	59,827,513	21,080,853	14,000,000	1,055,958	198,526,960
2005	13,049,089	19,870,684	7,895,688	0	4,061,302	44,876,763	22,916,079	14,400,000	1,673,497	204,414,147
2006	20,535,464	52,513,242	7,100,575	0	6,375,902	86,525,183	44,736,631	33,250,000	1,608,356	211,344,343
2007	12,531,434	42,658,151	6,704,210	4,400,000	8,787,603	75,081,398	34,082,871	45,511,412	1,881,135	204,950,323
2008	19,644,431	6,239,735	7,149,521	0	7,561,873	40,595,560	19,500,791	73,050,705	1,999,776	150,994,611
2009	25,014,071	11,359,722	5,010,644	0	894,150	42,278,587	18,812,756	37,644,335	1,717,634	135,098,473
2010	0,000,000	0,000,000	42,825	0	60,618	103,443	2,105,505	97,262	0,000,000	—
Totals	214,964,840	237,690,188	56,898,266	4,400,000	34,322,333	548,275,627	187,238,360	217,953,714	10,084,404	132,999,149

	Approved	Decommitted	Net Approved	
	€	€	€	€
Liabilities on the Fund:				
<i>Of which</i>				
1. Reserve for future reclaims by account holders				-47,277,247
2. Disbursements allocated to beneficiary projects by				
(a) Dormant Accounts Fund Disbursement Board	63,082,815	4,117,383	58,965,432	
(b) Government (2006)	76,642,596	1,444,557	75,198,039	
(c) Government (2007)	22,278,213	279,739	21,998,474	
(d) Government (2008)	30,213,774		30,213,774	
(e) Government — Early Childhood Initiative (2006)	10,000,000		10,000,000	
(f) Government — Rural Social Scheme (2004-2008)	64,400,000		64,400,000	
(g) Government — Catch Up Measure 5 new RAPID towns	01,250,000		1,250,000	
<i>Sub-totals</i>	267,867,398	-5,841,679	262,025,719	
3. Remaining funds to be disbursed by NTMA on foot of approvals				-44,072,005
Net Value of Dormant Accounts Fund (uncommitted funds)				41,649,897

Under the Dormant Accounts Act 2001, the NTMA is required to maintain a Reserve Account to meet reclaims from account holders and operational expenses of the agency and the Dormant Accounts Board.

Community Development.

41. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs his plans for the operation and development of the various community-based schemes operated by his Department in respect of the urban and rural communities; his intentions, if any, to expand the scope and scale of such schemes to cater for the need arising from the current economic situation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14202/10]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Pat Carey): As the Deputy will be aware, my Department's mandate includes the promotion, support and development of

communities, both urban and rural, across the country. I can confirm to the Deputy that my Department will seek to continue to support and cater for the needs of these communities in the current economic situation through the administration and operation of its various community-based schemes. As the Deputy will know, details in relation to these schemes, and other schemes and programmes operated by my Department, can be accessed on my Department's website at www.pobail.ie. Given the ongoing pressure on public funds, I do not envisage any significant expansion of the relevant programmes in the foreseeable future. I can, however, assure the Deputy that it will continue to be a primary concern to make every effort to ensure that the daily front-line services provided with funding from my Department are protected, especially those focused on the needs of the most socially deprived communities.

Question No. 42 answered with Question No. 15.

Question No. 43 answered with Question No. 12.

Question No. 44 answered with Question No. 29.

Question No. 45 answered with Question No. 15.

Question No. 46 answered with Question No. 19.

Question No. 47 answered with Question No. 7.

Na hOileáin.

48. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Dinny McGinley** den Aire Gnóthaí Pobail, Comhionannais agus Gaeltachta an bhfuil aon iarratas faighte ina Roinn maidir le soilse poiblí a chur ar fáil ar na céanna ar na hOileáin seo, Inis Oirthir, Gabhla, an tOileán Rua, Inis Meáin, Oileán Uaighe agus Inis Caorach, cad é costas measta na soilse agus an gcuirfidh sé an t-airgead ar fáil leis na soilse a thógáil, agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina dtaobh. [14061/10]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Pat Carey): Tá iarratas faighte ag mo Roinn le gairid ó Ancaire, Comharchumann na nOileán Beag i gContae Dhún na nGall, chun deontas a cheadú i gcomhar soilse poiblí a chur ar fáil ar na céanna atá luaite ag an Teachta. Tá costas measta de €84,500 tugtha i leith na hoibre seo. Déanfar an t-iarratas seo a mheas i gcomhthéacs an tsoláthair airgid atá ar fáil ag mo Roinn i gcomhar feabhsúcháin den chineál seo in 2010, ag tógáil san áireamh geallúintí agus tosaíochtaí atá ar láimh cheana.

National Drugs Strategy.

49. **Deputy Catherine Byrne** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs his views on the role of peer groups and families in tackling addiction; if the pilot short-stay respite programme for families of drug users which is outlined in the new national drugs strategy has commenced; the way this will operate in communities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14235/10]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Pat Carey): I have long been of the view that families and peer groups can play a vital role in tackling drug addiction. Indeed, this is generally accepted and there is an increasing focus on family involvement, in particular, under the National Drugs Strategy. Meanwhile, much of the focus of the prevention pillar is underpinned by a realisation of the need to build the self-esteem of young people to enable them to cope with negative peer pressures and to be positive influences in their peer groups.

[Deputy Pat Carey.]

The 2007 Report of the National Advisory Committee on Drugs — “*The Experiences of Families Seeking Support in Coping with Heroin Use*” — outlined the typical path of such families, moving from a lack of knowledge and coping alone, through accessing support, re-building families and supporting the recovery of the problem drug user.

The support of stable families is recognised as being hugely influential in regard to making progress towards recovery. Indeed, organisations involved in drug rehabilitation increasingly have family programmes included as part of the recovery plan for individual clients. The importance placed on family involvement is also illustrated by the on-going support afforded to the Family Support Network by the Office of the Minister for Drugs. The Network carries out very important work in supporting families and encouraging their involvement in the recovery process.

Action 32 of the National Drugs Strategy 2009-2016 envisages the development of a comprehensive integrated national treatment and rehabilitation service. This will incorporate the implementation of the recommendations of the Report of the Working Group on Drugs Rehabilitation, which calls for the development of a pilot short-stay respite programme for families of drug users.

The HSE holds the lead role in relation to the implementation of these recommendations and it also chairs the National Drugs Rehabilitation Implementation Committee. It is envisaged that the development of a pilot short-stay respite programme for families of drug users will be addressed in that context over the period of the National Drugs Strategy.

EU Directives.

50. **Deputy Joe Costello** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment when and the way the Services Directive will be transposed into Irish law; if the directive will apply to casual trading which is licensed by the local authorities here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14305/10]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): The Regulations to bring the Services Directive [Directive 2006/123/EC] into law under the European Communities Acts are well advanced. My Department is working with the Office of Parliamentary Counsel with a view to completing the legislation as soon as possible.

The regulation of casual trading by local authorities under the Casual Trading Act, 1995 is an “authorisation scheme” under the terms of the Directive. The Directive, therefore, covers casual trading.

International Exhibitions.

51. **Deputy Noel Ahern** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Innovation if he will clarify the position in relation to the Shanghai International Exhibition 2010; the investment, size and purpose of the pavilion; if it is run by State agencies or if it is leased out to commercial interests; the strategy for following up thereafter in order to capitalise on our investment from a tourism, industrial and education point of view; the level of the Irish agencies that are operating there; if marketing is outsourced; if it is intended to recruit local staff with the knowledge of the Irish scene in the subsequent marketing and sales campaign; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14390/10]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): The Department of An Taoiseach is responsible for coordinating the arrangements in relation to all aspects of our participation in Shanghai. My Department and the development agencies have engaged with the Department of An Taoiseach to ensure that any opportunities for any potential trade or investment benefits for Ireland, which could flow from our involvement in the Expo, will, of course, be pursued.

Employment Support Services.

52. **Deputy Simon Coveney** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment further to Parliamentary Question No. 39 of 4 March 2010, when a reply will issue. [14429/10]

53. **Deputy Simon Coveney** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment further to Parliamentary Question No. 40 of 4 March 2010, when a reply will issue. [14430/10]

54. **Deputy Simon Coveney** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment further to Parliamentary Question No. 41 of 4 March 2010, when a reply will issue. [14431/10]

55. **Deputy Simon Coveney** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment further to Parliamentary Question No. 42 of 4 March 2010, when a reply will issue. [14432/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Dara Calleary): I propose to take Questions Nos. 52 to 55, inclusive, together.

The information requested by the Deputy is set out in the following tables. The provision of data on a monthly basis is not readily available so is therefore set out on a yearly basis for all tables. Furthermore, for certain tables information is readily available on a regional basis only.

Tables 1 to 5 set out the number of places in relevant placement schemes operated by FÁS in Cork from 2005 to 2009 as well as the number of places available in 2010. Table 6 sets out the number of available Community Employment places over the same timescale. Table 7 sets out the number of FÁS training places available in Cork from 2005 to 2010 and Table 8 provides the current estimated waiting times by course type. Table 9 sets out the number of training places provided under the Technical Employment Support Grant (TESG). TESG funding is offered to clients when courses not delivered by FÁS are deemed appropriate.

Certain cohorts of the unemployed, including people who are under 35 years of age, are accorded priority access to FÁS training supports, with at least 30% of training places reserved for those aged under 25 years. Table 10 sets out the types of training courses available in the years 2005 to 2010.

Table 1

Year	Cumulative Client Number
2005	29
2006	26
2007	19
2008	17
2009	16
2010	15 (YTD)

Note: The Employment Support Scheme is being phased out gradually to be wholly replaced by the Wage Subsidy Scheme (See Table 2).

[Deputy Dara Calleary.]

Table 2: Wage Subsidy Scheme

Southwest Regional Total

Year	Cumulative Client Number
2005	8
2006	25
2007	55
2008	88
2009	102
2010	99 (YTD)

Table 3: Work Placement Programme — Southwest Regional Total

Year	WPP1 — (Graduates)	WPP2 (Non-Graduates)
2009	20	5
2010 (YTD)	23	13

Table 4: Workplace (5-7 week work experience programme for jobseekers)

Year	Cumulative Client Number
2005	14
2006	9
2007	3
2008	3
2009	7
2010	13 (YTD)

Table 5: Job Initiative Scheme available places

Year	City	County	Total
2005	128	0	128
2006	114	0	114
2007	101	0	101
2008	89	0	89
2009	82	0	82
2010	81	0	81

Note: Following changes introduced to the Job Initiative Scheme by the Minister for Enterprise Trade and Employment in late 2004, there is currently no recruitment onto the scheme while existing participants will have their contracts renewed.

Table 6: Community Employment Scheme available places

Year	City	County	Total
2005	1,227	926	2,153
2006	1,177	888	2,065
2007	1,188	896	2,085
2008	1,186	895	2,081
2009	1,201	906	2,107
2010	1,195	904	2,099

Table 7: FÁS Training Places in Cork

Year	Available Capacity
2005	1,206
2006	861
2007	1,229
2008	2,297
2009	1,089
2010	3,914

Table 8: Waiting times for training courses in Cork as at the end of February 2010

Training Course Type	Waiting Time					<i>Total</i>
	0-4 months	5-8 months	9-12 months	13-17 months	18+ months	
Office/Administration	244	39	25	8	2	318
Computer Hardware/Networks/Programming	178	77	15	1		271
Computer Applications	548	322	301	23	5	1,199
Construction Related	499	79	16	3		597
Engineering Related	383	226	112	50	6	777
Electronics/Industrial Servicing	28	8	3	1		40
Sales/Marketing	45	4			1	50
Transport/Warehousing/Distribution	201	143	69	2		415
Health/Beauty/Child Care/Welfare	322	208	111	28	8	677
Pre Employment/Job Clubs/Return to Work	292	101	39	15	4	451
Self Employment/Enterprise	107	11	24			142
Animal/Land/Marine	87	75	69	2		233
Sports/Leisure	111	6	3	32	24	176
Other	129	22	24	2	2	179
<i>Total</i>	3,174	1,321	811	167	52	5,525

[Deputy Dara Calleary.]

Table 9: FÁS Cork — Technical Employment Support Grant (TESG)

Year	Places Provided
2005	670
2006	402
2007	522
2008	560
2009	1,660
2010	329 (YTD)

Table 10

Course Type	Year					
	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Office/Administration	X	X	X	X	X	X
Computer Hardware/Networks/Programming	X	X	X	X	X	X
Computer Applications	X	X	X	X	X	X
Construction Related	X	X	X	X	X	X
Engineering Related	X	X	X	X	X	X
Electronics/Industrial Servicing	X	X	X	X	X	X
Sales/Marketing	X	X	X	X	X	X
Transport/Warehousing/Distribution	X			X	X	X
Health/Beauty/Child Care/Welfare	X	X	X	X	X	X
Pre Employment/Job Clubs/Return to Work	X	X	X	X	X	X
Self Employment/Enterprise	X		X		X	X
Animal/Land/Marine			X	X		X
Sports/Leisure	X	X	X	X	X	X
Other	X	X	X	X	X	X

FÁS Training Programmes.

56. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the number of training courses provided directly by FÁS or sourced by FÁS for each year from 2003 to 2009; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14437/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Dara Calleary): The information requested is being collated and will be passed to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Community Employment Schemes.

57. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the number of community employment scheme places supported by FÁS for each year from 2003 to 2009; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14438/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Dara Calleary): The information requested by the Deputy is set out in the table.

Year	Total
2009	23,512
2008	22,896
2007	22,992
2006	22,281
2005	22,650
2004	22,194
2003	19,848

Departmental Expenditure.

58. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the Exchequer contribution to FÁS for each year from 2003 to 2009; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14439/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Dara Calleary): The information requested by the Deputy is set out in the table:

Year	Exchequer	National Training Fund	Total
	€ millions	€ millions	€ millions
2003	594.61	222.05	816.66
2004	553.21	264.67	817.88
2005	603.13	300.07	903.20
2006	655.54	329.32	984.86
2007	695.02	363.39	1,058.41
2008	715.57	364.98	1,080.55
2009	670.87	342.52	1,013.39

FÁS Training Programmes.

59. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the number of unemployed persons interviewed by FÁS for each year from 2003 to 2009; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14440/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Dara Calleary): The information requested by the Deputy is set out in the table. Prior to 2007, the employment status of all FÁS clients was not recorded. The data for the years 2003 to 2006 set out the total number of clients interviewed by FÁS, including the employed. The data provided in respect of the years 2007 to 2009 show the total number of unemployed persons interviewed in each year.

Year	Persons interviewed By FÁS
2003	97,200
2004	90,700
2005	84,500
2006	78,600

[Deputy Dara Calleary.]

Year	Persons interviewed By FÁS
2007	127,300
2008	151,100
2009	204,000

EU Funding.

60. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance if, in view of the current economic climate, he will prepare an updated National Strategic Reference Framework for Ireland, setting out the policy context within which the funding available to Ireland under the Regional Competitiveness and Employment Objective over the 2007 to 2013 period through the European Regional Development Fund and the European Social Fund may be applied; the amount that will accrue to Ireland through the ERDF and ESF funds during the years 2010, 2011, 2012 and 2013; the amount of this funding that has already been allocated; if any of these funds remain to be allocated or will be re-allocated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14306/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): Ireland's National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF) was approved by the European Commission in July 2007. The document, in accordance with EU Regulations governing EU Structural Funds, sets out the strategic direction for the deployment of the EU Structural Funds (€750m) allocated to Ireland over the 2007-13 period under the Regional Competitiveness and Employment (RCE) Objective through the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the European Social Fund (ESF).

The strategy is being implemented through three operational programmes; a national Human Capital Investment ESF OP managed by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Innovation and two regional ERDF OPs managed by the Border, Midland and Western and Southern and Eastern and Regional Assemblies.

The NSRF is strategic in nature with sufficient flexibility in the priorities identified. Therefore, it is not proposed to update the document. However, as provided for the EU Regulations, the BMW OP and the HCI OP were renegotiated with the EU Commission due to the changed socio-economic circumstances. The amendments, consistent with the NSRF, will ensure that the important objectives are met despite the changed socio-economic and budgetary circumstances and that Ireland will drawdown its full EU Structural Funds allocation over the 2007-13 period.

The annual allocations are set out in the table 1 below and reflect the full amount of structural funds available to Ireland over the 2007-2013 programming period. Table 2 below sets out the same information broken down by region.

A further €151m has been allocated under ERDF for smaller Territorial Co-operation Operational Programmes, including the PEACE III Programme and the INTERREG Programmes for Ireland/Northern Ireland/Scotland and Ireland/Wales.

Table 1 — Ireland's indicative financial allocation for NSRF

	Total	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
	€	€	€	€	€	€	€	€
Total ERDF	375,362,372	95,791,745	80,123,038	63,789,267	46,770,097	29,044,643	29,625,536	30,218,046
Total ESF	375,362,370	95,791,744	80,123,038	63,789,267	46,770,097	29,044,642	29,625,536	30,218,046
Total all Funds — NSRF 2007-2013	750,724,742	191,583,489	160,246,076	127,578,534	93,540,194	58,089,285	59,251,072	60,436,092

Table 2 — Ireland's indicative financial allocation for NSRF — regional breakdown

Region	Fund	Total	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
		€	€	€	€	€	€	€	€
Southern & Eastern	ERDF	146,603,534	19,719,928	20,114,327	20,516,613	20,926,946	21,345,484	21,772,394	22,207,842
Border, Midlands & Western	ERDF	228,758,838	76,071,817	60,008,711	43,272,654	25,843,151	7,699,159	7,853,142	8,010,204
Total ERDF		375,362,372	95,791,745	80,123,038	63,789,267	46,770,097	29,044,643	29,625,536	30,218,046
Southern & Eastern	ESF	146,603,534	19,719,928	20,114,327	20,516,613	20,926,946	21,345,484	21,772,394	22,207,842
Border, Midlands & Western	ESF	228,758,838	76,071,817	60,008,711	43,272,654	25,843,151	7,699,159	7,853,142	8,010,204
Total ESF		375,362,370	95,791,744	80,123,038	63,789,267	46,770,097	29,044,642	29,625,536	30,218,046
Total all Funds — NSRF 2007-2013		750,724,742	191,583,489	160,246,076	127,578,534	93,540,194	58,089,285	59,251,072	60,436,092

Industrial Relations.

61. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghail** asked the Minister for Finance if he will respond to correspondence (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14317/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): I understand that there is no correspondence with me on this specific matter but that the details supplied relate to the difficulties arising for the transaction of business with public service offices during the programme of industrial action undertaken by public service unions. The industrial action is in response to the pay reductions imposed by the Government on public servants with effect from 1 January last as part of the Government's budgetary strategy to bring the public finances under control.

Any industrial action, whatever form it takes, is regrettable, in particular if it has any impact on service delivery to the public. In that regard, under a process of engagement and discussion between public service employers and the Public Services Committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, facilitated by the Labour Relations Commission, a draft agreement has been reached between the parties which provides for the settlement of the dispute in the public service.

The Labour Relations Commission has called upon unions in the public service to suspend their programme of industrial action pending the balloting of their members on the draft agreement. I welcome this call and would urge the public service unions to suspend their industrial action to enable normal services to be resumed in public offices as quickly as possible.

Tribunals of Inquiry.

62. **Deputy P. J. Sheehan** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide updated figures for the cost of a Dáil Inquiry and six tribunals (details supplied); the figures provided by the cost comparison report prepared by his Department, setting out the cost to date and time taken to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14323/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): Based on bi-monthly reports made to the Department of Finance by the Departments with responsibility for the individual tribunals, up to end-February 2010 the cumulative cost of the six requested tribunals as listed below was €217.31 million, of which €44.41 million comprised administration and €172.9 million derived from legal costs. The legal costs figures include €79.19 million for third-party legal costs that are already paid. Further third party legal costs have yet to be presented and taxed.

	Admin Costs	State Legal Costs	3rd Party Legal Costs	Total Costs
	€m	€m	€m	€m
Beef Tribunal of Inquiry to enquire into allegations of improper practices within the beef industry and the abuse of the EU export credit refund scheme (established May 1991; Report presented to Relevant Minister, July 1994)	5.320	4.630	17.283	27.233
Finlay Tribunal of Inquiry into the Blood Transfusion Service Board (established October 1996: Report presented to Relevant Minister, March 1997)	0.500	0.700	3.500	4.700
Lindsay Tribunal of Inquiry into the Infection with HIV and Hepatitis C of Persons with Haemophilia and Related Matters (established September 1999: Report presented to Relevant Minister, September 2002)	3.133	4.350	39.166	46.649
McCracken Tribunal of Inquiry into the Dunne's payments to politicians (established February 1997: Report presented to Relevant Minister, August 1997)	0.100	0.860	5.600	6.560

	Admin Costs	State Legal Costs	3rd Party Legal Costs	Total Costs
	€m	€m	€m	€m
Moriarty Tribunal of Inquiry into Payments to Messrs. Haughey and Lowry (established September 1997 — ongoing)	7.888	31.194	2.564	41.646
Mahon Tribunal of Inquiry into Certain Planning matters and Payments (established November 1997 — ongoing)	27.467	51.975	11.077	90.519
Total	44.408	93.709	79.19	217.307

In relation to the Dáil Inquiry (DIRT Inquiry), I am informed by the Houses of the Oireachtas Service that the cost of that Inquiry to the Service was €1.5 million (as per early 2001). In addition, I am informed by the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General that the costs incurred by the Comptroller and Auditor General's Office on the DIRT Inquiry were €1.096 million.

Tax Collection.

63. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for Finance the amount of revenue that would be collected from a universal social contribution using a set of criteria (details supplied) in tabular form; the revenue which would be generated from the social contribution from different categories of persons; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14332/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): As the Deputy will be aware, I announced in the Budget that, with a view to restoring balance in the income tax system, to simplify it, to make it fairer and more broadly based, I intended to introduce a new system of just two charges on income viz. a new universal social contribution to replace employee PRSI, the Health Levy and the Income Levy. This will be paid by everyone at a low rate on a wide base as a collective contribution to public services. Income Tax will apply on a progressive basis to those with higher incomes reflecting their capacity to make a greater contribution.

The position is that the possible parameters of such a system are under active examination by my Department in consultation with the Department of Social Protection, the Revenue Commissioners and other Departments concerned. A steering group and a variety of working groups have been established to carry out the necessary research. As the Deputy may be aware the combined yield from the income levy, the health levy and employee and self-employed PRSI is projected to be of the order of €5.8 billion in 2010 on the basis of current arrangements. The extensive work currently underway to examine restructuring the system on the lines indicated is very significant, represents a fundamental review of the system and involves very detailed analysis and interrogation of the existing three data sets, drawing from the health levy, income levy and PRSI.

Accordingly, in my view it would be unhelpful to the overall process at this stage to divert the limited resources available into carrying out the detailed analysis requested by the Deputy. Notwithstanding this, I would point out to the Deputy my contribution to the Committee Stage of the Finance Bill 2010 on this matter and that I remain committed to publishing a discussion paper in due course which will include much of the analysis requested.

Tax Code.

64. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Finance his views on allowing for a VAT refund or disregard for works carried out on homes to adapt them to make them more accessible for disabled persons in the same way as a VAT refund is available on adaption works

[Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh.]

carried out on vehicles for disabled users; and if not; if he will give the matter consideration. [14339/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that the Value Added Tax (Refund of Tax) (No 15) Order 1981 provides for the refund of VAT on qualifying goods that are purchased for the exclusive use of disabled persons suffering a specified degree of disablement. “Qualifying goods” are goods which are aids or appliances, including parts and accessories, specially constructed or adapted for use by a disabled person and includes goods which, although not so specially constructed or adapted, are of such a kind as might reasonably be treated as so constructed or adapted having regard to a particular disablement of that person.

The provisions of the Order extend to works carried out on homes to adapt them to make them more accessible for disabled persons. The provisions do not apply to the actual construction of a home but would apply, for example, to certain alterations or adaptations which would be necessary to meet the particular needs of the disabled person.

Applications under the Refund Order should be made on Form VAT 61A and submitted to the Central Repayments Office in Monaghan.

Financial Services Regulation.

65. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for Finance the steps he will take to resolve the difficulties being experienced by a group (details supplied) that includes a significant number of citizens of this State; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14356/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): As the Deputy will be aware matters relating to a Society registered in another jurisdiction are the exclusive responsibility of the relevant authorities in that jurisdiction.

National Solidarity Bond.

66. **Deputy Noel Ahern** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the National Solidarity Bond announced in Budget 2010; the details of same; the position regarding same; and the timescale for its implementation. [14392/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): I announced in Budget 2010 that the Government intended to introduce a National Solidarity Bond.

This bond will effectively be a new form of our state savings products which are aimed at the retail investor. We already have savings bonds and savings certificates, which are three and five and a half year investment products managed by the National Treasury Management Agency. The new bond will be a longer-term product which will be attractive to people who wish to invest for up to 10 years. Where an investor wishes to encash their investment before the final maturity date of 10 years they will be able to do so.

The structure is quite innovative — there will be an annual interest payment and a final redemption bonus payable. The final investment bonus will be payable to investors who encash their bonds after five, seven or ten years.

Legislative provisions relating to the introduction of the National Solidarity Bond were included in the Finance Bill which has now completed all stages in the Oireachtas and is scheduled to be signed by the President in the coming days. I expect that the bonds will be available for purchase in all Post Offices before the end of the month and information will also be available by telephone and on the internet.

Insurance Industry.

67. **Deputy Noel Ahern** asked the Minister for Finance the position regarding house insurance; if there is any legislation or procedure with insurance companies regarding offering insurance, any equivalent or declined cases scheme as operated in the motor trade; the position regarding a person who cannot obtain house insurance and is exposed to fire, flood or other problems; if legislation to cover such cases is being considered; or if he can offer insurance in view of the fact that the privately owned industry has refused to do so; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14393/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): The Financial Regulator has advised me that the offering of house insurance by insurance companies is a commercial matter based on the assessment an insurer will make of the risks involved. It has no role in relation to issues of pricing or the scope of cover provided by insurance companies. I have also been informed that there is no equivalent for house insurance to the declined cases scheme as operated in the motor trade. I understand that this is because motor insurance is compulsory whereas house insurance is not.

I have no plans at this stage to introduce legislation to require insurance companies to cover such people, as there is a possibility that such a proposal could undermine the existing insurance model by forcing companies to take on risks which they cannot afford. The probable outcome of this is that either such firms would leave the market, or they would quite likely price high risk business in such a prohibitively expensive fashion, that it would quickly undermine the purpose of the legislation and would result in a considerable increase in overall household and business insurance costs. The State is not in a position to provide household insurance to people unable to obtain cover in the private market, as there is no legislative basis for doing so. However, following the recent flooding and other weather events, the Government will keep the matter under review.

Pension Provisions.

68. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Finance, further to Parliamentary Question No. 165 of 23 March 2010, if he will make a statement detailing the respective sets of assumptions and reference periods referred to by him in his reply on which the very different public pension spending projections contained in the national pensions framework and the OECD Economic Survey: Ireland 2009 were based. [14403/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): As noted in the OECD Economic Survey: Ireland 2009, the projections on pensions are sourced from the joint Economic Policy Committee-European Commission Ageing Report on economic and budgetary projections for the EU-27 member states. The Ageing Report projections run to 2060 and national projections to 2050. The Ageing Report assumptions differ somewhat from national assumptions and are the reason for the difference in projections.

The Ageing Report's economic assumptions were finalised before the start of economic crisis in early 2008. In contrast, our national projections recognise the considerable fall-off in the starting economic position since then and its knock-on effects on the GDP level in the long run. The Ageing Report is based on harmonised EU population projections while national pension projections are based on CSO population projections. There are also slight differences in the long-run economic assumptions used by both as the Ageing Report is based on an EU-wide set of convergence criteria. Both sets of projections tell the same story of increasing pressure on pensions in the long run from an ageing population. The recent wide-ranging reforms announced in the National Pensions Framework were taken in this context.

Tax Collection.

69. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Finance, further to Parliamentary Question No. 200 of 16 February 2010, if the computer difficulties have now been resolved; if he will provide an explanation for the ongoing delay; the number of outstanding claims for mortgage interest relief for top-up mortgages; the average waiting time per customer and the longest waiting time of any customer. [14404/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): This is a matter for the Revenue Commissioners. I am informed by Revenue that the necessary internal computer changes have recently been completed. Some 2,700 taxpayers have provided additional information required of them by Revenue in relation to top up mortgages. Each case requires an individual review to confirm entitlement to mortgage interest relief in the light of the information provided. Some 550 reviews have been completed to date. Where entitlement to mortgage interest relief is confirmed, arrangements are in place to have any arrears due paid directly to taxpayers. I am advised by Revenue that details of the average waiting time and the longest waiting time of any customer are not available but Revenue has confirmed it is focused on completing the remaining reviews as quickly as possible.

Humanitarian Assistance Scheme.

70. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Finance, further to Parliamentary Question No. 116 of 10 March 2010, if he will amend the terms of the scheme to allow the community welfare officer to provide funds towards the cost of permanent relocation of the family home in the specific circumstances in which there is a significant risk of future flooding of the property; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14406/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): As stated in my response to PQ 166 of 10 March 2010 and PQ previous responses, I have no plans to introduce a grant for home relocation. Consideration to amending the terms of the Humanitarian Assistance Scheme is a matter for my colleague the Minister for Social and Family Affairs.

Tax Yield.

71. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Finance the revenue accruing to the State from VAT in each of the past five years with a breakdown by the various rates of VAT. [14412/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that the estimated net yield of VAT for the years 2005 to 2009 and the estimated breakdown in respect of the yields from the reduced VAT rate and the standard VAT rates are as set out in the following table.

Net VAT Yield 2005 to 2009

	Reduced VAT Rate	Standard VAT Rate	Total
	€m	€m	€m
2005	5,108	7,017	12,125
2006	5,914	7,537	13,451
2007	6,415	8,104	14,519
2008	5,319	8,113	13,432
2009	3,690	6,948	10,638

The figures for 2009 are provisional and subject to revision. Due to the nature of VAT returns, precise figures for the breakdown of VAT receipts by tax rate are not available and consequently the figures provided are estimates.

Mortgage Arrears.

72. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Finance if he will reply to a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14423/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): As the Deputy is aware, on 25th February 2010, I informed the Government of my proposals regarding expanding the membership of the Interdepartmental Mortgage Arrears Group, under the Chairmanship of Mr. Hugh Cooney who is an insolvency accountant. The revamped Group has commenced its work, having met twice since being established, and has finalised its Terms of Reference which I have approved and incorporated into the supplementary documentation for my Statement on Banking which I delivered to this House on 30 March 2010. In general, the terms of reference reflect the commitments made by the Government both in the Renewed Programme for Government and in subsequent Government decisions relating to the issues of mortgage arrears and personal debt.

I understand that the Group will focus initially on exploring the feasibility of a range of possible options for improving the level of mortgage support to homeowners in difficulty. Proposals will be based on factual information gathered by the Group and will take into account the findings of existing reports and mortgage support schemes in operation in other jurisdictions. I expect that these recommendations will be made to me on a rolling basis as the Group progresses with its findings and that a final report on this phase of the review will be ready by end June 2010. The Group will then continue to address the issues of personal debt with regard to the outcome of the ongoing deliberations by the Law Reform Commission on personal debt.

State Properties.

73. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Finance the reason for the delay in the Office of Public Works deciding on an alternative use of a premises (details supplied) in Dublin 11; if in view of the urgency of this matter, he will expedite this decision. [14447/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Deputy Martin Mansergh): The Office of Public Works is considering a range of options with a view to the optimum usage of the premises in question, and a final decision is yet to be made in this regard. The Deputy will be advised further on this matter when a decision is made.

Departmental Reviews.

74. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for Finance the number and subject of and value of programmes considered for value for money reviews completed in each of the past three years; the number that were completed on time; the value of savings identified in these reports; and the extent to which the savings have been implemented. [14468/10]

75. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for Finance the value for money reviews planned for 2010; the subject matter and the value of the programmes involved and the planned completion date of each. [14469/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 74 and 75 together. 2006-2008 Round of Reviews

[Deputy Brian Lenihan.]

The Value for Money and Policy Review process was launched in 2006, replacing the old Expenditure Review Initiative (ERI). In total 65 Reviews were completed during the 2006-2008 Round of Reviews. 32 reviews were not completed under the round and were carried forward into the new round of VFM reviews for 2009-2011. 19 of these 'carryover' reviews have been completed or are near completion (to February 2010). 2009-2011 Round of Reviews

In October 2008 the Government agreed to undertake a new round of Value for Money and Policy Reviews covering the three year period 2009-2011. Building on the experience from the 2006-2008 round of reviews and also taking account of the OECD's recommendations in their report on the Irish Public Service, a number of improvements were made to the process. The key changes are as follows:

- there is a particular focus on four big spending sectors — Health, Education, Social Welfare and Justice;
- the process is more independent, including the appointment of independent Chairpersons to oversee each review and greater Department of Finance involvement in individual reviews;
- topics for review are linked to the high-level objectives in the Annual Output Statement for individual Departments;
- review topics are selected annually to give Government more flexibility to target reviews each year at areas where it is believed they can add most value; and
- completed reviews are to continue to be made available to the relevant Select Oireachtas Committee and laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas.

In December 2008 the Government agreed a list of 12 topics to be reviewed by 12 individual Departments in 2009 under the new arrangements for the Value for Money and Policy Review initiative. The latest position on these 2009 reviews is included at Appendix 1. With regard to reviews planned for 2010, the Department of Finance is currently finalising, with individual Departments/Offices, a list of specific topics for review in 2010 under the Value for Money and Policy Review Initiative. Once this list of topics is finalised, the Minister for Finance will bring forward the list to Government for their agreement.

The latest analysis by the Central Expenditure Evaluation Unit on the impact of the Value for Money Reviews and the savings involved was carried out in December 2009 on the 41 Value for Money Reviews that have been completed since 1 August 2007. All of these reviews were part of the 2006-2008 round of VFM reviews. A full list of these reviews and a summary of their impacts are set out at Appendix 2.

Appendix 1 — Topics for review in 2009

Department/Office	Review topic	Progress to date
Education & Science	School Transport	The report is close to finalisation pending some minor re-drafting.
Health & Children*	Disability Services	Review is at data collection and fieldwork stage.
Justice, Equality & Law Reform	Asylum Seekers Accommodation	Review is completed and awaiting sign-off.
Social & Family Affairs	Child Support	At drafting stage
Agriculture, Fisheries & Food	Afforestation programme	Review postponed following announcement of three forestry policy reviews on foot of commitment in revised Programme for Government.
Arts, Sport & Tourism	Tourism Product Development	Review is at data collection and analysis stage.
Communication, Energy & Natural Resources	Greener Homes	Steering Committee has met on 8 occasions and review is close to sign-off.
Community, Rural & Gaeltacht Affairs	Rural Social Scheme	Terms of Reference agreed and proceeding to data collection stage.
Defence#	Reserve Defence Force	At Terms of Reference Stage
Enterprise, Trade & Employment	Inspection activity by the National Employment Rights Authority and the Health and Safety Authority	Not commenced
Environment, Heritage & Local Government	Water Services Investment Programme	At drafting stage
Transport	Review of Regional Airport Expenditure	At drafting stage

*Department of Health and Children is also carrying out a VFM review in 2009 of the Economic Cost and Charges associated with Private and Semi-Private Treatment Services in Public Hospitals.

#Following on from discussions at a meeting of the Special Group on Public Service Numbers and Expenditure Programmes in early 2009, the Department of Defence proposed a change to their 2009 review topic. It was agreed to reschedule a review of the Reserve Defence Forces as the Defence 2009 review topic on the basis that such a review was more likely to generate savings than the original agreed review of Training of General Service Recruits following the suspension of recruitment to the Defence Forces since late 2008.

Appendix 2 — Reviews completed since 1 August 2007

Department	Title	Date Completed	Summary of Review Impacts
Agriculture, Fisheries & Food	Farm Waste Management	1/11/2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This scheme is currently suspended having been closed to new applicants in December 2006. • The existing budget for 2010-11 period is based on outstanding commitments under the scheme. • Budget for 2010 is €245m and for 2011 is €123m. • No administrative savings have been possible to date due to ongoing processing of payments made under the Scheme.
	FIRM (Food Research & Development Grants)	5/3/2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding for FIRM in 2007 was €8.38m, in 2008 was €5.0m and for 2009 is projected to be €6.7m. • 2009 funding covers existing approvals only and there will be no new calls for eligible projects to be considered for aid. • The review found that FIRM is managed in an efficient manner, with total management costs at 4.3% of total expenditure. • The review made some recommendations to improve the effectiveness of the programme — capturing impact of funded research, benchmarking against similar international programmes and more emphasis on disseminating research outputs.
	Dairy Hygiene Scheme	8/4/2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The scheme was part of the 2000-2006 NDP operational programme which terminated at end 2006. • Funding in 2009 is for outstanding grant claims. • The review acknowledged general effectiveness of the 2000-06 scheme, but identified a number of factors to be considered in the context of any revised scheme, which have been taken into account when adopting the Farm Improvement Scheme in the context of the 2007-2013 Rural Development Programme.
	Marketing and Processing Scheme	28/10/2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apart from current budgetary considerations, State aid approval for this scheme has expired in terms of considering new projects to grant aid. • Resources freed up in the absence of new calls for proposals have been redirected to assist with two other research measures. • Funding provided in 2009 (and up to 2012) relates to maturing projects in the beef, sheep and dairy processing sectors totalling €150m

Appendix 2 — Reviews completed since 1 August 2007 — *continued*

Department	Title	Date Completed	Summary of Review Impacts
	Bovine TB Scheme	1/12/2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The expenditure for this scheme has been reduced in line with reductions in the incidences of disease occurrence. • By highlighting the high cost of administration arising from the large number of local offices, the review facilitated a review of these offices and a decision on the rationalisation process is currently underway. • The recommendation to rationalise field visits/reactor collection service has led to savings of approx 20% (€350k) in T&S since March 2009 (not including 25% reduction in rates). • Transferring responsibility for collection of disease levies from ERAD resulted in small saving on staff costs.
	Bovine Animal Identification and Traceability System	3/6/2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recommendations in respect of Bovine Passports and Bovine Database Compliance Certificates are well progressed and financial benefits will accrue in 2010, with the latter expected to generate €300k in full year savings. • The other recommendations are being progressed and in the meantime the Division has reduced its staff complement by 3 CO's.
	Installation Aid Scheme	19/6/2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scheme currently suspended as part of decisions in context of 2009 Budget. The preliminary findings of the review did form part of this decision making process. • Due to reduced administrative requirements of the Scheme in 2009, admin staff have been reduced by 1 EO and 1 CO.
Arts, Sport & Tourism	Local Authority Swimming Pool Programme	29/9/2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Due to budgetary constraints no new round of this programme has been launched, but the report recommendations will be used to assist in formulating future policy in the area and will be incorporated in any new programme. • A database was established in mid-2007 to collect data from Local Authorities on pool usage and numbers of primary school children receiving water safety and swim tuition. This allows DAST to aggregate and analyse data to provide details on the impact of grant aid in the area.
	Irish Film Board	13/10/2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The review recommendations relate to agreeing targets, including timeframes for their delivery and performance indicators, with DAST and do not have any impact on the operation of the Irish Film Board or its activities. • The IFB have drawn up a strategy and consequent business plans.

Appendix 2 — Reviews completed since 1 August 2007 — *continued*

Department	Title	Date Completed	Summary of Review Impacts
	Irish Sports Council 2000-2006	25/2/2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ISC now submit a detailed quarterly report in advance of liaison meetings with DAST arising from a recommendation in the review. • ISC are now monitoring best practice internationally. • Specific and measurable performance indicators are being developed and agreed with DAST.
Communications, Energy & Natural Resources	Group Broadband Scheme	30/11/2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The recommendations of this review were addressed in the planning and implementation of the National Broadband Scheme (NBS). • The NBS project was designed and managed in accordance with Guidelines for Appraisal and Management of Capital Expenditure and with EU and National Public Procurement Policy. • The NBS contract contains a number of controls to ensure compliance with contractual commitments, including — phased payments on reaching defined milestones, penalties for failing to meet contractually binding service or customer obligations, and clawback and exit clauses.
	Broadband Infrastructure (MANs)	23/9/2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation of the review recommendations led to a reduction in the scope of Phase II of the MAN's programme and a reduction in expenditure on that part of the programme. • In December 2007 the Minister for CENR suspended the construction of 28 of Phase II MAN's which had been expected to cost approximately €20m to complete. • The review recommended that a more targeted approach to MAN's investment would be appropriate. • An evaluation of 81 towns with population suitable for a MAN was carried out and Govt approval given to proceed with an appraisal under the Capital Appraisal Guidelines of the 11 highest scoring towns with a view to deciding whether or not to proceed with a MAN in each of these towns.
Community, Rural & Gaeltacht Affairs	Caiteachas Caipitil ar na hOileáin	7/1/2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staffing resources of Islands Division have been enhanced through restructuring resulting in enhanced streamlining of work practices. • An additional Engineer with appropriate marine and project management experience appointed to assist Chief Engineer, bringing additional experience in Sustainable Energy and Project Management sectors. • Further training in Project Management and related matters arranged for staff. • Joint study between DCRGA and SEI to develop a model for islands energy needs through renewable energy commenced. • INTERREG project to examine more efficient ways of providing ferry service underway. • Project management teams in place for all major capital projects. Joint committee monitor smaller projects.

Appendix 2 — Reviews completed since 1 August 2007 — *continued*

Department	Title	Date Completed	Summary of Review Impacts
	Ciste na Gaelige	25/9/2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This review covered the period 2000-2005 and most of the findings and recommendations of the review have been overtaken by subsequent developments. • These developments necessitated a significant change of emphasis by DCRGA to meet new and demanding challenges. • It is difficult to isolate a specific impact of the review as the thrust of policy had already changed substantially.
	Local Development Social Inclusion Programme	30/1/2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many of the review recommendations will be implemented through the redesigned programme — including redefined goals and objectives, adopting lifecycle approach, clearer performance indicators, improved monitoring and independent evaluation. • The merger process should result in savings in the medium-long term but these can not be quantified at this time.
Defence	Clothing Procurement in the Defence Forces	18/8/2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The review identified the potential for increased efficiency and effectiveness in the clothing storage and distribution system. • Following recommendations from the group established to address the findings, 3 clothing stores were closed and the personnel redeployed to other duties. • The recommendations regarding stock holding levels and enhanced efficiency of the distribution system will be addressed in a new tender competition currently being prepared.
	Naval Service Vessel Maintenance	15/4/2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The review found there was a low incidence of unscheduled maintenance resulting in lost patrol days and the maintenance programme was appropriately focussed on supporting operational targets of the Naval Service, underpinned by an ongoing programme of planned preventative maintenance. • The primary recommendations centred on improving coordination of resource management within the maintenance function including improved systems of performance measurement. • The review recommended revised maintenance management structures and these were quickly implemented by the Naval Service. • Work is progressing on improving systems of performance management.

Appendix 2 — Reviews completed since 1 August 2007 — *continued*

Department	Title	Date Completed	Summary of Review Impacts
Education & Science	Youthreach and Senior Traveller Training Centres	7/4/2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • While the achievement of savings was an element of this review, in general it focussed on the efficiency and effectiveness with which the programmes used their resources to achieve their stated objectives. • VECs were notified in August 2008 that no under 18s could be enrolled in STTCs from 1/1/09 and no allowance should be paid to learners under 16 in Youthreach from 1/1/09. • Budget 2008 announced a reduction of 100 STTC places to 984 w.e.f. 1/9/09, as part of the phasing out of STTCs over 10-15 years as recommended in the review. This resulted in a saving of €270k from Sept-Dec 2009. • The McCarthy report recommended phasing out STTCs over a 2-3 year period and this is under consideration by DES.
	Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) Undergraduate Skills Programme	7/4/2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation of review recommendations is ongoing, with specific elements having been implemented. • Funding for ICT skills is continuing, with Postgraduate skills conversion courses receiving more emphasis by the HEA to address skills gaps. • Ring-fenced funding the HEA for ICT Skills courses is continuing and is subject to increased reporting and monitoring of outcomes by HEA.
	Teacher Education and Development	7/4/2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The review recommendations focussed mainly on organisational efficiencies and effectiveness and less on savings per se. • Since the review major restructuring and amalgamations of the support services has taken place and structures continue to be reviewed in the context of the current climate, resulting in the reduction of costs across the area of Teacher Education. • At primary level the SDPS, CAPP SMPP and PCSP have been amalgamated into the Primary Professional Development Service, with a consequent rationalisation of staff and administrative support. • At post primary level the SLSS, SDPI and SPHE have been similarly amalgamated. • In relation to evaluation, the Inspectorate is now developing metrics which will be applied to teacher support interventions in the future.
	Youth Encounter Project (YEP) Schools	8/9/2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Of 51 recommendations in the review, 12 have been implemented while a further 11 are in the process of implementation. • Most of these recommendations relate to improved governance and communications structures, while the remainder concern rebalancing the composition of staff within schools and improving information, particularly performance indicators. • It is not expected that the continued implementation of recommendations will have an impact on the 2010 Estimates process.

Appendix 2 — Reviews completed since 1 August 2007 — *continued*

Department	Title	Date Completed	Summary of Review Impacts
	ICT Support Services for Schools	30/10/2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ICT advisor posts were not renewed for the 08/09 academic year, in line with the review recommendation that the resources would be better employed focussing supports for ICT leadership and change within each school. • ICT advisor expenditure fell from €1.44m in 2008 to just €26.5k in 2009.
Enterprise, Trade & Employment	Science Foundation Ireland	30/7/2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The review made 10 recommendations which maintain the focus of existing SFI operations and are designed to improve the ongoing implementation and management of SFI's programmes and to maximise the future impact and VFM from investments. • Given the nature of investment there will not be a clear and immediate "cause and effect" in terms of impact from implementation of recommendations. • A key recommendation of the report is that SFI should continue its core mission of funding research excellence in areas where Ireland can compete on a global scale. • The impact of the findings in this review did not result in the need for a lower level of resources, but recommended that the level of Capital spend is at the very least maintained and in certain areas increased. • DETE see no scope for further reduction in the pay budget for SFI and argue that it is imperative that funding for SFI's Programme Management line is not just sustained, but increased.
Environment, Heritage & Local Government	Rural Water Programme	12/12/2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The review has been taken into account in formulating the Rural Water Programme 2009 and as part of the revised scheme of operational subsidy payable to group schemes. • The recommendations are being considered as part of a review of future policy and support arrangements for Rural Water Programme.

Appendix 2 — Reviews completed since 1 August 2007 — *continued*

Department	Title	Date Completed	Summary of Review Impacts
Finance	Civil Service Childcare Initiative	22/10/2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The key recommendations were that no further crèches should be built under this Initiative and that the subhead for Capital expenditure (routine maintenance costs and minor capital costs) would transfer to OPW, which happened w.e.f. 1/1/09. Responsibility for building and maintenance work (with an associated full-time post at HEO level) transferred to OPW. This left responsibility for policy and audit related activities with Dept. Finance.
Foreign Affairs	Support for Irish Emigrant Groups Abroad	3/8/2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In July 2007 the Govt set a target of increasing emigrant services funding to €34m by 2012. While it had increased from €2.9m in 2003 to €15.2m in 2007, it has remained at just over €15.1m since. A more formalised monitoring and evaluation system has been developed in cooperation with DFA's Evaluation and Audit Unit and ICT Unit. Funding for community and heritage projects has also been expanded from within the overall allocation. A service level agreement has been put in place with the Federation of Irish Societies, the key second line service in Britain.
	Support to Tsunami Affected Countries	17/10/2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The review found that Irish Aid made a prompt and appropriate response to the disaster and managed its programme in an efficient and effective way. The primary impact in respect of the maintenance of a corps of volunteers for responding to emergencies which has been established under the Rapid Response Initiative is that funding of around €1.3m be set aside each year to recruit, train and deploy these volunteers in response to emergencies.
	Evaluation of the Mozambique Country Programmes 2001-2006	14/2/2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The review recommendations are designed to further enhance the effectiveness of the Irish Aid programme in Mozambique. It is not anticipated that the implementation of the recommendations will have implications for the Estimates process, as it is intended to further enhance the effectiveness of the programme.
	Automated Passport Project	24/10/2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The review made a number of recommendations designed to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the service.

Appendix 2 — Reviews completed since 1 August 2007 — *continued*

Department	Title	Date Completed	Summary of Review Impacts
Justice, Equality & Law Reform	Probation & Welfare Service Assistance to Voluntary Bodies	16/7/2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many of the review recommendations coincided with the new business model being implemented by the Service. • A Regional Manager was assigned to oversee the implementation of many of the review recommendations. • Performance indicators are established and included in Funding Agreements. Payment of grants is contingent on completion of Funding Agreement and timely submission of accounts. • The shortcomings identified in the review led to remedial action being taken by the P&WS and in certain cases some projects were closed down. • These improvements and closures allowed for a saving of approximately €1.25m in the funding allocation in the 2009 Estimates.
	Courts Service — Staff Training and Development	13/2/2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Following the review, the Court's Service report that they constantly seek to contribute to offices' efficiency and effectiveness through the training provided. • They will move away from the idea of training and development being a matter of choice. • They are working with relevant groups and offices in training related initiatives such as managing new staff and instruction manuals.
	Courts Service ICT Programme 2001-2007	9/7/2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The review findings are positive and conclude that value for money has been obtained in ICT expenditure from 2001-2007. • In line with the review recommendation, the Courts Service ICT strategy document 2006-2010 was reviewed in June 2009 and a revised ICT strategy document 2009-2011 produced to align it with the Courts Service strategic plan. • The Courts Service ICT unit is at present examining implementation of the remaining recommendations.
Office of Public Works	Provision of Flood Relief Schemes	12/11/2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In line with the review recommendations, OPW initiated and completed a project planning and implementation manual which incorporates measures to improve the interface between the Design Team, the Administration Unit and the Engineers involved in managing/monitoring flood relief works. • A Flood Risk Indicators, Methods and Datasets Scoping Study has been completed to provide indicators of flood risk to inform option selection and project appraisal and prioritisation.

Appendix 2 — Reviews completed since 1 August 2007 — *continued*

Department	Title	Date Completed	Summary of Review Impacts
Revenue Commissioners	Information Technology External Resources Expenditure in 2006	7/3/2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The review concluded that expenditure on external resources is well managed and delivers value for money. • The review identified areas with scope for enhanced effectiveness and efficiency and proposed a range of measures to enhance the value obtained from expenditure. • Savings realised from implementation of recommendations were reflected in funding requirements for Estimates process and allowed Revenue live within overall cuts imposed for 2008 and 2009. • Procurement management strategy resulted in reductions ranging from 8% to 35% across a number of external resource contracts.
Social & Family Affairs	Medical Review and Assessment Services	27/8/2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The review of payments to carers was subsumed in to the work being carried out in the development of a National Carers Strategy in 2008.
	Review of Carers Allowance and Carers Benefit Schemes	9/7/2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The majority of the review recommendations are being implemented under the Medical Referral and Case Management project, with a total cost of €4.3m, of which €2.1m will be spent in 2009. • MRAS admin staff will be freed up to carry out more value adding roles. • Medical Assessor capacity will be maximised. • Payments based only on certificates received by the Department
Transport	CIE Subvention	30/11/2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The findings of the review are assisting the drafting of enforceable contracts between D/Transport and CIE companies governing the provision of service for the subvention paid to the operating company, in terms of the requirements and expectation of services regarding frequency, quality of service etc.
	Capital Spend by Dublin Transport Office	15/5/2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The review focused heavily on the QBC element of Traffic Management Grants, which is the main cost element. • The review made important recommendations on both project appraisal at stages of development and after their introduction, and implementation of these recommendations could add to the efficiency and effectiveness of the TMG scheme. • Where new QBC's are being devised they will be subject to full Cost Benefit Analysis. For extensions or enhancements to existing QBC's a partial benefit cost ratio is applied. • Individual construction projects to construct the QBC network will be specified and appraised. • The need for ex-post reviews of QBC's is agreed in principle but due to resource constraints progress will be slow in the short term.

Pension Provisions.

76. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for Finance if he will consider introducing modifications to the pension scheme of a company (details supplied) to enable persons who have contributed to this scheme for a period of 40 years to cease paying contributions. [14470/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): The Minister for Transport has primary responsibility for matters relating to the company in question, including its pension schemes. With regard to pension arrangements, the administration of the schemes and proposals for amendment to the schemes are a matter for the company and its pension committee in the first instance. The relevant legislation requires that any amendments to the schemes be approved by the Minister for Transport, after consultation with the Minister for Finance. I am not aware of any such proposal to amend the schemes having been made. On a point of information, I can inform the Deputy that most defined benefit schemes require continued contributions from employees even where the maximum service has been accrued.

77. **Deputy Noel Ahern** asked the Minister for Finance the position regarding payments into pension funds by high net worth persons; if a limit has been imposed in relation to the amount invested per year or in total; his views on whether the current system is unfair to persons paying tax at the 20% rate; the measures that have been introduced or are proposed to limit the advantage received by persons on the 41% rate; the claw back that has been introduced; if reference to 8% tax and benefit of 33% savings will be clarified; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14472/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): Following the Review of Tax Relief for Pensions Provision carried out jointly by my Department and the Revenue Commissioners in 2005, as part of the Internal Reviews of certain tax schemes, a number of significant changes were made to pensions tax policy in the 2006 Budget and Finance Act. These changes impacted primarily on high net worth individuals.

The most significant of the changes was the imposition of a maximum allowable pension fund on retirement for tax purposes. It works by imposing a limit or ceiling on the total capital value of pension benefits that an individual can draw in their lifetime from tax-relieved pension products, where those benefits come into payment for the first time on or after 7 December 2005. This limit, called the Standard Fund Threshold, was originally set at €5 million and was increased in line with an indexation factor in 2007 and 2008 to its current value of just over €5.4 million. No index-linked increase was applied for 2009. In certain circumstances, a higher threshold called the “personal fund threshold” could apply. By imposing a punitive tax rate on benefits drawn in excess of the limit, it discourages the build-up of excessive tax relieved pension funds in the first place, which was one of the main concerns raised in the Review.

The second significant change was the imposition of a limit on lump sum payments that can be made tax-free under various pension arrangements. At present, where lower limits do not apply, the maximum lifetime tax-free lump sum that can be payable is an amount not exceeding 25% of the Standard Fund Threshold mentioned earlier. Any balance of a lump sum greater than 25% of the Standard Fund Threshold is liable to tax at the individual’s marginal rate of income tax. In that regard, I stated in my 2010 Budget Speech, that I accept the Commission on Taxation recommendation that retirement lump sums below €200,000 should not be taxed. The treatment of lump sum payments above this level will be considered and developed during the implementation phase of the recently published National Pensions Framework.

[Deputy Brian Lenihan.]

In Finance (No. 2) Act 2008, the earnings limit that acts, in conjunction with the age related percentage limits, to restrict the amount of tax relieved pension contributions that can be made by individuals in any year, was reduced to €150,000 from the previous level of just over €275,000. As with the overall limit on tax-relieved pension funds and the maximum tax-free lump sum, this restriction also impacts on those on higher earnings.

The Government agreed, in the revised Programme for Government, that a new pension savings incentive will be set at a rate equivalent to 33% tax relief rather than the existing marginal rate relief. This commitment is now included in the National Pensions Framework. The Framework also makes clear that PRSI and Health Levy relief on pension contributions will be in addition to the 33% rate of tax relief and the mechanism for delivering this relief will also be developed during the implementation phase of the Framework. Overall, I consider this to be a very significant change that, when implemented, will provide a very strong incentive for individual contributions to pension schemes and greatly improve the attractiveness of pension saving for the lower paid.

Departmental Correspondence.

78. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghaíl** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will respond to correspondence (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14316/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy John Moloney): I regret that due to industrial action I am not in a position to provide a substantive response to your Parliamentary Question. If this matter remains of continuing concern to you, however, I would invite you to raise it with me again in due course.

79. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will support a matter (details supplied). [14349/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): I regret that due to industrial action I am not in a position to provide a substantive response to your Parliamentary Question. If this matter remains of continuing concern to you, however, I would invite you to raise it with me again in due course.

Vaccination Programmes.

80. **Deputy Noel Ahern** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will clarify her announcement in January 2010 regarding the HPV vaccination programme for girls currently in first year; if the programme will start before summer 2010 or afterwards; if it applies to girls currently in first year; if it will be administered to girls now in first year who will be in second year in autumn 2010 and who may only be reached after the summer; and when this programme will move to the next stage. [14378/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): I regret that due to industrial action I am not in a position to provide a substantive response to your Parliamentary Question. If this matter remains of continuing concern to you, however, I would invite you to raise it with me again in due course.

Medical Cards.

81. **Deputy Noel Ahern** asked the Minister for Health and Children the position regarding

the processing of medical cards applications; if existing cards are still valid until the renewal process including appeals is completed; the reason applications are refused to persons on basic social welfare payments only; if a common sense approach has been lost in the new system; and the further reason a renewal application in respect of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 9 has been refused. [14379/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): I regret that due to industrial action I am not in a position to provide a substantive response to your Parliamentary Question. If this matter remains of continuing concern to you, however, I would invite you to raise it with me again in due course.

82. **Deputy Noel Ahern** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will examine the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 11 in view of the fact that their application for an over 70 years medical card took ten months to process; if she will arrange for a refund of medical expenses incurred during that time; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14380/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): I regret that due to industrial action I am not in a position to provide a substantive response to your Parliamentary Question. If this matter remains of continuing concern to you, however, I would invite you to raise it with me again in due course.

Mental Health Services.

83. **Deputy Noel Ahern** asked the Minister for Health and Children the psychiatric services operating on the north side of Dublin; the structural or organisational changes taking place; the reason a person (details supplied) in Dublin 9 has been moved to a new team and location; if it is due to her medical condition or category or location of their home address or other reasons; and if it will be arranged that they will be allowed to continue with their existing team and location. [14381/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy John Moloney): I regret that due to industrial action I am not in a position to provide a substantive response to your Parliamentary Question. If this matter remains of continuing concern to you, however, I would invite you to raise it with me again in due course.

Services for People with Disabilities.

84. **Deputy Noel Ahern** asked the Minister for Health and Children the services to which persons suffering from multiple sclerosis are entitled and specifically if she will detail those available in the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 11. [14382/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy John Moloney): I regret that due to industrial action I am not in a position to provide a substantive response to your Parliamentary Question. If this matter remains of continuing concern to you, however, I would invite you to raise it with me again in due course.

Prescription Charges.

85. **Deputy Noel Ahern** asked the Minister for Health and Children her plans for the implementation of the 50 cent prescription charge. [14383/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): I regret that due to industrial action I am not in a position to provide a substantive response to your Parliamentary Question. If this matter remains of continuing concern to you, however, I would invite you to raise it with me again in due course.

Hospital Services.

86. **Deputy Noel Ahern** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of ear, nose and throat consultants that are attached to Temple Street Children's Hospital, Dublin 1; if her attention has been drawn to the 12 month delay for an ENT outpatient appointment; if she will prioritise the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14387/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): I regret that due to industrial action I am not in a position to provide a substantive response to your Parliamentary Question. If this matter remains of continuing concern to you, however, I would invite you to raise it with me again in due course.

87. **Deputy Paul Connaughton** asked the Minister for Health and Children the position regarding the Community Hospital and Nursing Home at Belmullet, County Mayo; the proposals for the future of this hospital; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14396/10]

Minister of State at the Department of the Health and Children (Deputy Áine Brady): I regret that due to industrial action I am not in a position to provide a substantive response to your Parliamentary Question. If this matter remains of continuing concern to you, however, I would invite you to raise it with me again in due course.

Child Care Services.

88. **Deputy Paul Connaughton** asked the Minister for Health and Children if her attention has been drawn to the need for a grant allocation to improve the child care facilities at the old national school at Ballygar, County Galway; if her further attention has been drawn to the fact that this is the only creche in Ballygar and of the ever increasing population in this area and of the very large Traveller population in this area; if funding will be made available as a matter of urgency to improve this facility; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14397/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Barry Andrews): I have responsibility for implementing the National Childcare Investment Programme 2006-2010 (NCIP) which is a multi-annual programme to improve the availability and quality of childcare options, primarily through capital grant-aiding the construction and refurbishment of childcare facilities and the Community Childcare Subvention Scheme (CCSS) which provides current support grants for community services.

The initial capital allocation to the programme was €358 million over 5 years. However, due to the economic downturn, the capital grant programme was closed to new applicants in 2009. I understand that Ballygar Community Playgroup Ltd., which had applied for capital grant funding of €1.2 million, was advised that this was the case in April 2009. I understand that the company appealed this decision and was advised in December 2009 that it was not possible to uphold their appeal.

During 2010, existing NCIP capital grant commitments amounting to €30 million will continue to be met. A smaller scale capital grant programme, designed to maintain the existing

childcare infrastructure, is expected to be introduced in 2011 and I would hope to announce details of this programme later this year.

89. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health and Children the private agencies contracted by the Health Service Executive to provide residential child care services to the HSE; the money awarded to each of these services and providers each year for the past five years; the number of children cared for per year, per provider, during this time; the registered name of each company; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14408/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Barry Andrews): I regret that due to industrial action I am not in a position to provide a substantive response to your Parliamentary Question. If this matter remains of continuing concern to you, however, I would invite you to raise it with me again in due course.

Nursing Homes Repayment Scheme.

90. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health and Children the reason all outstanding payments have not been issued under the nursing home refund scheme to a person (details supplied) in County Roscommon; when this will be resolved; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14409/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): I regret that due to industrial action I am not in a position to provide a substantive response to your Parliamentary Question. If this matter remains of continuing concern to you, however, I would invite you to raise it with me again in due course.

91. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health and Children the position regarding the issue of interest owing to long stay patients; when repayment will commence in the west; the cost of the administration of this repayment programme; the money to be repaid; the number of persons who have received a repayment to date; the value of such payments; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14410/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): I regret that due to industrial action I am not in a position to provide a substantive response to your Parliamentary Question. If this matter remains of continuing concern to you, however, I would invite you to raise it with me again in due course.

92. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health and Children the funding held by the Health Service Executive on behalf of long stay patients; the charges placed on the management of this fund; the income generated from the fund in 2008 and 2009; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14411/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): I regret that due to industrial action I am not in a position to provide a substantive response to your Parliamentary Question. If this matter remains of continuing concern to you, however, I would invite you to raise it with me again in due course.

Health Service Staff.

93. **Deputy Phil Hogan** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of individual posts, advertised or placed in public competition under the terms of the Recruitment and Appointment Act 2004, designed to select the most qualified person, in open transparent competition, that were removed as a result of mediation under the terms of the final framework

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agreement, an agreement between unions (details Supplied) and awarded to the Health Service Executive administrators; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14413/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): I regret that due to industrial action I am not in a position to provide a substantive response to your Parliamentary Question. If this matter remains of continuing concern to you, however, I would invite you to raise it with me again in due course.

Services for People with Disabilities.

94. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will reply to a matter (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14425/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy John Moloney): I regret that due to industrial action I am not in a position to provide a substantive response to your Parliamentary Question. If this matter remains of continuing concern to you, however, I would invite you to raise it with me again in due course.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme.

95. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Health and Children further to Parliamentary Question No. 196 of 23 February 2010 when a reply will issue. [14428/10]

Minister of State at the Department of the Health and Children (Deputy Áine Brady): I regret that due to industrial action I am not in a position to provide a substantive response to your Parliamentary Question. If this matter remains of continuing concern to you, however, I would invite you to raise it with me again in due course.

Child Care Services.

96. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health and Children the implications of the cessation of the National Childcare Investigation Programme 2006 to 2010; and the new arrangements for funding this sector. [14450/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Barry Andrews): I have responsibility for implementing the National Childcare Investment Programme 2006-2010 (NCIP) which is a multi-annual programme to improve the availability and quality of childcare options, primarily through capital grant-aiding the construction and refurbishment of childcare facilities and the Community Childcare Subvention Scheme (CCSS) which provides current support grants for community services.

The initial allocation to the programme was €575 million over five years, of which €358 million was in respect of capital and €217 million was in respect of current expenditure. Due to the economic downturn, the capital grant programme was closed to new applicants in 2009, at which point approximately €190 million of its allocation had been committed and approximately €152 million had been drawn down. NCIP capital expenditure in 2010 is expected to amount to €30 million and the total number of new childcare places created is expected to amount to 25,000. From 2011 onwards, a smaller capital programme designed to maintain the existing infrastructure is expected to be allocated.

The NCIP current allocation has increased to €239 million, largely due to an increased allocation of approximately €17 million to the CCSS, bringing its total allocation to approximately €165 million over 2008-2010. The CCSS supports some 900 community childcare services, enabling them to charge reduced childcare fees to approximately 30,000 disadvantaged and low

income working parents. The CCSS will be replaced in September 2010 by a new Community Childcare Subvention (CCS) scheme which will maintain the existing rates of childcare supports for parents in receipt of social welfare benefits and improve the rates of childcare supports for parents in low income employment and parents in training and education.

In addition, in January of this year, I introduced the new free Pre-School Year in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) scheme with an annual allocation of €170 million. The ECCE scheme provides a free pre-school year to all children in the year before commencing primary school. Children qualify for the year when they are aged between 3 years 3 months and 4 years 6 months in September of the relevant year. I am pleased to say that over 51,000 children, or 80% of children in the year before starting school, are availing of the free pre-school year at this point with a further 5% of children availing of a pre-school year under the CCSS scheme.

Medical Cards.

97. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health and Children when a medical card will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14463/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): I regret that due to industrial action I am not in a position to provide a substantive response to your Parliamentary Question. If this matter remains of continuing concern to you, however, I would invite you to raise it with me again in due course.

Public Transport.

98. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Transport his views on changing the law to designate specific spaces on public buses and trains for wheelchair users only, to ensure they are not left behind at rush hour and at other busy times; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14340/10]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): I have asked CIE to report to me in regard to whether legislation is required or whether there are alternative means to address the issue raised by the Deputy. I will give consideration to any proposals from the Company.

Pension Provisions.

99. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for Transport if he will consider introducing modifications to the pension scheme of a company (details supplied) to enable persons who have contributed to this scheme for a period of 40 years to cease paying contributions. [14471/10]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): This is a matter for CIÉ and not one in which I have any role.

Departmental Investigations.

100. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if he will support the case of a person (details supplied). [14355/10]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I regret to advise the Deputy that it is not possible to provide a response to his Question at this time. The information sought by the Deputy will be provided at a later date.

Immigration Matters.

101. **Deputy Chris Andrews** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if it is correct that a person can no longer describe themselves as Tibetan on Garda National Immigration Bureau cards; if so, when the Tibetan option was erased from the drop down menu in the software that creates these cards; the reason that option disappeared; if he was requested by China to disallow Tibetan as an option on GNIB cards; the person who instructed the GNIB to erase the option of Tibetan nationality; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14433/10]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I regret to advise the Deputy that it is not possible to provide a response to his Question at this time. The information sought by the Deputy will be provided at a later date.

Human Rights Issues.

102. **Deputy Jim O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform his views on whether the importance of having a strong and independent Human Rights Commission; and if he will ensure the necessary resources are made available to achieve that objective. [14060/10]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): The functions of the Irish Human Rights Commission are as prescribed in the Human Rights Commission Act 2000. The Act also provides that the IHRC is independent in the performance of its functions. Under the Act the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform is required in each financial year to pay the Commission, out of moneys provided by the Oireachtas, a grant, with the consent of the Minister of Finance, of such an amount as he or she determines towards the expenses of the Commission in the performance of its function.

Having regard to the Exchequer position, I am satisfied that the funding made available to the Commission in 2010 is reasonable in the circumstances.

Departmental Expenditure.

103. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if he will restore funding for an organisation (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14334/10]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): As the Deputy is aware, from 2003-2008 the Remembrance Commission operated a Scheme of Acknowledgement, Remembrance, and Assistance for Victims in this Jurisdiction of the Conflict in Northern Ireland.

Under the Scheme, payments could be made to individuals under various categories such as acknowledgement payments, economic hardship payments and medical expenses payments. The Scheme also contained a provision to enable payments to be paid to groups offering support services to victims of the conflict. Under this element of the scheme payments were made to the organisation to which the Deputy refers for the purpose of meeting the counselling and other needs of victims or their family members. During the period of operation of the Scheme this organisation received a total of €1.2m of the €1.5m allocated for victim support services and was the only recipient of money under this heading.

The term of appointment of the Remembrance Commission came to an end on 31 October 2008. As the Remembrance Commission’s term of appointment has come to an end, funding under the Scheme is no longer available but I took a decision to grant additional funding to

the group totalling €190,300 to enable it to continue to operate while seeking to put alternative funding options in place.

As I have made clear, my first priority is to ensure that those victims who require ongoing medical treatment for injuries sustained in bombings and other incidents arising from the conflict in Northern Ireland will continue to be provided for. I have made special arrangements to have these costs provided by my Department through the Victims of Crime Office.

Asylum Support Services.

104. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform when he will publish the report of the committee to review the house rules, including the complaints procedure, in respect of the direct provision system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14335/10]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): The Report of the Committee to review the house rules for asylum seekers in accommodation centres will be published on the website of the Reception and Integration Agency of my Department by the end of the month. The RIA website address is www.ria.gov.ie.

Arising from the report and in accordance with its findings, the revised house rules were submitted to the National Adult Literacy Association for proofing in relation to simplicity of language. The house rules were then recirculated to the members of the review group and final approval on the text was received in November 2009. RIA is currently working on adding visual aids to the document in order to facilitate ease of understanding. Furthermore, a programme of information and dissemination to residents and staff of all accommodation centre about the house rules will begin shortly.

The text of the revised house rules will also be published on the RIA website by the end of the month.

Departmental Properties.

105. **Deputy Joe Costello** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if he has obtained a lease on some or all of premises (details supplied) in Dublin 1; the purpose for which the premises will be used; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that no planning permission has been sought for a change of use; if his further attention has been drawn to the fact that premises are located directly across from a local authority housing complex; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14338/10]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): This matter was the subject of an Adjournment Debate in the House on the 30th March, 2010. I have nothing further to add to the response given on that occasion.

Drug Courts.

106. **Deputy Catherine Byrne** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform further to Parliamentary Question No. 427 of 23 March 2010, the outcome of persons who were referred to the Drugs Court since 2001 but who did not successfully complete the programme; the follow-ups that were in place for the 29 people who have successfully completed the programme to ensure they did not re-offend; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14347/10]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I refer the Deputy to my reply to Question 427 on 23 March. As she is aware, my Department has been examining

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the operation of the Court to see how its throughput levels might be increased. I hope to be in a position to make an announcement on the matter in the near future.

Sentencing Policy.

107. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the data available on the consistency of sentencing for crimes of a similar profile; and his plans to ensure that the courts are more consistent in the approach they take particularly in relation to crimes for which there is a mandatory sentence. [14357/10]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): The judiciary has been developing a system to gather relevant criteria and access information about the range of sentences and other penalties which have been imposed for particular types of offence. This will be a valuable support to judges when considering the sentence to be imposed in an individual case. The project is overseen by a steering committee, established by the Courts Service Board and chaired by Mrs. Justice Susan Denham of the Supreme Court. I understand a number of pilot projects have been run in several court jurisdictions, including Dublin, Cork and Limerick Circuit Criminal Courts; the Dublin District Court and the Court of Criminal Appeal. The outcomes will be reviewed and assessed by judges prior to final evaluation and establishment of a website. I understand it is envisaged that, in addition to the case content, which is being compiled following consultation with the Data Protection Commissioner, the website will contain references to leading cases on sentencing, summaries and links to significant judgments on sentencing law, some statistical data and academic material on sentencing.

The issue of mandatory sentences, or more accurately, presumptive minimum sentences continues to generate a certain amount of debate. I have contacted the Attorney General in regard to this matter who has formally requested the Law Reform Commission to examine the issue of mandatory sentencing generally. I understand that this issue is to be included in the Commission's programme of work for 2010.

I should add that the Criminal Justice Act 1993 (as amended by section 23 of the Criminal Justice Act 2006) provides that the Director of Public Prosecutions may, where it appears to him that a sentence imposed by a court for a crime on indictment is unduly lenient, apply to the Court of Criminal Appeal to review the sentence. The Director of Public Prosecutions is, of course, independent in the carrying out of his functions.

Recidivism Rate.

108. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the statistics of the extent of re-offending among people who have been convicted to jail sentences; the measures of recidivism he uses as a policy target when assessing the performance of the prison and probation service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14358/10]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I wish to advise the Deputy that the Irish Prison Service facilitated a major study of prisoner re-offending by the UCD Institute of Criminology. The study found that 27.4% of released prisoners were serving a new prison sentence with one year. This rose to 39.2% after two years, 45.1% after three years, and 49.2% after four years. The fact that over 50% of prisoners do not re-offend within four years of release compares well internationally.

The Prison Service provides a range of rehabilitative programmes which have the dual purpose of providing prisoners with purposeful activity while serving their sentences and encouraging and equipping them to lead productive lives on release. Prisoner rehabilitation involves

significant multi-dimensional input by a diverse range of general and specialist services provided both by the Irish Prison Service and in-reach statutory and non-statutory services. Amongst these are healthcare, psychiatric, psychological, educational, work and training, vocational, counselling, welfare and spiritual services. These services are important in addressing offending behaviour, drug and alcohol addiction, missed educational and vocational opportunities, anger management, and self management in the interest of encouraging positive personal development in prisoners, and preparing them for re-integration and resettlement on release from custody. In addition, the Probation Service has an active role during the course of the prisoner's sentence in helping maintain links with family and community agencies, encouraging prisoners to address their offending behaviour and engaging prisoners in individual counselling and group counselling programmes such as offending behaviour, addiction, violence and sex offending.

The Irish Prison Service is developing and rolling out a fully co-ordinated Integrated Sentence Management system (ISM) across all prisons and places of detention. ISM involves a new emphasis on prisoners taking greater personal responsibility for their own development through active engagement with both specialist and non-specialist services in the prisons. The end result will be a prisoner-centred approach to working with prisoners with provision for initial assessment, goal setting and periodic review to measure progress.

ISM was first introduced on a pilot basis in Arbour Hill and Wheatfield prisons. During 2009, it was extended to additional numbers of prisoners in these prisons and was also initiated in the Training Unit and the Midlands Prison. Preparatory work also commenced in St Patrick's Institution. Altogether over 200 prisoners have participated in ISM to date. Parallel work on a range of necessary system supports such as the development of an IT database and staff training is ongoing. It is envisaged that ISM will be consolidated in these five prisons in 2010, with approximately 500 prisoners participating by the end of the year. ISM will continue to be rolled out to all other institutions on a phased basis, subject to the availability of resources.

In addition, as the Deputy will be aware the Probation Service of my Department works in partnership with a range of community based projects to assist it with its core work. These projects -numbering about 50 — will receive in the region of €11m in funding this year from my Department. The projects support the work of the Service in re-integrating ex-offenders back to society by providing a range of supports such as work training, support with tackling addiction issues, accommodation needs etc. This range of supportive work also contributes to reducing re-offending and enhancing community safety.

Rights of Entry.

109. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the protections available to prevent the entry into Ireland of persons from abroad who have criminal records and would represent a threat; if he is satisfied with the success of these measures; and the number of persons who have been convicted in the past 12 months in Ireland who had prior criminal records abroad. [14359/10]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): Section 4 (3)(d) of the Immigration Act, 2004 permits refusal of entry to “a non-national where the non-national has been convicted (whether in the State or elsewhere) of an offence that may be punished under the law of the place of conviction by imprisonment for a period of one year or by a more severe penalty”. A person can also be refused a visa where there is a history of criminality.

The powers of the State are more constrained, however, when it comes to a national of another Member State of the European Union.

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Article 5 of Directive 2004/38/EC on the right of Union citizens and their family members to move and reside freely within the territories of the Member States provides for the right of entry to the territory of a Member State to a Union citizen and their family members. Including family members who are not nationals of Member State. While this right is not unqualified, Article 35 of the Directive allows Member States to adopt measures to refuse terminate or withdraw any rights conferred under the Directive in cases of abuse of rights or fraud, strict conditions apply to Member States which take such actions.

Article 27 of the Directive sets out the circumstances in which Member States may restrict the rights of entry and residence of Union citizens and their family members. Member States may restrict the freedom of movement of Union citizens on public policy, public security and public health grounds and are free, as such, to determine the requirements of public policy and public security for their own territory. It is important to stress however that Member States are prohibited from taking such actions only on the basis of a previous criminal conviction.

Restrictive measures may be taken only on a case-by-case basis where the personal conduct of the individual concerned represents a genuine, present and serious threat affecting one of the fundamental interests of society of the host Member State. A previous criminal conviction can be taken into account, but only in so far as the circumstances which gave rise to that conviction are evidence of personal conduct which constitutes a present and serious threat to public policy.

A key element in combatting the movement of criminals is co-operation. In particular, Ireland and the UK work closely to try to curb illegal migration and organised crime in the common travel area. Operation Gull was established to curb illegal migration between Ireland and Great Britain through Northern Ireland. Over one hundred (100) operations have been carried out to date, at ports of entry both here and in the North. Other initiatives have been developed in relation to joint training, sharing immigration liaison officer resources and immigration information and biometric exchanges. Furthermore both states are developing electronic data processing systems to enhance border management particularly at the external borders of the common travel area.

As regards the last part of the Deputy's Question, as regards the number of persons who have been convicted in the past 12 months in Ireland who had prior criminal records abroad, I have no official responsibility to the Dáil in relation to this matter. Statistics in relation to such convictions is a matter for the Courts Service, which, under the Courts Service Act, 1998 is independent in the performance of its functions (s. 4(3)), which include the management of the courts, (s.5(a)) and provision of statistics (s. 5(c)).

Citizenship Applications.

110. **Deputy Noel Ahern** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the position regarding an application for a certificate of naturalisation in respect of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 15; and when it will be processed and approved. [14388/10]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I regret that the information requested by the Deputy is not readily to hand. I will write to the Deputy as soon as it is available.

111. **Deputy Noel Ahern** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the position regarding an application for a certificate of naturalisation in respect of a person (details supplied). [14389/10]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I regret that the information requested by the Deputy is not readily to hand. I will write to the Deputy as soon as it is available.

Prison Building Programme.

112. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if he will respond to a report in a newspaper (details supplied) that he has abandoned plans to replace St. Patrick's Institution; and the position regarding same. [14451/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Barry Andrews): Contrary to media reports, the development of the new national children detention facilities is well underway. The Office of Public Works has completed both concept designs and sketch designs to deliver 167 places and these have been approved by the Steering Committee established to oversee progress on the project. The Steering Committee is due to meet again today to consider the planning process to be used in respect of the new facilities and work will commence shortly on developing detailed designs in consultation with the various stakeholders so that Request for Tenders documentation for construction can be prepared. Sufficient capital funding has been provided this year to progress the planning and design of the facilities.

The project will be undertaken in phases. It is anticipated that the first phase will consist of 80 new places and will facilitate the transfer of responsibility for detaining 16 and 17 year old boys from St. Patrick's Institution. The second phase is intended to provide a further 57 new places with the remaining 30 places being provided in existing facilities.

The completion date for the new facilities will be subject to the planning process to be followed but it is hoped, subject to any requirements that the planning authorities may have, that Phase 1 of the project could be complete by mid- 2013.

Funding for the project has been earmarked in the National Development Plan. As with all major capital projects of this nature, expenditure will be reviewed on an ongoing basis to ensure value for money and tendering for the construction of the new facilities will be subject to Government approval and to the necessary funding being made available.

Departmental Correspondence.

113. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if he will review travel documentation for a person (details supplied) in Dublin 20; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14462/10]

Minister for Justice and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I regret to advise the Deputy that it is not possible to provide a response to his Question at this time. The information sought by the Deputy will be provided at a later date.

Land and Conveyancing Law Reform Act 2009 .

114. **Deputy Jim O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if his attention has been drawn to the concerns that have been expressed about the operation of the Land and Conveyancing Law Reform Act 2009 in so far as it relates to rights of way and way leaves for water, cables, septic tanks and otherwise, very many of which are unregistered having been acquired by use over a long period and which may be extinguished if not registered or confirmed by Court Order prior to 31 December 2012 resulting in uncertainties and even conflict all over the country; and if he will establish a group to examine the issue and to advise on any appropriate amendment to the Act. [14466/10]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I am not aware of any concerns in relation to the provisions of section 39 of the Land and Conveyancing Law Reform Act 2009 which deal with the extinguishment of easements. Section 39 provides that, except where it is protected by registration in either the Land Registry or Registry of Deeds, as appropriate, an easement is extinguished on the expiry of a 12-year continuous period during which the beneficiary ('dominant owner') ceases to use or enjoy the easement.

European External Action Service.

115. **Deputy Joe Costello** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the progress made to date by the EU in developing the European external action service under the provisions of the Lisbon treaty; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14304/10]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): There has been substantial work in recent weeks on the European External Action Service (EEAS) which is an important innovation under the Lisbon Treaty supporting the work of the new High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Catherine Ashton.

On 25 March the High Representative presented her proposal for a Council Decision on the organisation and functioning of the EEAS, together with related proposals on budgetary and staff matters. These proposals follow intensive consultations with a range of stakeholders, including the Member States. The Council will make its Decision after consulting the European Parliament and obtaining the consent of the European Commission. The Parliament will have the power of co-decision in regard to the associated budgetary and staffing legislation.

The High Representative's proposals are complex and will require careful scrutiny and debate in the coming weeks. I look forward to discussing them with my colleagues at the Council meeting on 26 April. This will be an important decision for the Council with long-term consequences. The Council must take care to get the organisational structure of the EEAS right, particularly in terms of its central administration and its Delegations in Third Countries and international organisations. The Decision will also deal with the links between the EEAS and other EU institutions, particularly the Commission where the High Representative is also Vice-President and the Parliament which will be consulted regularly by the High Representative on the main aspects and the basic choices of the common foreign and security policy. The guidelines for the EEAS endorsed by the European Council remain a valid basis for considering the High Representative's proposals.

The Treaty provides that the EEAS will comprise officials from relevant departments of the Commission and the Council Secretariat, as well as staff seconded from national diplomatic services of the Member States. The High Representative's proposals include provisions for the staff recruitment process and consequential amendments to the EU's Staff Regulations.

I believe the EEAS recruitment process should be open, transparent and merit-based while also ensuring that EEAS staffing is representative of the diversity of the Union. These points were made on 22 March when Ministers in the General Affairs and Foreign Affairs Councils had a useful, wide-ranging discussion with High Representative Ashton.

Irish candidates will be able to compete for positions within the EEAS on an equal footing with those from other Member States. My Department has sought general expressions of interest from Irish diplomats in working for the EEAS.

The overall size of the EEAS is still under consideration and it will be a few years before it reaches full operational strength. Staffing from the member States, including Ireland, is likely to start modestly. However, over time there will be a real benefit to the State through the experience gained by the rotation of Irish officials between the EEAS and the Irish diplomatic

service. I look forward to Irish candidates of the highest calibre being recruited into the new Service.

The work of the EEAS will be complementary to the work of national diplomatic services and EU Delegations will work in close cooperation with the Embassies of EU Member States. A Declaration attached to the Lisbon Treaty makes clear that the establishment of the EEAS does not affect the existing responsibilities of Member States for the formulation and conduct of their foreign policy nor their national representation in third countries and at international organisations. In particular, the promotion of Ireland's trade and economic interests, the provision of consular assistance, and the administration of our overseas development aid programmes will remain our own responsibility.

Passport Applications.

116. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if he will support the case of a person (details supplied) in County Galway. [14350/10]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): A passport application for the named person was registered with the Passport Office in Balbriggan on 23 March, 2010. It was received through the Passport Express service which is a ten day guarantee service that is provided by the Passport Office in partnership with An Post.

However, due to industrial action the Passport Express guarantee was suspended on 4 March. As a result it is presently taking up to twenty working days to process Passport Express applications. As applications are being processed on a first come first served basis, the application in question will not be processed until the third week of April.

Sports Capital Programme.

117. **Deputy Olivia Mitchell** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the number, location and funding allocated to projects under the sports capital programme in 2006, 2007 and 2008 in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14325/10]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Deputy Mary Hanafin): The information sought by the Deputy is available on the Department's website www.dast.gov.ie

118. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the level of funding under the sports capital programme administered by her Department which is being committed by way of grant aid to sporting organisations which has not yet been drawn down; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14337/10]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Deputy Mary Hanafin): Under the Sports Capital Programme, which is administered by my Department, and part funded from the proceeds of the National Lottery, funding is allocated to sporting and community organisations at local, regional and national level throughout the country.

While no decision has been made on the timing of the next round of the Programme, €48 million has been provided in my Department's Vote in the 2010 Estimates to cover payments to be made from the C1 subhead, out of which grants are paid for the provision of sports and recreation facilities in respect of previously awarded grants.

At the beginning of this year there was just over €117m in outstanding grants from previous allocations.

119. **Deputy Tom Sheahan** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism when funding will be awarded to a GAA club (details supplied) in County Kerry in relation to the piling mat; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14343/10]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Deputy Mary Hanafin): The club in question was provisionally allocated €180,000, including a Clár top up of €30,000, under the Sports Capital Programme 2007. All provisional allocations are subject to the terms and conditions of the Programme. Grantees, including the one in question, are informed that the Department's technical advisers, the Office of Public Works (OPW), have a monitoring role in relation to grants amounting to more than €150,000. While the allocation has been formally approved and tenders for certain elements of the project have been approved, the OPW is not satisfied with the tender process for the works referred to by the Deputy and the club has been notified of the OPW's reservations.

Inland Waterways.

120. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the position regarding a project (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14318/10]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Pat Carey): I am advised that the proposal referred to by the Deputy is not feasible as the facility in question will be required for operational purposes from early April 2010.

The Deputy will appreciate that I am unable to be more specific within the constraints of a "details supplied" Question but I will be glad to provide further information if he wishes to contact my office.

Sports Funding.

121. **Deputy Arthur Morgan** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if his Department has received an application from a sporting organisation (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he has considered their application. [14346/10]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Pat Carey): My Department received an application in January 2010 for assistance under Na Scéimeanna Feabhúcháin Gaeltachta from the organisation referred to by the Deputy.

This application is currently being assessed by my Department and a decision will be made in due course, subject to existing commitments and available resources.

Departmental Correspondence.

122. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if he will respond to correspondence (details supplied) regarding an issue under the remit of his Department. [14400/10]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Pat Carey): There are a number of issues of public concern raised in the Deputy's Question. However, given the difficulty in responding adequately to the matters raised by him within the constraints of a 'details supplied' Question, I am arranging to have the relevant information forwarded directly to him.

If the Deputy would prefer to re-submit the Question in a less restricted format, I will, of course, be glad to put my response on the record of the House.

Dormant Accounts Fund.

123. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs the total expenditure by his Department from the proceeds of the Dormant Accounts Fund in 2009 and the likely expenditure from this fund in 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14452/10]

Minister for Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Pat Carey): The Dormant Accounts Fund Acts provides for an annual transfer by credit institutions and insurance undertakings of monies in accounts determined to be dormant into the Dormant Accounts Fund (DAF).

Expenditure in 2009 under a number of DAF measures that come within the remit of my Department amounted to some €8.9m. In 2010, €6.65m is being provided to meet commitments due to beneficiaries under such measures.

Information relating to the Dormant Accounts Fund and on beneficiaries is available on the web-site of my Department at www.pobail.ie.

Departmental Funding.

124. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the number of applications for funding from various groups throughout County Kildare received in his Department in 2010; the extent to which he has responded or intends to respond; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14453/10]

125. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the number of bodies or groups throughout County Kildare that applied to his Department for funding in 2009; the number of successful applicants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14454/10]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Pat Carey): I propose to take Questions 124 and 125 together.

As the Deputy will be aware, my Department operates a wide range of grant programmes and schemes and details of these are available on my Department's website at www.pobail.ie. Some of the schemes are administered directly by my Department and others are administered on behalf of the Department by various bodies and groups, where applications for funding are submitted directly to the bodies/groups in question.

In relation to the applications administered directly by my Department, I can confirm that under the Scheme of Community Support for Older People (CSOP), 9 groups from County Kildare applied for funding in 2009 and all were approved for funding. 9 applications from groups in County Kildare for funding have also been received under the CSOP to date in 2010. 6 of these applications were successful and 3 are currently being assessed.

In 2009, 9 groups from County Kildare applied for funding under the programme of grants for locally-based community and voluntary organisations ("Once-off Grants") and 7 groups were approved for funding. No applications were received in 2010 and the scheme is currently closed to applications.

3 Community Development Projects in County Kildare were allocated funding under the Community Development Programme in 2009 and also under the new Local and Community Development Programme in 2010.

The Kildare Local Development Company, Cill Dara Ar Aghaigh Teoranta, was allocated €1.1 million for the delivery of the Local Development Social Inclusion Programme (LDSIP)

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in 2009. It has been allocated funding of €0.98 million for delivery of the new Local and Community Development Programme in 2010.

It should be noted that applications for funding for drugs initiatives in County Kildare are made to the South West Regional Drugs Task Force (RDTF).

Finally, for completeness, I wish to confirm to the Deputy that funding under the Rural Development Programme 2007-2013 is provided through integrated local development companies and that a total of €12.28 million has been indicatively approved for rural development purposes under this programme in County Kildare.

National Drugs Strategy.

126. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the extent to which he proposes to offer assistance towards the drugs task force programme in 2010; the way this compares with previous years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14455/10]

130. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs his proposals for interaction with local community based groups involved in the fight against drugs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14459/10]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Pat Carey): I propose to take Questions Nos. 126 and 130 together.

As the Deputy is aware, the majority of expenditure incurred through my Department's Vote for drugs initiatives is channelled through the Local and Regional Drugs Task Forces. In this regard, in excess of €31 million will be made available this year to the Task Forces for the ongoing implementation of their strategic plans. Overall, this represents a reduction of 11% in the funding provided in 2009. The reduction in 2009 over 2008 was of the order of 8% but, in that regard, it should be noted that responsibility and funding for the Young Peoples Facilities and Services Fund transferred to the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs with effect from 1 January 2009.

My Department will continue to support and engage with local and community-based groups involved in tackling drug misuse through the Task Force network and in line with the structures outlined in the National Drugs Strategy 2009-2016.

Departmental Funding.

127. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the number of groups, bodies or agencies that received funding from his Department in the past 12 months; the extent to which such funding is likely to be available in the course of 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14456/10]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Pat Carey): As the Deputy will be aware, my Department operates a wide range of grant programmes and schemes, details of which are available on my Department's website at www.pobail.ie.

Against this background, the Deputy will appreciate that funding is provided each year to a very large number of individuals, groups, bodies and agencies. I do not consider that the allocation of staff resources that would be required to fully list all of these allocations could be justified, particularly in the context where a significant amount of the relevant information is already available on my Department's website or in the annual Appropriation Accounts that are laid before the Oireachtas.

If the Deputy has a particular query regarding specific groups, bodies or agencies, I will, of course, be happy to provide the relevant information to the extent feasible.

Strategy Statements.

128. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs his priorities for his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14457/10]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Pat Carey): My priority over the coming period will be to progress the actions and commitments reflected in the Programme for Government and the Revised Programme for Government that relate to my functions and areas of responsibility in the restructured Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. In this regard, work will commence shortly on the preparation of a new Statement of Strategy for my Department. In developing this new Statement of Strategy, my Department will take stock of the progress made to date on meeting Government Programme commitments and decide how best to focus its efforts over the coming period so as to achieve real results on the ground and deliver on our mandate.

Over its lifetime, the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs made significant progress in enhancing the cohesiveness and efficiency of delivery of various programmes that were transferred to it from other Departments. A similar challenge will face the new Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, but I am confident that the experience garnered in that context over recent years will prove invaluable in further enhancing the delivery of the Department's new social development and social inclusion programmes to the benefit of all our customers and stakeholders.

Community Development.

129. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs his proposals to liaise with urban and rural support groups involved in social regeneration; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14458/10]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Pat Carey): As the Deputy will be aware, my Department's mandate includes the promotion and support of both urban and rural communities.

Against this background, my officials and I liaise on a daily basis with a wide range of communities across the country, including urban and rural support groups involved in social regeneration such as integrated local development companies, rural development groups, urban based partnerships, Rapid Area Implementation Teams, and Local and Regional Drugs Task Forces. I can assure the Deputy that this work will continue to receive priority.

Details of the scope of the work undertaken by my Department, including funding available to urban and rural support groups involved in social regeneration, can be found on my Department's website at www.pobail.ie.

Question No. 130 answered with Question No. 126.

131. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs his plans for the future of the RAPID programme with particular reference to the possibility of extending the scope of the programme to address the economic situation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14460/10]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Pat Carey): In order to ensure the continued relevance of the RAPID Programme, a review of RAPID area boundaries, including an analysis of data from Census 2006 across a range of socio-economic and deprivation indicators, has been undertaken with the intention of allowing adjustments necessary to ensure that areas are appropriately targeting the most disadvantaged communities.

Following the review, the Government approved the inclusion of five new towns in the RAPID Programme in May last — Ballina, Dungarvan, Enniscorthy, Mullingar and Rathkeale.

The review also proposed changes to the boundaries of some of the other 46 RAPID areas and I expect to bring proposals to Government in this regard in due course.

I anticipate that, through its focus on deprivation and social exclusion, the RAPID Programme will continue to address the impact of the economic downturn on vulnerable communities and to provide opportunities for social and economic recovery.

132. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs his proposals to expand the CLÁR scheme operated by his Department; the extent to which he has examined the scope for expansion in this area having particular regard to the economic situation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14461/10]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Pat Carey): Funding of €8m is being provided for the CLÁR Programme in 2010 by my Department. However, as CLÁR leverages funding through other Departments and Agencies, the value of the investment that is being supported in rural areas through the Programme will be considerably higher. I have no immediate plans to further expand the Programme.

Departmental Agencies.

133. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the position of the amalgamation of the Combat Poverty Agency and the Office of Social Inclusion; if the officials have moved to their new offices; the cost of such a move if any; the cost of the change of websites, published documents and so on due to the change; if all the changes of such have now been completed; the staffing structure of the new agency; if the agency is sharing its facilities with any other such agency or Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14255/10]

134. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the position of the strategic plan for the integration of the Combat Poverty Agency and the Social Inclusion Agency; the number of staff assigned to this sector; the status of the staff assigned; the comparison of these numbers to the previous numbers of both agencies and their original status; the number of complaints made to this sector since the amalgamation; the status of the complaints; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14253/10]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): I propose to take Questions Nos. 133 and 134 together.

The primary reason for the integration of the Combat Poverty Agency with the Office for Social Inclusion was to ensure that the strongest possible mechanisms are in place to tackle poverty and social exclusion as recommended in the review of the Combat Poverty Agency. The role of the Division is to support the Government in developing and implementing the strategies for preventing, reducing and ultimately eliminating poverty and social exclusion. This includes promoting greater social inclusion and social cohesion in collaboration with other stakeholders including, in particular, people experiencing poverty.

With effect from 1st July 2009 (in line with the Government Decision announced in Budget 2009), the Combat Poverty Agency and the Office for Social Inclusion were integrated to form the Social Inclusion Division within the Department of Social and Family Affairs. The Social Inclusion Division combines the experience and expertise of the staff of both bodies and is currently located in the Department's offices in Townsend St, Dublin 2.

The necessary legislative provisions were contained in Part 5 of the Social Welfare (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2008. The legislation provided that the permanent staff of the Agency would become civil servants with effect from the date of the Commencement Order on 1st July 2009. There were 26 staff in the Division on the date of the Commencement Order. There are 20 staff at all grades from Principal Officer to Clerical Officer in the Division at present.

Savings as a result of the integration include savings that arise in respect of board members' fees, accommodation and savings that arise as a result of the integration of support services such as combined personnel, payroll and ancillary services. Savings also arise on account of the non-filling of a number of short-term temporary staff positions that ended in June 2009 and as a result of the redeployment of a small number of administrative and HR support staff. It was envisaged that the extent and timing of the savings would be identified and dealt with as part of the implementation process with measures that could be advanced quickly to achieve administrative efficiencies and cost savings prioritised.

In accordance with the terms of the lease in place for the offices of the former Combat Poverty Agency, the annual rent is €228,000 plus a service charge of €27,000. The Department will exercise its rights to break out of the lease in March 2011. There will be no penalty for exercising this option. The Department will use the space for its own Departmental purposes in the meantime. The integration of the websites of the Office for Social Inclusion and the Combat Poverty Agency will be undertaken on an in house basis during this year. The Social Inclusion Division's Strategic Plan is currently available on www.socialinclusion.ie.

Anti-Poverty Strategy.

135. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the number of research projects being undertaken by the new integrated division in determining poverty and its effects; the areas of research; the timescale of this research; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14252/10]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): The integration of the Combat Poverty Agency and the Office for Social Inclusion to form the Social Inclusion Division has facilitated an enhanced capacity in relation to research and data. Evidence-based research on the changing nature, extent and causes of poverty is a vital element in the fight against poverty and social exclusion.

One of the functions of the division under its strategic plan 2009-2011 is to coordinate and initiate as required quantitative and qualitative research to assist with meeting the challenges that emerge from the monitoring and evaluation processes and, in particular, on new and emerging poverty risks. The work programme of the division has an enhanced role for high quality research in support of government strategies to tackle poverty and to promote social inclusion, which seeks to make best use of internal and external research capacity.

It is the intention that reports of research undertaken by the division will be published in a timely manner and that collaboration and consultation with social partners, including the community and voluntary pillar, and other bodies such as the National Economic and Social Council will be a key feature of the way in which the division works.

[Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív.]

The main components of the research programme of the division are:

- The analysis of data from the annual Survey on Income and Living Conditions in conjunction with the Central Statistics Office and the Economic and Social Research Institute. The division is currently finalising with the ESRI a report on poverty trends between 2004 and 2007 for children, people of working age and older people.
- The development and reporting of indicators and associated data strategies to monitor progress on the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016. This work is undertaken through a technical advisory group made up of research and statistical experts, government departments and the social partners.
- The analysis of the impact and effectiveness of public policy on poverty and social exclusion. In this regard, the division recently published a review of the effectiveness of domestic energy efficiency programmes in conjunction with the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland.
- Support for independent research studies on new and emerging aspects of poverty under an academic research funding programme developed by the former Combat Poverty Agency. These reports are published on-line as research working papers. Recent reports have analysed topics such as active citizenship in Dublin's Docklands, public-private partnerships in social housing regeneration, early school leaving, lone parents and the private rented sector, medical card eligibility and the financial difficulties of those living below the poverty line.

Two research seminars to promote and disseminate the research work of the division are planned as part of the Irish programme for the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion 2010. The first of these will examine Irish poverty rates in a comparative European context and is being organised in conjunction with the Economic and Social Research Institute. The second will review indicators for monitoring progress on poverty and is being organised in conjunction the technical advisory group.

Social Welfare Benefits.

136. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the way a person (details supplied) in County Mayo was assessed for jobseeker's allowance; the way his Department assessed their spouse as earning over €19,000 when their salary is set at €15,700; and if this case will be reassessed. [14331/10]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Due to staff action currently being taken, I regret that I am unable to provide the information sought by the Deputy.

137. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the position regarding an application for jobseeker's allowance in respect of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14336/10]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Due to staff action currently being taken, I regret I am unable to provide the information sought by the deputy.

Social Welfare Appeals.

138. **Deputy Olwyn Enright** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs when an appeal

of a decision to refuse mortgage interest supplement in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Offaly will be concluded; the position regarding same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14348/10]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Due to staff action currently being taken, I regret that I am unable to provide the information sought by the Deputy.

Social Welfare Benefits.

139. **Deputy Noel Ahern** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the position regarding an application for jobseeker's allowance in respect of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 11; the reason for the delay in making a decision; the average delay nationally for jobseekers allowance; and the average delay on the north side of Dublin. [14360/10]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Due to staff action currently being taken, I regret that I am unable to provide the information sought by the Deputy.

140. **Deputy Noel Ahern** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the position regarding benefits for a family (details supplied). [14362/10]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Due to staff action currently being taken, I regret that I am unable to provide the information sought by the Deputy.

Pension Provisions.

141. **Deputy Noel Ahern** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the position regarding an application for contributory pension in respect of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 11. [14363/10]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Due to staff action currently being taken, I regret that I am unable to provide the information sought by the Deputy.

Social Welfare Benefits.

142. **Deputy Noel Ahern** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the position regarding the benefits available to a person (details supplied). [14364/10]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Due to staff action currently being taken, I regret that I am unable to provide the information sought by the Deputy.

143. **Deputy Noel Ahern** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the position regarding an application for unemployment benefit in respect of a person (details supplied). [14365/10]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Due to staff action currently being taken, I regret that I am unable to provide the information sought by the Deputy.

Pension Provisions.

144. **Deputy Noel Ahern** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs if a person (details supplied) in Dublin 11 is entitled to a non-contributory State pension. [14366/10]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Due to staff action currently being taken, I regret I am unable to provide the information sought by the deputy.

Social Welfare Benefits.

145. **Deputy Noel Ahern** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the position regarding an application for social welfare payment in respect of persons (details supplied) in Dublin 11. [14367/10]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Due to staff action currently being taken, I regret that I am unable to provide the information sought by the Deputy.

146. **Deputy Noel Ahern** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the position regarding entitlements to benefits in respect of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 9. [14368/10]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Due to staff action currently being taken, I regret that I am unable to provide the information sought by the Deputy.

147. **Deputy Noel Ahern** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the position regarding an application for jobseekers allowance in respect of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 11. [14369/10]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Due to staff action currently being taken, I regret that I am unable to provide the information sought by the Deputy.

148. **Deputy Noel Ahern** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the position regarding an application for the household benefits package in respect of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 11. [14370/10]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Due to staff action currently being taken, I regret that I am unable to provide the information sought by the Deputy.

149. **Deputy Noel Ahern** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the payments being made to persons (details supplied) in Dublin 11. [14371/10]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Due to staff action currently being taken, I regret that I am unable to provide the information sought by the Deputy.

Community Employment Schemes.

150. **Deputy Noel Ahern** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the reason an exemption on rehabilitative grounds was not extended to a person (details supplied) in Dublin 11 to allow them to continue in a community employment scheme until 11 September 2010; if he will confirm the regulations and state whether it is in order for a person to carry on after their 65th birthday when an exemption exists; if she will grant this person an exemption to enable them to continue on the scheme. [14372/10]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Due to staff action currently being taken, I regret that I am unable to provide the information sought by the Deputy.

Social Welfare Benefits.

151. **Deputy Noel Ahern** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the number of persons on jobseekers benefit for a period of 12 to 15 months for each of the past 12 months; the number of these who were later declined this allowance or granted a weekly personal allowance of less than €100 per week; the number of such persons in education; the number

on disability benefit; the number of persons receiving no payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14373/10]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Due to staff action currently being taken, I regret that I am unable to provide the information sought by the Deputy.

152. **Deputy Noel Ahern** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs if he will clarify the position regarding a person (details supplied) in Dublin 9 in relation to whether their application to transfer to invalidity pension from disability benefit is under consideration; and if not, if the process can commence. [14374/10]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Due to staff action currently being taken, I regret that I am unable to provide the information sought by the Deputy.

Pension Provisions.

153. **Deputy Noel Ahern** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs if he will give an update on applications for non-contributory pension by persons (details supplied) in Dublin 11; and if decisions have been finalised. [14375/10]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Due to staff action currently being taken, I regret I am unable to provide the information sought by the deputy.

154. **Deputy Noel Ahern** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the position regarding the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 11; the rate of social payment that are in receipt of; if, in view of the fact its a non-contributory pension, they would do better as their spouse is on qualified adult allowances or on their own contributions; if he will confirm that they are double respite care allowance for acting as carer's for persons; the reason they have not been awarded a 50% carer's allowance; if he will confirm that these persons have all other entitlements such as household benefit scheme. [14376/10]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Due to staff action currently being taken, I regret that I am unable to provide the information sought by the Deputy.

Social Welfare Benefits.

155. **Deputy Noel Ahern** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs his plans in view of recent media reports about the possible extension of the free travel scheme to visiting EU nationals over the age of 65 years; if this proposal has been considered by his Department; and when this proposal might be introduced. [14377/10]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): I understand the Deputy is referring to the Golden Trekker scheme which is the responsibility of the Minister for Arts, Sports and Tourism.

This new scheme of was introduced following the Tourism Renewal Group recommendations. It involves a new reduced price rail travel scheme aimed at senior citizens visiting Ireland from abroad was announced by the Minister for Finance in Budget 2010. Accordingly, Fáilte Ireland, in conjunction with Iarnród Éireann, has now developed this free rail travel scheme — the “Golden Trekker” — to boost overseas visitor numbers amongst a strong market segment for Irish tourism. The scheme, which was launched on 16 March, provides for free mainline, commuter and DART rail tickets to all tourists to Ireland aged 66 and over and there is no restriction on nationality or country of residence.

[Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív.]

The free travel scheme operated by the Department of Social and Family Affairs is available to all people permanently resident in the State aged 66 years or over, irrespective of nationality or country or origin. The scheme permits free travel on most CIE public transport services, Luas and a range of services offered by a large number of private operators in various parts of the country. The scheme is also available to people under 66 in receipt of certain qualifying payments such as carer's allowance or disability allowance.

While the scheme is free for those who are eligible, all of the transport companies involved, including CIE, are paid for the service by the Department of Social and Family Affairs. In 2009 approximately 680,000 persons were in receipt of free travel passes at a cost of €73.5 million.

Pension Provisions.

156. **Deputy Noel Ahern** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the provisions available for recipients of contributory State pensions who for reasons of ill health are unable to collect their pensions on a weekly basis; in particular, if old age pensioners must collect their pensions on a weekly basis or if there is a certain amount of flexibility in the current arrangements whereby they can collect their pensions every three to four weeks; if there is a limit on the amount of time that can pass before a person must collect their pension; the consequences for a person's pension entitlements if they have not been able to collect their pension for a number of weeks and if it is normal in such cases to send a person's entitlements back to the Department; the way in which a person can reclaim a number of weeks' payments if they have been sent back to the Department; and the position regarding the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 11. [14386/10]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Due to staff action currently being taken, I regret that I am unable to provide the information sought by the Deputy.

Social Welfare Benefits.

157. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Social Affairs how a person (details supplied) in Dublin 12 was told by his Department on 16 March 2010 that they owed his Department a sum of money; his views on whether it is reasonable that they will be deducted the sum of €19 weekly from 8 April 2010 even though they are on invalidity pension and have no other source of income. [14399/10]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Due to staff action currently being taken, I regret that I am unable to provide the information sought by the Deputy.

Flood Relief.

158. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the value to date of urgent needs payments awarded to flood victims in each county; the number of applicants involved; the corresponding figure for payments under the humanitarian assistance towards flood damage scheme; if the humanitarian scheme will consider permanent housing relocation payments in circumstances in which there is a high probability of the property flooding in the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14407/10]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): The HSE's Community Welfare Service has been providing support to households under the Humanitarian Aid Scheme since last November's flooding. Up to the 26th March 2010 they had made 2,735

payments to 1,253 individuals to the value of €1,070,595 throughout the country. The following tabular statement gives a county by county breakdown of expenditure and payments.

The question of permanent housing relocation payments is not within the scope of the Humanitarian Aid Scheme; this is a housing issue to be dealt with by the relevant housing authorities in the first instance. However, the Community Welfare Service will continue to work with any families in this position to ensure that the objectives of the humanitarian aid scheme are fully achieved in their case.

People seeking assistance should contact their local Community Welfare Office. Further information and applications forms in relation to the Humanitarian Assistance Scheme are available from the Community Welfare Service in the affected areas and from the Department's website (www.welfare.ie) and the HSE's website (www.hse.ie).

Value and Number of Payments Made and Individuals Assisted — Week Ending 26th March 2010 under the Humanitarian Assistance Scheme

County	Expenditure by County	Number of Payments Made	Individuals Assisted
	€		
Galway	306,513	765	334
Cork	290,588	790	477
Clare	212,202	435	97
Westmeath	78,279	344	86
Tipperary	63,489	122	75
Roscommon	22,946	59	28
Carlow	5,171	32	28
Limerick	16,114	33	32
Wicklow	12,781	20	15
Kildare	11,183	32	14
Waterford	6,666	11	10
Other*	44,663	92	57
Total	1,070,595	2,735	1,253

*There were fewer than 10 individuals assisted in each of the other counties.

Social Welfare Benefits.

159. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs if he will ensure that a payment in respect of a person (details supplied) is up to date and awarded in full; and if he will further ensure that any arrears will be awarded without delay. [14414/10]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Due to staff action currently being taken, I regret that I am unable to provide the information sought by the Deputy.

160. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the position regarding a review for a work exemption in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Mayo. [14426/10]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Due to staff action currently being taken, I regret that I am unable to provide the information sought by the Deputy.

161. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs if a person (details supplied) in County Mayo will be approved and awarded farm assist. [14434/10]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Due to staff action currently being taken, I regret that I am unable to provide the information sought by the Deputy.

Departmental Agencies.

162. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the position regarding the role and activities of the Affordable Homes Partnership; if he will detail its structure, including governing arrangements, and the suggested role and functions of the new proposed housing agency of which the affordable homes agency is to become part; how this new agency will be accountable to him; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14330/10]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy Michael Finneran): The Affordable Homes Partnership (AHP) was established in August 2005 under the aegis of my Department. The AHP is subject to public service corporate governance disciplines as outlined in the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies, which includes audit and appropriate ethics requirements. The functions of the AHP are specified in the Affordable Homes Partnership (Establishment) Order, 2005, as amended by the Affordable Homes Partnership (Establishment) (Amendment) Order, 2007. By virtue of a provision in the Local Government Services (Corporate Bodies) (Confirmation of Orders) Act, 2008, this order has statutory effect as if it were an Act of the Oireachtas. Further details on the governance of the AHP and its structure, including details of the membership of the Board of the AHP, are available on the AHP's website, *www.ahp.ie*.

While the original core function of the AHP, co-ordinating and promoting the delivery of affordable housing, is of less urgency now in some local authority areas, considerable work is being carried out by the AHP in terms of assisting local authorities and the Department in addressing a number of issues directly relating to that core function. These include, for example: — ongoing support to local authorities to help them bring the remaining unsold affordable units into effective use; — assisting local authorities and the Department in mainstreaming the leasing initiative within the overall social housing investment programme; — review of local authority housing strategies; and — the provision of a central credit checking and loan assessment procedure for all local authority mortgage lending. The principal objective of the prospective Housing and Sustainable Communities Agency is to work with and assist the Department and local authorities in their objective of delivering sustainable communities in a high quality living environment by advising on, and assisting in, policy development and implementation, providing specialist support services, facilitating the provision of good quality housing and neighbourhoods and ensuring that development takes place in a manner that respects people, surroundings and the long-term common interest.

The Agency will be required to comply with the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies.

An Implementation Group comprising personnel from my Department, the Department of Finance, the CCMA and the CEO Designate of the new Agency is currently working to bring the Agency through to establishment, including finalising Governance and accountability arrangements.

Water and Sewerage Schemes.

163. **Deputy Arthur Morgan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local

Government the position regarding a sewerage scheme (details supplied) in County Donegal; when works will commence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14345/10]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): The Bundoran Sewerage Scheme, which is part of the Donegal Group B Scheme, was included in my Department's Water Services Investment Programme 2007-2009. My Department is currently examining Donegal County Council's Tender Documents for the scheme. A decision will be conveyed to the Council as soon as possible in light of the finalisation of the Water Services Investment Programme for the period 2010 to 2012. I expect to publish the new Programme shortly.

EU Directives.

164. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the steps that are being taken to ensure the 2008 directive on the protection of the environment through criminal law (2008/99/EC) is transposed into Irish Law; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14352/10]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): Directive 2008/99/EC on the protection of the environment through criminal law is due for transposition into Irish law by 26 December 2010. The Directive requires Member States to apply criminal sanctions for breaches of some 72 EU Directives and Regulations. My Department is currently consulting relevant Government Departments and agencies to assess the implications of the Directive for existing legislation. Consultation with the Office of the Attorney General and preparation of a Regulatory Impact Analysis will also be required. All necessary steps will be taken to ensure transposition of the Directive by the due date.

Local Authority Staff.

165. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghail** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when, further to Parliamentary Question Nos. 395 and 396 of 17 November 2009, a reply will issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14353/10]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): Some of the information sought is not readily available in my Department, and the retrieval of relevant files and compilation of this information involves a significant amount of time and work. While this process is underway, it has been delayed by industrial action in the Civil Service and the local government sector. The information will be forwarded to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Programmes for Government.

166. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he will reply to a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14417/10]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): It is my intention that all of the commitments set out in the Programme for Government would be implemented over the timeframe set out for the agreed Programme. More specifically, both I and the Minister for Housing will set out our priorities for the coming year, in the Department's Annual Output Statement 2010, at the presentation of the Department's Estimates to the Oireachtas Select Committee on the Environment, Heritage and Local Government

[Deputy John Gormley.]

towards the end of April. I will arrange to forward a copy of the finalised Annual Output Statement to the Deputy at that time.

Social and Affordable Housing.

167. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he will reply to a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14418/10]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy Michael Finneran): The Social Housing Leasing Initiative (SHLI), which was introduced last year, will be a key element of the future housing programme. It is anticipated that in 2010 the leasing initiative and the Rental Accommodation Scheme will together deliver some 4,000 to 4,500 units, or 50% of the total expected social housing output. To the end of March 2010, approximately 2,268 units had been sourced and approved under the SHLI. 1,610 of these had received full approval, with a further 658 units having been given provisional approval. Some 523 of the fully approved units are considered to be operational on the basis of signed lease agreements being in place, and are either occupied or in the course of occupation.

Homeless Persons.

168. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he will reply to a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14419/10]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy Michael Finneran): I refer to the reply to Question No. 14 of 25 February 2010 which sets out the position generally regarding the implementation of the Government's Homeless Strategy and the Implementation Plan for the Strategy. I indicated in that reply that work was proceeding to procure additional accommodation specifically for homeless households. Arising from this work, I announced, on 29 March 2010, an enhanced package of measures, building on existing schemes, to help local authorities to accelerate progress towards their targets for providing long-term housing for homeless people. A key element is the allocation of €20 million in capital funding specifically for the procurement of accommodation by approved housing bodies for homeless people under this programme.

This funding will be available, in conjunction with funding under the social housing leasing initiative, to leverage the procurement of the maximum number of properties either through leasing or purchase using private funding or, potentially, borrowing from the Housing Finance Agency. The programme also involves certain other financial enhancements and other measures to maximise effectiveness and speed of delivery of accommodation.

Planning Issues.

169. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he will reply to a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14420/10]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy Michael Finneran): My Department is aware of the concerns of consumers of housing services in current market conditions, including in regard to unfinished or partially completed residential developments. The Department is progressing work with stakeholders, including the National Building Agency and local authority representatives, to develop a fuller picture of the

scale of these difficulties in terms of mapping such developments on a county by county basis, setting out the range of statutory powers at the disposal of the relevant agencies and determining what further measures might need to be considered.

170. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he will reply to matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14421/10]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy Michael Finneran): The legislative provisions in relation to taking in charge of estates are contained in Section 180 of the Planning and Development Act 2000. Section 180 provides, in relation to estates which have been completed to the satisfaction of the planning authority in accordance with the permission, that the planning authority must, if requested to do so by the developer or by the majority of the qualified electors who are owners or occupiers of the houses involved, initiate the procedures in section 11 of the Roads Act 1993 for declaring the road(s) to be public roads, for whose maintenance the local authority will then be responsible. It is a matter for the elected members to decide whether or not to take in charge the roads in question.

In relation to estates which have not have been completed to the satisfaction of the planning authority and where enforcement proceedings have not been commenced within the relevant period, section 180 also provides that the planning authority must, if requested to do so by the majority of the residents as defined above (but not the developer), initiate the procedures in section 11 of the Roads Act. Section 180 also provides that, where a planning authority makes an order under section 11 of the Roads Act, it must also take in charge any open spaces, car parks, sewers, water mains or drains within the attendant grounds of the development.

In February 2008, my Department issued Circular Letter PD 1/08, promoting a comprehensive and pro-active approach to the taking in charge of residential estates. It required each planning authority to develop or update, as appropriate, and implement a policy on taking in charge in accordance with the policy guidance, the main principles of which are as follows:

- Certain core facilities and infrastructure should always be taken in charge on request, including public roads and footpaths, unallocated surface parking areas, public lighting, public water supply, foul and storm water drainage and public open spaces;
- The issue of taking in charge should be addressed at preplanning application stage, and in the planning application when the developer should be required clearly to identify the area to be taken in charge in due course;
- Planning authorities should take all necessary measures to ensure proper completion of the development, in particular through securing adequate bonds, ongoing inspection of construction and taking enforcement action where necessary;
- The procedures for taking in charge should begin promptly on foot of a request by the majority of the residents in the development or by the developer, as appropriate. Protocols, including time frames, must be set out by planning authorities to respond to requests for taking in charge; and.
- In relation to older estates, priority must continue to be given to resolving those estates that have been left unfinished or not taken in charge for the longest period.

[Deputy Michael Finneran.]

A new local government service indicator in relation to taking in charge was introduced in 2008 onwards. Planning authorities are required to provide the following information in respect of the previous year:

- The number of residential estates for which the planning permission has expired in respect of which formal written requests for taking in charge (from residents or developers) were on hands at the beginning of the year;
- The number of estates that were taken in charge in the year in question;
- The total number of dwellings in these estates; and
- The number of estates in respect of which requests were received that were not completed to the satisfaction of the planning authority in line with the planning permission.

In 2008, 316 estates were taken in charge. Further statistics on this issue are outlined in the 2008 Service Indicators Report which are available to view and download at www.lgmsb.ie.

Fire Safety Inspections.

171. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he will reply to a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14422/10]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy Michael Finneran): Statistics forwarded by fire authorities to my Department in relation to fire prevention inspections carried out under the Fire Services Acts 1981 and 2003 for the 5 years 2004 to 2008 are set out in the following tables. Statistics for 2009 are awaited from fire authorities.

Year 2004	Inspections under <i>Fire Services Acts 1981 and 2003</i>					
	Section 13 — Planning		Section 24 — Licensing		Other Sections	
	Premises Inspected	Inspections Undertaken	Premises Inspected	Inspections Undertaken	Premises Inspected	Inspections Undertaken
Cork City Council	0	0	160	432	32	39
Dublin City Council	4	4	460	788	805	1522
Limerick City Council	248	80	15	15	0	0
Waterford City Council	1	1	48	57	96	102
Carlow County Council	25	25	117	151	28	36
Cavan County Council	24	28	96	151	26	36
Clare County Council	1	9	139	164	19	28
Cork County Council	1,210	1,425	298	464	262	389
Donegal County Council	160	160	203	246	295	320
Galway County Council	35	35	203	165	40	35
Kerry County Council	125	150	255	335	61	70
Kildare County Council	1,080	1,080	39	58	92	125
Kilkenny County Council	19	19	88	92	39	47
Laois County Council	25	195	130	260	50	100
Leitrim County Council	43	43	35	62	29	30
Limerick County Council	145	145	145	170	112	141

Year 2004	Inspections under <i>Fire Services Acts 1981 and 2003</i>					
	Section 13 — Planning		Section 24 — Licensing		Other Sections	
	Premises Inspected	Inspections Undertaken	Premises Inspected	Inspections Undertaken	Premises Inspected	Inspections Undertaken
Longford County Council	48	48	18	28	30	40
Louth County Council	9	13	38	41	31	34
Drogheda City Council	11	12	20	22	47	49
Dundalk Town Council	24	27	15	17	24	28
Mayo County Council	Not available	368	Not available	353	Not available	25
Meath County Council	48	48	85	85	120	120
Monaghan County Council	14	16	72	144	61	145
Offaly County Council	160	194	48	78	25	30
Roscommon County Council	142	60	50	119	0	0
Sligo County Council	154	133	119	143	90	90
North Tipperary County Council	8	8	115	127	6	8
South Tipperary County Council	0	0	19	34	26	34
Waterford County Council	10	10	50	50	71	80
Westmeath County Council	26	26	70	83	4	4
Athlone Town Council	5	8	18	21	0	0
Wexford County Council	4	4	41	52	29	31
Wicklow County Council	0	0	79	104	47	51

Year 2005	Inspections under <i>Fire Services Acts 1981 and 2003</i>					
	Section 13 — Planning		Section 24 — Licensing		Other Sections	
	Premises Inspected	Inspections Undertaken	Premises Inspected	Inspections Undertaken	Premises Inspected	Inspections Undertaken
Cork City Council	0	0	169	410	128	210
Dublin City Council	5	6	552	875	836	1467
Limerick City Council	132	132	96	303	0	0
Waterford City Council	0	0	29	44	90	106
Carlow County Council	28	31	140	170	54	71
Cavan County Council	15	20	105	135	8	11
Clare County Council	12	13	151	179	28	28
Cork County Council	1	1	306	473	178	249
Donegal County Council	146	146	189	223	241	272
Galway County Council	123	123	181	209	30	42
Kerry County Council	26	31	244	286	148	176
Kildare County Council	248	248	81	136	90	106
Kilkenny County Council	14	14	25	35	23	31
Laois County Council	13	10	94	94	31	31
Leitrim County Council	164	165	44	79	21	28
Limerick County Council	405	405	108	108	0	0
Longford County Council	26	26	15	17	20	25
Louth County Council	2	3	41	45	44	49
Drogheda Borough Council	2	3	22	47	45	56
Dundalk Town Council	15	18	26	30	37	43
Mayo County Council	104	104	270	301	38	43

[Deputy Michael Finneran.]

Year 2005	Inspections under <i>Fire Services Acts 1981 and 2003</i>					
	Section 13 — Planning		Section 24 — Licensing		Other Sections	
	Premises Inspected	Inspections Undertaken	Premises Inspected	Inspections Undertaken	Premises Inspected	Inspections Undertaken
Meath County Council	40	40	75	75	110	110
Monaghan County Council	42	40	138	66	14	12
Offaly County Council	137	166	41	67	21	26
Roscommon County Council	5	5	52	140	5	12
Sligo County Council	200	200	97	117	99	99
North Tipperary County Council	1	1	119	130	1	1
South Tipperary County Council	0	0	35	47	29	37
Waterford County Council	20	20	56	60	35	48
Westmeath County Council	30	32	1	1	3	3
Athlone Town Council	2	2	3	9	9	15
Wexford County Council	0	0	50	55	10	15
Wicklow County Council	0	0	49	61	36	38

Year 2006	Inspections under <i>Fire Services Acts 1981 and 2003</i>					
	Section 13 — Planning		Section 24 — Licensing		Other Sections	
	Premises Inspected	Inspections Undertaken	Premises Inspected	Inspections Undertaken	Premises Inspected	Inspections Undertaken
Cork City Council	0	0	160	412	120	212
Dublin City Council	4	6	492	897	518	983
Limerick City Council	102	102	55	185	53	75
Waterford City Council	1	2	51	28	26	35
Carlow County Council	38	40	120	128	55	67
Cavan County Council	20	20	120	140	8	8
Clare County Council	16	20	144	184	36	64
Cork County Council	0	0	276	475	181	260
Donegal County Council	94	98	250	265	14	14
Galway County Council	139	139	191	211	0	0
Kerry County Council	0	0	198	206	102	122
Kildare County Council	223	231	53	142	62	84
Kilkenny County Council	16	16	23	31	29	40
Laois County Council	117	12	24	24	2	2
Leitrim County Council	80	80	43	73	32	38
Limerick County Council	0	0	93	124	91	107
Longford County Council	5	5	8	10	0	0
Louth County Council	2	3	41	55	44	51
Drogheda Borough Council	0	0	23	31	41	49
Dundalk Town Council	0	0	24	39	37	51
Mayo County Council	86	87	273	341	43	43
Meath County Council	42	42	80	80	115	115
Monaghan County Council	109	248	10	10	7	7
Offaly County Council	256	282	65	67	36	40
Roscommon County Council	6	6	55	120	22	34

Year 2006	Inspections under <i>Fire Services Acts 1981 and 2003</i>					
	Section 13 — Planning		Section 24 — Licensing		Other Sections	
	Premises Inspected	Inspections Undertaken	Premises Inspected	Inspections Undertaken	Premises Inspected	Inspections Undertaken
Sligo County Council	200	200	112	240	55	55
North Tipperary Co Council	0	0	115	135	2	2
South Tipperary Co Council	0	0	8	9	7	9
Waterford County Council	24	24	57	60	42	46
Westmeath County Council	24	28	10	10	5	5
Athlone Town Council	0	0	4	5	6	6
Wexford County Council	0	0	43	61	28	44
Wicklow County Council	0	0	52	69	54	79

Year 2007	Inspections under <i>Fire Services Acts 1981 and 2003</i>					
	Section 13 — Planning		Section 24 — Licensing		Other Sections	
	Premises Inspected	Inspections Undertaken	Premises Inspected	Inspections Undertaken	Premises Inspected	Inspections Undertaken
Athlone Town Council	0	0	4	6	7	9
Carlow County Council	43	47	114	138	60	78
Cavan County Council	18	13	102	128	7	7
Clare County Council	8	12	130	205	62	106
Cork County Council	2	2	268	448	137	209
Cork City Council	0	0	152	275	84	151
Donegal County Council	8	12	130	205	62	106
Drogheda Borough Council	0	0	6	9	4	5
Dublin City Council	0	0	366	588	1,232	1,852
Dundalk Town Council	0	0	5	6	5	7
Galway County Council	125	125	202	236	3	9
Kerry County Council	14	14	225	264	105	139
Kildare County Council	0	0	0	0	0	0
Kilkenny County Council	0	0	0	0	0	0
Laois County Council	145	15	30	30	4	4
Leitrim County Council	31	31	48	80	23	39
Limerick City Council	85	85	74	236	41	64
Limerick County Council	21	21	95	124	110	130
Longford County Council	107	107	50	76	3	11
Louth County Council	0	0	5	8	3	5
Mayo County Council	53	54	185	226	32	38
Meath County Council	45	45	85	85	105	105
Monaghan County Council	0	0	77	218	0	0
Offaly County Council	246	260	73	78	0	0
Roscommon County Council	6	6	55	120	22	34
Sligo County Council	106	106	104	142	0	0
North Tipperary County Council	0	0	119	138	2	4
South Tipperary County Council	0	0	8	13	21	24
Waterford City Council	0	0	19	26	15	19

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Year 2007	Inspections under <i>Fire Services Acts 1981 and 2003</i>					
	Section 13 — Planning		Section 24 — Licensing		Other Sections	
	Premises Inspected	Inspections Undertaken	Premises Inspected	Inspections Undertaken	Premises Inspected	Inspections Undertaken
Waterford County Council	19	19	65	80	33	35
Westmeath County Council	32	37	13	14	4	4
Wexford County Council	0	0	74	84	102	116
Wicklow County Council	0	0	9	9	21	23

Year 2008	Inspections under <i>Fire Services Acts 1981 and 2003</i>					
	Section 13 — Planning		Section 24 — Licensing		Other Sections	
	Premises Inspected	Inspections Undertaken	Premises Inspected	Inspections Undertaken	Premises Inspected	Inspections Undertaken
Athlone Town Council	0	0	0	0	0	0
Carlow County Council	300	300	81	104	57	85
Cavan County Council	11	11	97	123	5	5
Clare County Council	24	24	132	168	60	74
Cork County Council						
Cork City Council	0	0	135	202	129	173
Donegal County Council	9	9	249	267	18	26
Drogheda Borough Council	0	0	12	18	10	19
Dublin City Council	10	13	363	667	1,632	2,386
Dundalk Town Council	0	0	8	14	7	16
Galway County Council	103	103	181	210	4	10
Kerry County Council	29	29	226	293	181	222
Kildare County Council	205	228	61	83	65	71
Kilkenny County Council						
Laois County Council	248	0	39	47	7	11
Leitrim County Council	52	52	42	67	33	39
Limerick City Council	67	67	74	233	94	90
Limerick County Council						
Longford County Council						
Louth County Council	0	0	9	20	4	9
Mayo County Council						
Meath County Council						
Monaghan County Council	7	7	86	259	25	31
Offaly County Council	52	52	46	61	75	126
Roscommon County Council						
Sligo County Council	87	87	103	155	128	128
North Tipperary County Council	0	0	116	141	7	11
South Tipperary County Council	0	0	3	4	11	13
Waterford City Council	1	1	26	31	34	39
Waterford County Council						
Westmeath County Council	22	22	52	58	49	57
Wexford County Council	0	0	78	86	64	84
Wicklow County Council						

Housing Grants.

172. **Deputy John Deasy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government his plans to introduce grants for the replacement of old windows in houses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14436/10]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy Michael Finneran): Under the terms of my Department's Housing Aid for Older People (HAOP) grant scheme, which is administered by individual local authorities, grants of up to €10,500 are available for the carrying out of necessary repairs or improvements to a house. The types of works allowable under the scheme can be varied and may include repairs to/replacement of windows and doors which, in the opinion of the local authority, are considered necessary to make the house habitable for the lifetime of the occupant.

Outside of the HAOP scheme, there is no specific grant scheme currently available from my Department for the replacement of windows in private dwellings and I have no plans to introduce such a scheme.

Social and Affordable Housing.

173. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the number of social houses provided in each year from 2003 to 2009; if he will divide these figures into which schemes, such as Part V, are responsible for delivering these houses; the Exchequer contribution in respect of social housing for each year from 2003 to 2009; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14441/10]

174. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the number of affordable houses provided in each year from 2003 to 2009; if he will divide these figures into which schemes, such as Part V, that are responsible for delivering these houses; the Exchequer contribution in respect of affordable housing for each year from 2003 to 2009; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14442/10]

175. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the number of persons assisted to meet their housing needs in each year from 2003 to 2009, excluding social and affordable housing; if he will divide these figures into which schemes, such as shared ownership, that are responsible for delivering these houses; the Exchequer contribution for housing schemes, excluding social and affordable housing, for each year from 2003 to 2009; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14443/10]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy Michael Finneran): I propose to take Questions Nos. 173 to 175, inclusive, together.

Information in relation to the numbers of households whose needs have been met in the period 2003-2008 through the broad range of housing supports available can be found in the Annual Housing Statistics Bulletins which are available on my Department's website at www.environ.ie. Data for 2009 are currently being compiled, and will be made available on the Department's website once finalised.

The detail sought in relation to the Exchequer contribution towards the range of housing programmes is set out in the following tables. Figures for 2010 are drawn from the Revised Estimates Volume for 2010 while figures for the years 2003-2009 are final outturn figures.

Exchequer Provision (Capital)

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	Estimate 2010	Total
B.1 Capital — Social Provision & Support									
B.1.1 LA Housing	602,150,000	620,240,000	751,650,000	858,694,000	941,273,000	979,728,785	690,536,343	366,500,000	5,810,772,128
B.1.2 CAS	95,864,000	86,555,000	80,661,000	99,361,000	113,766,000	156,290,000	158,512,741	145,000,000	936,009,741
B.1.3 Traveller Accom.	28,950,000	35,692,000	37,000,000	35,555,000	35,000,000	35,000,000	19,601,979	35,000,000	261,798,979
B.1.4 Childcare Facilities	470,000	455,000	428,000	300,000	670,000	750,000	539,712	500,000	4,112,712
B.1.14 Communal Facilities	2,063,000	2,524,000	2,524,000	2,624,000	1,922,000	2,998,391	4,452,816	3,500,000	22,608,207
B.2 Capital — Local Authority Estate Regeneration & Remedial Works									
B.2.1 Regeneration	162,945,000	173,095,000	209,549,000	164,445,000	315,398,000	217,384,195	200,877,032	195,000,000	1,638,693,227
B.2.2 Retrofitting	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	45,000,000	45,000,000
B.3 Capital — Private Housing Adaptation — Grants and other Supports									
B.3.1 Housing Grants	93,176,000	60,333,000	39,509,000	40,999,000	48,210,000	81,261,787	75,864,366	80,000,000	519,353,153
B.3.2 Site Subsidies	27,890,000	17,797,000	12,688,000	36,076,000	35,217,000	38,492,685	6,938,473	6,000,000	181,099,158
B.3.3 Mortgage Allowances	1,721,000	2,265,000	2,600,000	3,127,000	3,333,000	3,159,464	3,175,805	3,500,000	22,881,269
Totals	1,015,229,000	998,956,000	1,136,609,000	1,241,181,000	1,494,789,000	1,515,065,307	1,160,499,267	880,000,000	9,442,328,574

176. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the number of persons that were on waiting lists for social housing for each year from 2003 to 2009; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14444/10]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy Michael Finneran): The number of households on a local authority's waiting list continuously fluctuates as households on the list are allocated housing and new households apply for housing support. My Department does not hold information in relation to the numbers currently on waiting lists in local authorities.

A statutory assessment of housing need is carried out every three years by all housing authorities in accordance with the terms of the Housing Act 1988. The last assessment took place in 2008 and indicated that there were 56,249 households in need of social housing support, an increase of some 30% on the corresponding figure in 2005. Further information regarding the assessment, including a breakdown of housing need figures by housing authority, is available on my Department's website at www.environ.ie.

Dublin Docklands Development Authority.

177. **Deputy Jim O'Keefe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the way the financial affairs of the Dublin Docklands Development Authority were monitored and supervised by his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14464/10]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): The Dublin Docklands Development Authority is a commercial semi-State body and has been financed from resources generated through the acquisition, development and sale of property. The Authority is established under the Dublin Docklands Development Authority Act 1997, which sets out the statutory functions and responsibilities of the Authority, including its financial reporting requirements.

My Department has a general oversight role in relation to the Authority, ensuring that it discharges its statutory mandate to revitalise and regenerate the Docklands area. The 1997 Act provides for a number of specific Ministerial oversight functions, for example,

- the appointment of the Chairperson of the Authority, the other seven directors of the Executive Board, and members, of the Authority's Council;
- sanction for borrowing up to an overall statutory limit of €127 million, with the agreement of the Minister for Finance,
- the approval of Planning Schemes, and
- determining the manner in which the Authority must keep its accounts and present audited accounts annually.

Under the provisions of the 1997 Act, the Authority must prepare an Annual Report and Audited Accounts for submission to the Minister prior to laying before both Houses of the Oireachtas. The Authority's accounts are audited by independent external auditors.

178. **Deputy Jim O'Keefe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the reason he refused to adopt the proposal from the Committee of Public Accounts to have the affairs of Dublin Dockland Development Authority brought within the

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remit of the Comptroller and Auditor General and subject to scrutiny by the PAC; and if he will introduce the necessary amending legislation accordingly. [14465/10]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): The Authority’s accounts are audited by independent external auditors. Under existing legislation, the Authority, along with many other State and semi-State commercial bodies, is outside the remit of the Comptroller and Auditor General.

Last Autumn, I wrote to the Authority’s Chair, who is an acknowledged expert in corporate governance matters, requesting that a comprehensive review of corporate governance arrangements within the Authority be undertaken. Consequently, the Authority commissioned two independent consultants’ reports to assess its planning and financial procedures. These two reports, together with a covering report from the Authority’s Board, were submitted to me at the beginning of February and are now being considered by my Department, in consultation with the Attorney General’s Office.

I expect that the consideration of the reports will be completed within a matter of weeks, at which stage I will bring to Government proposals to respond appropriately to the issues raised. In that context, I will keep the issue of any future involvement on the part of the Comptroller and Auditor General under review. Any decision to bring the DDDA within the remit of the C&AG has potentially wider implications for other commercial State bodies and would need to be considered in that context also.

It is important to note that under existing arrangements, it is open to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on the Environment, Heritage and Local Government to request the Authority to appear before it, thus affording Oireachtas members an opportunity to question the Authority on its activities and outlook. The last such appearance by the Authority’s Chair and Acting CEO took place as recently as 1 December 2009.

Foreshore Licences.

179. **Deputy Jimmy Deenihan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when a foreshore licence will be issued to a company (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14467/10]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): Following the enactment of the Foreshore and Dumping at Sea (Amendment) Act, 2009, my Department assumed responsibility on 15 January 2010 for a range of foreshore functions including all foreshore energy-related developments (including oil, gas, wind, wave and tidal energy).

The four foreshore applications made by Shannon LNG in respect of the project referred to are at an advanced stage of consideration and I expect to make a decision on them shortly.

Pest Control.

180. **Deputy Pádraic McCormack** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if his attention has been drawn to the problem caused by mink in the wild in areas such as Connemara, County Galway, where mink are killing lambs and causing destruction to sheep flocks; and his views on introducing a bounty on mink to encourage the trapping or elimination of this vermin due to the damage they are causing. [14313/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): I am not aware of any verifiable case of where lambs or sheep have been killed by mink. Fur farming is a licensed

activity controlled by my Department. I have no plans to introduce a scheme whereby a bounty would be paid for the control of mink.

Rural Environment Protection Scheme.

181. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the way he plans to keep the substantially greater matching funds that are now accruing to REP scheme three and REP scheme four in view of the fact that he has recently announced a new agri-environmental scheme which will cost €50 million and assuming that half of the money will come from the EU; his plans to let the matching funds be returned to the EU and not drawn down; his further plans to assign this funding to another scheme which will require matching funds to be provided by the Exchequer; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14319/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): The Rural Environment Protection Scheme remains in operation. Almost 30,000 farmers have applied to join REPS 4 since it was launched. All existing REPS 3 and 4 participants will be allowed to remain in the scheme until the end of their existing contracts, the last of which will finish at the end of 2015. This year, my Department will spend €330 million on REPS. All EU funding provided for REPS in the current Rural Development Programme will be drawn down in full.

I launched the new Agri-Environment Options Scheme on 30 March. EU funding for that scheme comes from modulation funds arising from the CAP Health Check and from the European Economic Recovery Package. The Minister for Finance agreed in December last to provide additional funding from the national exchequer, allowing for the launch of the new scheme at a rate of up to €5,000 for approximately 10,000 participants.

Sugar Beet Sector.

182. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the procedures involved for a group of farmers who wish to produce sugar beet on a commercial basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14324/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): Sugar beet can no longer be grown in Ireland for sugar processing following the decision to close down the sugar processing industry in 2006. Under the EU restructuring scheme for the sugar industry, the entire Irish sugar quota was renounced, the associated processing facilities were dismantled and the stakeholders concerned, including the beet growers, were compensated for the loss of the industry.

Some sugar beet continues to be grown here for fodder purposes.

Grant Payments.

183. **Deputy Seymour Crawford** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the position regarding payments for REP scheme four on a county basis; his views on whether in the present difficult banking and farming income situation that these payments are vital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14341/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): Out of 28,842 farmers due payments in REPS 4, payments have issued to over 21,000 as of today. Because of industrial action by officials in my Department, I am not in a position to provide a breakdown of these figures by county.

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To meet the requirements of EU regulations, applications for REPS payments have to go through an exhaustive series of administrative checks before payment can be released. In a significant number of cases, those checks raised issues and queries which required further detailed examination. The Department's staff are working to resolve these as quickly as possible. Many of these cases require the applicants' planners to amend the farm plans that were submitted originally. The applicants concerned have been made aware of the position and the applications will be further processed without delay on receipt of amended plans.

In a small number of local offices, the processing of payments has been delayed by staffing issues arising from the moratorium on recruitment and promotions in the public service and the Department is attempting to resolve these difficulties.

I am conscious of financial difficulties being experienced by many farm families and my objective remains to ensure that all outstanding claims are processed to payment stage as quickly as possible.

Farm Retirement Scheme.

184. **Deputy Jimmy Deenihan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when farm retirement will be approved in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14344/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): Due to industrial action by staff in my Department, I am not in a position to provide a reply to this question.

Grant Payments.

185. **Deputy Seán Ó Feargháil** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when a REP scheme four payment will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14354/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): Due to industrial action by staff in my Department, I am not in a position to provide a reply to this question.

National Drugs Strategy.

186. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science if her attention has been drawn to the work of a group (details supplied) in Dublin 11, and its role in improving retention and participation rates in education; and if in view of the negative implications of the budget 2010 cuts on this project, she will identify alternative sources of funding in order that this project can continue. [14445/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Coughlan): My Department provides funds for over thirty projects in Local Drugs Task Force areas, including the project referred to by the Deputy.

In the context of the budget for 2010 and the difficult fiscal climate, it was decided that funding for these projects was to be reduced from €3,643,000 in 2009 to €2,461,000 in 2010 and to cease from 2011.

My Department is currently reviewing the implications of the budget decisions relating to funding allocations for all of these projects.

A key aspect of the review is to determine whether my Department is the appropriate location for these projects or whether funding could more appropriately be channelled through

another Department or agency. In this regard, officials of my Department have held discussions with officials in the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs to determine whether projects which involve a significant element of youth work might be more appropriate to that Office. These discussions are ongoing.

A number of the projects are being reviewed within my Department in the context of their work being similar to that of other Departmental initiatives aimed at preventing early school leaving.

I anticipate that the examination of the projects and related discussions with the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs will be completed shortly and that a report on the findings of the review will be provided to me for consideration.

Schools Building Projects.

187. **Deputy Frank Feighan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science the position regarding an application by a school (details supplied); and if she will expedite this application. [14312/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Coughlan): The new post primary school referred to by the Deputy, is one of eight schools which were approved for inclusion in the 3rd Bundle of schools to be procured via Public Private Partnership.

This bundle is in the pre-procurement stage. Detailed output specifications and Public Sector Benchmark (PSB) are being finalised and outline planning permission has now been received in the case of seven of the schools. My Department is working closely with the relevant local authority to complete the planning process and a final decision in relation to the 8th school is expected shortly. Following completion of the pre procurement process, the Bundle will be ready for hand-over to the National Development Finance Agency (NDFA) for procurement.

The indicative timeframe for the delivery of a PPP school currently stands at approximately 4 years from the date the Bundle is announced.

School Curriculum.

188. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science the cost of enabling all schools to offer transition year; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14320/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Coughlan): Due to industrial action by some staff in the Department of Education and Science, I am not in a position to provide the costings sought by the Deputy.

Every year, my Department invites all second-level schools to participate in the Transition Year Programme.

The management authority of each school is responsible for making decisions regarding the Transition Year Programme in their school. Guidelines have been issued by my Department to support schools in this process. In some schools, the programme is compulsory for all students. In those that offer it as an option, circumstances may arise where it is necessary to limit the number of students who can avail of it. In cases where restrictions apply, schools should have clear procedures regarding how places are allocated to students.

As announced in the Budget in December, additional funding is to be allocated to schools which participate in the Transition Year Programme. Officials in my Department are currently considering the manner in which this money will be disbursed to schools. The relevant management bodies will be consulted as part of this process.

Literacy Levels.

189. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science the amount allocated by her Department for literacy initiatives and teaching at primary level; the amount allocated for literacy in DEIS schools at second level; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14321/10]

190. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science the means by which literacy rates among second level pupils are measured by her Department; the supports that exist for students at second level experiencing literacy difficulties; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14322/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Coughlan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 189 and 190 together.

Promoting literacy and numeracy skills is a core element of the ongoing work of schools and it is not possible to identify this expenditure separately. The 2004 National Assessment of English reading was published by the Educational Research Centre in 2005, and examined the achievement of some 4000 pupils in first and fifth classes in primary schools. The results show little variation in achievement compared with the previous survey in 1998, or over the period since 1980. Lower pupil achievement was strongly associated with socio economic status, medical card coverage and low parental educational attainment. Other factors associated with poorer average scores include being a member of the Traveller community, speaking a first language other than English or Irish, living in a lone parent household or being part of a large family. Factors associated with higher levels of achievement were parents reading to their child, parents reading for enjoyment, the availability of books and educational resources in the home, and parental rules about watching TV and playing computer games.

The Educational Research Centre in their report on Reading Literacy in Disadvantaged Primary Schools (2004) found that the proportion of pupils with serious literacy difficulties in schools serving disadvantaged communities averages in the region of 27-30% or about three times the national average.

The DEIS Action Plan, Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools, sets out a range of measures to address educational disadvantage, and promoting proficiency in literacy and numeracy is a central tenet of the approach set out. The measures include:

- additional literacy and numeracy advisers to support and advise schools in adopting an effective whole-school approach;
- extra resources for intensive professional development programmes for teachers;
- access to numeracy/literacy supports and measures at primary level;
- further development of paired reading initiatives implemented through the Home School Community Liaison Scheme;
- after school and holiday time supports assisting children's literacy;
- access to family literacy programmes.
- Expansion of the Junior Certificate Schools Programme in DEIS schools;
- provision for school library and librarian support in post primary schools with most disadvantage.

In addition, from the beginning of 2007, standardised testing in English Reading and Mathematics has been implemented on an annual basis for all pupils at two stages of the primary cycle, supported by an annual grant to schools (€1.792m in 2009) for the cost of test materials, manuals, test scoring services or test related software. This work is complemented by a separate programme of national monitoring so that national trends in different categories of school can be tracked over time. Schools in the DEIS programme have already been sampled by the Educational Research Centre in 2007 and will be again in May of this year. The sample of English medium schools has been undertaken in 2009, and Irish medium schools will be sampled in 2010. The results will be published when the study is finalised.

At post primary level, literacy levels are monitored through Ireland's participation in the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment, in 2000, 2003, 2006 and 2009. The PISA 2006 study assessed performance of 15 year olds across 57 countries in maths, reading and science. Ireland performed very well in English reading, ranking 5th of 29 OECD countries and 6th of 56 countries (USA results were omitted for technical reasons). Only one EU country, Finland, achieved a higher mean score than Ireland in reading. The mean score in Ireland was 517, compared with 547 in Finland, the highest scoring of all countries in the survey. In Ireland, 3.2% of pupils performed below Level 1, 9% at Level 1, 20.9% at Level 2, 30.2% at Level 3, 25.1% at Level 4 and 11.2% at Level 5. This compares with OECD average figures of 7.4%, 12.7%, 22.7%, 27.8%, 20.7% and 8.6%. The results for PISA 2009 will be published when available.

Schools Refurbishment.

191. **Deputy Tom Sheahan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science when emergency funding will be awarded in respect of a school (details supplied) in County Kerry. [14342/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Coughlan): Funding for Emergency Works Grants are made available to those schools most in need of resources as a result of unforeseen emergencies of a capital nature that may arise during the school year.

The school mentioned by the Deputy has submitted an application for funding under this scheme to my Department and this application is being assessed. A decision will issue to the school as soon as possible.

School Staffing.

192. **Deputy Noel Ahern** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science further to Parliamentary Question No. 248 of 25 March 2010 regarding the teacher supply panels and in particular the suggestion as circulated by a school in Dublin 11 that the withdrawal of the supply panel will result in sub teachers without Garda vetting approval being used in the future, if her attention has been drawn to the circulation of this letter which has alarmed parents; if she will clarify the situation and allay parents concerns regarding non-Garda vetted teachers; the action that she will take regarding this issue; and if she will make a statement on the matter.. [14384/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Coughlan): The arrangements for vetting of teaching and non-teaching staff are set out in Department Circular 0094/2006 which issued to all schools in June 2006. The Circular is available on my Department's website. The requirements under the Circular in regard to vetting are not diminished

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in any way by the policy decision in relation to the value for money consideration that applied to the pilot supply panels.

The employment and appointment of all teachers is a matter for each individual school board of management. Good recruitment practice in all cases should also involve the checking of recent employment records, qualifications, experience and names of referees. Irrespective of the position on vetting by the Garda Vetting Unit where facts or information comes to a Board of Management's attention calling into question a person's suitability to work with children it is a matter for the Board to satisfy itself that the person is suitable to work in that capacity. This will naturally have to be assessed on a case by case basis. The Board will have to consider all the circumstances of the case, give due weight to all relevant factors, and afford fair procedures to the individual concerned before making a decision.

193. **Deputy Noel Ahern** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science her views on the staffing levels at a school (details supplied) in Dublin 11. [14385/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Coughlan): The key factor for determining the level of staffing resources provided at individual school level for the coming school year is the pupil enrolment at 30 September 2009.

The staffing schedule for the coming school year was recently published by my Department. The additional posts in the renewed Programme for Government enabled some improvement to be made to the staffing schedule. These improvements have been targeted at medium-to-larger schools which are typically under the greatest pressure in relation to class sizes.

The staffing schedule includes an appeals mechanism for schools who are dissatisfied with their staffing allocation. The appeals criteria are outlined in the published staffing schedule which is available on my Department's website.

Due to industrial action on the part of some staff in the Department of Education and Science, I am not in a position to give the full details sought by the Deputy.

Schools Refurbishment.

194. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science the position regarding the application of new regulations requiring the provision on in-class disabled toilet facilities to a new planned school project (details supplied) in County Cork. [14401/10]

195. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science the position regarding the application of new regulations requiring the provision on in-class disabled toilet facilities to a new planned school extension project (details supplied) in County Cork. [14402/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Coughlan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 194 and 195 together.

From January 1st 2010 all new building projects, including those for schools, must obtain a Disability Access Certificate from the relevant Local Authority. The Building Control (Amendment) Regulations 2009 (S.I. 351 of 2009) prescribes the procedures to be followed in respect of these new certification measures. The basis for developing the Disability Access Certificate documentation is Part M of the current Building Regulations 2000.

In general, however, it has been the policy of my Department to provide all new schools with access-for-all facilities and special toilets for disabled teachers and students. In addition, new schools with two or more storeys are provided with lifts to enable access-for-all.

My Department advises school authorities and their design teams of accessibility requirements during the architectural planning of projects.

Both of the projects referred to by the Deputy are at an advanced stage of architectural planning. However, due to industrial action on the part of some staff in the Department of Education and Science, I am not in a position to give further details in respect of the two projects referred to by the Deputy.

Traveller Education.

196. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science her views on reversing the cutbacks to traveller education centres around the country; if she will examine the work done at one of these centres (details supplied) run by the County of Dublin Vocational Education Committee; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14405/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Science (Deputy Seán Haughey): The 2006 Report and Recommendations for a Traveller Education Strategy recommended that Senior Traveller Training Centre (STTC) provision be reviewed. Subsequently, the 2008 Value for Money Review of the Youthreach and STTC programmes recommended the phasing out of the STTC programme over the medium to long term. It is on this basis that my Department has decided to phase out segregated provision for Travellers.

All full-time and part-time Further Education programmes funded by my Department are already open to Travellers and they are accessing these programmes in increasing numbers. My Department is currently in discussions with the Irish Vocational Education Association (IVEA), representing Vocational Education Committees (VECs), in relation to the phasing out of STTCs and integrating adult Travellers within mainstream further education provision.

Educational Disadvantage.

197. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 197 and 198 of 24 March 2010, the way the supports provided to primary schools to date by the Walk Tall Support Service, which she is in the process of abolishing, can be integrated into the Social Personal and Health Education support in view of the fact the 50% cut to SPHE support staff made in June 2009 and that all SPHE support staff at primary level have been given official notice that their posts are going. [14415/10]

198. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science if she will reverse the decision to abolish the Walk Tall Support Programme at primary level in view of the fact that under the newly reconfigured education support service there is no drugs focus as all support will be generic. [14416/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Coughlan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 197 and 198 together.

As the Deputy is aware, my Department is reconfiguring the delivery of support for teachers in light of the reduced resources available. Although the Walk Tall Support Service will no longer exist in its current guise, it is my intention that the support for substance misuse preven-

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tion be further integrated into SPHE support. It is widely acknowledged that while a strand of SPHE can be taught in isolation, it should be linked to each of the other strands of the SPHE curriculum in order to be at its most effective.

The Teacher Education Section of my Department is currently conducting an interview process to identify those personnel who will work in the newly formed Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) that will provide support on a regional basis from September next.

These personnel will form multi-disciplinary teams who will work in close co-operation with the Education Centre Network to respond to needs identified by schools in the region including support for the Walk Tall Programme where possible.

Vocational Education Committees.

199. **Deputy Arthur Morgan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science if the name of a school (details supplied) in County Donegal by her Department in 1979, conferred any legal rights to the community; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14427/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Coughlan): I am advised by my officials that the disposal of the site in question was executed by the VEC, in the first instance, as the property was then in their ownership. From enquires made of the VEC, my Department understands that the property was disposed of to Coláiste Mhuire, Loch an Iúir by means of full freehold ownership. As my Department was not a party to the contract, I am not in a position to comment further.

Grant Payments.

200. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science the qualification criteria for the back to education allowance in view of the recent announcements in relation to the curtailment of entitlement to maintenance grants when persons are in receipt of back to education allowance; the qualifying criteria in respect of the allowance at this stage; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14435/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Coughlan): Students currently in receipt of the Back to Education Allowance (BTEA) and the maintenance grant will continue to be eligible for both payments for the duration of their current course provided they continue to meet the terms and conditions of the relevant grant schemes.

Students in receipt of BTEA who are entering or progressing to a new course with effect from 2010/11 will no longer be eligible for student maintenance grants but can apply for assistance towards the cost of the student services charge and any fees payable.

The qualification criteria for the BTEA are a matter for my colleague, the Minister for Social and Family Affairs.

School Accommodation.

201. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science if a decision has been taken on alternative accommodation for a special school (details supplied) in Dublin 11; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14446/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Coughlan): I wish to advise the Deputy that the Sites Acquisition/ Property Management Section of my Department are actively pursuing this matter with the OPW. In this regard, my officials have written to them seeking their views on the proposal. A response to this request is awaited.

National Drugs Strategy.

202. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science if her attention has been drawn to the importance of an initiative (details supplied) for third level education in terms of improving retention and participation in school; and if in view of the cost effectiveness of this project, she will undertake to maintain her Department's funding. [14448/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Coughlan): My Department has provided funds for over thirty projects in Local Drugs Task Force areas, including the project specifically referred to by the Deputy.

The projects are administered by the three VECs in Dublin City, Dublin County and in Dún Laoghaire, while the remaining three projects are funded directly by my Department.

In the context of the budget for 2010 and the difficult fiscal climate, it was decided that funding for these projects was to be reduced from €3,643,000 in 2009 to €2,461,000 in 2010 and to cease from 2011.

In the Dublin City area, a decision was taken to prioritise those projects where frontline staff were employed. In that context, no allocations were made to a small number of projects, including the project referred to by the Deputy.

It is important to note that since 1990 my Department has funded an Initiative for Third Level Education in the same locality as the project in question. The interventions under this initiative, both financial and cultural, aim to increase educational aspirations not only in the schools but also in the wider community and to increase the participation rate of pupils from the area in third level education.

203. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science the scope of the review by her Department on the implications of Budget 2010 cuts to local drugs task force mainstreamed projects; the timescale of this review; the precise format of same; when this information will be made available to each of the projects; and if in view of the impact of these cuts in the most disadvantaged areas, she will consider reversing this decision. [14449/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Coughlan): My Department provides funds for over thirty projects in Local Drugs Task Force areas.

In the context of the budget for 2010 and the difficult fiscal climate, it was decided that funding for these projects was to be reduced from €3,643,000 in 2009 to €2,461,000 in 2010 and to cease from 2011.

My Department is currently reviewing the implications of the budget decisions relating to funding allocations for all of these projects.

A key aspect of the review is to determine whether my Department is the appropriate location for these projects or whether funding could more appropriately be channelled through another Department or agency. In this regard, officials of my Department have held discussions

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with officials in the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs to determine whether projects which involve a significant element of youth work might be more appropriate to that Office. These discussions are ongoing.

A number of the projects are being reviewed within my Department in the context of their work being similar to that of other Departmental initiatives aimed at preventing early school leaving.

I anticipate that the examination of the projects and related discussions with the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs will be completed shortly and that a report on the findings of the review will be provided to me for consideration.